

# Practice Matters

A Quarterly Publication of the  
Administrative Review Division

## Quality Assurance and Improvement

Colorado's Administrative Review Division (ARD) serves as an independent third-party review system under the auspices of the Colorado Department of Human Services. The ARD is the mechanism responsible for the federally required Case Review System and a portion of the Quality Assurance System for the Division of Child Welfare (DCW) and the Division of Youth Corrections (DYC).

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In March 2009, the Federal CFSR identified the Administrative Review Division's Narrative Findings as a valuable tool for identifying case specific issues. In contrast, the review concluded that, short of waiting six months for the next review to be held, there was no method to ensure that identified issues were addressed. To remedy this concern, the Administrative Review Division (ARD), in collaboration with County staff and the ARD Steering Committee, determined that when there are "unresolved issues significantly impacting a child's safety, permanency, or well-being," the ARD could require a County/Region to provide a response. Volume 7.304.65 J was updated July 1, 2010, stating that counties are required to respond to the ARD within the time frame specified in the Narrative Findings. Requests for responses may be assigned an immediate or five-day response time. The ARD requests an immediate response when there is a safety concern in need of urgent attention. All other issues receive a five-day response time. If the response is considered sufficient and timely, no further response is necessary. If the response is not timely or sufficient, the ARD is required to notify the County/Region that additional follow up is necessary. If needed, a meeting with representatives from the County Department/Region, the ARD, and the Division of Child Welfare

## Review Findings: Collaborating on Behalf of Children

(DCW), may be held to determine next steps and time frames for resolution. Alternately, the County/Region can disagree that there is a concern, at which point, the case is referred to the DCW.

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2011, the ARD conducted 7,098 out-of-home reviews. Those reviews involved 9,510 children/youth in placement through either a County Department of Human/Social Services or the Division of Youth Corrections (DYC). An overwhelming percentage (99.4%) of reviews did not require the response process, indicating the majority of reviews did not have unresolved issues at the time of the review. This article intends to discuss the small percentage (0.6%) of cases throughout SFY 2011 in which the ARD required the County/Region to respond to an unresolved issue related to child safety, permanency, or well-being. In addition, follow up information summarizing the impact of this intervention method will be discussed.

In the first year of implementation, a total



## Volume VII

### 7.304.65 Administrative Review [Rev. eff. 7/1/10]

#### J. Administrative Review Findings

2. For all narrative findings that contain "Issues for County Administration," the County is required to respond to the Administrative Review Division within the time frame specified in the narrative depending on the issue identified.
  - a. A County response shall be sent to the Administrative Review Division.
  - b. If the County response is considered sufficient and timely, no further action is taken and the County shall be notified in writing within five (5) working days.
  - c. If the County's response is not timely or sufficient, notification will be given to the County and appropriate division(s) representative for further follow up/action.
  - d. An internal meeting will be held with the appropriate division(s) and their representatives within a maximum of twenty (20) working days to determine next steps and time frames for resolution.
  - e. If the issues are unresolved, a corrective action process may be pursued.

of 43 reviews identified an issue that required a County/Region response.

These reviews involved 40 discrete cases, three of which were reviewed twice within the sample span and, again, had an issue that required County/Region response. A detailed case file read was conducted to assess the issues that required response. Chart I (page four) illustrates the types of issues that were identified by the ARD as requiring response. Permanency issues were identified in 27 cases (63%), safety issues were identified in 19 cases (44%), and well-being issues were identified in 16 cases (37%). In the cases in which well-being was identified as an issue, it appears that mental health issues (28%), physical health issues (16%) and education issues (14%) were identified as themes that arose during those reviews.

Of the 43 reviews noted earlier in this section, three required the County/Region to respond immediately, while the majority (40) required a five-day response. In order to resolve the issue identified by the ARD, the County/Region was required to submit, in writing (in Trails), a plan to address the identified issue. Once submitted, the plan was reviewed by the ARD to determine whether it was adequate based on the identified issue(s), and the determination was documented in Trails. If the County/Region and the ARD were unable to reach agreement on a satisfactory plan, the review was referred to the DCW for further follow up. Of the 43 reviews, ten were referred on to the DCW for further assistance.

The finding intervention was observed to have a positive impact on 33 (76.7%) of the 43 reviews. In two instances (4.7%), the intervention appeared to impact the case but not the outcome for the child/family. In eight of the 43 reviews (18.6%), the finding intervention did not have the desired impact on the case or the outcome.

The following anecdotes illustrate the impact of the finding intervention method when a response was required:

#### Safety

A case review revealed that an allegation of institutional abuse that met criteria for assignment had been inadvertently screened out. As a result of the review, and identification of an unresolved safety issue, the referral was made to the appropriate County. Following the investigation, it was determined that the children were safe and no further action was required.

#### Permanency

A case was reviewed in which a youth had been in placement for seven years, had been freed for adoption since January 2009, and was living in an adoptive home since February 2004. The review revealed that the remaining barrier to adoption was the acquisition of his relative's fingerprints. It appeared the issue was related to being unable to locate a site offering ink prints rather than digital prints in their home state. To resolve the identified issue, the Department flew the relative to Colorado and facilitated completion of the fingerprinting process. As a result, the youth's adoption was then finalized approximately two months after the review.

Another review identified a child who had been in his adoptive home for two-and-one-half years but had not achieved permanency because his adoptive parent was requesting further evaluation. Following the review, the child was referred for the requested evaluations and appropriate services were identified. The adoptive mother was then ready to proceed with the adoption, which occurred in August 2011, approximately one year following the review.

The ARD helped to facilitate the finalization of an adoption through its review of two siblings, who had been freed for adoption since November 2009, and who were still in foster care. During the review, while discussing progress toward permanency, the adoptive kinship provider

stated that she was not provided with subsidy paperwork and did not understand the process. By requiring the County to respond to the unresolved permanency issue, the subsidy process was expedited and finalization occurred within two months of the review.

### Well-Being

When Colorado's children are placed out-of-state, caseworkers often rely on the receiving state's caseworker to communicate information regarding the children's safety and well-being, as well as progress toward permanency. Several cases in which County responses were required involved children placed by Colorado in another state, and these cases lacked documentation from the receiving state. In one case, a medically fragile child had been placed out-of-state and little information was being conveyed from the receiving state to the caseworker in Colorado. At the time of the review (July 2010), information was not available from the receiving state regarding contact with the relative providers for two months and there was no information about the child's health, service providers, or developmental services. By bringing this issue to the attention of the Department's administration, communication with the receiving state was facilitated. Information regarding services provided to the child and regarding child safety was promptly provided. In addition, it appears the improved communication ultimately led to timely permanency, as an allocation of parental responsibilities was granted in November 2010.

There have been other positive results to the finding intervention in cases in which the child was placed out-of-state. Counties contacted receiving states and requested documentation of contact with the child, the provider, and information to support that the child's safety, permanency, and well-being were being assessed. Additionally, one County chose to provide additional training to their ongoing workers about the ICPC process

and documentation requirements. One child achieved permanency by returning to her mother's care and custody, and another child is expected to be adopted by relatives within the next few months.

Another review identified that a sibling group of three remained in a foster home that was not a permanent placement option and did not support the therapeutic interventions provided by the Department. Information provided during the review indicated concerns regarding the children's well-being and efforts to provide permanency. The Department subsequently provided a sufficient explanation regarding maintaining the children in their current foster home. The Department also agreed to seek an adoptive home for the sibling group prior to the completion of the termination hearing. Once the court terminated the parent-child relationship, the children were placed into an adoptive home and adoption of all three children was finalized approximately one year post-termination.

### Conclusion

After reviewing the data by researching reviews that required a County/Region response, it appears the process is an effective intervention to resolve issues and improve outcomes for children. The process of identifying significant issues related to child safety, permanency, and well-being allows the ARD to encourage and support County/Region staff in addressing identified barriers or concerns with the purpose of ensuring that children remain safe and experience successful outcomes. The majority of the identified issues were not immediate or unresolved safety issues; more accurately, they were areas for improvement. By working together as partners, the ARD, the DCW, County Departments, and the DYC Regions are able to utilize this method to illustrate our shared values and commitment toward promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of Colorado's children.

Data analysis supports decision-making and provides a method to evaluate progress.

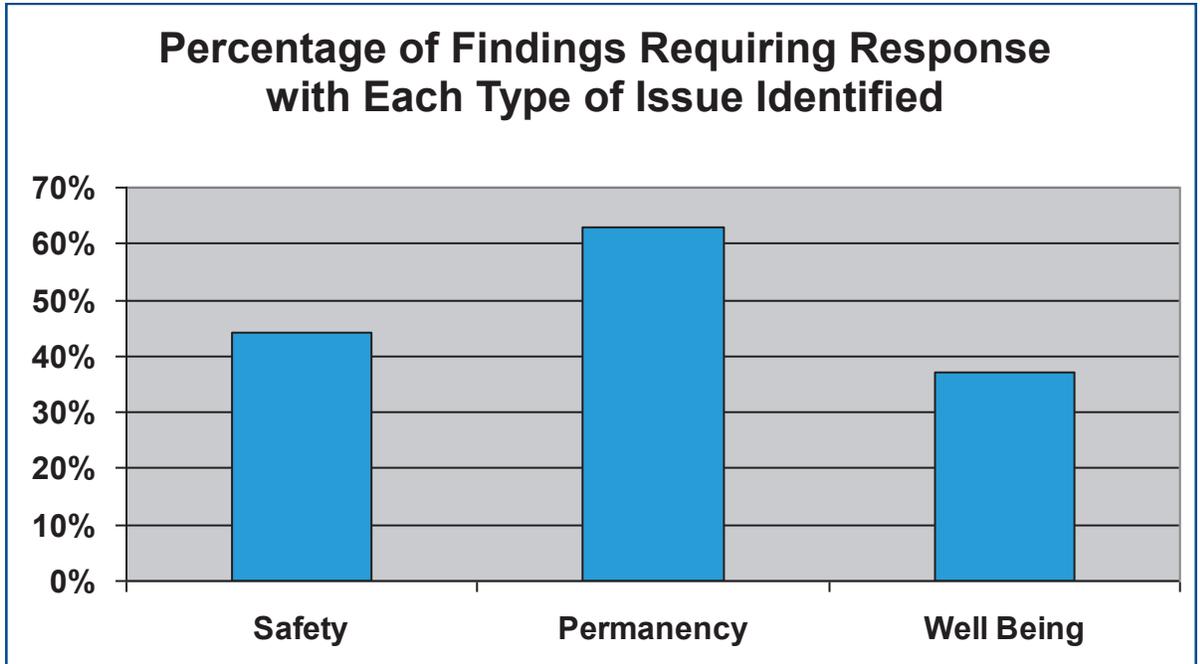
Involvement of children, youth, families, stakeholders and staff is crucial.

The ARD collects and analyzes qualitative data to assess state processes as implemented in County practice.

Coming up in the next issue of *Practice Matters*:

Facilitating positive transitions for youth who move between County Departments and the DYC.

Chart I



Please note that each finding may include more than one issue named in the chart above, thereby creating a total equaling more than 100%

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