

## 1201 – Child Placement Services

### VIII. CASE REVIEWS

The case of every child in the custody or placement responsibility of a county department of social services shall be reviewed by a Permanency Planning Action Team (PPAT) and documented on the DSS-5241 Family Services Agreement Review (<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/forms/dss/dss-5241-ia.pdf>). Permanency Planning Action Teams should be action-oriented. These teams are valuable in achieving a safe, permanent home for every child in foster care placement within one year. While these teams are needed to review agency decisions, they are also responsible for ensuring that every foster care case moves quickly toward a permanent resolution.

PPATs are open, non-adversarial forums for focusing on casework practice and planning. The PPAT process allows each party involved to have input into service needs of the child and family; to document progress of the parents in improving the conditions that led to foster care placement; to develop the most appropriate permanent plan; and to ensure that permanency is achieved for every child. The PPAT process also ensures that the plan that is developed will be followed regardless of changes in social work staff. In addition, disagreements can be addressed prior to court hearings, helping each party to understand the position of the others, and thus providing the opportunity for informed negotiation.

#### A. Permanency Planning Action Team Purpose

The primary purpose of the PPAT is to ensure that reasonable efforts to achieve a safe, permanent home for a child are being pursued actively. Specifically, the action team shall determine:

- the need for continued custody of the child with the county child welfare agency;
- the need for continued placement of the child;
- the appropriateness of the child's current foster care placement;
- if reunification is the plan, the extent of progress made by the parents toward improving the conditions that caused the child to be removed;
- if reunification is the plan, the barriers or safety issues that prevent reunification from being achieved today;
- the extent of agency efforts to achieve the child's permanent plan;
- the services that have been provided by other community agencies to help the family achieve the goals identified in the Out of Home Family Services Agreement;
- the services that are still needed from the county child welfare agency or other community agencies to help the family achieve the goals identified in the Out of Home Family Services Agreement;
- the extent of compliance with the Out of Home Family Services Agreement ;

- the most appropriate permanent plan for the child and how to achieve the plan quickly;
- the most appropriate alternative permanent plan for the child that is ready to implement if the primary plan becomes unworkable; and/or
- the expected date by which the permanent plan will be achieved.

Every child in the legal custody or the placement authority of the county child welfare agency must have his/her case reviewed at a PPAT meeting. Cases that must be reviewed include:

- Children who are in the legal custody of a county child welfare agency;
- Children who are in foster care placement under a Voluntary Placement Agreement;
- Children over age 18 who have signed a DSS-5108 Contractual Agreement for Continuing Residential Support (<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/forms/dss/dss-5108.pdf>) with the agency;
- Children who are legally freed for adoption who have not been placed;
- Children who are legally freed for adoption and placed in adoptive homes, but the Decree of Adoption has not yet been issued;
- Children who have been returned home or who have been placed in the home of relatives or kin, yet who are still in the legal custody of county child welfare agency.

## **B. Required Time Frames for Case Reviews**

PPAT reviews are required at the following intervals:

- within 60 days of the child coming into agency custody or placement responsibility;
- within 90 days of the first agency team review, but no more than 150 days of the child coming into agency custody or placement responsibility; and
- every six months thereafter.

Social workers may convene action team reviews more frequently than required. Frequent action team meetings when children are first placed into foster care increase the likelihood of achieving a safe, permanent home within one year.

## **C. Participants in the Action Team Review**

The PPAT shall provide an unbiased, objective, and thorough review of all elements of a child's placement in foster care and the agency's plan for the child's future. To ensure that the nature of the action team is objective, it shall be conducted by a team which includes at least one person who does not have responsibility for services to the child or his family, and no responsibility for case management. Participants who shall be invited to the PPAT include (but are not limited to) the following:

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- the child's parent(s), unless parental rights have been terminated;
- the child; **Counties shall ensure that in any hearing or review the child shall be consulted in an age appropriate manner about any permanency plans for the child. If a youth has obtained the age of 14 years or older, by federal law, the child shall be consulted and given the opportunity to select up to two members as part of the team who are not a foster parent of, or caseworker for, the child.**
- the foster parents/caregivers/adoptive parents;
- community resource persons, at least one of whom is not responsible for the case management or delivery of services to the child or parents; and
- the Guardian ad Litem.

Parents have the right to participate fully in every review of their child's case by a Permanency Planning Action Team and are considered to be members of the team. They shall receive timely notice of the meetings. They shall also be informed that they have the right to present information from their perspective. Every effort should be made to meet at a time and location that enables parental attendance.

The agency must notify the parent(s) of:

- their right to attend and the opportunity to be heard at the action team meetings;
- the dates and locations of the meetings; and,
- the right to have their attorneys present at these meetings.

Notification to parents and other required participants should be documented in the case record and signatures of all persons attending the PPAT meeting shall be recorded on the Family Services Agreement Review.

Children who are old enough and of sufficient maturity shall be invited to participate in reviews of their cases. By law, children who have obtained the age of 14 years or older, shall be consulted on the case plan and review. Decisions made at PPAT should be made "through the eyes of the child." Children have no control over the decisions that are made for them by adults yet these decisions have significant impact on their lives. The more agencies can empower children by including them in the decision-making process, the better those agencies serve them. One of the individuals selected by the child may be designated to be the child's advisor and, as necessary, advocate, with respect to the application of the reasonable and prudent parent standard to the child.

Foster parents and other caregivers have the most current and complete knowledge of the child's adjustment in foster care. They play a vital role in the planning and decision-making regarding the child's future. They should always be strongly encouraged to attend and participate fully in the case planning and review meetings.

By providing services to children and/or their families, community resource providers may have information essential to planning and decision-making. It is crucial to involve them in the planning and review process. The child's teachers and/or guidance counselors should be included in this process. In addition, having at least one resource person who has no direct service or case management responsibilities to the case strengthens case decision-making. Not only does this provide for additional input into the child's case, but an individual with no direct case responsibility is better able to view the "big picture" objectively and make recommendations from the broader community perspective.

Likewise, the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) for the child can bring a different perspective to the case review. Appointed by the Court, the GAL is charged to investigate the facts of the case and determine the needs of the child, as well as the resources available within the family and community to meet those needs. The GAL makes recommendations to the Court on behalf of the child

#### **D. Essential Issues to be Discussed during Case Reviews**

- At the initial review, discuss reasons that necessitated placement and type of placement provided. Include in the discussion what efforts have been made; why those efforts did or did not work; and what efforts are currently being made.
- At subsequent reviews, discuss: why the child still is in care; why the particular placement was chosen, changes in the placement, and whether the placement remains appropriate.
- The long-range plan for permanence for this child: What treatment and services are being provided for the parents, the child, and support for the foster parents including respite?
- Specific tasks to be completed by the agency and the parents: Do these tasks or services relate to what brought the child into care? Will these tasks or services result in the desired changes in behavior?
- Tasks completed or not completed by the agency and by the parents: Are these tasks reasonable and appropriate? Has progress been documented? Why have some tasks not been completed?
- The visitation plan: Is the plan reasonable and appropriate? Is the plan being carried out? Does it need to be changed? Are there barriers to visitation? What is the agency doing to address these barriers? Should the visit time be increased?
- The projected likely date by which the child may be returned and safely maintained at home, or placed for adoption or legal guardianship: Are we focusing on the child's need and perceptions of time? Have there been delays?
- Are there any changes that any party feels should be made to the placement, the permanent plan, services needed, or behaviors required of the parents?
- Reasonable and prudent parent standard: Does the child have regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate

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activities? Are the placement providers following the reasonable and prudent parent standard? Are there any barriers to applying the standard? What is the agency doing to address these barriers?