



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
1250 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Mr. Kenneth Deibert
Deputy Director
Arizona Department of Economic Security
Division of Children, Youth and Families
1700 W. Jefferson, Site Code 740-A
Phoenix, Arizona 85005

Dear Mr. Deibert:

The Children's Bureau in collaboration with the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Children, Youth and Families completed a review of Arizona's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) during the week of September 21 – 25, 2009. The final report on the AFCARS Assessment Review (AAR) is enclosed, which includes the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP). The data used for this review were from the report period October 1, 2008 - March 31, 2009 (2009A).

We appreciate the amount of time and effort that your staff committed to the planning and implementation of the AFCARS Review. We would especially like to thank David Longo, Nick Espandas, and Curtis Ballard for their time and input for the AFCARS Assessment Review.

The AAR evaluates two areas: the AFCARS general requirements (reporting populations and technical standards) and the data elements (foster care and adoption). Information collected on these areas is combined and based on an analysis of the findings a rating factor is assigned to each of the general requirements and each data element. The rating factors are: "1," the system is not collecting the AFCARS data elements and the data are not transmitted to ACF; "2," technical corrections are required; "3," improvement in data quality is needed; and "4," the State fully meets the AFCARS standards. The enclosed report provides a more detailed explanation of each of the rating factors, as well as, charts that summarize the State's rating factors for the General Requirements and the Data Elements. As part of the post-site visit analysis, the State's documents, the data, the case file review findings, and the onsite notes were assessed to make the final determination of findings. The State team should carefully review all the findings in each document as there have been some changes from the onsite findings.

Overall, the AAR determined that Arizona has a good approach to collecting its AFCARS data and generally submits accurate data. The State has incorporated many good practices for using the data, including using the data in many of its management reports. The State's approach to collecting the circumstances that contributed to the child's removal from home is also innovative. By incorporating the removal circumstances into the system's integrated risk assessment the worker does not have to do duplicative data entry and the reasons are integrated into both the family and child case plans.

During the post-site visit phase, the State made several corrections to the extraction code based on the preliminary findings of the onsite review. These revisions were submitted to the Children's Bureau in time to be incorporated into the final findings. In many instances these corrections resulted in a change of the rating factor that was given during the onsite review. As noted in the enclosed report, there are some additional technical corrections that must be completed in order for the State to be fully compliant with AFCARS. While most of the remaining corrections are minor, there are a few significant changes that remain that require modifications to the information system's screens.

One of these corrections relates to the foster care reporting population and the elements related to a foster care episode. The AFCARS reporting population is to include only children who have a removal episode that is more than 24 hours. The State is partially meeting this requirement; the extraction code excludes removal episodes that begin and end on the same day. Currently, records in which the removal and discharge dates are on two consecutive days, and the length of stay in foster care is less than 24 hours, are incorrectly included in the AFCARS foster care population. In addition to this being an issue under the reporting population, it is also an issue for the foster care elements related to dates of a removal episode and the number of removals (foster care elements #18 - 20). If a child enters foster care for more than 24 hours, and has information in the system of an episode that began one day and ended the next, the AFCARS data will now reflect two removal episodes instead of one. In order to accurately reflect the total number of removals that meet the AFCARS standards, the State needs to add a clock field to both the removal status and legal status. The program code would use these fields to determine whether the child's removal was for less than 24 hours and exclude all removal episodes that are for 24 hours or less from the population. Once that episode is excluded, it would not be included in the count of the number of removals from home.

Another correction that needs to be made to the system screens relates to the field that collects the child's relationship to the individuals that adopted him/her. For children who have been adopted, the State currently collects and reports only one type of relationship between the child and the adoptive parent, such as "foster parent" or "relative." If a child was adopted by a relative who also had been a foster parent, the AFCARS data should include both of these responses.

The last significant modification to the screens pertains to the collection of adoption special needs factors. For AFCARS reporting purposes, records for children who were adopted and determined to have special needs are to indicate what the primary basis is for the special need (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, sibling group, medical or psychological diagnoses, or a State-defined special need). Currently, the system allows the workers to enter all conditions that exist but does not identify the special need that may be the greatest barrier to the child's adoption. Instead of the workers determining this information, the extraction code contains a hierarchy based on what was selected in the screen. The first item in that hierarchy is "medical conditions or mental, physical or emotional disabilities." During the case file review, reviewers often note that another reason had been identified as being primary barrier to the adoption, for instance age of the child or being part of a sibling group. The State will need to develop a method to allow the worker to identify on the field which condition is the primary basis of special need.

The State also may be underreporting its number of adoptions. This could impact the State's eligibility for an adoption incentive payment. The State and Federal teams discussed several options the State can implement in order to ensure all finalized adoptions are reported in AFCARS.

There are some corrections that will require the State to resubmit AFCARS data for past report periods. The State and the Children's Bureau will have to discuss which reports will be required for resubmission. One factor that will be taken into consideration is the report periods used for the State's current Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan. One reason the State will need to resubmit the data is that it appears the State is over-reporting the number of placements a child has experienced during a removal episode.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report and the attached AIP, the State staff must submit the AIP electronically to the Children's Bureau with estimated due dates for completing the tasks in the AIP. An electronic copy of the final matrices will be e-mailed to your staff. Additionally, the State's plan for implementing the changes to the system and for caseworker training must be included in the State's title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report as part of the information required by 45 CFR 1357.15(t) and 45 CFR 1357.16(a)(5).

The Regional Office will work with the State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AIP. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's Network of Training and Technical Assistance Centers.

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In closing, I would like to thank the staff who participated in the review for their hard work and their commitment to collecting accurate and reliable AFCARS data. If you have any questions regarding the report, please contact Angelina Palmiero at (202) 205-7240.

Sincerely,

/s/

Joseph J. Bock
Acting Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosures

cc: Sally Flanzer, Program Manager, CB Region IX
Division of Program Implementation, Children's Bureau
Division of State Systems, Children's Bureau
Child and Family Services Review Team, Children's Bureau



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