

Department of Health and Human Services

**OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**MISSOURI'S ADOPTION
AND FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS
AND REPORTING SYSTEM
(AFCARS)**



**JUNE GIBBS BROWN
Inspector General**

**OCTOBER 1999
A-07-99-01040**



Region VII
601 East 12th Street
Room 284A
Kansas City, Missouri 64106

CIN: A-07-99-01040

October 8, 1999

Mr. Gary J. Stangler
Director, Department of Social Services
Broadway State Office Building
P.O. Box 1527
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102

Dear Mr. Stangler:

This report provides you with the results of our audit entitled *Missouri's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System*, otherwise known as AFCARS. The purpose of our review was to assess Missouri's system for selecting, collecting, recording, and verifying performance data submitted to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Specifically, we reviewed Missouri's AFCARS data collection procedures and verified the data elements reported to ACF for the first six months of Federal Fiscal Year (FY) 1999.

We found Missouri (State) reported foster care data to ACF that was inaccurate and incomplete. We are recommending the State implement and/or strengthen procedures to ensure: 1) foster care data at the county offices is being entered accurately; 2) computer programs properly download information from the State system to the AFCARS format; and 3) downloaded foster care data is evaluated for accuracy and completeness.

The State was in general agreement with our findings and recommendations. A copy of the State's response to our draft report is provided in its entirety as Appendix B.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 1993, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) which shifted focus from activities to the results of those activities. The GPRA mandated that Federal agencies establish strategic planning and prepare annual performance plans, beginning with a plan for FY 1999.

The purpose of the performance plan is to clearly inform Congress and the public of the agency's annual performance goals, the measures used to assess performance, the strategies required to achieve performance, and the procedures used to verify and validate performance information. The annual performance plan establishes the connection between long term goals outlined in the

strategic plan and the day to day activities of management and staff, and sets out measurable goals that define what will be accomplished during the fiscal year.

The ACF Annual Performance Plan covers all of the programs administered by ACF for the economic and social well being of children, youth, and families. For a number of major programs, ACF is largely dependent upon State administered systems for the collection of performance data. The AFCARS reporting system is designed to collect State performance data specifically related to adoption and title IV-B/IV-E foster care. Federal requirements for AFCARS are set forth at 45 Code of Federal Regulations 1355.40.

There were 66 foster care and 37 adoption data elements in AFCARS. The data elements for foster care consisted of a child's general and demographic information, placement settings, circumstances associated with removal, case plan goals, caretaker information, termination of rights, foster parent data, discharge data, and sources of Federal financial funding. The data elements for adoption consisted of a child's general and demographic information, special needs status, birth parents, court actions, adoptive parent data, placement information, and sources of Federal financial funding.

The State agencies were required to begin collecting the AFCARS data on October 1, 1994 and submit it semi-annually to ACF. This data was then compiled to compare actual performance with performance goals set out in the annual performance plan.

At the State, the Department of Social Services is responsible for collecting and recording the AFCARS data. The State submitted data to ACF in the AFCARS format for the first time in FY 1998.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

We conducted our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, except that our review of internal controls was limited to obtaining an understanding of the State's AFCARS data collection procedures and verifying data elements. We did not review the overall internal control structure of the State.

The objective of our review was to assess the Missouri system for selecting, collecting, recording, and verifying performance data submitted to ACF through AFCARS. Specifically, we reviewed and verified that the data elements for the first six months of FY 1999 were accurate and reliable. We discussed Federal and State policies and procedures with State and Regional ACF personnel, reviewed background information on AFCARS and Federal regulations related to the collection and reporting of adoption and foster care data. Our review included visits to selected county offices located throughout the State. At these offices, we reviewed case files of children involved in the adoption and foster care programs to become familiar with specific documents included in the files. We also interviewed personnel in order to obtain an understanding of the procedures for collecting and reporting the AFCARS data at the county office level.

To determine the validity of the data received by ACF, we reconciled the State and ACF versions of Missouri's AFCARS data files for the period October 1, 1998 through March 31, 1999. Using the State's AFCARS data files, we then verified adoption and foster care computer data to both the individual case files and the Missouri computer system for Cole county.

We performed our work during the period April through July 1999 at the Regional ACF office in Kansas City, Missouri, State offices in Jefferson City, Missouri, and county offices in Pettis, Livingston, Pulaski, Jefferson, St. Louis City, St. Louis, and Cole counties.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During our review of the data collected and recorded by the county office, we found 92 of the 198 foster care cases contained errors. A detailed listing of the cases with errors is shown in Appendix A. The 92 cases had a total of 124 errors in the following categories:

<u>Error Type</u>	<u>Clerical Errors</u>	<u>System Errors</u>	<u>Total Errors</u>
Disability Unreported	0	54	54
Dates Incorrect/Incomplete	11	19	30
Vendor Information Incorrect/Incomplete	5	16	21
Funding Information Incorrect	2	7	9
Removal Reason Incorrect/Incomplete	6	0	6
Number of Placements Incorrect	0	2	2
Foster Care Family Structure Incorrect/Incomplete	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
Totals	<u>24</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>124</u>

Although the county made clerical errors, the preponderance of the errors related to the downloading of data, which was a State-wide problem. The State's computer system contained accurate data. However, when the program designed to create AFCARS data was applied to the State computer system, errors occurred. Consequently, we believe there are flaws in the design of the State's AFCARS computer program.

These errors could have caused information on foster care children in the ACF Performance Plan to be inaccurate, incomplete, and therefore, unreliable. However, to date, the Missouri AFCARS data has not been used in the statistics for the ACF Performance Plan. The State submitted data for FYs 1998 and 1999. The ACF did not use those years in developing baseline data for the years 1999 or 2000 ACF Performance Plans.

We are recommending the State implement and/or strengthen procedures to ensure:

- foster care data at the county offices is being entered accurately;
- computer programs properly download information from the State system to the AFCARS format; and
- downloaded foster care data is evaluated for accuracy and completeness.

Auditee Comments

The State was in general agreement with our findings and recommendations (See Appendix B). State officials indicated that they: had identified and corrected the problem associated with misreporting of disability conditions; were redesigning tracking forms to reduce clerical errors during data entry; and were continuing to investigate the other reporting errors. These officials said that they were committed to reporting accurate data for the children they serve.

* * * * *

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUDITEE RESPONSE

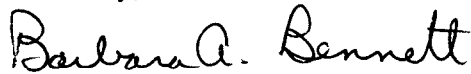
Final determinations as to actions to be taken on all matters reported will be made by the HHS Action Official identified below. We request that you respond to the HHS Action Official identified below within 30 days from the date of this report. Your response should address each recommendation and present any comments or additional information that you believe may have a bearing on the final determination.

In accordance with the principles of the Freedom of Information Act (Public Law 90-23), OIG, OAS reports issued to HHS' grantees and contractors are made available if requested, to members of the press and general public to the extent information contained therein is not subjected to the exemptions in the Act which HHS chooses to exercise. (See 45 Code of Federal Regulations, part 5.)

Page 5 - Mr. Gary J. Stangler

We appreciate the courtesy extended to our auditors during this review. If you have any questions, please contact Joe Green, Audit Manager, at (515) 323-2147. Please refer to the Common Identification Number (CIN) in all correspondence relating to this report.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Bennett
Regional Inspector General
for Audit Services

Enclosures

HHS Action Official
Linda Lewis
Regional Administrator, Region VII
HHS/Administration for Children and Families
601 East 12th Street, Room 276
Kansas City, Missouri 64106

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS AND REPORTING SYSTEM
STATE OF MISSOURI
JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI
OCTOBER 1, 1998 THROUGH MARCH 31, 1999
A-07-99-01040

SCHEDULE OF FOSTER CARE DATA ERRORS

<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Number of Errors</u>	<u>Description of Errors</u>
2	1	Removal Reason Incorrect: sexual abuse listed as physical abuse.
3	2	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation and emotionally disturbed. Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
5	2	Date Incorrect: first removal from home. Date Incorrect: computer generated removal transaction.
6	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
7	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
9	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
11	1	Date Incorrect: discharge from last foster care episode.
12	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
14	2	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed. Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
15	2	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation and emotionally disturbed. Number of Placements Incorrect.
16	1	Disability Not Reported: visually or hearing impaired, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions.
17	2	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation. Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.

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18	1	Removal Reason Incomplete: child behavior not listed.
21	1	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation, visually or hearing impaired, physically disabled, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions.
22	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
23	1	Vendor Information Incomplete: year of birth for both foster caretakers.
24	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
25	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
27	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
29	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed and other diagnosed conditions.
30	1	Disability Not Reported: other diagnosed conditions.
31	1	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation.
33	2	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed. Vendor Information Incorrect: race for both foster caretakers.
34	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
35	1	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled and emotionally disturbed.
37	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
38	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.

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<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Number of Errors</u>	<u>Description of Errors</u>
39	2	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions. Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.
41	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
45	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
46	2	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation, visually or hearing impaired, physically disabled, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions. Date Incorrect: first removal from home.
47	4	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed. Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review. Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker. Funding Information Incorrect: SSI or other social security should not be listed.
48	1	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions.
51	2	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation, visually or hearing impaired, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions. Vendor Information Incomplete: year of birth, race, and Hispanic origin for both foster caretakers.

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54	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
55	2	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed. Funding Information Incorrect: SSI or other social security should be listed.
59	1	Date Incorrect: removal from last episode.
60	2	Date Incomplete: most recent periodic review. Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.
61	1	Disability Not Reported: visually or hearing impaired and emotionally disturbed.
62	1	Date Incorrect: year of birth for first principle caretaker.
64	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed and other diagnosed conditions.
66	2	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled. Number of Placements Incorrect: previous settings in episode.
69	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed and other diagnosed conditions.
71	1	Date Incorrect: year of birth for first principle caretaker.

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<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Number of Errors</u>	<u>Description of Errors</u>
74	3	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review. Date Incorrect: placement date in current setting. Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.
75	1	Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.
76	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
77	1	Funding Information Incorrect: title IV-E should be listed.
79	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
81	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
85	1	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation, emotionally disturbed, and other diagnosed conditions.
86	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
90	1	Date Incorrect: year of birth for first principle caretaker.
94	3	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed. Date Incorrect: year of birth for second principle caretaker. Funding Information Incorrect: title XIX should not be listed.

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<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Number of Errors</u>	<u>Description of Errors</u>
95	4	<p>Disability Not Reported: physically disabled.</p> <p>Date Incorrect: year of birth for both principle caretakers.</p> <p>Foster Care Family Structure Incomplete: type of foster care family.</p> <p>Vendor Information Incomplete: year of birth, race, and Hispanic origin for both foster caretakers.</p>
96	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
97	1	Vendor Information Incomplete: year of birth for both foster caretakers.
100	2	<p>Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed and other diagnosed conditions.</p> <p>Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.</p>
103	2	<p>Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.</p> <p>Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.</p>
106	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed and other diagnosed conditions.
108	1	Disability Not Reported: mental retardation and emotionally disturbed.
110	1	Removal Reason Incorrect: physical abuse, parent alcohol abuse, and parent drug abuse listed as child alcohol abuse, and child drug abuse, and inadequate housing.
111	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.

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<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Number of Errors</u>	<u>Description of Errors</u>
113	1	Vendor Information Incomplete: year of birth, race, and Hispanic origin for both foster caretakers.
119	1	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled, visually or hearing impaired, and emotionally disturbed.
122	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
126	3	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled. Foster Care Family Structure Incomplete: type of foster care family. Vendor Information Incomplete: year of birth, race, and Hispanic origin for both foster caretakers.
128	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
129	2	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review. Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.
130	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
131	1	Removal Reason Incorrect: parent drug abuse listed as child drug abuse.
133	1	Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth, race, and Hispanic origin for first foster caretaker.
134	1	Funding Information Incorrect: amount of monthly payment.
135	1	Date Incorrect: latest removal and computer-generated removal transaction.

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137	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
146	1	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled and emotionally disturbed.
148	2	Vendor Information Incorrect: race for both foster caretakers. Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
149	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
150	1	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review.
151	1	Disability Not Reported: visually or hearing impaired, physically disabled, and other diagnosed conditions.
152	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
154	1	Funding Information Incorrect: amount of monthly payment.
167	1	Funding Information Incorrect: amount of monthly payment.
169	2	Disability Not Reported: physically disabled. Removal Reason Incorrect: parent drug abuse listed as child drug abuse.
170	1	Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker.
174	2	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed. Removal Reason Incomplete: physical abuse not listed.

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<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Number of Errors</u>	<u>Description of Errors</u>
177	3	Date Incorrect: most recent periodic review. Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for second foster caretaker. Funding Information Incorrect: title IV-E foster care and title XIX should be listed.
178	1	Disability Not Reported: emotionally disturbed.
179	1	Funding Information Incorrect: title XIX should be listed.
187	1	Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for both foster caretakers.
190	1	Vendor Information Incorrect: year of birth for both foster caretakers.
196	1	Disability Not Reported: other diagnosed conditions.
	<u>124</u>	Total



MISSOURI
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September 21, 1999

Barbara A. Bennett
 Regional Inspector General for Audit Services
 601 East 12th Street
 Room 284A
 Kansas City, Missouri 64106

Dear Ms. Bennett:

This letter is in response to your office's draft audit report on Missouri's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (CIN: A-07-99-01040).

We have identified the programming error, which led to the misreporting of disability conditions and have corrected the problem. We have confidence that future reports will be error free for this data element. We have also investigated the problems associated with misreporting the removal reasons. We are anticipating that we will soon be able to redesign our Alternative Care Tracking form to reduce clerical errors associated with the entry of this data into our system. We will need additional time to investigate the remainder of the problems and as such have not yet formulated plans for rectifying them.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to your audit findings and are committed to enhancing our system and reporting only the most accurate data for the children we serve.

Sincerely,

Gary J. Stangler
 Gary Stangler
 Director

GS/LP