North Carolina Division of Social Services
Child and Family Services Review Protocol

I. The Goals, Mission, Vision, and Desired Outcomes for the Children's Services System

The state Division of Social Services and 100 county Departments of Social Services share in their commitment to excellence in providing services to children and their families. To that end, they share common goals, mission, vision, and desired outcomes for the Children's Services System.

There are three main **Goals** for the Children's Services System. They are to achieve Safety, Permanence, and Well-being for all children in North Carolina.

Mission: The Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section is committed to provide family-centered services to children and families to achieve well-being through ensuring self-sufficiency, support, safety and permanence.

Vision: Every child in North Carolina will grow up in a safe, permanent, self-sufficient family where well-being needs of all are met.

The **Desired Outcomes** for Children's Services are to:

1. Protect children from abuse and neglect.
2. Reduce recurrence of abuse and neglect.
3. Maintain children safely in their own homes.
4. Prevent inappropriate entry into foster care.
5. Reduce abuse and neglect in foster care.
6. Provide permanence and stability for children in their living situations.
7. Reduce time in foster care to permanence within one year or less.
8. Reduce reentry into foster care.
9. Support and sustain continuity of family relationships and family connections.
10. Increase the capacity of families to provide for children.
11. Promote appropriate education services for children.
12. Arrange for adequate mental health and physical health services for children.
13. Limit placement of young children in group homes and institutions.

II. Purpose of Child and Family Services Reviews

The purpose of the Child and Family Services Review process is to assist in realizing the goals, mission, vision, and desired outcomes for the Children's Services System in North Carolina. The reviews provide a mechanism for evaluating the Children's Services System's response to children and families; for identifying management, training, system and policy issues; for recognizing strengths in practice; and for making recommendations to strengthen the delivery of all children's services programs statewide.

The review process is designed to measure outcomes and practice. The process also provides public accountability for all 100 county Departments of Social Services and for the Children's Services System statewide.

III. Confidentiality

All requirements for confidentiality as stated in federal and state statutes, administrative rules and in Chapters IV, VI and VIII, Volume I, Children's Services of the Family Services Manual for the North Carolina Division of Social Services shall be followed. No identifying, case specific information will be incorporated in the Child and Family Services review report.

The Child and Family Services Review report, attachments, and accompanying cover letter are considered public documents and are subject to the conditions outlined in Chapter 132 of the North Carolina General Statutes.

IV. Review Coordination

A. Review Team

Each county is urged to designate staff to serve, along with Division staff, on the review team. Counties will be given the option to co-facilitate/co-lead the review with the Lead Reviewer from the Child and Family Services Program Review Team during the onsite review. This will involve participating in the selection of cases that are made onsite, assisting in presiding over the debriefing process, helping to explain the logistics of the quality assurance function and assisting with quality control throughout the onsite review process. If the county chooses not to co-facilitate/co-lead, they should notify Division staff in writing when submitting the information requested in the notification letter prior to the onsite review, and staff from the Child and Family Services Program Review Team will serve as Lead Reviewer. Each county reviewer will be paired with a Division reviewer to work as a team. The Lead Reviewer from the Division will also contact the Agency's Review Coordinator prior to the onsite review to answer any questions the Agency's Review Coordinator may have regarding the Child and Family Services Review Protocol, including the process for submitting information and the onsite review process itself. The Agency's Review Coordinator should contact the Division's Lead Reviewer anytime there is a question about the Child and Family Services Review Protocol and if there has been no communication with the Lead Reviewer prior to the onsite review. To ensure a working knowledge of the process, the Division will make an effort to ensure that at least one of its members on the review team has a working relationship with or is knowledgeable of the county being reviewed.

B. Counties to be Reviewed

All 100 county Departments of Social Services will be reviewed. Three months prior to the scheduled review, the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section will notify each county Director of the week of their review. The beginning date of the review will be determined at a later time. When that date has been determined, the county will be notified. To ensure the integrity of the onsite review process itself and that it remains uneventful, the agency's Children's Programs Representative will inform the Division's Child and Family Services Program Review Team of any situation in the agency or immediate community that might have an impact on the onsite review process such as staff turnover, child fatality, etc. This will allow the team to place any identified situations in the proper perspective and context of the overall review.

C. Notification Process

An information packet will be sent to the county director by the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section three months prior to the week scheduled for the review. Included in this packet are the following:

1. A standardized notification letter to the county director identifying the week scheduled for the review.

2. Lists of children whose names appear in the State automated database as having received Case Planning/Case Management and Foster Care services during the period from which a sample will be selected

3. Instructions for submitting the following information to the Supervisor of the Child and Family Services Program Review Team within ten days of the date of the notification letter.

   - A log or listing of CPS reports that were accepted for Investigative/Family Assessment during the six-month sample period and were subsequently found to be one of the following:
     1. unsubstantiated
     2. substantiated and closed immediately
     3. services provided and protective services no longer needed
     4. services recommended

5. services not recommended.

- Verification that cases listed in the State automated database as having received Case Planning/Case Management and Foster Care Services were active for a minimum of sixty days during the review period.
- The name of county staff that the director designates as the Agency Review Coordinator.
- The names of any county staff that the director designates as part of the review team.
- The names and addresses of the chair of the county board of social services, the county manager, and the chair of the county commissioners who will receive the final report.
- The names and addresses of the chair of the Community Child Protection Team, Guardian Ad Litem Administrator, agency attorney, chief district court judge, and the chair of the Foster Parent Association. These individuals, as well as the chair of the county board of social services, are identified as community stakeholders who will receive a questionnaire from the division.

4. An outline for the Agency Self-Report and a copy of the Agency Self-Survey form. The Agency Self-Report and Self-Survey are to be completed by the agency and are to be submitted to the Supervisor of the Child and Family Services Program Review Team within thirty days of the date of the notification letter with a copy to the Children's Program Representative. It is preferred that this information be submitted electronically, either on disk or through e-mail attachment in a format that can be accessed by the Division. The purpose of the report and survey is to provide information related to Children's Services program and system issues in the county. The Division's Lead Reviewer indicated in the notification letter to the county director should be contacted anytime there are questions regarding submission of the requested information or the protocol itself.

The Agency Self-Report will be incorporated into the final review report. This provides the agency with the opportunity to identify agency and program strengths, to offer a self-evaluation of outcomes data, to describe any changes that the agency has instituted since the last review, and to comment on any areas needing improvement in the county's Children's Services System.

V. Sample to be Reviewed and Review Period

A combination of Reports Not Accepted for CPS Investigative/Family Assessment, CPS Investigative/Family Assessment cases, CPS Case Planning/Case Management cases, and Child Placement cases will be reviewed.

Cases to be reviewed will be selected from cases that were open for services during the six months prior to the month preceding the date of the notification letter. That is, if the date of the notification letter is in the month of December, cases will be selected from the six months prior to the month of November, or May through October. This is the sampling period. Selected cases will be assessed for their level of outcome achievement beginning with the sampling period, and ending at the time of the on-site review. This is the review period.

A sample of Reports Not Accepted for CPS Investigative/Family Assessment will be selected by the Lead Reviewer on site from the agency's files. CPS Investigative/Family Assessment cases will be selected from the CPS log submitted by the agency, the names of which will be provided to the Agency Review Coordinator at the time of the Entrance Conference. These Assessments should be made available to the Lead Reviewer shortly thereafter so as not to delay the review process. The Placement, Placement Provider and Case Planning and Case Management records for each child should be available to the review team upon arrival for the onsite review. Please refer to page 9 in the Preparation of Records for Review section for additional information on the protocol for case selection. CPS Case Planning/Case Management cases will be selected from cases open for 215 services as indicated in the Division's automated information system. Child Placement cases will be selected from the list of all children open for services on the PQA 084. All cases in both Case Planning/Case Management and Child Placement must have received a minimum of sixty days services during the review period.

VI. Agency Review Coordinator's Responsibilities

- Coordinate with the designated Lead Reviewer from the Division regarding any of their responsibilities listed here;
- Select, according to criteria discussed below under *Case Selection and Review*, the cases to be reviewed from the random pre-sample received from the Division;
- Orient local staff to the purpose and activities of the review;
- Ensure that workers (supervisor, if worker is not available) assigned to the cases selected for review are scheduled for interviews on their case(s);
- Schedule and confirm interviews with each person involved in a case who is to be interviewed and orient those persons to the purposes of the review (see attached sample letter);
- Prepare a listing of scheduled interviews for each review member that includes the name of the person to be interviewed, the time, date, and type of interview, whether office visit or telephone;
- Reserve space for record review, interviews, and other planned

meetings;

- Assemble all case records to be reviewed so that they will be accessible and ready for review at the onset of the review;
- It is not necessary for the agency to provide copies of the instrument for the record review. Review instruments will be provided by the review team.

VII. Case Selection and Review

The sample is selected from the universe of cases in the program area under review. The universe includes all children and all families whose cases were open for services during the period under review. Cases for children in foster care will be selected by the child's name and cases involving Case Planning/Case Management Services will be selected by the family name.

Sample cases must have been open for services a minimum of 60 days during the period under review, even though services may be closed at the time of the on-site review. Cases eligible for review may fall into one of the following categories:

- Opened for services prior to the six-month sampling period, and continued to be open at least the first 60 days of the sampling period;
- Opened for services during the six-month sampling period, and at least 60 days services provided during the sampling period; or
- Opened for services during the six-month sampling period, and at least 60 days services provided prior to the on-site review.

A pre-sample consisting of 18 or less Foster Care cases and 18 or less Case Planning/Case Management cases will be randomly selected from the population of cases in the county identified as active for sixty days. This pre-sample will be sent to the Agency Review Coordinator 45 days prior to the on-site review. From this listing, the Agency Review Coordinator will select, according to criteria, a smaller sub-sample totaling 6-12 cases for review. The Agency Review Coordinator should provide the names of the cases in this sub-sample to the Division 14 days prior to the on-site review.

Agency child and family services other than those for which the record was selected for review that were provided during the review period will also be reviewed. For example, if a case was selected for review for Case Planning/Case Management and Foster Care Services became necessary, the Foster Care Services will be reviewed. If a case was selected for review for either Case Planning/Case Management or Foster Care Services and a CPS report was accepted in the review period in that case, the Investigative/Family Assessment conducted in response to that report will be reviewed.

Number of Cases to be reviewed:

- **Level III counties** will have six Placement cases, six Case Planning/Case Management cases, six Investigative/Family Assessment cases that were found to be unsubstantiated, substantiated and closed, services recommended, services not recommended, or services provided and protective services no longer needed, and twenty reports not accepted for Investigative/Family Assessment.

- **Level II counties** will have four Placement cases, four Case Planning/Case Management cases, five Investigative/Family Assessment cases that were found to be unsubstantiated, substantiated and closed, services recommended, services not recommended, or services provided and protective services no longer needed, and twelve reports not accepted for Investigative/Family Assessment.

- **Level I counties** will have three Placement cases, three Case Planning/Case Management cases, four Investigative /Family Assessment cases that were found to be unsubstantiated, substantiated and closed, services recommended, services not recommended, or services provided and protective services no longer needed, and eight reports not accepted for Investigative/Family Assessment.

Interviews may not be possible in all Case Planning/Case Management and Placement cases in the pre-sample. Therefore, the Agency Review Coordinator should select the cases for the review from the random listing of 36 or less cases using the criteria below:

- The Agency Review Coordinator must select cases that meet the criteria listed in the bullets below. The selection must begin with the first case listed on the pre-sample provided by the Division and proceed in order until the required number of cases is reached.
- The Agency Review Coordinator should determine if the individuals in the case who must be interviewed are willing and available for interviews and can be scheduled during the review week. The case may be rejected and the next case on the list considered only under the following circumstances:
  - ♦ In all Case Planning/Case Management and Placement cases, if the primary social worker or supervisor and parent or other caretaker, at minimum, are either unavailable or unwilling to be interviewed such that sufficient information cannot be obtained to complete the review instrument, or
  - ♦ If the case was pulled in error and had not been open for services for a minimum of sixty days during the review period.

- ♦ If the child selected is a sibling (possibly with a different last name) of a child previously selected.
- ♦ If the social worker was the worker for a case previously selected, except in smaller counties where there are fewer social workers.

- The Agency Review Coordinator must record the reasons for eliminating any cases from the sample of cases to be reviewed and make that information available to the Lead Reviewer.
- The cases in the sample of 36 or less cases that are not selected for review will be used:
  - ♦ To substitute for cases in the sample of 36 or less that cannot be reviewed for the reasons listed above, and
  - ♦ To provide a pool of additional cases to be reviewed, if needed.

<u>Case Interviews</u>

The review team member(s) assigned a particular case is responsible for interviewing the individuals involved in the case, as well as reviewing the case record.

Reasonable efforts should be made to schedule interviews with the following persons for each case selected for review:

- The social worker or supervisor most knowledgeable of the case.
- Whenever possible, children 12 years of age or older who are cognitively and emotionally able to participate.
- The appropriate parents, foster parents, relative caretakers, pre-adoptive or adoptive parents. (No parents whose rights have been terminated)
- The Guardian Ad Litem.

In addition:

- Availability of a major service provider or other person who has knowledge of the family's situation who can be contacted if the scheduled interviews with any of the persons other than the social worker or supervisor can not be conducted.

The interviews with the individuals in a case should follow the time designated on the reviewer's schedule for reviewing the case record. Without first becoming familiar with the circumstances of the case through a review of the record, the reviewer will be unable to explore pertinent issues with the person being interviewed. (See Attachment-Sample Interview Schedule) The Agency Review Coordinator is responsible for scheduling interviews. When scheduling interviews, it should be remembered that it might be necessary to interview some persons (e.g. GAL's) for more than one case. Therefore, care should be given in scheduling their interviews to avoid lapses or overlapping of time.

Persons to be interviewed must be prepared for the interview by the

Agency Review Coordinator or designee by helping them understand the purpose of the review. They should be assured that their participation is voluntary, but that their participation is critical to the success of the review. By participating in the interview process, clients are given the opportunity to respond to the interviewer's specific questions and to give feedback regarding their experience with the agency. After the interviews have been scheduled, the appointments should be confirmed in writing. (See Attachment—Confirmation Letter)

Preparation of Records for Review

All records pertaining to each child reviewed should be pulled and made available to the review team as indicated on page 5 under Section V. This includes child protective service records, child and family records, and placement provider records. Case records should be as orderly and up-to-date as possible, with materials in chronological order. If the agency uses electronic files instead of paper files, it will be necessary for the Agency Review Coordinator to either make computers and technical support available to the reviewers or obtain hard copies of the files, or the portions of the files containing information relevant to the review.

Local Stakeholder Questionnaires

The review includes a survey of community representatives, i.e., stakeholders, who are knowledgeable about the functioning of the agency in the community. The Division will mail questionnaires to individuals identified as stakeholders. The purpose of these questionnaires is to obtain information about the systemic factors under review, and about how the systemic factors affect the outcomes for children and families in general, not on a case-specific basis.

Once the stakeholders have been identified and their names and addresses provided to the Division, it is recommended that county staff inform the stakeholders that they will be receiving the survey and encourage them to complete and return the questionnaire to the Division.

VIII. Review Process

At the time of the review, the reviewers will hold an entrance conference with the agency director and any staff or others at the discretion of the director. This conference will include:

1. Introductions of Division and agency staff
2. A discussion of the review process, data, and report
3. Issues raised in the Agency Self-Report and Self-Survey
4. An opportunity for the county to discuss and clarify any information pertinent to their individual agency and ask any

questions about the review

5. Any information that the agency can share regarding agency protocol, procedures, and record keeping practices that could aid the reviewers in the review process or any current issues within the agency or immediate community that may impact the onsite review process.

The designated case records should be available to the reviewers immediately upon the conclusion of the entrance conference. The case records should be clearly labeled with the name of the child and the sample number.

Individual state/county review teams will examine the case records to measure the county's performance related to outcomes. Findings from the record review along with supporting/clarifying information obtained from interviews will be documented on the review instrument.

Case Debriefing Process

When the review instrument, appropriate interviews, and the case rating summary have been completed for each case, each state/county review team will present their case(s) to the entire review team, which includes the Agency Review Coordinator, for debriefing. Debriefings will likely occur several times during the course of the on-site review. The agency director and/or designated management and supervisory staff are strongly encouraged to attend the de-briefing sessions as questions and challenges will be addressed at this time. The Lead Reviewer should inform the agency director and/or designated management staff of the scheduled debriefings to accommodate any conflicts that may interfere with their attendance at debriefing.

The Child and Family Services Review process is considered a self assessment at the county level. It is therefore extremely important and highly recommended that county staff not only partner with Division staff during the case record review, but also participate in presenting cases during the debriefing process to demonstrate partnership in this learning process.

What happens when consensus cannot be reached during the debriefing process?

If, during the time of the debriefing process, there are any unresolved issues or the team cannot reach consensus, the Lead Reviewer will contact the Supervisor of the Child and Family Services Program Review Team, or other Family Support and Child Welfare Services Management staff if the Supervisor of the Child and Family Services Program Review Team is not available, for a final decision on the issue. The agency director should participate in and have the opportunity to provide input during the debriefing process and prior to contacting the Division, when possible. If the director is not able to participate in the debriefing process, someone from the agency should be designated by the agency Director to represent him/her in this decision making process.

While the debriefing process is a time for input and discussion around case ratings as they relate to law, rule, policy and practice, there may be times during the debriefing process when discussions have the potential to become somewhat more lengthy and stressful than usual, and the team can not reach a consensus. To prevent this from occurring, it is strongly recommended that the team consult the Supervisor of the Child and Family Services Program Review Team for resolution as soon as it becomes obvious that consensus cannot be reached by the team. We suggest that good partnership and team building skills are employed, when consensus cannot be reached during debriefings, such as taking a short break to allow everyone time to reflect on the issues being discussed to help bring about consensus and resolution. Once consensus is reached or a decision has been made on each case being debriefed, it is recommended that the Agency Review Coordinator arrange for the review instruments to be copied for agency use. After all of the cases have been debriefed, the entire review team will participate in completing the County Rating Summary in preparation for the exit conference.

An exit conference will be held at the conclusion of the review to present an overview of the findings of the review. Participants at the exit conference will include members of the Review Team, the director, and staff members or others at the director's discretion. The purpose of the exit conference is to provide closure to the review process and to provide general findings from the review process.

There will be an opportunity for questions about the Review Team's findings, for comments about the findings, and for identification of anything that the county would like reflected in the review report. The director will be informed that a Review Evaluation Form will be attached to the agency final report. The Director, or his designee, will be urged to complete the evaluation form and return it to the Child and Family Services Program Review Team Supervisor.

IX. <u>Compilation of Results and Preparation of Reports</u>

The Division will prepare the review report, which will include analysis of all outcomes of the review and relevant data. The analysis will focus on broad program issues, with emphasis on identified strengths, but will also address areas in need of improvement. Information provided by the county DSS in the Agency Self-Report will be incorporated in the review report.

A formal Program Improvement Plan will be required for any outcome in which the agency did not achieve substantial conformity. The Program Improvement Plan should also include Reports Not Accepted for Investigative/Family Assessment when more than one report was rated as needing improvement in Level I counties, and when more than two reports were rated as needing improvement in Level II and in Level III counties.

The Division will e-mail a draft copy of the Child and Family Services Review Report and a cover letter within thirty days from the last day of the record review if the county has e-mail access. Otherwise, the Division will fax or mail this draft copy. The agency will have the opportunity to review the report and provide any additional input that they want considered, as well as any formal response that the county wishes to be attached to the final review report. The county should submit their input and any formal response to the Division within ten workdays of receipt of the draft report. Input to the report and any formal response should be submitted to the Child and Family Services Program Review Team Supervisor, preferably electronically either by e-mail attachment or disk in a format that can be accessed by the Division.

The Division will consider the county's input and determine whether the report should be amended. The Child and Family Services Program Review Team Supervisor will discuss with the county their input and any amendments to the report in an effort to reach an agreement on the final report. The final review report, including any formal response from the county, will be sent simultaneously to the county DSS director, the chair of the county social services board, the chair of the county commissioners, and the county manager within ten days from the date of the county's input and response to the draft report or the date the county's input and response was due, whichever is sooner.

X. Division Follow-up/Program Improvement Plan Development

The appropriate Children's Programs Representative (CPR) will contact the county within thirty days after the agency receives the draft report. The CPR will be copied with the draft report as well. This will provide an opportunity for the agency and the CPR to discuss the issues and recommendations contained in the report. The contact will also provide a time for the agency to receive positive feedback regarding practice issues. The CPR will provide consultation to the agency in implementing any recommended changes.

A Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is required for any outcome in which the agency did not achieve substantial conformity. With consultation from the CPR, the agency will develop and submit a PIP within thirty days of the date of the final written report. Once completed and reviewed by the CPR, the agency will submit their PIP to the Local Support Operations

Manager that supervises the CPR's. The Local Support Operations Manager will review the PIP to ensure that the PIP addresses the issues identified in the report. The Local Support Operations Manager will provide written notice to the agency regarding the acceptability of the PIP. On a continuous basis, the CPR will monitor the PIP and assess the agency's compliance and progress until acceptable performance is achieved. During this period, the CPR will provide the agency and the Division with quarterly updates on the agency's progress. When it is determined that all goals have been met, the Division will notify the agency in writing of their removal from PIP status.

The PIP should be developed using the following format/headings as a guide:

1) Area(s) Needing Improvement - Outcome area(s) where substantial conformity was not achieved and circumstances behind such (this should be spelled out in the PIP).

2) Goals - What are the desired outcomes that will result in the agency meeting Substantial Conformity (the agency should explain).

3) Action Steps - How to get there by doing what (this should be spelled out in the PIP).

4) PIP Monitoring (the agency and CPR/the Division)
a) The role of the agency. What will PIP monitoring look like for county staff? For Example: Reading records, staff observation, staff interviews, reviewing reports, etc. (this should be spelled out in the PIP).
b) The CPR role. What will PIP monitoring look like for the CPR? (this should be spelled out in the PIP).

XI. Conclusion

The intent of the Child and Family Services Review process is to enhance the quality of practice in North Carolina's children's services system. The reviews give the Division and county departments of social services a structural assessment of their programs and allow them to direct energy to the areas most needing improvement. Counties can use the results of their review to document their compliance with accreditation requirements for Child Welfare Services. Counties that are doing well have the opportunity to use the review process to provide their community with documentation of the positive work that they do.

The reviews also serve to identify needs for training and technical assistance from the Division, and to fulfill the need for public reporting of children's services issues. At the end of each review cycle, the Division of

Social Services, Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section, will prepare an analysis of the findings from the Child and Family Services reviews in a summary report that will be made public.