



Bulletin

NUMBER

#15-68-22

DATE

November 17, 2015

OF INTEREST TO

County Directors

Social Services Supervisors
and Staff

ACTION/DUE DATE

Read information and
prepare for implementation

EXPIRATION DATE

November 17, 2017

Timely Case Documentation in the Social Service Information System (SSIS) Supports Case Practice

TOPIC

Improvement is needed in reporting child foster care placement and adoption data.

PURPOSE

Inform county and tribal agency staff of the need to improve specific placement and adoption data reporting in SSIS, and instructions on how to report data accurately and timely in SSIS.

CONTACT

Child Safety and Permanency Division:

Autumn Baum, social services consultant
651-431-4678, autumn.baum@state.mn.us

Beth Chaplin, social services consultant
651-431-4919, beth.chaplin@state.mn.us

SIGNED

JAMES G. KOPPEL
Assistant Commissioner

TERMINOLOGY NOTICE

The terminology used to describe people we serve has changed over time. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the use of "People First" language.

I. Background

The collection and submission of Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data is required by section 479 of the Social Security Act. Federal regulations at 45 C.F.R. §1355.40 set forth AFCARS requirements for collection of uniform and reliable information on children who are under the placement and care responsibility of Title IV-E agencies, and children adopted under the auspices of a Title IV-E child welfare agency. Title IV-E agencies that fail to meet the standards of 45 C.F.R. § 1355.40 (a-d) are considered to be in substantial noncompliance with requirements of the state's Title IV-E plan. In the most recent federal review period, Minnesota failed to be in substantial compliance with one federal data entry requirement, and was approaching noncompliance in several other key areas. County and tribal caseworkers should immediately work to improve timely documentation of several key data elements in SSIS, including case information for child placements in foster care and adoption. By improving the timeliness and accuracy of these key data elements in SSIS, county and tribal agency staff can bring Minnesota back into AFCARS compliance and improve data quality.

II. Introduction

Overall, county and tribal workers have consistently met the data entry thresholds for most data elements in SSIS. However, in a recent federal review, Minnesota did not meet the federal data entry threshold in one area and was lagging in several other areas.

Specifically, during the review period of October 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015, Minnesota failed to enter a date of discharge from foster care within 60 days of the actual discharge date for 11.06 percent of all children discharged from foster care. Substantial noncompliance occurs when required data are missing, inconsistent, or "out of range" (disallowed values) by more than 10 percent of the total number for any one data element.

Minnesota was also found to be missing data in the following required areas:

- Court/administrative review dates reflecting permanency review hearings for children in placement longer than seven months
- Permanency goals documented for children in care longer than 30 days
- Special needs status of children whose adoptions have been finalized.

III. Missing AFCARS Data Elements at or Near Substantial Noncompliance

A. Child Placement (Foster Care) Data

1. Date of Discharge from Continuous Placement

This is the month, date, and year a child was discharged from a continuous placement. If a child has not been discharged, this must be left blank. This date must be entered within 30 days of the date of discharge from continuous placement.

When a child is discharged from a continuous placement, the Reason Discharged and the Discharge Date should be entered as soon as possible, or within 30 days. When the Discharge Date is entered, the system automatically fills in the Discharge Entry Date with the date of entry. This is required by AFCARS regulations and cannot be edited. If the Discharge Entry Date into SSIS is 60 or more days after the Discharge Date, there is an AFCARS error which can lead to penalties against the state's Title IV-B and IV-E allocations.

Note: When a child is returned home under court-ordered protective supervision, this is considered a discharge from continuous placement and accordingly, the reason should be entered as Reunified with Parents/Primary Caregivers in SSIS. However, when a child is returned home under a court-ordered trial home visit, this is not considered a discharge from continuous placement. (The trial home visit is documented in the Placements/Locations/Absences folder.)

SSIS SCREEN: Client Permanency Folder – Continuous Placements Folder – Continuous Placement Tab – Reason and Date Discharged Fields

The screenshot shows the SSIS Client Permanency Folder - Continuous Placements screen. The left sidebar contains a tree view with folders such as 'Address/Phone/Email/State Detail', 'Adolescent Services', 'Name/Race', 'Relationship', 'Employment', 'Disability/Diagnosis/Substance', 'Health/Insurance', 'Medication/Checkup', 'CWB/Education/Infant and Toddler', 'CMH Screenings and Assessments', 'Court Actions', 'Permanency', 'Continuous Placements', 'Placements/Locations/Absences', and 'Northstar History'. The 'Continuous Placements' folder is expanded, and the 'Cont plcmnt - 09/28/2015' sub-folder is selected. The main area displays the 'Removal Information' tab for this placement. Fields include 'Cont Placement #' (209370003), 'Start Date' (09/28/2015), 'Entry Date' (10/13/2015 3:09:40 AM), 'Target Population' (Child welfare/protection), 'Supervising Agency' (County social services), and 'Effective Date' (9/28/2015). The 'Reason Discharged' and 'Discharge Date' fields are circled in red. A dropdown menu is open for 'Reason Discharged', showing a list of reasons: Reunification with parents/primary caretakers, Living with other relatives, Adoption finalized, Reached age of majority or emancipated, Guardianship to an unrelated individual, Transfer to another agency, Runaway from plcmnt/plcmnt no longer planned, Death of client, Permanent transfer of legal and physical custody to a relative, and Tribal customary adoption. A red arrow points to the dropdown menu.

2. Date of Most Recent Court or Administrative Review of Placement (when applicable)

For children who have been in care for seven months or longer, this is the month, day, and year of the most recent court or administrative review hearing. For children who have not had a court or administrative review hearing, this field must be left blank.

When there is a court or administrative review of a child's continuous placement, which should occur at least every six months, the Hearing Type and Date should be entered as soon as possible, or within 30 days. If the hearing is a court review, click to answer "yes" to the Judicial Findings Meet Placement Review Requirements field in the Child Findings tab of the child's Court Actions folder. If the "yes" button is not clicked, SSIS will not count it towards the AFCARS Placement Review question.

SSIS SCREEN: Client Court Actions Folder – Court Hearing Tab Hearing Type and Date Fields

The screenshot shows the 'Court Hearing' tab for a client named Luke Schmidt. The left sidebar contains a tree view with folders for 'Address/Phone/Email/State Detail', 'Adolescent Services', 'Name/Race', 'Relationship', 'Employment', 'Disability/Diagnosis/Substance', 'Health/Insurance', 'Medication/Checkup', 'CWB/Education/Infant and Toddler', 'CMH Screenings and Assessments', 'Court Actions', and 'Court: Juvenile 9/28/2015'. The main form area is titled 'Court hearing' and contains the following fields:

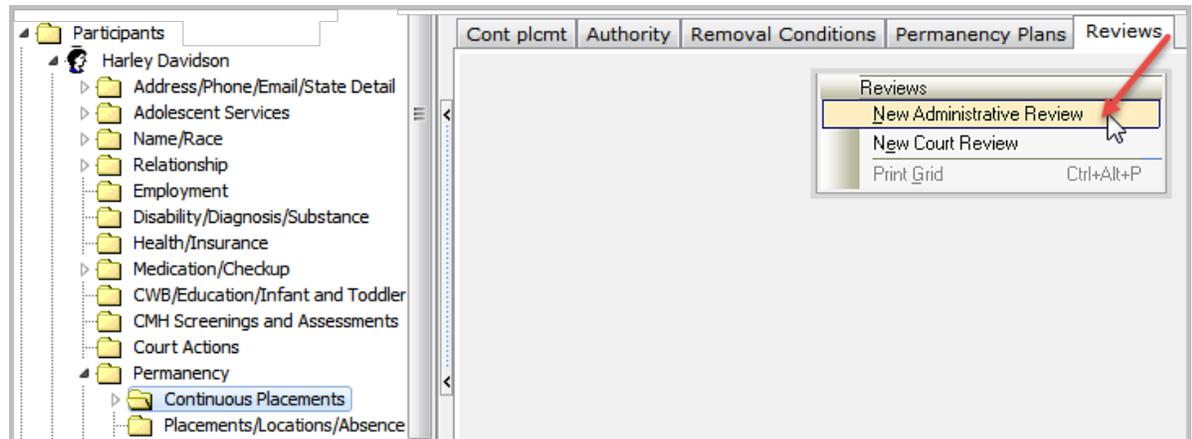
- Regarding: Luke Schmidt
- Court type: Juvenile
- Petition type: CHIPS
- Filing date: 3/27/2015
- Petition detail: (empty)
- Hearing type: Review (circled in red)
- Date: 9/28/2015 (circled in red)
- Order/disposition: Abstain from chemical use, Adjudicate CHIPS, Case plan
- Date: 9/28/2015

SSIS SCREEN: Client Court Actions Folder – Child Findings Tab – Judicial Findings Meet Placement Review Requirements Fields

The screenshot shows the 'Child Findings' tab for the same client. The form contains the following fields:

- Continuous placement: 09/28/2015 to present
- Best interest statement: Yes No, Date: 3/27/2015
- Reasonable (active) efforts statement: Yes, Date: 3/27/2015
- Reasonable (active) efforts to finalize permanency plan made: Yes No, Date: 9/28/2015
- Judicial findings meet placement review requirements: Yes No (highlighted with a red box)

SSIS SCREEN: Client Permanency Folder – Continuous Placements Folder – Reviews Tab – New Administrative Review



3. Current Permanency Plan

This indicates the current primary permanency plan and the concurrent permanency plan for a child. When a child enters a continuous placement, a primary permanency plan and concurrent permanency plan should be entered within 30 days.

Permanency plans are selected from the following list:

- i. **Reunify with parents or principal caretaker(s)**—
The goal is to keep a child in foster care for a limited time to enable an agency to work with the family with whom a child was living prior to entering foster care in order to establish a stable family environment.
- ii. **Live with relatives – permanent transfer of legal and physical custody**—The goal is to have permanent legal and physical custody of a child transferred to a relative.
- iii. **Live with relatives – adoption**—The goal is to facilitate a child's adoption by relatives.
- iv. **Adoption — non-relative**—The goal is to facilitate a child's adoption by foster parents or other unrelated individuals.
- v. **Guardianship – non-relative**—Note: This option will be removed from SSIS in 2016 as it is not an allowable

permanency disposition for children in foster care under Minnesota law.

- vi. **Case plan goal not yet established**—No case plan has been established other than the care and protection of a child. According to Minnesota policy and practice guidelines, the permanency plan and concurrent plan should be established within 30 days of a child's removal.

SSIS Screen: Client Permanency Folder – Continuous Placement Folder – Permanency Plans Tabs

Cont plcmt - 05/05/2007		Authority	Removal Conditions	Permanency Plans	Reviews
Primary plan	Primary permanency plan	<input type="text" value="Plan A"/> Ⓢ			
	Date to be achieved:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"><p>Reunify with parents or principal caretakers</p><p>Live with relatives - permanent transfer of legal & phys custody</p><p>Live with relatives - adoption</p><p>Adoption - non-relative</p><p>Guardianship - non-relative</p><p>Not yet determined</p></div>			
Concurrent plan	Concurrent permanency	<input type="text" value="Plan B"/>			
	Date to be achieved:	<input type="text"/> Ⓢ			

Cont plcmt - 05/05/2007		Authority	Removal Conditions	Permanency Plans	Reviews
Primary plan	Primary permanency plan	<input type="text" value="Plan A"/> Ⓢ			
	Date to be achieved:	<input type="text" value="5/5/2009"/> Ⓢ			
Concurrent plan	Concurrent permanency plan	<input type="text" value="Plan B"/> Ⓢ			
	Date to be achieved:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"><p>Live with relatives - permanent transfer of legal & phys custody</p><p>Live with relatives - adoption</p><p>Adoption - non-relative</p><p>Guardianship - non-relative</p><p>Not yet determined</p></div>			

B. Documented Disability as a Barrier to Adoption

When a child is under guardianship of the commissioner, this data entry point indicates that an agency has determined that a child has special needs pertaining to eligibility for an adoption subsidy under Title IV-E. If the barrier to adoption is a mental, physical, behavioral, or emotional disability that is clinically diagnosed by a qualified professional, the caseworker must enter this as a barrier to adoption.

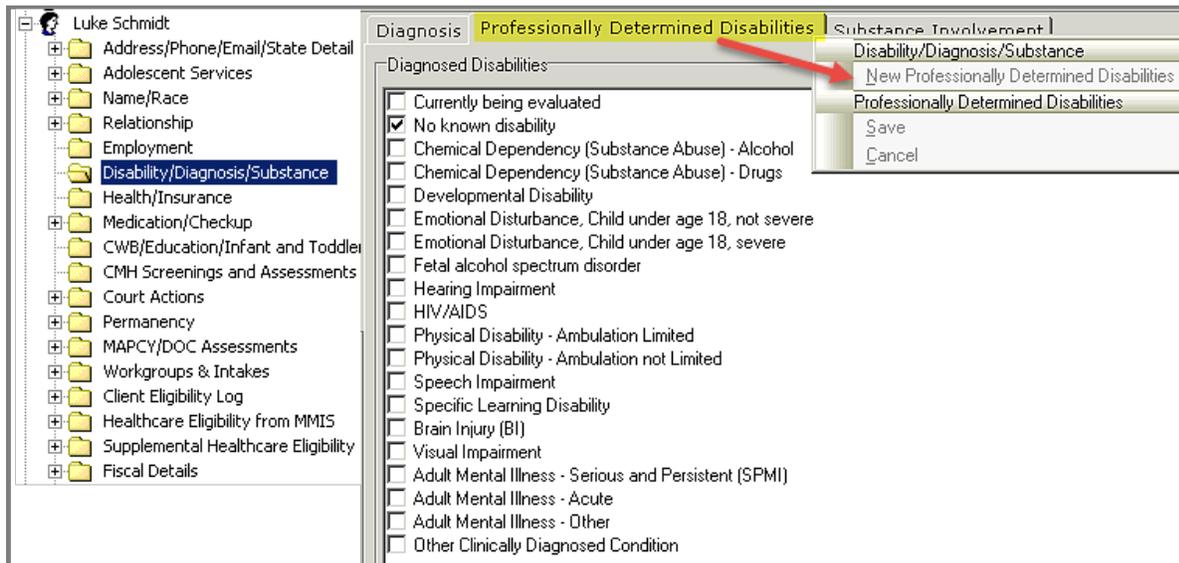
Errors occur if the disabilities specified in the Child Ward's Barriers to Adoption node are not also – and previously – documented by selecting the applicable checkboxes on the Disability screen within a child's Disability/Diagnoses/Substance Involvement folder.

In Minnesota, qualifying diagnosed disabilities include the following:

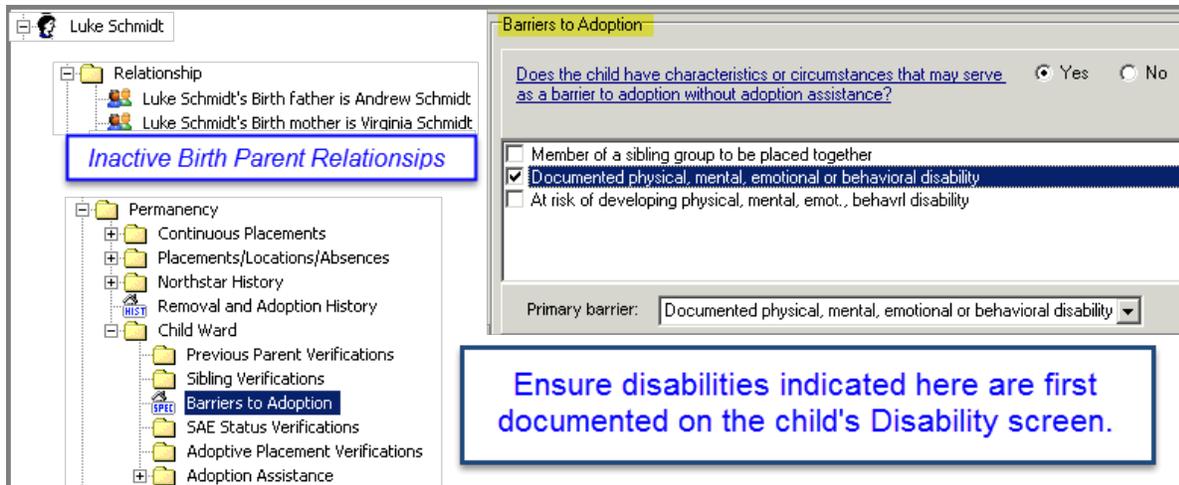
- 1. Developmental disability**—Significantly below average general cognitive and motor functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior manifested during the developmental period that adversely affect a child or youth's socialization and learning.
- 2. Emotional disturbance, child under age 18, severe**—A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree: An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal problems. The term includes persons who are schizophrenic or autistic. The term does not include persons who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are also seriously emotionally disturbed. Diagnosis is based on the most recent edition of the DSM.
- 3. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**—FASD is an umbrella term referring to the diagnosable conditions associated with prenatal alcohol exposure, including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (pFAS), and Neurobehavioral Disorder associated with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (ND-PAE).
- 4. Physical disability—ambulation limited**—a physical condition that adversely affects a child's day-to-day motor functioning, such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, multiple sclerosis, orthopedic impairments, and other significant physical disabilities.

5. **Brain injury**—otherwise called Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). TBI is a nondegenerative, noncongenital insult to the brain from an external mechanical force, possibly leading to permanent or temporary impairment of cognitive, physical, and psychosocial functions, with an associated diminished or altered state of consciousness.
6. **Visually impaired**—having a visual impairment that may significantly affect educational performance or development.
7. **Hearing impaired**—having a hearing impairment, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects educational performance or development.
8. **Other medically diagnosed conditions requiring special care**—conditions other than those noted above which require special medical care such as chronic illness. Included are children diagnosed as HIV positive or with AIDS.

SSIS SCREEN: Client Disability/Diagnosis/Substance Folder – Professionally Determined Disabilities



SSIS SCREEN: Client Node; Permanency Folder – Child Ward Subfolder Barriers to Adoption Node – Documented Disabilities Selection



IV. Improving, Supporting and Documenting Case Practice

Caseworkers and their supervisors should develop ways to improve documentation in SSIS. Regular case-related staff meetings, caseworkers creating regular User Reminders in SSIS, and checklists for workgroups transitioning to Adoption/Guardianship Case Ward are strongly suggested.

In particular, county and tribal caseworkers should ensure that the date of, and reason for, a child's discharge from their continuous placement is correctly documented in SSIS within 30 days of the discharge date.

Ideally, the primary caseworker for a child should enter the discharge date into SSIS when the child exits foster care. When more than one agency is involved, caseworkers should ensure diligence in case management to avoid unnecessary delays entering a discharge reason and corresponding date into SSIS. Timely entry of this information is critical to certify compliance with AFCARS requirements.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory

This information is available in accessible formats for people with disabilities by calling (651) 431-4670 (voice) or by using your preferred relay service. For other information on disability rights and protections, contact the agency's ADA coordinator.