

Final Report
Rhode Island Child and Family Services Review
September 2010

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Rhode Island. The CFSR is the Federal Government's program for assessing the performance of State child welfare agencies with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children and families. It is authorized by the Social Security Amendments of 1994 requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promulgate regulations for reviews of State child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR is implemented by the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS.

The Rhode Island CFSR was conducted the week of April 26, 2010. The period under review for the onsite case review process was from April 1, 2009, through April 30, 2010. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children's Bureau, which provides the State's child welfare data for the 12-month CFSR target period ending March 31, 2009
- Reviews of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases) at three sites: 17 cases in Bristol (Region 2), 17 cases in North Kingstown (Region 3), and 31 cases in Providence (Region 1)
- Interviews and focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State level) with stakeholders including, but not limited to, children, youth, parents, foster and adoptive parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, child advocates, Tribal representatives, and attorneys

All 65 cases were open child welfare agency cases at some time during the period under review. The key characteristics of the children in the cases reviewed are presented in the table at the end of this section. For this table, and for other tables in the report, figures displayed may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

The first section of the report (Section A: Outcomes) presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State's performance in achieving specified outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The second section of the report (Section B: Systemic Factors) provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Key Characteristics of Cases Reviewed

Case Characteristics	Foster Care	In-Home Services
Total Number of Cases	40	25
Date case was opened		
Opened prior to the period under review	32 (80%)	15 (60%)
Opened during the period under review	8 (20%)	10 (40%)
Child entered foster care during the period under review	18 (45%)	N/A
Child's age at start of period under review		
Younger than 10	19 (47.5%)	*
At least 10 but younger than 13	8 (20%)	*
At least 13 but younger than 16	7 (17.5%)	*
16 and older	6 (15%)	*
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native Non-Hispanic	0	*
Asian Non-Hispanic	2 (5%)	*
Black Non-Hispanic	4 (10%)	*
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic	0	*
Hispanic (of any race)	12 (30%)	*
White Non-Hispanic	19 (47.5%)	*
Unknown/Unable to Determine	0	*
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	3 (7.5)	*
Primary reason for opening case		
Physical abuse	5 (12.5%)	2 (8%)
Sexual abuse	3 (7.5 %)	0
Neglect (not including medical neglect)	15 (37.5%)	10 (40%)
Medical neglect	1 (2.5%)	0
Abandonment	0	0
Mental/physical health of parent	0	2 (8%)
Mental/physical health of child	3 (7.5)	1 (4%)
Substance abuse by parent	5 (12.5%)	1 (4%)
Child's behavior	3 (7.5%)	2 (8%)
Substance abuse by child	0	1 (4%)
Domestic violence in child's home	1 (2.5%)	2 (8%)
Child in juvenile justice system	4 (10%)	4 (16%)
Other	0	0

*Information on in-home services cases is not available for these characteristics.

SECTION A: OUTCOMES

In the Outcomes Section of the CFSR Final Report, an overall rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement is assigned to each of the 23 items reviewed. An item is assigned an overall rating of Strength if 90 percent or more of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as a Strength. The item ratings are used to determine the performance of a State on the seven outcomes, each of which incorporates one or more of the individual items. The evaluation options for these outcomes are “substantially achieved,” “partially achieved,” and “not achieved.” For a State to be in substantial conformity with a particular outcome, 95 percent or more of the applicable cases reviewed must be rated as having substantially achieved the outcome. Two outcomes—Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1—also are evaluated based on State performance with regard to six national data indicators. For a State to be in substantial conformity with these outcomes, both the national standards for each data indicator and the case review requirements must be met. A State that is not in substantial conformity with a particular outcome must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan to address the areas of concern identified for that outcome.

The Children’s Bureau has established very high standards of performance for the CFSR. The standards are based on the belief that because child welfare agencies work with our nation’s most vulnerable children and families, only the highest standards of performance should be considered acceptable. The standards are set high to ensure ongoing attention to achieving positive outcomes for children and families with regard to safety, permanency, and well-being. This is consistent with the goal of the CFSR to promote continuous improvement in performance on these outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that States are not required to attain the 95-percent standard established for the CFSR Onsite Review or the national standards for the six data indicators by the end of their Program Improvement Plan implementations. The Children’s Bureau recognizes that the kinds of systemic and practice changes necessary to bring about improvement in particular outcome areas often take time to implement. Also, improvements are likely to be incremental rather than dramatic. Instead, States work with the Children’s Bureau to establish a specified amount of improvement or to determine specified activities for their Program Improvement Plans. That is, for each outcome that is not in substantial conformity or item that is rated as an Area Needing Improvement, each State (working in conjunction with the Children’s Bureau) specifies the following: (1) how much improvement the State will demonstrate and/or the activities that it will implement to address the Areas Needing Improvement and (2) the procedures for demonstrating the achievement of these goals. Both the improvements specified and the procedures for demonstrating improvement vary across States. Therefore, a State can meet the requirements of its Program Improvement Plan and still not perform at the 95-percent (for outcomes) or the 90-percent (for items) levels established for the CFSR.

The second round of the CFSR assesses a State’s current level of performance once more by applying the high standards and a consistent, comprehensive, case review methodology. The results of this effort are intended to serve as the basis for continued Program Improvement Plans addressing areas in which a State still needs to improve, even though prior Program Improvement Plan goals may have been achieved. The purpose is to ensure that program improvement is an ongoing process and does not end with the completion of a Program Improvement Plan.

The following sections provide information on how Rhode Island performed on each outcome in the first round of the CFSR as well as the current CFSR. If the outcome was not substantially achieved during the first round, the key concerns observed at that time and the strategies implemented in the Program Improvement Plan to address those concerns are discussed.

Because many changes were made in the CFSR process based on lessons learned during the first round and in response to feedback from the child welfare field, a State's performance in the second round of the CFSR is not directly comparable to its performance in the first round, particularly with regard to comparisons of data indicators or percentages regarding Strength and Area Needing Improvement ratings. Key changes in the CFSR case review process that make it difficult to compare performance across reviews include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increase in the sample size from 50 to 65 cases
- Stratification of the sample to ensure a minimum number of cases in key program areas, resulting in variations in the number of cases relevant for specific outcomes and items
- Changes in criteria for specific items to enhance consistency and ensure an assessment of critical areas such as child welfare agency efforts to involve noncustodial parents in planning for their children

For each outcome, there is a table presenting the data for the case review findings and national indicators (when relevant). The table is followed by a discussion of Rhode Island's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome at the time of the State's first CFSR report, which was held in fiscal year (FY) 2004, the State's status relevant to the current review, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed under the outcome. Performance of individual sites included in the Onsite Review is presented in the tables. Variations in outcome and item ratings as a function of type of case (i.e., foster care or in-home services) also are identified when appropriate.

1. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect					
Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	4	5	12	21	91.3
Partially Achieved	0	2	0	2	8.7
Total Applicable Cases	4	7	12	23	
Not Applicable Cases	13	10	19	42	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	100%	71%	100%		

Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards					
National Data Indicators	National Standard (%)			State's Percent	Meets Standards?
Absence of maltreatment recurrence	94.6+			91.5	No
Absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff	99.68+			98.78	No

Status of Safety Outcome 1

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 91.3 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. It should be noted that taken individually, the two indicators used to assess this outcome were rated as a Strength in more than 90 percent of the cases. However, taken together, the percentage of cases that substantially achieved this outcome did not meet the required 95 percent. In addition to the case review findings, the State did not meet the national standards for the national data indicators pertaining to absence of maltreatment recurrence or absence of maltreatment of children in foster care by foster parents or facility staff. The State also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The primary concern identified in the 2004 review was that the State was not effective in preventing maltreatment recurrence.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Revised the safety assessment, investigative summary, and intake summary to improve the identification of safety issues and the development of a specific protective plan, and to ensure that critical safety information is shared at case transfer
- Implemented the Information and Referral (I&R) process that requires follow-up on reports on families already open to DCYF when the reports do not meet the criteria for investigation but may need additional case management. As part of the I&R process, caseworkers must contact the family to assess and discuss the concerns contained in the report.
- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new case/service plan informed by that assessment
- Conducted a case analysis with the assistance of the National Resource Center on Child Protective Services to determine contributing factors to the State's rate of repeat maltreatment and strategies for improvement.
- Created a new child protective services (CPS) investigation finding ("unfounded—referred for case management review") that allows investigators to determine that while no maltreatment is substantiated, the family is in need of and willing to engage with community-based services
- Trained staff how to assess safety and risk, and how to develop viable safety plans
- Participated in a Breakthrough Series on safety and risk, with a goal of enhancing and engaging natural family supports to increase family resilience.
- Implemented the Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCP) to provide immediate access to community-based crisis stabilization and family preservation services

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

 X **Strength** **Area Needing Improvement**

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 23 (35 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable when there were no child maltreatment reports during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency policy requirements.

Rhode Island DCYF policy establishes the following report categories and corresponding response requirements:

- Emergency Response reports: A child protective investigator (CPI) must respond to the report within 10 minutes of assignment.

- Immediate Response reports: A CPI must respond to the report within the shift in which the call was received.
- Routine Response reports: A CPI must respond to the report within 24 hours of assignment.

Rhode Island DCYF policy does not specify what constitutes a “response” and does not specify a timeframe for establishing face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim. Policy does indicate that the investigation must be completed within 10 days during which time the alleged child victim must be seen.

The results of the assessment of item 1 are presented in the table below.

Item 1 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	4	6	12	22	96
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	4
Total Applicable Cases	4	7	12	23	
Not Applicable	13	10	19	42	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	100%	86%	100%		

Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 22 cases when the investigation was initiated and face-to-face contact was made within the timeframes required by State policy. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case that was assigned a routine response when the child was not seen within the 10 days allowed for an investigation.

Rating Determination

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 96 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in accordance with required timeframes. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 1 also was rated as a Strength in Rhode Island’s 2004 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, policy requires the CPI to interview the child victim in a report as soon as possible within the timeframes of the response priority. Additionally, face-to-face contact must be made with all of the children named in the report and any other children in the household within the 10-day timeframe allowed for an investigation.

Data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that the timeliness of investigations was rated as a Strength in 96 percent of the 42 cases reviewed for this item in the 2008 Rhode Island State Child and Family Service Review (RI-State CFSR), which is modeled after the Federal CFSR.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DCYF generally responds to referrals of child abuse and neglect in a timely manner.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 18 (28 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were not applicable for this item if there was no substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. For all applicable cases, reviewers were to determine if there had been a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report involving similar circumstances had occurred within a 6-month period before or after that identified report. The results of the assessment of item 2 are presented in the table below.

Item 2 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	3	5	9	17	94
Area Needing Improvement	0	1	0	1	6
Total Applicable Cases	3	6	9	18	
Not Applicable	14	11	22	47	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	100%	83%	100%		

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 17 cases when there was only one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report on the family within a 6-month period. Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when there were two substantiated maltreatment reports on the family within a 3-month period.

In addition to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment reports, reviewers reported the following findings with regard to the number of maltreatment reports on the family during the life of the case ("life of the case" refers to the time from the date of the first allegation of abuse or neglect to the time of the Onsite Review):

- In five cases, there were no maltreatment reports as the case was opened for reasons other than maltreatment.
- In 20 cases, there were fewer than three reports.
- In 21 cases, there were at least three reports but fewer than six reports.
- In 15 cases, there were between 6 and 11 reports.
- In four cases, there were 12 or more maltreatment reports.

Rating Determination

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 94 percent of the applicable cases, there was no recurrence of substantiated or indicated maltreatment within a 6-month period. This percentage is greater than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF has an automated system that identifies cases in which there has been a maltreatment recurrence and generates a weekly report listing all pending cases of maltreatment recurrence. All investigations listed in the report must be reviewed by CPS administrators prior to a substantiation of the current investigation to determine if the current report actually is an incident of repeat maltreatment.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, DCYF has reduced the rate of maltreatment recurrence from 13.1 percent in 2007 to 8.5 percent on March 31, 2009.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive stakeholder comments on repeat maltreatment during the onsite CFSR.

Safety Outcome 2

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate					
Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	10	7	14	31	47.7
Partially Achieved	2	7	6	15	23.1
Not Achieved	5	3	11	19	29.2
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Substantially Achieved by Site	59%	41%	45%		

Status of Safety Outcome 2

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 47.7 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The State also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistently effective in addressing underlying and ongoing risk of harm to children, particularly in situations involving parental substance abuse, mental illness, and/or domestic violence.
- In some cases, risk of harm to children had been identified, but services were not provided to either children or parents.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new case/service plan informed by the assessment
- Worked on the development of an administrative services organization to provide a statewide comprehensive network of prevention services which was the precursor to the FCCP
- Worked on redesigning procuring and managing services for children and families with the most complex needs, which was the preliminary work toward the State's current system of care effort

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal or reentry into foster care

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 3 was applicable in 37 (57 percent) of the 65 cases. Cases were excluded if the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and there were no other children in the home, or if there were no concerns regarding the safety of any children in the home during the period under review. For applicable cases, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families that would prevent placement of children in foster care and at the same time ensure their safety. The results of the assessment of item 3 are presented in the table that follows.

Item 3 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	7	10	11	28	76
Area Needing Improvement	0	2	7	9	24
Total Applicable Cases	7	12	18	37	
Not Applicable	10	5	13	28	
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	100%	83%	61%		

Item 3 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- Although no services were provided when the child was removed from the home, the removal was necessary to ensure the safety of the child (five cases).
- Services were provided to the family to ensure the safety of the child and prevent removal (17 cases).
- Services were provided after reunification of the child to prevent reentry (three cases).
- Efforts were made to provide services prior to removal and/or reentry (three cases).

Case review information indicates that a range of services was offered or provided to families. This included but was not limited to the following: assessments for substance abuse, substance abuse treatment, anger management services, financial assistance services, domestic violence services, parenting education and support services, case management services, transportation services, psychological services (mental health screenings and treatment), behavioral therapy, evidence-based Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), daycare services, crisis intervention, intensive in-home services, in-home counseling, medication management, and after-care services.

Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- Services were not provided to the family, and the children remained at risk in the home (one case).
- Services were provided, but they did not target the key safety concern in the family, leaving the children at risk in the home (four cases).
- Services were not provided to protect the children in the home, and the children were subsequently removed or reentered foster care (four cases).

Rating Determination

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 76 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 3 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, Rhode Island law requires DCYF to provide services to children and their families to prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their homes. The Statewide Assessment reports the following as DCYF efforts to prevent removal:

- Development of partnerships with community-based agencies to promote interventions with families as early as possible in the case and to formulate viable safety plans for maintaining children in their own homes
- Provision of home-based behavioral and clinical intervention services
- Establishment of the FCCPs to ensure that families are able to access necessary family preservation and family support services and prevent DCYF involvement when it is appropriate to do so

Data reported in the Statewide Assessment indicate that this item was rated as a Strength in 89 percent of the applicable cases reviewed during the 2008 RI-State CFSR.

The Statewide Assessment identified a number of barriers to providing services to families to prevent removal from the home, including the following:

- Language barriers: The number of providers able to quickly accommodate families whose primary language is not English has increased slowly, although wait lists have decreased in the last few years.
- Resources: The service capacity levels for some critical services have not significantly improved. Example: parent aide services are practically nonexistent as this service is not covered by insurance, and the funding by DCYF is not sufficient to cover the cost. Parent aide services are often a service put in place to manage safety threats to children who remain at home.
- Changes in intensive home-based mental health treatment services for children: The program included intensive clinical and case management services to children in their homes, schools, and other community settings for a period of 6 months with possible extensions in the duration and intensity of services, but it was reduced in duration to a maximum of 16 weeks per year and was revised to focus on children with the most significant mental health needs in an effort to prevent psychiatric hospitalization or stabilize a child returning to the home and community from said hospitalization.

The Statewide Assessment also reports, however, that when children enter DCYF foster care through the juvenile justice system (particularly through the Truancy Court and Drug Court), it is not always possible for DCYF to implement actions to prevent these removals. This is because youth appear before the Truancy Court and Drug Court usually prior to any DCYF involvement. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, a number of youth who appear in these courts are ordered into out-of-home placement even though most of them do not have safety or risk factors within the family that would require out-of-home placement. The Statewide Assessment also notes that DCYF and community partners have had many informal meetings with truancy magistrates to address this practice and suggest alternatives that do not require the child to be removed from the family.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on FCCP indicated that families are referred to FCCP when the investigation is unfounded or very low risk. These services generally are early intervention services, and FCCP is able to put services for families in place very quickly. Some stakeholders confirmed that FCCP is not available to families with open Family Service Unit (FSU) cases.

Stakeholder comments regarding Truancy Court were consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment, including that children who appear in the court are being ordered into out-of-home placements when there are no risk factors indicating a need for this type of service. A few stakeholders also expressed the opinion that Truancy Courts are using foster care as a form of punishment for youth who appear in that court.

Item 4. Risk assessment and safety management

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 4 was applicable for all 65 cases. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to address the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The results of the assessment of item 4 are presented in the table below.

Item 4 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	10	8	15	33	51
Area Needing Improvement	7	9	16	32	49
Total Cases	17	17	31	65	
Strength by Site	59%	47%	48%		

Item 4 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by the agency through the following: conducting initial and ongoing assessments of risk and safety either in the children's home or in the children's foster home, and addressing all safety-related concerns identified through the assessment.

Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was no initial risk assessment (six cases).
- There was no ongoing risk assessment (27 cases).
- There was no initial safety assessment (five cases).
- There was no ongoing safety assessment (22 cases).
- There were safety concerns in the child's home that were not addressed by the agency (eight cases).

- There were safety concerns regarding parent-child visitation that were not addressed by the agency (four cases).
- There were safety concerns regarding the child's placement that were not addressed by the agency (two cases).
- A safety assessment was not completed when the child was discharged from foster care (seven cases).

Additionally, in eight cases, only the child who was the focus of DCYF involvement was assessed for risk and safety—other children living in the household were not assessed.

Rating Determination

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 51 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to assess and address the risk of harm to the child. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 4 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF policy mandates that risk assessments be conducted throughout the child protection investigation and within 60 days of the case opening in the FSU. Policy also mandates that risk reassessments be conducted at least every 6 months thereafter or when case circumstances require. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, risk and safety assessments are to be conducted using the FCRPCA tool, which was implemented in 2007 and is accessible through the Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST). The FCRPCA service plan (FCRPCASP) not only assesses and monitors risk and safety, but also addresses all other child and family issues related to permanency and well-being for child welfare and juvenile justice populations.

The FCRPCA is used to reassess safety and risk for the child prior to reunification or when significant changes in the family situation occur.

The Statewide Assessment reports data relevant to item 4 from monthly supervisor case reviews that use an instrument modeled after the Federal CFSR instrument. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, in the first quarter of 2009, 93 percent of cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item. The Statewide Assessment also notes that this percentage represents an increase from the fourth quarter of 2007, when only 78 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as a Strength for this item.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Stakeholders commenting on this item expressed different opinions about the effectiveness of DCYF in assessing risk and managing safety, and on the effectiveness of the assessment tool. Some stakeholders indicated that DCYF is effective in assessing risk and safety, with a few stakeholders reporting that safety and risk are assessed at every contact. Additionally, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that the safety plans are now required to contain specific steps to ensure safety. Despite this positive feedback, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that safety and risk are not consistently assessed and, as a result appropriate safety plans are not consistently developed.

Most stakeholders acknowledged that the agency provides a formal tool for conducting risk and safety assessments, the FCRPCA, but they expressed different opinions about the effectiveness of this tool. Although some stakeholders indicated that the FCRPCA helps the caseworker be more efficient by consistently assessing the needs and services of the entire family, a few stakeholders expressed concern that the assessment tool is not effective and is difficult to complete.

A few stakeholders expressed the opinion that some cases referred to FCCP were not appropriate and should have been referred to the FSU.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations					
Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	2	3	9	14	35.0
Partially Achieved	7	7	11	25	62.5
Not Achieved	1	0	0	1	2.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Substantially Achieved by Site	20%	30%	45%		

Conformity of Statewide Data Indicators With National Standards				
National Data Indicators	National Standard (Scaled Score)	State Score (Scaled Score)	Meets Standards?	
Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification	122.6+	96.1	No	
Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions	106.4+	141.7	Yes	
Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods	121.7+	123.6	Yes	
Composite 4: Placement stability	101.5+	97.4	No	

Status of Permanency Outcome 1

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The outcome was substantially achieved in 35.0 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. In addition to case review findings, Rhode Island did not meet the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to timeliness and permanency of reunification, and placement stability. However, the State did meet the national standard for the data indicators pertaining to

timeliness of adoptions and permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. The State also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State was not consistent in its efforts to prevent reentry into foster care.
- Reunification occurred without adequate preparation or planning, and there was a lack of post-reunification supports/resources.
- The State was not consistent with regard to ensuring placement stability for children in foster care.
- There was a lack of sufficient placement resources and a frequent use of emergency shelters, which resulted in multiple, short-term placements for children, including very young children.
- The State was not consistent with regard to establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner.
- The State did not consistently make concerted efforts to achieve children's permanency goals in a timely manner.
- In some cases, inappropriate permanency goals remained in place for an extended length of time due to reluctance by DCYF and/or the court to explore other permanency options.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Assigned a DCYF attorney to handle only termination of parental rights (TPR) appeals to decrease the length of time for appeals
- Improved the process for the timely completion of license applications to promote sufficient capacity by leasing fingerprinting equipment to expedite the background check process and by contracting home studies to reduce the completion time
- Created a database within RICHIST that allows the Placement Unit to see the foster homes with openings and the characteristics of the children that these foster homes are willing to accept to better match children entering foster care with an appropriate placements
- Developed and implemented policy on locating and engaging absent parents, including the use of Federal Parent Locator Services
- Trained DCYF staff and community partners on the relevance of fathers and paternal relatives to children's permanency and well-being
- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new service plan informed by that assessment
- Trained staff on the new assessment and service plan process and tool, with an emphasis on engaging the family in the assessment and planning process
- Trained supervisors on the use of guardianship as a permanency option
- Established an Adoption Specialist Certification Program to increase the level of adoption expertise among clinicians in the State

The Children's Bureau has not yet made a determination regarding the achievement of the measure of this outcome for the 2004 CFSR Program Improvement Plan.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

Findings pertaining to the items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 5. Foster care reentries

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

An assessment of item 5 was applicable for 18 (45 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if the child did not enter foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of the assessment of item 5 are presented in the table below.

Item 5 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	2	6	7	15	83
Area Needing Improvement	0	0	3	3	17
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	6	10	18	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	4	10	22	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	100%	100%	70%		

Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 15 cases when the child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in three cases when the child's entry into foster care occurred within 12 months of the date of discharge from a prior foster care placement episode. In one case, the child reentered foster care within 4 months; in another case the child reentered foster care within 10.5 months; and in the third case, the child reentered foster care within 2 months.

Rating Determination

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 83 percent of the cases, reviewers found that the children reentered foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 5 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Performance on the Composite 1 Measure Relevant to the Permanency of Reunification

The data below are presented to provide additional information about foster care reentry. There is no national standard for the measure of foster care reentry. National standards with regard to permanency have been established only for the scaled composite scores. The measure of foster care reentry is part of Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification. The State's performance on Composite 1 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

Rhode Island's performance on the individual measure of foster care reentry (measure C1.4) included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was the following: In the 12 months prior to the CFSR 12-month target period for the data indicators, 23.6 percent of children exiting foster care to reunification reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the time of discharge. This percentage is greater than the national median of 15.0 percent. (For this measure, a lower percentage reflects a higher level of performance.)

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF and the Yale Consultation Center conducted a data analysis during FY 2007 to identify the populations experiencing the highest reentry rates. The findings were that the following populations had the highest reentry rates into foster care:

- Children ages 11 years and older
- Children removed from their homes for behavioral reasons rather than for reasons related to abuse or neglect
- Children placed in group homes or non-relative foster homes

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCYF is making efforts to reduce the reentry rate by targeting services to these populations.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, the Juvenile Court has had an impact on the rate of children who reenter foster care within 12 months of a prior episode. Some of the youth who go through Juvenile Court experience short-term placements and later come into care based on their assessed need for service. This practice often circumvents DCYF and frequently prevents the implementation of in-home services to prevent removal. During the 2008-2009 school year, 39 youth presented to DCYF's intake unit for opening due to a Juvenile Court order for immediate placement. Most of these cases were not open to DCYF prior to the order for placement.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive stakeholder comments on the issue of foster care reentry during the onsite CFSR.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. Reviewers also assessed the stability of the child's most recent placement setting. The results of the assessment of item 6 are presented in the table that follows.

Item 6 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	9	8	15	32	80
Area Needing Improvement	1	2	5	8	20
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	90%	80%	75%		

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's current placement was stable and that the child either did not experience a placement change during the period under review (25 cases) or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interests (i.e., they were intended to further achievement of the child's permanency goal or to provide specialized services for the child) (7 cases).

Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or both of the following:

- The child was in multiple placement settings during the period under review, and at least one placement change was not planned by the agency to attain the child's permanency goal (five cases).
- The child's placement setting at the time of the onsite CFSR was not stable (six cases).

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 28 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 10 cases experienced two placements during the period under review.
- Children in two cases experienced three placements during the period under review.

Rating Determination

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 80 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 6 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Measures Included in Composite 4: Placement stability

The data below are presented to provide additional information about placement stability. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 4 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Rhode Island's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 4: Placement stability was the following:

- C4.1: 85.8 percent of the children in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is greater than the national median of 83.3 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 86.0 percent.
- C4.2: 61.5 percent of the children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is greater than the national median of 59.9 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 65.4 percent.
- C4.3: 36.6 percent of the children in foster care for at least 24 months experienced two or fewer placement settings. This percentage is greater than the national median of 33.9 percent but less than the national 75th percentile of 41.8 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF policy requires caseworkers to meet regularly with foster parents and children to assess needs, monitor progress, and ensure that all necessary supports are in place to maintain the child's placement. The Statewide Assessment notes that there is a report in RICHIST that allows the Placement Unit to see all of the foster homes with openings and the characteristics of the children that these foster homes are willing to accept. Placement Unit staff review available information about the homes and begin calling prospective foster parents to determine which home is the best fit and is available to accept placement of the child. Additionally, the Statewide Assessment reports that the reasons for change in child placement are tracked during administrative reviews.

The Statewide Assessment reports that DCYF and the Yale Consultation Center conducted a study of youth in foster care placement from August 2005 to May 2008 to determine the factors associated with placement stability. The results identified the following five populations as having high placement instability rates:

- Children whose primary reason for removal was neglect
- Children who had an emotional or behavioral diagnosis
- Children with disabilities
- Children placed in non-relative foster care
- Children placed in an emergency shelters
- Children between the ages of 2 and 5

According to the Statewide Assessment, there is a lack of support for DCYF non-relative general licensed foster families. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, these foster families need support in navigating and understanding legal and court proceedings and in preparing children in their care for permanency. Additionally, foster parents need support as they begin to develop relationships with biological parents. Although the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association (RIFPA) has a mentoring program for newly licensed foster parents and a telephone help line for foster families, it is not equipped to provide this level of support.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that another finding of the study was that placement moves for 33 percent of the children with three or more moves in the 12-month period were to promote achievement of the child's the permanency goal.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that the State attempts to ensure stable placements for children in foster care. Some stakeholders suggested that children in relative foster family placements have higher stability than children in non-relative foster homes. Some stakeholders also suggested that services are offered to foster families to support placements and prevent disruptions.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

All 40 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal was appropriate. Reviewers also were to determine whether the agency had sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The results of the assessment of item 7 are presented in the table below.

Item 7 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	3	4	11	18	45
Area Needing Improvement	7	6	9	22	55
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	30%	40%	55%		

Item 7 was rated as a Strength in 18 cases when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate, had been established in a timely manner, and, if relevant, that the agency had filed for TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA.

Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child's permanency goal at the time of the onsite CFSR was not appropriate given the case situation and the needs of the child (eight cases).
- The child's permanency goal was not established in a timely manner (19 cases).
- The agency had not sought TPR in accordance with the requirements of ASFA, particularly with regard to documenting compelling reasons in the case file for not seeking TPR (eight cases).

ASFA requirements with regard to filing for TPR were met in 43 percent of 14 applicable cases.

The following case goals were identified for the 40 foster care cases:

- Adoption (10 cases)
- Reunification with parents (27 cases)
- Other planned permanent living arrangement (OPPLA) (three cases)

Rating Determination

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 45 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and had met ASFA requirements when relevant. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 7 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Measures Included in Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods

The data below are presented to provide additional information about permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards were established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 3 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Rhode Island's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 3: Permanency for children in foster care for extended time periods was the following:

- C3.1: 23.7 percent of the children in foster care for 24 months or longer at the start of the 12-month CFSR target period were discharged from foster care to a permanent home (adoption, reunification with parents or other relatives, or guardianship) by the end of the target period. This percentage is less than the national median of 25.0 percent.
- C3.2: 95.9 percent of the children exiting foster care during the target period who were legally free for adoption at the time of exit were discharged to a permanent home. This percentage is less than the national median of 96.8 percent.
- C3.3: 36.2 percent of the children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation had been in foster care for 3 years or longer at the time of discharge. This percentage is less than the national 25th percentile of 37.5 percent. (For this measure, a lower percentage reflects a higher level of performance.)

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, a permanency goal for each child in foster care must be determined by the caseworker in consultation with the supervisor. State statute allows for one of the following six permanency planning goals:

- Maintenance in the home
- Reunification
- Adoption
- Guardianship

- Permanent placement with a fit and willing relative
- Planned living arrangement/independent living

The Statewide Assessment reports that the initial permanency planning goal is almost always reunification unless there is a prior involuntary TPR or the case involves cruel and extreme abuse. Progress toward permanency is monitored through reviews by the Administrative Review Unit (ARU), and the ARU officer makes recommendations, when necessary, to modify the goal. The Statewide Assessment also reports that Dashboard reports from RICHIST are available to track the timeliness and appropriateness of permanency planning goals.

As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, although State legislation and DCYF policy allow for concurrent planning, DCYF practice does not reflect the policy and/or procedure of concurrent planning. This was attributed in the Statewide Assessment to the legal perspective in the State, which is that concurrent planning is an inherent contradiction that undermines the reasonable efforts requirements of most TPR allegations excluding cruel/abusive torture and abandonment.

The Statewide Assessment notes that a key barrier to filing for TPR in a timely manner is the Family Court's preference to have an adoptive resource in place prior to the filing of the TPR petition. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, when a petition is filed and no pre-adoptive home has been identified, the court will make it clear either from the bench or in mediation that it will not address the petition until an adoptive resource has been identified. The Statewide Assessment reports that because agency policy requires that TPR be filed before the permanency goal of adoption can be formally established, DCYF often must continue to work on permanency goals that may not be appropriate. Additionally, according to the Statewide Assessment, there is sometimes a long period of time, up to 12 months, between arraignment of dependency, abuse, and neglect (DNA) petitions and actual findings of abuse or neglect (commitment of the child to DCYF). As reported in the Statewide Assessment, this sometimes results in DCYF filing a TPR petition before there has been a finding of abuse or neglect on the underlying petition. Additional information pertaining to TPR is provided under item 9 below and item 28 in the Systemic Factors section of this report.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in October 2007, DCYF established Permanency Support Teams (PSTs) within each of the DCYF Regional Offices to improve the timeliness of establishing permanency goals with particular emphasis placed on children who have been in foster care for long periods of time. These teams are comprised of DCYF staff and staff from collaborating community-based agencies. The Statewide Assessment notes that the objective of the PST is to ensure that every child in DCYF custody who is not reunified with parents will have an appropriate permanency goal and will maintain valuable connections with other members of their family and other significant, caring adults. The PSTs can assist the caseworker with any of the following tasks:

- Preparing necessary case documentation
- Completing Internet searches for paternal and maternal relatives who may be a placement resource or connection for the child
- Assisting with the negotiation of adoption and guardianship subsidies
- Explaining to prospective guardians their rights and responsibilities
- Reviewing the appropriateness of permanency planning goals

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, when the permanency goal of planned living arrangement/independent living is considered or is the permanency goal, the case is referred to the PST for consultation on whether this is the best permanency goal for the child. Additionally, prior to choosing guardianship as the permanency goal, DCYF must document why reunification is not an option and why adoption is not in the child's best interest. At least one parent must come to court and enter agreement to the guardianship.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The key issues addressed by stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were whether permanency goals were established in a timely manner and were appropriate to the needs of the child, whether concurrent planning was being used in the State, and whether petitions for TPR were filed in a timely manner.

Most stakeholders commenting on the appropriateness and timeliness of goals expressed the opinion that the State generally is effective in establishing an appropriate permanency goal in a timely manner. Some stakeholders indicated that the initial permanency goal generally is reunification.

Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that concurrent planning is done informally in some cases; other stakeholders reported that concurrent planning is not practiced at all. Some stakeholders indicated that they would prefer the consistent use of concurrent planning for children as it would increase the likelihood of timely permanency. Additionally, a few stakeholders expressed the opinion that concurrent planning suggests that the agency will not make reasonable efforts to reunify children with their parents.

Some stakeholders reported that the State is effective in filing for TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA and that when DCYF does not file for TPR, compelling reasons usually are documented. A few stakeholders indicated that DCYF will file a TPR petition even when there is no identified adoptive resource for the child; however, other stakeholders reported that some courts will not accept a TPR petition if there is no identified adoptive resource for the child. Some stakeholders reported that in some cases, the court discourage the filing of a TPR petition in order to give parents more time to continue with their reunification efforts.

A few stakeholders expressed the opinion that establishing permanency in a timely manner is difficult for some children because there often are situations in which the parent's attorney will delay the adjudication hearing with the goal of having the case heard as a dependency charge rather than an abuse/neglect petition. A dependency charge indicates that the child is in foster care due to "no fault" of the parents. Stakeholders suggested that if a case is heard as a dependency charge, that often makes it difficult to terminate parental rights later. Stakeholders also noted that parent attorneys have been successful in delaying adjudication for as long as 9 months to 1 year after the child is removed from the home, which makes it difficult to establish permanency goals in a timely manner.

Many stakeholders expressed the opinion that PSTs were initially met with a lot of resistance by DCYF caseworkers. However, the PSTs, according to these stakeholders, have proved to be effective and have been beneficial in finding connections and in establishing appropriate plans for children and youth.

Additional stakeholder information pertaining to TPR is provided under item 9 below and item 28 in the Systemic Factors section of this report.

Item 8. Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 8 was applicable for 27 (67.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of the assessment of item 8 are presented in the table below.

Item 8 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	4	4	8	16	59
Area Needing Improvement	1	3	7	11	41
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	7	15	27	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	5	3	5	13	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	80%	57%	53%		

Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 16 cases when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency had made concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 11 cases when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to achieve reunification or guardianship in a timely manner. Some of the concerns identified pertained to the agency not providing appropriate services to promote reunification and not engaging parents, and a general lack of concerted efforts to achieve reunifications.

Rating Determination

Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 59 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 8 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Measures Pertaining to Timeliness Included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification

The data below are presented to provide additional information about the timeliness of reunification. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 1 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Rhode Island's performance on the individual timeliness measures included in Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification was the following:

- C1.1: 66.8 percent of the reunifications occurred in at least 8 days but less than 12 months of the child's entry into foster care. This percentage is less than the national median of 69.9 percent.
- C1.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children discharged to reunification was 7.8 months. This length of stay is greater than the national median of 6.5 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.)
- C1.3: 51.2 percent of children entering foster care in the 6 months prior to the 12-month target period were discharged from foster care to reunification in more than 7 days but less than 12 months of entry into foster care. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 48.4 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, reunification usually is the initial permanency goal and the ARU evaluates the child's progress toward reunification. The Statewide Assessment reports that barriers to timely reunification include the lack of post reunification support services in the State and waiting lists for some services, particularly parent aide services and substance abuse services.

The Statewide Assessment also reports that when guardianship is the permanency planning goal, DCYF provides a 1-day training to relatives and kin who will be the legal guardian of the child. Additionally, these relatives or kin are eligible for a guardianship subsidy once they have been granted legal guardianship of the child. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, a parent can terminate the guardianship by filing a request with the Family Court and showing proof that circumstances have changed and that the parent is now a fit and willing parent. DCYF is notified of any filing that requests reconsideration of the guardianship and conducts an assessment to determine whether circumstances have changed for the parent and whether termination of the guardianship is in the best interest of the child.

Stakeholder Interview Information

There were insufficient substantive comments from stakeholders on the permanency goal of reunification during the Onsite Review.

Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that the permanency goal of guardianship is being used more frequently now than it has in the past and currently is viewed by the agency and the court as a viable option for children of all ages.

Item 9. Adoption

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 9 was applicable for 10 (25 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. The results of the assessment of item 9 are presented in the table below.

Item 9 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	2	0	1	3	30
Area Needing Improvement	1	2	4	7	70
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	3	2	5	10	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	7	8	15	30	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	67%	0	20%		

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in three cases when reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in seven cases when reviewers identified one or more of the following:

- Delays in filing for TPR (six cases)
- Delays in the TPR process after filing (one case)
- Delays in finalizing adoptive placement (one case)
- Delays in the identification of an adoptive home (two cases)
- Delays in searching for absent parents (two cases)

Additional findings relevant to this item were the following:

- Of the 10 children with a goal of adoption, 3 achieved the goal during the period under review.
- Of the three children who had a finalized adoption during the period under review, two had been in foster care for less than 24 months.
- Of the seven children with a goal of adoption who were not adopted during the period under review, six had been in foster care for longer than 24 months.

Rating Determination

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 30 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 9 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Performance on the Individual Measures Included in Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions

The data below are presented to provide additional information about the timeliness of adoptions. There are no national standards for performance on these measures individually. National standards have been established only for the scaled composite score. The State's performance on Composite 2 is shown in the table for Permanency Outcome 1.

For the target 12-month CFSR period established for the data indicators, Rhode Island's performance on the individual measures included in Composite 2: Timeliness of adoptions was the following:

- C2.1: 42.3 percent of the children exiting to adoption were discharged in less than 24 months from the time of entry into foster care. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 36.6 percent.
- C2.2: The median length of stay in foster care for children adopted was 26.1 months. This median length of stay is less than the national 25th percentile of 27.3 months. (For this measure, a lower number of months reflects a higher level of performance.)
- C2.3: 23.0 percent of children who were in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year were discharged to a final adoption by the last day of the year. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 22.7 percent.
- C2.4: 18.4 percent of children who were in foster care for 17 months or longer on the first day of the year became legally free for adoption (i.e., there was a TPR for both mother and father) within the first 6 months of the year. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 10.9 percent.
- C2.5: 76.5 percent of children who were legally free for adoption were adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free. This percentage is greater than the national 75th percentile of 53.7 percent.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF policy states that when a child has been in foster care for 12 months, a permanency hearing must be held in the Family Court to address whether DCYF has made reasonable efforts toward permanency and to make a determination as to whether a TPR petition should be filed. If a TPR petition is filed, Rhode Island law requires that all TPR petitions be adjudicated within 180 days of filing. Additionally, Rhode Island law and DCYF policy require the Family Court to review the status of the child if the child is not placed in a permanent resource within 30 days from the date of the final TPR decree. The Statewide Assessment notes that DCYF must inform the court of its efforts to recruit an adoptive resource for the child.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State law requires that all TPR petitions must be adjudicated within 180 days of the filing of the petition. However, the Statewide Assessment reports that in some cases, the court wants DCYF to withdraw the petition without prejudice (a dismissal that allows for refiling the case in the future) and refile (to start the 180-day cycle anew, thus preserving the evidence).

The Statewide Assessment notes that mediation usually is ordered by the court in TPR cases because mediators often are successful in helping the parties reach agreement about the terms of an open or direct-consent adoption in which the biological parent maintains some form of contact with the child. Additionally, the Statewide Assessment indicates that mediation seems to reduce the number of TPR trials. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that DCYF caseworkers and foster/adoptive parents indicate that the mediation process is not a positive experience for them because frequently they feel pressured to accept "deals" with which they do not fully agree in order to avoid the possibility of an unfavorable outcome at trial.

Stakeholder Interview Information

Some stakeholders commenting on this item during the Onsite Review expressed the opinion that there has been an increase in adoptions and that this increase can be attributed to the focus on mediation and open adoptions. Some stakeholders, however, confirmed the information reported in the Statewide Assessment that foster/pre-adoptive parents often feel pressured by court mediators into signing off on the visitation terms of the open adoption even when they do not agree with them.

Item 10. Other planned permanent living arrangement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 10 was applicable for 3 (7.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to OPPLA. The results of the assessment of item 10 are presented in the table below.

Item 10 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	1	0	0	1	33
Area Needing Improvement	1	1	0	2	67
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	1	0	3	
Not Applicable Foster Care Case	8	9	20	37	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	50%	0	N/A		

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in one case when reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to ensure a long-term placement appropriate for the child's special needs. Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in two cases when reviewers determined that the youth received no services to prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living.

The table below provides the ages of the children when the goal of OPPLA was established.

Age of Child When OPPLA Was Established	Number of Children
13 years of age	1
16 years of age or older	2
Total	3

Rating Determination

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 33 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the goal of OPPLA was being addressed in an appropriate way. This percentage is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 10 also was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

Statewide Assessment Information

According to the Statewide Assessment, DCYF policy allows for the permanency goal of OPPLA (or APPLA, as it is called in Rhode Island) when guardianship or adoption is not possible. At the time of the Statewide Assessment, youth 16 years and older constituted 79 percent of cases with the service plan goal of OPPLA (which in Rhode Island includes permanent placement with relatives but not discharged from DCYF custody, planned living arrangement-other, or planned living arrangement-independent living) and 19.3 percent of those with a service plan goal of OPPLA were youth in juvenile corrections. Supplemental information amending the Statewide Assessment indicates that 100 percent of the two applicable cases were rated as a Strength for this item during the 2008 RI-State CFSR.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that DCYF policy mandates that Independent Living (IL) services must begin for children in out-of-home placement at the age of 16. The services available to these youth are discussed in item 35 of this Final Report. As reported in the Statewide Assessment, Real Connections, which is a partner in the PST, has been successful in developing and fostering personal connections for youth who were in danger of aging out of foster care without significant adult connections. Real Connections staff use case-mining, eco-mapping, and relationship mapping to locate relatives of these youth to establish permanent connections for them.

Stakeholder Interview Information

The few stakeholders commenting on the permanency goal of OPPLA during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the goal is appropriately used for youth who have no other permanency options. However, stakeholders commenting on the agency's effectiveness in preparing youth for making the transition from foster care to independent living indicated that many youth leaving foster care are not adequately prepared for independent living. Stakeholders noted that as a part of the State FY 2008 budget, the State lowered the age of foster care eligibility from 21 years of age to 18 years of age. This, according to some stakeholders, decreased the State's ability to prepare youth for successful independent living.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children					
Number of Cases Reviewed by the Team According to Degree of Outcome Achievement					
Degree of Outcome Achievement	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Substantially Achieved	6	5	10	21	52.5
Partially Achieved	4	5	9	18	45.0
Not Achieved	0	0	1	1	2.5
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Substantially Achieved by Site	60%	50%	50%		

Status of Permanency Outcome 2

Rhode Island is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. The outcome was substantially achieved in 52.5 percent of the cases reviewed. This percentage is less than the 95 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The State also was not in substantial conformity with this outcome in its 2004 CFSR and was required to address the outcome in its Program Improvement Plan.

Key Concerns From the 2004 CFSR

The following concerns were identified in the 2004 review:

- The State did not consistently place siblings together in foster care due to insufficient foster home capacity.
- The State was not consistently effective in promoting visitation between children in foster care with their parents, particularly with fathers, or with their siblings in foster care.
- The State did not consistently seek relatives as placement resources.
- The State was not consistent with regard to concerted efforts to preserve connections of children in foster care to extended families.
- The State was not consistent in promoting the relationship between children and their parents.

To address the identified concerns, the State implemented the following strategies:

- Developed and implemented policy on locating and engaging absent parents, including the use of Federal Parent Locator Services
- Trained DCYF staff and community partners on the relevance of fathers and paternal relatives to children's permanency and well-being
- Developed and implemented the FCRPCA and a new service plan informed by that assessment

- Trained staff on the new assessment and service plan process and tool, with an emphasis on engaging the family in the assessment and planning process

The State met its goals for this outcome by the end of its Program Improvement Plan implementation period.

Key Findings of the 2010 CFSR

The findings pertaining to the items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Strength Area Needing Improvement

Case Review Findings

Item 11 was applicable for 37 (92.5 percent) of the 40 foster care cases. Cases were not applicable if TPR was attained prior to the period under review, contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interests, and/or parents were deceased or their whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most current foster care setting was near the child's parents or close relatives. The results of the assessment of item 11 are presented in the table below.

Item 11 Ratings	Bristol	North Kingstown	Providence	Total	Percent
Strength	7	10	19	36	97
Area Needing Improvement	1	0	0	1	3
Total Applicable Foster Care Cases	8	10	19	37	
Not Applicable Foster Care Cases	2	0	1	3	
Total Foster Care Cases	10	10	20	40	
Strength by Site	87.5%	100%	100%		

Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 20 cases when reviewers determined that the child was placed either in the same community as the parents or near the parents' community. The item also was rated as a Strength in 16 cases when reviewers determined that even though the child was placed out of his or her community, the placement was necessary to meet the needs of the child and/or support attainment of the permanency goal. Item 11 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case when reviewers determined that the child's placement was not sufficiently close to the parents' location, and there was no justification for the distance.

Rating Determination

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength. In 97 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency placed children in locations close to their parents or relatives when appropriate. This percentage is more than the 90 percent required for a rating of Strength. Item 11 also was rated as a Strength in Rhode Island's 2004 CFSR.

