



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

DEC 4 2007

The Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco
Governor of Louisiana
900 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

Dear Governor Blanco:

I would like to congratulate the State of Louisiana on the successful completion of its Program Improvement Plan (PIP) under the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). All required action steps in the PIP have been completed and all data goals have been achieved. As a result, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is hereby rescinding the associated CFSR penalties.

During the week of September 8, 2003, ACF and State of Louisiana staff jointly conducted an on-site review of child welfare cases being served by the Department of Social Services (DSS), Office of Community Services (OCS). Cases were examined for safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children involved in the sample. In addition to reviewing children's cases, community stakeholders were interviewed in three sites to determine the overall functioning of the child welfare system.

As a result of the review findings, DSS entered into a two-year PIP and committed to making significant systemic improvements. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the State when they made landfall during PIP implementation. On June 19, 2006, ACF approved a renegotiated PIP that reflected the State's new priorities of recovery and reform and allowed an additional year for PIP completion.

After review of the final PIP quarterly report submitted by DSS on October 23, 2007, Children's Bureau staff concluded that Louisiana had successfully completed its PIP. In order to meet the requirements of its PIP, DSS not only needed to complete all action steps and tasks leading to systemic change, but also needed to meet established data goals for improvement. Specifically, during the PIP period, DSS achieved national data standards regarding increased timely reunification of children with their parents or timely adoption, increased stability of foster care placements, and decreased repeat maltreatment and maltreatment while in foster care.

Under Marketa Gautreau's leadership, the Louisiana OCS used the significant challenges presented by the 2005 hurricanes as springboards toward short-term recovery as well as long-term, prevention-minded reform of the State's child welfare system. Specific action steps in the PIP centered on three strategies to address current concerns regarding the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the child welfare system.

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The State analyzed all current child welfare data, practice, and external factors related to the rise in foster care placements, developed and implemented a protocol for case management and decision-making for displaced foster children and their biological parents, and provided more qualified legal representation for children and parents in the child welfare system.

In addition to short-term recovery, the State has taken significant steps toward long-term reform by working closely with community stakeholders, the Federal Child Welfare National Resource Center network, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improve many additional areas of the State's system. "Louisiana LIFTS" is an ongoing initiative that seeks to achieve further improvements to the child welfare system for children and families served. Through it, OCS seeks to improve case intake processes, improve family assessments and case planning, improve community-based services, improve foster and adoptive parent recruitment, reduce the number of children placed in residential treatment, and better support young people that are emancipated out of foster care into adult life. Although the listed initiatives will continue beyond the end of the PIP, they serve to further the CFSR goals related to safety, permanency, and well-being in the State.

Once again, congratulations on the successful completion of the Louisiana PIP. The Administration for Children and Families commends the work of the Department of Social Services, especially the staff of the Office of Community Services. Despite the overwhelming administrative, fiscal, and personal impacts of the 2005 hurricanes, Louisiana's staff exemplified dedication and commitment to improving the safety, permanency, and well-being for the State's children and families.

Sincerely,



Daniel C. Schneider
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Children and Families

cc: Ann Williamson, Secretary, Department of Social Services, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Marketa Gautreau, Assistant Secretary, Office of Community Services,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Joan E. Ohl, Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families,
Washington, D.C.
Joseph Bock, Acting Associate Commissioner, Children's Bureau, Washington, D.C.
Jerry Milner, Director, Child and Family Services Reviews, Children's Bureau,
Washington, D.C.

**STATE OF LOUISIANA
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW
REVISED/RENEGOTIATED
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN
EIGHTH QUARTER (FINAL)
PROGRESS REPORT
OCTOBER 23, 2007**



LOUISIANA PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN EIGHTH QUARTER PROGRESS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Louisiana developed its original Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in September 2004 to address deficiencies noted in the 2003 Child and Family Services Review. The targeted completion date was September 30, 2006, and a great deal of progress had been made both on reaching data goals related to national standards and benchmark completion when Hurricane Katrina, followed closely by Hurricane Rita, devastated southern Louisiana, disseminated the population of the state's largest urban area throughout the country, and disrupted all normal operations of the Office of Community Services, including PIP progress.

Subsequently, with the cooperation and assistance of our Federal partners, a renegotiated/revised PIP was submitted on June 14, 2006 and approved on June 19, 2006, with an extended completion date of September 30, 2007. This revised PIP focuses on short-term recovery efforts to assure safety, well-being and permanency for Louisiana's children including those who were displaced to other states as a result of the hurricanes. While addressing these short-term recovery efforts, Louisiana took advantage of the opportunities brought about by the storms to assess and plan initiatives referred to in previous reports as "long-term reform", and created a matrix of activities involving the national child welfare resource centers.

The initiatives to improve Louisiana's child welfare system have been designated as **Louisiana Leading Innovations for Family Transformation and Safety (LIFTS)**, a series of changes to strengthen families and to ensure children safe, permanent solutions. Louisiana LIFTS reflects OCS's goal of ensuring a family-focused and community-based system of care for Louisiana's most vulnerable children. We, with technical assistance from our federal and foundation partners, have identified six key elements for implementation to enhance outcomes for children and families:

- Improving intake
- Meeting family needs
- Community-based services
- Foster/Adoptive parenting
- Residential treatment
- Transitioning youth

To enhance dissemination of Louisiana LIFTS, a brochure has been developed which provides a more detailed overview of Louisiana LIFTS. A copy of the brochure is attached.

The Louisiana LIFTS initiatives are consistent with the proactive approach taken in the renegotiated/revised PIP toward recovery from the devastation of the 2005 hurricane season and with the outcomes identified in the Child and Family Services Review as opportunities for improvement in Louisiana's child welfare system:

- *Safety 1*: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.
- *Safety 2*: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible.
- *Permanency 1*: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

- *Well Being 1:* Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.
- *Well Being 2:* Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- *Well Being 3:* Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

DATA GOALS

Louisiana met each of the identified data indicator/national standards:

- Length of time to achieve reunification
- Length of time to achieve adoption
- Stability of foster care placements
- Recurrence of child maltreatment
- Incidence of maltreatment in foster care

OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

The renegotiated PIP contained three major objectives: analysis of current CPI data, practice, and external factors as they relate to the increase in children entering foster care; development and implementation of a protocol for case management and decision-making for displaced children and their biological families; and provision of more qualified legal representation for children and/or parents in the child welfare system. The objectives were subdivided into nine strategies, which were further subdivided into 24 action steps for achievement of the three overarching objectives. Each of the action steps has been achieved, thus all strategies and objectives have been accomplished. Action step achievement by quarter is indicated below:

Quarter	Number of Action Steps Due	Number of Action Steps Completed
4	16	16
5	0	0
6	3	3
7	5	5
TOTALS	24	24

CONTINUING ACTIVITIES

The Office of Community Services is committed to ongoing efforts to assure continuous improvement in our child welfare system. Two major activities to support the progress begun through PIP implementation and Louisiana LIFTS are described below:

Focus on Four:

Focus on Four serves as a template for assuring priority to the four domains of our primary responsibility:

- **Safety** – In recognition of our primary responsibility to assess the safety of children alleged to be abused or neglected, the Form 5 was developed in collaboration with experts from the Child Welfare National Resource Center to document the workers’ professional assessment of various factors often associated with child maltreatment that may cause a child to be unsafe, and to document any needed safety plan. This form is already in use in all regions. It is to be used by Alternative Response workers, Child Protection investigators, and Family Service workers.

- **Risk** – Structured Decision Making (SDM) is an evidence based tool to assist workers in identifying the severity of risk factors or family characteristics associated with repeat maltreatment. It guides the frequency of family contact and decision making regarding reunification and case closure. SDM is a valid, reliable, and consistent decision making process regarding the allocation of resources to the most needy families, and has been demonstrated to expedite permanency for children. Child Protection investigators and Alternative Response workers will not complete the SDM instrument, but will provide information needed to complete the instrument during staffings to transfer cases to either Family Services or Foster Care workers. The instrument will be completed no later than 30 days after a case has been accepted in Family Services or Foster Care, and each case will be re-assessed every 90 days.
- **Assessment of Family Functioning** – This tool guides workers in conducting a professional assessment of a family’s functioning in areas that affect their child’s safety and risk of abuse or neglect. It replaces the Form 60, and it guides workers and their clients to identify strengths and protective capacities as well as areas of concern and more serious problems. This tool will be used by Family Service, Foster Care and Adoption workers on all new cases within the first 30 days of case acceptance.
- **Case Planning** – A revised case plan instrument replaces the Form 2, and serves as a direct link from the problems identified in the Assessment of Family Functioning to provide a focused, prioritized approach to assist families in achieving behavioral changes necessary for the safety and well being of their children. It will be used by Family Service, Foster Care and Adoption workers on all new cases received.

The Form 5 is automated in the ACESS system. SDM, Assessment of Family Functioning, and the Case Plan are automated and will be integrated into future increments of ACESS development. With the exception of the Form 5 (currently in use), other instruments and tools will begin being used in the regions immediately following regional training which is planned as follows:

January through March 2008 – Baton Rouge, Covington and Jefferson Regions

April through June 2008 – Lake Charles, Thibodaux, and Lafayette Regions

July through September 2008 – Monroe, Shreveport, Alexandria, and New Orleans Regions

Organizational Structure:

After extensive internal planning, consultation with Child Welfare National Resource Centers and foundations, and collaboration with the Louisiana Department of Civil Service, we are moving forward with agency reorganization. These organizational changes will align our structure more closely with our vision for moving children to more prevention and home-based services, to move children more quickly to permanency, and to re-define our care of children in custody. The organizational changes are consistent with the vision of Louisiana LIFTS and reflect our change in practice:

- The Program Division has been divided into In Home and Out of Home Services. In Home Services will now include Child Protection Investigations, Alternate Response, Family Services, and all prevention programs. Out of Home Services will now include Home Development, Adoption, Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, and all of Foster Care, including residential and child-specific placements.
- The Policy, Planning and Accreditation Division will now include Quality Assurance.

- Resource Development has been restructured to include Training, Legal/Legislative, and a new Clinical Section.
- Human Resources and Fiscal Services Divisions are not affected by the reorganization; Field Services Division is minimally affected.

We believe that these organizational changes, which began on October 19, will effectively support our initiatives to continuously improve child welfare services in Louisiana. A copy of the revised Organizational Chart is attached.

CONCLUSION

We are pleased that our formal Program Improvement Plan has been completed, but recognize our PIP achievements as a starting, rather than finishing, point. The support provided by the Child Welfare Resource Centers and other organizations during PIP implementation have provided Louisiana with crucial building blocks for ongoing program improvement.