

Practice Matters

Administrative Review Division

Colorado, per Section 471 (a)(22), is responsible for developing and implementing standards to ensure that children are provided quality services that protect their safety and health. The Code of Federal Regulations (at 45 C.F.R. 1357.15 (u) and 45 C.F.R. 1355.34 (c)(3)) also requires a Quality Assurance (QA) System to regularly assess the quality of services provided to children and families. The State of Colorado, in the Child and Family Services Plan, identified the ARD as the entity responsible for implementing the Qualitative Case Review portion of this QA System. Within the QA System, the ARD combines information from the federally required Administrative Reviews and Case Reviews, as well as Assessment Reviews, to provide feedback on case practice and processes designed to improve outcomes for children and families .

The co-authors of Practice Matters this quarter are:

- Sara Chambers, Otero County
- Tim Hart, Pueblo County
- Terrie Ryan-Thomas, Boulder County
- Clinton Edgar, ARD
- Lindsey Gorzalski Hocking, ARD
- Leslie Mascarenas, ARD
- Roy Reed, ARD



Continuous Quality Improvement:

Understanding the Impact of the Qualitative Case Review - Assessments

Introduction

As an organization dedicated to continuous quality improvement, the Administrative Review Division (ARD) routinely looks both internally and externally at how administrative reviews can be a valuable change agent for the children served. The ARD recently adopted vision and mission statements exemplify this dedication:

*The Administrative Review Division's **vision** is to create a safe and promising future for children. Our **mission** is to strengthen the communities, families, and systems that work to make that future possible. As a neutral third party, we do this by facilitating reviews, gathering and analyzing data, publishing research, and providing training and technical assistance to effect change in practice, policies, and programs that lead to improved outcomes for Colorado's children.*

This edition of "Practice Matters" focuses on the assessment review process as an intervention that improves practice and outcomes for children. The assessment reviews focus on child welfare referrals that become a formal assessment. The reviews are completed on a random sample of each county's assessments. The size of the random sample allows for results that can be generalized to the assessment populations of that county at a 90% confidence level, with a 10% confidence interval.

Assessment reviews are conducted annually with all the mid-size and small Colorado counties, and biannually with the ten large counties. The ARD Management Team and In-Home Coordinator meet with county representatives subsequent to the review to discuss the county's performance and to review areas of strength and areas for improvement. Informative and collaborative discussions occur regarding the county's performance in hopes practice continues to improve. When the data gathered from these reviews is analyzed and compared to performance on previous assessment reviews, relative progress can be measured, hypotheses can be generated and tested, and improvement plans developed.

The overarching question this article attempts to answer is: "How do assessment review results impact county practice and, ultimately, outcomes for Colorado's children?" To answer this question, the ARD reviewed and compared the assessment review data for all Colorado counties from 7/1/10 through 6/30/12. The assessment review instrument contains a total of 15 questions, ranging from the appropriateness of assigning the referral according to Volume 7 to whether or not the county's finding matched the definition of founded, unfounded, or inconclusive. For purposes of this article, statewide compliance related to 11 of those questions will be discussed. Those questions relate to

four categories of the assessment process:

- screening decisions,
- family contact/interviews,
- the safety assessment tool, and
- the assessment outcome.

The following section presents an overview of statewide performance from SFY 2011 to SFY 2012 in these four areas. The forthcoming sections discuss how several counties were able to identify and improve upon the Safety Assessment component of the child welfare process. The article concludes with general thoughts and recommendations for continued performance improvement on the assessment process.

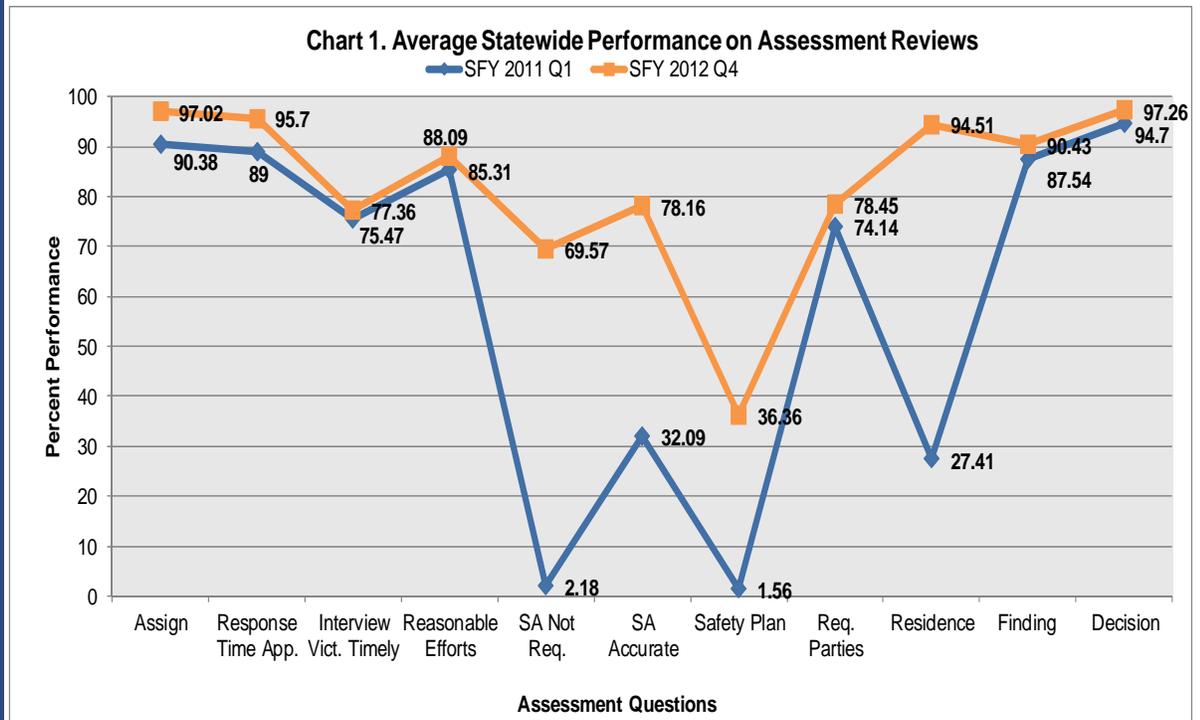
Results Overview

During the period under analysis, it is impressive to note that statewide compliance rates improved on all 11 questions studied. Chart 1 depicts the statewide average performance on the assessment review items, between the first quarter of SFY 2011 to the final quarter of SFY 2012. The following tables drill further down into these improvements and display the percent of change in compliance for each of the questions.

As illustrated in Table 1 on pg. 3, statewide compliance regarding referral acceptance and assigning appropriate response times are areas of strength (per federal CFSR guidelines items above 95% compliance rate¹). In the first quarter of SFY 2011, statewide compliance was approximately 90%. Over the measurement time period, the percent compliance increased by just under seven percentage points. This data demonstrates that most assessments are appropriately assigned.

In addition, there has been statewide improvement in assigning the appropriate response time as defined by Volume 7. Statewide compliance in assigning the appropriate response time increased also by approximately seven percentage points. These initial steps in the assessment process are a strength for the Colorado child welfare system and it is evident the ARD's continued focus on this piece of the assessment process contributes to county performance.

The data in Table 2 (also on pg. 3) indicates that although progress is being made regarding victim and family interviews, there are still barriers to the completion of these requirements. While the compliance rate of completing victim interviews within the assigned response time is an area for



The complete ARD Assessment Review instrument and instructions can be found at: www.colorado.gov/cdhs/ard/instruments

improvement, it appears that counties are making reasonable efforts to interview or observe the alleged victim within the assigned response time. In discussions with county staff during the review process, staff report that barriers to interviewing the victim timely, including difficulties in locating the family at home and not finding the children at school. In regards to the parties requiring an interview as part of the assessment, the ARD data reveals county performance has remained relatively

Table 1. Performance on questions related to screening decisions			
Question	7/1/10-9/30/10	4/1/12-6/30/12	Change
Was the referral appropriately assigned, in accordance with Volume 7?	90.38%	97.02%	6.64
Is the assigned response time appropriate, as defined by Volume 7?	89.00%	95.70%	6.70

assessment. Performance on this question increased by 67 percentage points, to just under a strength for the state at 94.51%.

Table 3 illustrates how performance on the documentation of assessment conclusions are another area to highlight in Colorado.

In SFY 2012 (7/1/11 to 6/30/12), the ARD conducted 1786 assessment reviews in 42 counties. On average, 162 assessment reviews are conducted monthly.

Table 2. Performance related to family contact/interviews			
Question	7/1/10-9/30/10	4/1/12-6/30/12	Change
Was the alleged victim interviewed/observed with the assigned response time?	75.47%	77.36%	1.89
Did the county make reasonable efforts to interview/observe the alleged victim within the assigned response time?	85.31%	88.09%	2.78
Were all required parties interviewed as part of the assessment/investigation?	74.14%	78.45%	4.31
If a visit to the child/youth's place of residence was warranted as part of the investigation, did a visit occur?	27.41%	94.51%	67.1

Statewide performance regarding overall findings reached 90% approximately one year after the implementation of the current ARD assessment instrument (July 2010), and has since remained high. In addition, the data indicates that counties

consistent during the past two years. However, county performance does not yet meet the threshold of being a strength for the state. The completion of the required interviews relates to the county's ability to identify areas of risk, assess child safety, and gather sufficient information to guide decision-making. In addition, the counties have become better at completing a visit to the home when it is necessary to the completion of an

have consistently done a strong job of documenting how they reached the decision to open a case or close at assessment.

Table 3. Performance related to the assessment outcome			
Question	7/1/10-9/30/10	4/1/12-6/30/12	Change
Based on documentation, did the county's overall finding match the definition of founded, unfounded, or inconclusive?	87.54 %	90.43 %	2.89
Does the documentation indicate how the county reached their decision to either open a case, or close at assessment?	94.70 %	97.26 %	2.56

7.202.532.B: Completion of the Colorado Safety Assessment Instrument is required for all Program Area 5 reports being investigated or assessed, except:

- 5. When there is clear evidence, upon initial contact with the alleged victim and person alleged to be responsible for abuse or neglect that no incident of child abuse or neglect occurred. The reasons for making this determination shall be documented in the automated case management system.

Table 4 highlights the significant progress Colorado has made in the accurate completion of the safety assessment process. The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) C-Stat performance management process has recently identified the accurate completion of the safety assessment process as a Strategic Plan Measure. As such, a more focused look at the ARD assessment review process and its impact on practice occurs in the following section.

Accurate Use of the Safety Assessment

As stated above, the CDHS has identified the accurate completion of the safety assessment process as a Strategic Plan Measure for the current fiscal year (SFY 2013). The goal for this measure is a 95% performance rate. While statewide performance has not yet

supervised, county-administered system, a partnership is required to address any areas for needed improvement. The DCW provided training and support to most of the counties around the use of safety assessment tool. The ARD used their available data to provide technical assistance to support efforts and assess progress based on change(s) in practice. The counties then implemented the continuous quality improvement model to increase and sustain performance in the safety assessment process.

The other elements of the safety assessment also demonstrated improvements during the measurement period. The ARD assessment review results indicate that counties have been able to greatly improve their documentation around when a safety assessment was not required. Within

Table 4. Performance related to the safety assessment tool			
Question	7/1/10-9/30/10	4/1/12-6/30/12	Change
If the county indicated a Safety Assessment was not required, does the documentation support this decision?	2.18%	69.57%	67.39
Was the safety assessment process completed accurately, in accordance with Volume 7?	32.09%	78.16%	46.07
If the county determined that a Safety Plan was required, was it used in accordance with Volume 7 requirements and of sufficient quality to protect the child/youth?	1.56%	36.36%	34.80

the measurement period, the statewide average on this question increased by over 67 percentage points. In addition, counties improved performance on the use of the safety plan, from 1.56% to 36.36%.

reached the 95% goal, substantial improvement has been made on this measure.

As of the fourth quarter of SFY 2012, county performance on accurately completing the safety assessment tool has increased to 78%. This is an increase of over 46 percentage points and demonstrates the focus counties have placed on the accurate completion of this tool. This increase in performance can be attributed to the collaboration between the ARD, the Division of Child Welfare (DCW), and the counties. As Colorado is a state-

County Insight on Safety Assessment Process Performance

Feedback was solicited from those counties who have shown improvement on the documentation of the safety assessment process. Three of the identified counties, Otero, Boulder, and Pueblo, spoke with the ARD about their performance and the how their county integrated state training and technical assistance into their practice. Each

county was asked if there were practice changes that were initiated in response to the initial ARD Assessment Review, what results were expected as a result of the practice change, and what resources were needed to implement and sustain the change.

In October of 2010, Otero County participated in their initial In-Home/ Assessment review with the ARD. Sara Chambers, Child Welfare and CORE Supervisor, shared that a member of the ARD management team provided training on the instrument and instructions during this review. Ms. Chambers felt the training was informative and relevant to the county's child welfare practice. Following the training, the county created three ring binders for each of the case workers to guide their day-to-day practice, informed by Volume 7 and the Children's Code. Ms. Chambers stated that when the ARD manager came to do the review report out meeting, the DCW Child Welfare Intake Specialist came as well. The Intake Specialist clarified recent rule changes regarding screen out criteria. In addition, the Intake Specialist provided general training on referrals and assessments.

It is evident these changes to practice have been successful in the area of the safety assessment process, as shown in Chart 2.

Otero County has improved their accurate completion of the safety assessment process by over 40 percentage points. In addition, Otero County's use of safety plans (when required) has become a strength at 100% performance in their last assessment review.

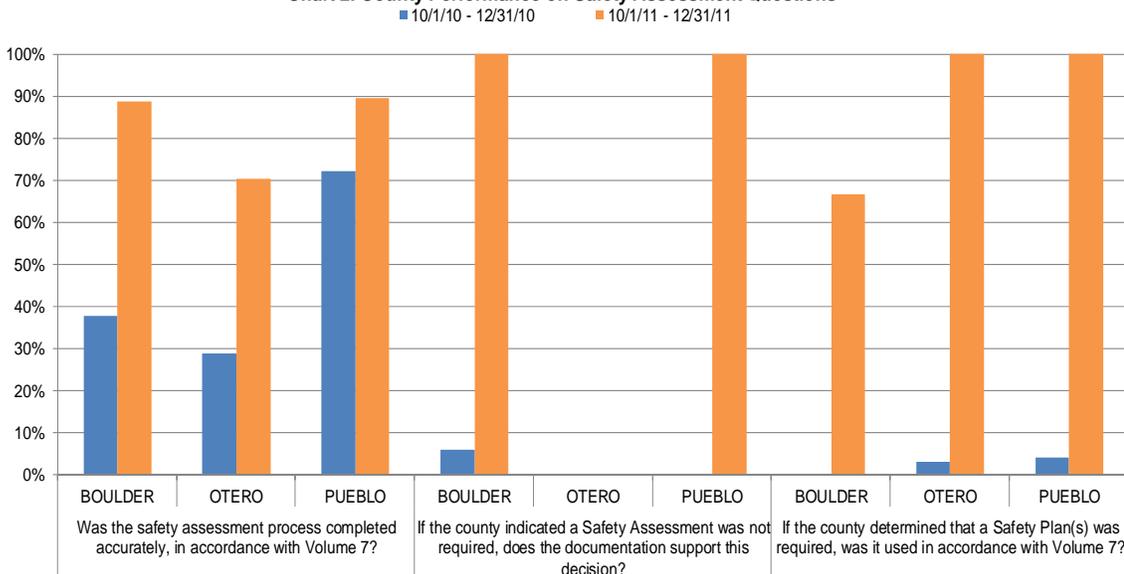
Boulder County has always held themselves to a high standard in their intake processes. When data from their assessment review identified safety assessment documentation as an area for improvement, the department focused their efforts to improve that aspect. Terrie Ryan-Thomas, Screening and Intake Manager, noted that shortly prior to the assessment review, Boulder County restructured their division from a historical organization of three relatively autonomous regional offices to a more centralized, unified department in regards to practice. Subsequent to this restructuring, DCW provided training on the safety assessment tool. Lastly, the county began holding monthly, division-wide meetings to discuss practice.

In the intake division meeting, the team reviewed the ARD results thoroughly. Assessment case specifics were requested to correlate actual practice with reviewer comments. When compliance was low, all case specifics were brought to the division meeting and the staff walked through each

“Our goal of the training and going through the...case specifics is to set clear expectations, increase proficiency, and learn from every review so we may continue to improve our work.”

— Terrie Ryan-Thomas, Boulder County

Chart 2. County Performance on Safety Assessment Questions



*No bar indicates that county did not have data for that question or time period.

Sara Chambers referenced a helpful publication from the American Bar Association titled "Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys". She endorsed the guide as an excellent resource for case workers, with removable laminated cards that are easily carried during an investigation. The cards have questions and guidelines relevant to effective assessment.

Coming up in the next issue of *Practice Matters: In-Home case review and the impact on children and families.*

assessment. Discussions occurred regarding what each reviewer had written and the worker addressed what they knew about the assessment and what details they might have added to more thoroughly complete the assessment documentation. These changes to structure and practice helped Boulder improve their performance on the question of accuracy on the safety assessment tool by over 50 percentage points.

Pueblo County had their first In-Home/Assessment review in December 2010. On this review, the county's performance regarding accurately completing the safety assessment was higher than most counties at 72%. However, Tim Hart, Child Welfare Administrator, shared that case-specific comments from reviewers regarding "No" responses on the safety assessment were used to facilitate discussion between supervisors and caseworkers.

This practice of using assessment review data to inform change in casework was recently included in a Practice Proposal, submitted in July 2012 for the Colorado's Practice Model compendium, titled *Internal Training for Intake Caseworkers*. In the submission, the use of assessment review data is explicitly mentioned:

"When Pueblo County undergoes an Administrative Review..., the supervisors listen to the...feedback regarding documentation and practice. Changes that the auditors suggest or identified rule changes are discussed in unit meetings and a plan for compliance and improvement is implemented."

The proposal also highlights how the

assessment review process for the ten large counties contributes to Pueblo's increase in performance:

"ARD conducts review on the assessment process every six months and [the recent review] demonstrates Pueblo's high performance in specific related measurements."

Between their assessment reviews in 2010 and 2011, Pueblo County increased their performance on the accurate completion of the safety assessment tool from 72% to 89.6%. The manner in which Pueblo County utilizes the ARD review process highlights how the ARD is able to facilitate improvements in practice through the provision of technical assistance (on an individual level) and the gathering of data.

Conclusion

The ARD assessment review process continues to be a useful and informative intervention into case practice. The impact of the assessment review is evidenced by how counties utilize data, both individual case level and systemic, to improve their case practice and organizational structure. Through this manner, the ARD assessment reviews are able to highlight successful practice, areas for improvement, and positive impacts on children. This is observed in Colorado's improved performance in assessment reviews for all areas of the assessment instrument, from SFY 2011 to SFY 2012. Although there continues to be room for improvement, the combined efforts of the ARD, County Departments, and the Division of Child Welfare has resulted in improved outcomes for Colorado's children and families.

References

¹ http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheadname1=Content-Disposition&blobheadname2=Content-Type&blobheadvalue1=inline%3B+filename%3D%22CFSR_Final_Report_November_2009.pdf%22&blobheadvalue2=application%2Fpdf&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1251694345903&ssbinary=true

Administrative Review Division
Marc J. Mackert, Ph.D., Director
4045 S. Lowell Blvd.
Denver, CO 80236
Phone: 303.866.7160
<http://www.colorado.gov/cdhs/ard>