



Highlights of [GAO-04-1017](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) is responsible for ensuring the safety and well being of about 3,000 children in its care and ensuring that services are provided to them and their families. In fiscal year 2003, CFSA's total budget was about \$200 million. Concerns have been raised about CFSA's supply of caseworkers, the foster care and adoptive homes, and the quality and timeliness of mental health services for foster care children. To help address these issues, the Congress appropriated \$14 million in fiscal year 2004 to CFSA, the Department of Mental Health (DMH), and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) specifically for foster care improvement. GAO examined CFSA's (1) strategies for recruiting, retaining, and managing its caseworkers; (2) efforts to license an adequate supply of safe foster and adoptive homes; and (3) efforts to collaborate with DMH and the Family Court to provide timely mental health services to foster care children. GAO also reviewed plans for and use of the federal foster care improvement funds.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CFSA address the human capital issues of its caseworkers and assess its efforts to recruit and retain foster parents. CFSA agreed with these recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1017.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cornelia M. Ashby, 202-512-8403, ashbyc@gao.gov.

D.C. CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY

More Focus Needed on Human Capital Management Issues for Caseworkers and Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

What GAO Found

CFSA actively recruited caseworkers and implemented retention strategies; however, caseworkers cited several management practices they said lowered their morale and adversely affected their ability to perform their duties. CFSA employed several recruitment approaches recommended by a number of child welfare organizations and exceeded most of its staffing goals for fiscal year 2003. Caseworkers cited high salaries and the training for new caseworkers as factors that encouraged them to remain at CFSA. However, GAO found a general consensus among the caseworkers with which GAO met that some management practices—poor communication, a lack of resources, poor supervision, and no rewards and recognition program—adversely affected their performance and morale. Agency officials said they had made some changes and were planning to take other actions to address these issues.

CFSA has developed goals and strategies for recruiting new foster and adoptive homes and improved licensing requirements. CFSA has made progress licensing new families, although more families have stopped serving than expected. Further, CFSA does not have processes for identifying the reasons foster parents stop serving or for determining the effectiveness of its recruitment strategies. CFSA has standardized and raised licensing requirements for all foster and adoptive homes, but as of May 2004, 308 foster homes were unlicensed, with about 22 percent of CFSA's foster children residing in them.

CFSA has begun collaborating with DMH and the Family Court to centralize and track mental health services for foster care children, but challenges remain to ensuring timely delivery. CFSA and DMH designed a standard process for referring foster care children to DMH for assessment and treatment and for tracking service delivery. DMH has also started expanding its service capacity for foster care children. For example, it has begun recruiting additional evaluators to perform assessments. While CFSA began using a database to track service delivery in August 2004, it has not analyzed the service delivery data collected on paper prior to August 2004 to determine whether foster care children were receiving timely services. Additionally, CFSA and DMH still face certain challenges, such as integrating caseworkers and Family Court judges into the new referral process.

CFSA, DMH, and COG have spending plans that are consistent with the statutory language providing the federal funds, but only a small portion of the foster care improvement funds had been obligated or spent as of June 2004, in part because funding was not received until March 2004. Further, it is unclear how the District and COG plan to support some of these programs in the long-term because future funding is uncertain.