

AFCARS Tracking Project

Category:  
Data, Information and Knowledge Management

State:  
Colorado

Submitted by:  
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## **Executive Summary**

The AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) Tracking project touches on county, state, and federal organizations in their endeavor to achieve better social outcomes for Colorado's families.

The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) is the second largest State agency in the State of Colorado. CDHS operates on an annual budget of over \$1.9B with an annual IT budget of over \$60M. CDHS oversees the state's 64 County Departments of Social/Human services, the state's public mental health system, Colorado's system of services for people with developmental disabilities, the state's juvenile corrections system, and all state and veterans nursing homes, through more than 5,000 employees and thousands of community-based service providers.

The CDHS Division of Child Welfare consists of a group of services intended to protect children from harm and to assist families in caring for and protecting their children. Taken together, these programs comprise the main thrust of Colorado's effort to meet the needs of children who must be placed or are at risk of placement outside of their homes for reasons of protection or community safety. The delivery of Child Welfare Services in Colorado is a state-supervised, county administered system.

The federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducts Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) as a Federal-State collaborative effort designed to help ensure that quality services are provided to children and families through State child welfare systems. The CFSR is one collaborative method to help States improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. The first round of these reviews was completed in 2004. No state was found to be in substantial conformity with federal requirements. Each state created a program improvement plan (PIP) to work toward meeting these requirements in their second review.

ACF has used AFCARS data to create 15 complex measures on which states will be rated against national standards for the second round of CFSRs.

In the AFCARS Tracking Project, the Governor's Office of Information Technology/Colorado Department of Human Services (OIT/CDHS) developed an easy-to-use tool, the AFCARS Business Intelligence (BI) Solution, that provides a way for Colorado to use the data indicators to better meet federally mandated Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) compliance standards and program improvement plan (PIP) requirements.

CDHS has used the AFCARS BI Solution for monitoring performance on the CFSR permanency composites and permanency measures at a State and County level, and to promote greater availability and understanding of data for current and prior time periods. The AFCARS BI Solution provides information that administrators, supervisors, and line staff can use to assess their performance quickly and easily.

This AFCARS BI Solution is a specific example of a successful application of business intelligence to government. It provides:

- A foundation for data-driven decision making
- A single voice that delivers consistent information
- An easy-to-use tool that reduces time needed to produce critical information
- Insight into satisfying compliance reporting requirements.

The AFCARS Tracking Project was nominated and selected as a 2009 Laureate by the Computerworld Honors Program.

### **C. Description:**

ACF mandates that every State submit a data extract of specific data elements pertinent to monitoring adoption and foster care services to families every six months. This is AFCARS. This data is available to all states but is not in an information-ready status until ACF sends it back to the states following high-end analysis using a statistical package, or a data analyst does the same at the State level.

ACF has used AFCARS data to create 15 complex measures on which states will be rated against national standards for the second round of CFSRs.

The AFCARS BI Solution is divided into State performance on each permanency composite and permanency measure and County breakout by each permanency measure. Trend data allows a user to analyze State or County performance over a number of years on any particular permanency measure. Users can also drill down to explore cases and children that contribute to particular scores and possible changes in practice to improve services to families and help the State meet compliance standards.

Applying business intelligence technology to the world of human services is just starting to pick up over the last couple of years. The biggest obstacle we had to overcome to be successful dealt with the lack expertise within our technical staff. The BI toolset was new to our IT organization. The complexity of the 15 measures was huge. We called upon outside support for assistance. This assistance provided development assistance in building the AFCARS BI solution along with providing on-site mentoring for our technical staff in the use of the BI toolset. They also provided assistance in building-out the BI environment as we prepared to implement the solution. Once the AFCARS BI solution was implemented, ongoing support and maintenance has been turned over to the internal IT staff. Additionally, the internal IT staff has begun development of other solutions utilizing Colorado Child Welfare data.

We took a very proactive approach in gaining support for the project from the Executive Management of CDHS and from the County Departments of Social/Human Services. One, research and analysis of the leading BI vendors was conducted which generated a business case for moving in the BI direction. This was presented to the Executive Director of CDHS. Along with the business case, proof of concepts were developed utilizing actual Colorado Child Welfare data for out of home services and the AFCARS data. These also were presented to the Executive Director and her Executive Management Team. By taking this approach, there was great enthusiasm on the part of the Executive Management Team to move forward with the project. Additionally, the same presentations were given to a number of the Directors of larger County Departments of Social/Human Services. Being able to see the information for their own counties was instrumental in getting their buy-in for the project.

The project has exceeded its goals. The BI solution was deployed statewide in August of 2008.

Due the tremendous support at the executive levels for the project, the AFCARS BI solution was embraced by the target audience of users within weeks of the rollout. The initial number of State and County was targeted at 250. We are now in the process of enhancing our production environment so that it will accommodate the entire State and County user community of approximately 3,400.

Several counties are also moving to the same BI toolset, so that they can merge State data with County data and provide internal management reporting to the County management.

#### **D. Significance:**

The BI toolset offered a means for CDHS to use the Colorado AFCARS extract directly to gain the information necessary to compare CDHS performance against the ACF CFSR national standards. The complex logic of each CFSR measure is programmed into the AFCARS BI Solution to allow an apples-to-apples comparison with CFSR national standards and PIP goals. This provides this critical child welfare information within hours to Colorado state and county employees, versus waiting months for that information previously. Each data set is always available, allowing for trend analysis at the State and County level.

The AFCARS Tracking project capitalizes on a business intelligence (BI) toolset. BI is part of a solution set that enables decision makers across an organization to solve performance management problems and improve performance in the organization. BI helps answer an organization's questions; how am I doing? And why? BI offers score-carding and dash-boarding to answer the what is the current state of affairs question, and reporting and analysis to answer the why question. It is based on an enterprise class platform, i.e., a modern web services-based, services-oriented architecture. This provides easy access to any number of users throughout the organization. This BI toolset can sit on top of any data source, so the AFCARS BI Solution was designed to plug in to the AFCARS data extract file that CDHS sends to ACF. Whenever there is a new AFCARS data extract file available, it is a matter of minutes to point the AFCARS BI Solution to the new data file.

As far as we can determine, this particular application is the first and only one of its kind. Others, typically more academic and research organizations, are using the AFCARS and other child welfare data to help states make data-driven decisions about their foster care programs, but this AFCARS BI Solution is unique in that it uses the exact logic of the CFSR measures using a dashboard and drill-through format rather than a statistical package. It is most effective for states to see at a glance how they are doing compared to the national standards and/or PIP goals to which they are held accountable.

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#### **E. Benefits of the Project:**

This AFCARS Tracking project brought the benefits of information management in a very concrete, easy-to-use tool for use by the heads-down data analyst to senior management. The AFCARS BI Solution provides a sharable visual to the average user who does not understand data; it brings this whole process back to the children and child welfare cases in a timely manner that benefits Colorado families.

It use to take a Child Welfare analyst about two months, in addition to and around other tasks, to process the AFCARS data using a statistical package, Excel, and Access, and deliver it in a meaningful format to managers and supervisors throughout the state. Now, that analyst can deliver the same extract file to ACF and to our own staff on the same day and have that data transformed to information usable and accessible by staff throughout Colorado in a matter of hours.

With Colorado being a county-administered state, the County Departments of Social/Human Services workers are on the front line in delivering services to the citizens of Colorado. Feedback from various counties has indicated that with the new AFCARS BI solution, it has forged a closer working partnership between the State and Counties. There is better participation between the State and Counties, that the Counties do not feel as if they are out there on their own in providing needed services to the clients. The Counties feel much more involved and in-tune with the CFSR process.

The AFCARS BI Solution can be used as is against another states data file (with minor tailoring for specific county names, etc.) or it can be tailored, expanded, and formatted to meet unique requests and wishes from other states.

The bottom line is that every state is held accountable for its foster care and adoption services and evaluated against the same national standards. What we have seen is that it is very difficult to evaluate trends in your own performance in such a way that duplicates and matches how the federal government evaluates your performance, and in a timely manner that allows evaluation and possible redirection of policy and procedures to effect positive change. This tool has all the federal logic built in and ready for use for states to monitor and manage performance. Another state can adopt this tool at a fraction of the cost, since all of the programming and testing is complete, rather than having to duplicate this effort.



### DATA INDICATORS FOR THE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW

Ranges, Medians, and National Standards for the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Data Indicators for 12m starting Oct 1, 2007 12:00 AM

Data Indicators	Indicator	Numerator	Denominator	CO PCT	National Standard
<b>Data indicators associated with CFSR Permanency Outcome 1 - Children have permanency and stability in their living situations</b>					
<b>Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification</b>				125.3	>= 122.6
<b>Component A: Timeliness of reunification</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C1.1</a> Trend		2,497	3,213	77.7%	>= 75.2%
<a href="#">Measure C1.2</a> Trend				5.8 months	<= 5.4 months
<a href="#">Measure C1.3</a> Trend		1,003	2,064	48.6%	>= 48.4%
<b>Component B: Permanency or reunification</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C1.4</a> Trend		717	4,390	16.3%	<= 9.9%
<b>Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions</b>				113.0	>= 106.4
<b>Component A: Timeliness of adoptions of children discharged from foster care</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C2.1</a> Trend		510	910	56.0%	>= 36.6%
<a href="#">Measure C2.2</a> Trend				22.4 months	<= 27.3 months
<b>Component B: Progress toward adoption for children in foster care for 17 months or longer</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C2.3</a> Trend		465	2,435	19.1%	>= 20.7%
<a href="#">Measure C2.4</a> Trend		31	1,464	2.3%	>= 10.9%
<b>Component C: Progress toward adoption of children who are legally free for adoption</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C2.5</a> Trend		544	930	58.5%	>= 53.7%
<b>Permanency Composite 3: Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time</b>				120.5	>= 121.7
<b>Component A: Permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C3.1</a> Trend		377	1,899	19.9%	>= 29.1%
<a href="#">Measure C3.2</a> Trend		919	973	94.5%	>= 98%
<b>Component B: Children growing up in foster care</b>					
<a href="#">Measure C3.3</a> Trend		266	843	31.6%	<= 37.5%
<b>Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability</b>				98.2	>= 101.5
<a href="#">Measure C4.1</a> Trend		5,847	6,802	86.0%	>= 86%
<a href="#">Measure C4.2</a> Trend		1,713	2,653	64.6%	>= 65.4%
<a href="#">Measure C4.3</a> Trend		1,050	2,929	35.8%	>= 41.8%

AFCARS State - Cognos Connection - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: http://hsadm23k8lgi-bj/cognos.cgi?\_adonnavts.run&report=(c\_its)glghome

**Cognos Connection**

AFCARS State | AFCARS County | AFCARS State Prior Period | AFCARS County Prior Period | Trails Reports | My Folders

**cdhs** Wisconsin Department of Children Services

**Data Indicators**

Data indicators associated with CFR Permanency Outcome 1 - Children

**Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification**  
 Component A: Timeliness of reunification  
 Measure C1.1 Trend  
 Measure C1.2 Trend  
 Measure C1.3 Trend  
 Component B: Permanency of reunification  
 Measure C1.4 Trend

**Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions**  
 Component A: Timeliness of adoptions of children discharged  
 Measure C2.1 Trend  
 Measure C2.2 Trend  
 Component B: Progress toward adoption for children in foster care  
 Measure C2.3 Trend  
 Measure C2.4 Trend  
 Component C: Progress toward adoption of children who are discharged  
 Measure C2.5 Trend

**Permanency Composite 3: Achieving Permanency for Children**  
 Component A: Permanency for children in foster care for 12 months  
 Measure C3.1 Trend  
 Measure C3.2 Trend  
 Component B: Children growing up in foster care  
 Measure C3.3 Trend

**Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability**  
 Measure C4.1 Trend  
 Measure C4.2 Trend  
 Measure C4.3 Trend

**Trending for Measure C1.4 - Cognos Viewer - Microsoft Internet Explorer**

Address: http://hsadm23k8lgi-bj/cognos.cgi

**Trend For Measure C1.4**

FFY	Measure C1.4 (%)	National Standard (%)
2002	22.5	8.9
2003	23.5	8.9
2004	21.5	8.9
2005	19.5	8.9
2006	17.5	8.9
2007	16.0	8.9

**PCT**

PCT	National Standard
125.3	>= 122.6
77.7%	>= 75.2%
5.8 months	<= 5.4 months
48.6%	>= 48.4%
16.3%	<= 9.9%
113.0	>= 106.4
56.0%	>= 36.6%
22.4 months	<= 27.3 months
19.1%	>= 20.7%
2.3%	>= 10.9%
58.5%	>= 53.7%
120.5	>= 121.7
19.9%	>= 29.1%
94.5%	>= 98%
31.6%	<= 37.5%
98.2	>= 101.5
86.0%	>= 86%
64.6%	>= 65.4%
35.8%	>= 41.8%

Local intranet

Done

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