



STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL

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SUMMARY REPORT DIGEST

**Department of Children and Family Services’
SEARCH FOR MISSING CHILDREN**

MANAGEMENT AUDIT

Release Date: December 2014

SYNOPSIS

House Resolution Number 120 directed the Office of the Auditor General to conduct a management audit of the Department of Children and Family Services’ (DCFS) search for missing children. The Resolution asked the audit to determine the following for calendar years 2011–2012: (1) the number of children reported missing; (2) whether timely reports of missing children were made to required parties; and (3) the steps followed to locate and recover missing children, including compliance with procedures.

DCFS’ goal is to provide for the well-being of children (State wards) in foster or substitute care who cannot return home safely and also to support child-abuse prevention. DCFS procedures state that missing wards are at great risk of victimization and exploitation and emphasizes timely action to reduce risks to missing wards. This audit found that compliance with procedures was not always documented, there was a lack of dates to determine if reporting was performed in a timely manner, data on missing wards was not always reliable, and the Department had not evaluated the program to search for missing wards.

1. **Number of Missing Children:** DCFS did not report the number of wards missing in a given year. DCFS used daily lists of missing wards which showed about 230 wards were missing each day. These missing wards were *not all runaways* but included wards whose caregivers did not know their whereabouts.
 - DCFS estimated that over the two year audit period, there were approximately 26,500 to 29,200 run incidents involving about 2,800 to 3,100 State wards. However, these data sources had limitations.
 - Some wards may be missing for less than a day, while other wards may be missing for weeks or months.
2. **Timeliness of Reports to Required Parties:** When a ward goes missing, caseworkers need to report to required parties (such as police, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), guardian, courts) within the time stated in DCFS procedures, typically “*immediately*” or “*within two working days.*”
 - To determine if wards were reported to required parties in a timely manner, the date when the caseworker *learned* that a ward was reported missing is required. However, this date was not documented by DCFS.
 - Without this date, it is not possible to determine whether caseworkers are meeting established time requirements for reporting missing wards to required parties (such as police, NCMEC, guardian, courts).
3. **Compliance:** In 47 of 100 cases sampled, caseworkers did not complete the DCFS missing child report within two working days, as required by procedure, but averaged six work days (longest took 98 work days).
 - In 96 of 100 cases sampled, we did not find evidence of supervisors’ confirmation that the initial required reports (such as to police, NCMEC, guardian, courts) by caseworkers had been made.
 - When DCFS determines that a ward is high risk (such as age 13 or younger, medical condition, abducted), supervisors are required to receive daily progress reports from caseworkers. In all 20 high-risk cases sampled, we found insufficient documentation for these daily progress reports being made.

Agency management is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, and controlling its programs. Given the noncompliance with procedures, management controls and monitoring need to be strengthened.

INTRODUCTION

The House of Representatives adopted Resolution Number 120 directing the Office of the Auditor General to conduct a management audit of the Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) search for missing children. The Resolution directed the audit to determine the following for calendar years 2011–2012: number of children reported missing; whether timely reports of missing children were made to required parties; and the steps followed to locate the missing children, including compliance with rules and procedures.

- DCFS does not distinguish between a runaway ward and a ward whose whereabouts are unknown. The missing wards were *not all runaways* but included wards whose caregivers did not know their whereabouts.
- DCFS did not have reports for agency management on wards missing during a given year.
- Such reports could indicate whether caseworkers were completing missing children reports in a timely manner, along with statistics on missing children/wards which show how long they are typically missing, where they run to, the reasons they run away, etc. (see inset).
- Agency management is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, and controlling its programs. Given the noncompliance with DCFS procedures and a lack of reliable data to determine whether missing child procedures are being followed, management controls need to be strengthened with an increased emphasis on compliance.
- Digest Exhibit 1 summarizes the overall search process for locating missing wards, along with the results of the audit. (Report pages 1 – 6)

Summary AUDIT RESULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCFS did not have reports for management on the total number of missing wards during the year and the location from where they went missing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCFS estimated 2,800 to 3,100 wards went missing 26,500 to 29,200 times during CY 2011-2012 (combined) but the data had limitations and was not complete.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures establish specific time requirements for caseworkers to report to specific parties, such as "<i>immediately</i>" or "<i>within two working days</i>," but a key date for determining timeliness of search procedures was not recorded – i.e., the <u>date</u> when the caseworker <u>learned</u> that a ward was missing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseworkers sometimes learned about a missing ward first but did not inform the DCFS Child Location and Support Unit for Missing Children (CLSU).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a lack of documentation to indicate if supervisory review of missing child cases had been performed.

These wards were *not all runaways* but included wards whose caregivers did not know their whereabouts.

DCFS did not have reports on missing wards for management, such as the total number that went missing during the year and the location from where they went missing.

Digest Exhibit 1	
OVERALL SUMMARY OF SEARCH PROCESS AND RESULTS OF AUDIT	
SEARCH PROCESS	A missing ward is one who is missing from placement.
Procedure 329.10:	<i>"Children who are missing are at <u>great risk of victimization and exploitation.</u>" [emphasis added]</i>
Procedure 329.30:	<i>"Supervisors and workers are expected to work <u>very aggressively</u> to locate a missing child and return the child to an approved placement." [emphasis added]</i>
A. Caregivers:	Caregivers are required to immediately report any missing ward.
B. Caseworkers:	Caseworkers need to do the following immediately (except as noted): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check/file missing person report; provide police a photo of ward. 2. Contact CLSU (Child Location & Support Unit for Missing Children). 3. Contact NCMEC (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children). 4. Notify child's legal parents/guardian. 5. Complete DCFS UIR (Unusual Incident Report) in 2 working days. 6. After 24 hours, stop payment for ward's room and board. 7. Request juvenile court for a child protection warrant in 2 work days.
C. Supervisors:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supervisors are required to immediately confirm that caseworker completed all required reports and contacts (shown above). 2. Supervisors are to meet with worker <u>weekly</u> to assist search. 3. Supervisors must document all meetings with workers in case file. 4. If ward is high risk (under age 13, health issues), caseworker must provide <u>daily</u> progress reports on the search to supervisor.
D. Child Location and Support Unit (CLSU):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When notified of missing ward, CLSU will send to caseworker the main search form, CFS 1014 missing child report, to complete within 2 working days and will monitor search efforts. • If a ward is missing after a week CLSU will send CFS 1014 Part II.
NUMBER MISSING	DCFS did not count the total number of missing wards in a year.
Audit period was CY 2011-2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26,500 to 29,200 run incidents reported based on different data. • 2,800 to 3,100 wards reported missing during the audit period. • DCFS uses 2 daily reports; a May 14, 2014 report showed a total of 240 wards were missing: 41 for 100 to 365 days, 7 for 1 to 6 years.
AUDIT RESULTS	The audit sampled 100 cases (run incidents).
The audit showed the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No date was recorded when caseworker first learned that a ward had gone missing, preventing us from determining timeliness. • Procedures require caseworkers to inform the CLSU immediately upon learning about a missing ward but they did not always do so. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Date CLSU was notified was not recorded in 39% of cases. – One worker did not notify CLSU for 17 working days. • 76% of cases lacked evidence that photos were provided to police. • 76% of cases had case notes that did not appear under the correct run incident (called the "Report ID Number"). • 47% of missing child reports not completed within 2 work days per procedure but averaged 6 work days; longest was 98 work days. • 28% of cases had more than 1 date for when ward went missing. • 70% of cases did not show a required medical exam scheduled. • Over 90% of cases lacked sufficient documentation of supervisors: (1) confirming that caseworkers completed required initial reports; (2) receiving daily reports on high risk wards (under age 13); and (3) having weekly meetings with workers for wards still missing. • 78% of cases did not have evidence of debriefing ward after run.
Source: Summary of audit results.	

BACKGROUND

The Illinois Administrative Code establishes the procedures to follow when a child for whom DCFS is legally responsible (called a State ward) goes missing. DCFS procedures require that when a ward goes missing, caregivers contact the police, caseworker, and its Child Location and Support Unit for Missing Children (CLSU). If the intent to run has been established, the child/ward is considered a runaway.

Caregivers are required to contact the Child Location and Support Unit for Missing Children (CLSU) to report a missing ward.

DCFS Procedure 329 titled “Locating and Returning Missing, Runaway, and Abducted Children” states “*The purpose of these procedures is to establish requirements and provide instructions for Department and Purchase of Service (POS) staff when children for whom the Department is legally responsible are reported or believed to be missing, runaway, or abducted.*” [emphasis added]

These procedures include the steps to follow when searching for a missing child, such as who to contact, amount of time to complete the contacts, and supervisory reviews that must be performed and documented. (p. 7)

NUMBER OF MISSING WARDS

House Resolution Number 120 asked for “*The number of children who were reported as missing, runaway, or abducted . . .*” in calendar years 2011 and 2012. DCFS did not have a report on the total number of wards missing during a week, month, or year. Consequently, DCFS was unable to provide an accurate number of wards who were missing. Depending on the DCFS data source, approximately 2,773 to 3,126 wards were reported to be missing about 26,491 to 29,201 times over the two years (combined).

DCFS data sources indicated that about 2,800 to 3,100 wards went missing 26,500 to 29,200 times over the two year (2011-2012) audit period.

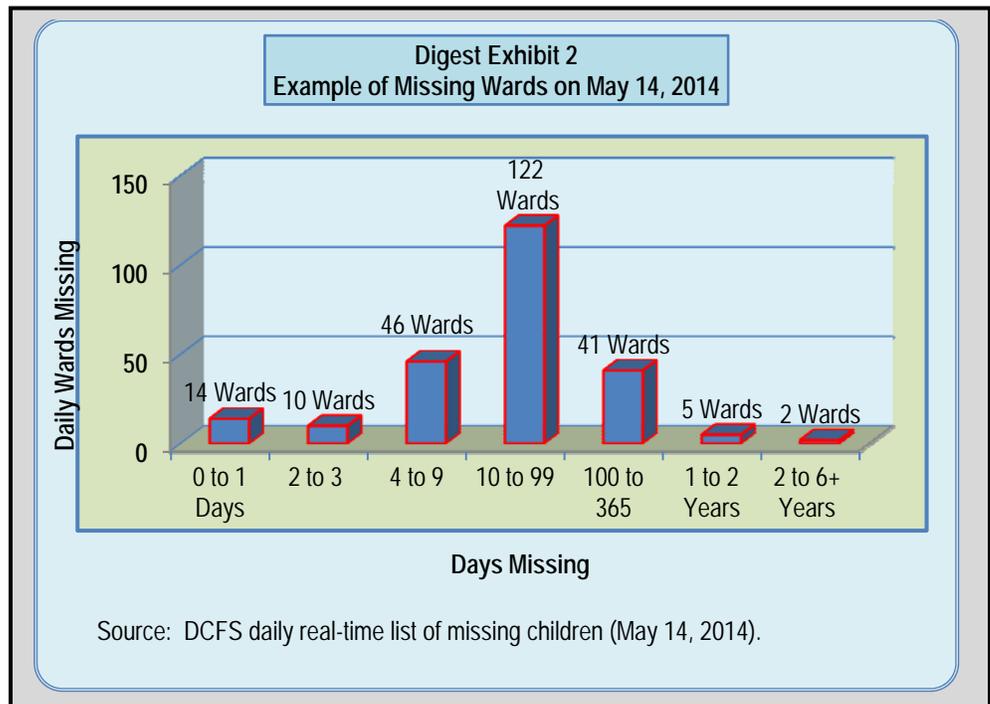
We reviewed four sources of data to identify the number of wards that were reported missing. However, each of the four sources had limitations which prevented us from making the determination required by House Resolution Number 120 on the number who went missing in 2011 and 2012:

1. **CFS 906 List.** DCFS had a list of CFS 906 forms completed to stop payments for room and board of wards that were missing. There were over 10,000 CFS 906 forms completed for wards that had gone missing during our audit period. We did not use this list as it excluded run incidents because the CFS 906 forms are required to be completed for wards missing over 24 hours.

2. **Daily Lists.** DCFS generates two real-time lists of missing wards which contain: (1) wards for whom a CFS 906 has not yet been completed, and (2) wards that are generally missing longer and DCFS has **completed** a CFS 906 form (to stop paying for their room and board). After a CFS 906 form is completed to stop payment, the ward would be moved from the first list to the second list.

Approximately 230 wards were missing on any day with about 40 new wards reported missing each day.

- These active lists were not retained from which an annual figure could be derived. The CLSU administrator indicated there were approximately 230 wards missing on any day and about 40 new wards were reported missing each day.
- Some wards may be missing for less than a day (e.g., was with a friend without informing the caregiver), while other wards may be missing for weeks. Digest Exhibit 2 summarizes the length of time wards were missing on May 14, 2014.



3. **Missing Child Database (MCD).** The MCD was used by the CLSU during the audit period. However, in April 2013, data in the MCD was transferred to the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and the MCD is no longer used.

- The MCD was a stand-alone database which did not have required fields as does SACWIS. It had long notes/text strings which made it difficult to match all the information for a run when data was transferred to SACWIS.

- The MCD contained almost 26,500 incidents of missing wards during our two-year audit period.
 - A DCFS official acknowledged that the MCD database had data integrity issues.
4. **SACWIS.** SACWIS is the agency’s current information system which shows over 29,000 incidents of wards reported missing in 2011 and 2012.
- When the MCD data was transferred into SACWIS in April 2013, the data did not transfer properly.
 - Multiple runs in MCD could have been combined into one report number in SACWIS or could have appeared under two Report ID numbers.
 - Our review found that 92 wards that had a CFS 906 form completed to stop their room and board payments were not included in the SACWIS missing children list.

While daily lists may serve the CLSU’s needs to monitor and track missing wards on a given day, capturing this information on annual basis would provide useful information to DCFS management. The CLSU does not prepare routine reports for management regarding missing wards which could identify:

- If the total number of missing wards is increasing or decreasing annually;
- If the agency has allocated sufficient resources to handle missing wards;
- If there are facilities from which wards run away more or less often;
- If some facilities need additional monitoring or corrective action; and
- If DCFS needs to make any policy changes regarding missing wards. (pp. 28 – 31)

RECOMMENDATION

DCFS should report the number of missing wards annually to its management, as well as other information which may be needed to effectively carry out its responsibilities regarding missing children.

DATA ACCURACY

The audit identified issues which impacted the accuracy of data on missing wards. Some case files showed different dates for when the ward was reported missing, such as in the CFS 1014 Missing Children Recovery Report, in the CFS 906 form completed to stop payment, or in SACWIS case notes. DCFS stated the reason for the differences could be typos, or dates entered by different workers, or involve a ward who ran away multiple times but only some of the incidents were recorded (i.e., ward went missing, was brought back but went missing again, such as within hours).

- **Multiple Dates.** In our random sample of 100 cases, there was more than one date for when 28 wards went missing in different DCFS documents. For 4 of these 28 cases, the missing date varied by at least 10 days in agency documents, including a 43-day difference between dates for one missing ward.
- **Data Organization.** The audit found 76 of 100 cases sampled (76%) contained case notes in SACWIS which did not appear to be grouped with the correct report. The case notes in MCD were not always separated for each individual run incident. The MCD had notes in one long string and SACWIS put these notes in “containers” within different Report ID’s so information about a particular run would be under a particular number.
- **Abductions.** During 2011-2012, DCFS classified 61 of the more than 29,000 total cases as abductions. This audit found that DCFS misclassified 40 of these 61 cases as abductions.
 - DCFS documents, such as the CFS 906 form used to stop room and board payments and/or SACWIS case notes, showed that 40 of these 61 cases were wards who were missing, not abducted.
 - Agency officials noted that no ward had been abducted by a stranger either during the audit period or in recent memory but were taken by parents or family members lacking custody.
- **Multiple CFS 1014 Forms.** There were other issues which showed that the data had errors. Each Report ID number should contain only one CFS 1014 missing child report; however, auditors identified 64 of 10,012 Report ID numbers that contained multiple CFS 1014 reports.

RECOMMENDATION

DCFS should emphasize to those involved in reporting and locating missing children to accurately record all information.

For reports to be useful and effective, the data contained in them must be accurate. DCFS needs to emphasize to employees the importance of entering data correctly and require supervisors to check that the data is in fact entered accurately. (pp. 34 – 37)

DCFS NOTIFICATION

DCFS Procedure 329.30(a) requires caregivers to notify the police, the caseworker, and the Child Location and Support Unit if the whereabouts of a ward become unknown (the CLSU is now renamed CIRU). However, we did not find that the CLSU was always notified when a ward went missing.

The CLSU was the agency's support unit when searching for missing wards and sent caseworkers the CFS 1014 missing child report to complete as they began searching for missing wards. Caseworkers record the dates they contact/notify/report the missing wards to police, NCMEC, parents/guardian, court, etc. The CLSU also sent a weekly follow up for caseworkers to complete, called the CFS 1014, Part II, Location Efforts.

DCFS procedures state that the caregiver should immediately report a missing ward to the CLSU; however, the date the CLSU was notified was not found in 39 of 100 cases sampled. A lack of notification to the CLSU can prevent or delay searching for the missing ward as the CLSU oversaw the search for missing wards.

DCFS Procedure 329.30(b)(2) states that a caseworker should immediately contact the CLSU upon learning that a ward is missing. However, caseworkers began searching for missing wards up to 17 working days before notifying the CLSU that a ward was missing. During this time the caseworkers may have submitted missing person reports, contacted parents or guardians, requested Child Protection Warrants from juvenile courts, and completed CFS 119 Unusual Incident Reports (UIR) without notifying the CLSU. (pp. 41 – 42)

REPORTING FOR CAREGIVERS

DCFS Procedure 329.30(a)

"Caregivers, including foster parents, relative caregivers, and staff of residential facilities, shall immediately report any missing child/youth to:

- 1) *The local law enforcement;*
- 2) *The child's case manager/worker; and*
- 3) *The Helpline of the Child Location and Support Unit for Missing Children (1-866-503-0184).*

Caregivers shall obtain the number of the missing person report from the law enforcement officer taking the report and provide the report number to the CLSU Helpline."

In 39 of 100 cases sampled the date that the CLSU was notified that a child was missing was not found.

RECOMMENDATION

DCFS should improve controls to ensure that the CIRU is immediately informed when a DCFS caseworker is notified that a ward has gone missing.

CASEWORKER LEARNED ABOUT MISSING WARD

The date when the caseworker first learned about a ward being missing was not documented. Knowing the date/time when the caseworker learned is needed to determine if caseworkers contacted the required parties (e.g., police, NCMEC, parent/guardian, courts) in a timely manner.

As noted in DCFS Procedure 329.10, "*Children who are missing are at great risk of victimization and exploitation. This is especially true for children who are identified as "high risk". Because of the potential dangers to the child, the child's worker is to consider a missing or abducted child as a major event that requires intensive intervention.*" [emphasis added]

The date when the caseworker first learned about a ward being missing was not documented. This date is needed to determine if required parties were contacted (i.e., reports were made) in a timely manner.

Auditors asked where we could find the date when the worker learned about the missing ward; DCFS said that “All of this information should be recorded in the SACWIS case notes, there is not a specific area in the notes for the documentation, but it should be documented.” However, in our sample, auditors did not find a date recorded in the applicable SACWIS reports or in the case notes for when the caseworker first learned the ward was missing.

Recording the date that the caseworker learned is necessary because supervisors and management need this information to determine if procedures were being followed in a timely manner.

Recording the date that the caseworker learned is necessary because supervisors and management need this information to determine if procedures were being followed in a **timely** manner. Although all the required parties were contacted in our sample by caseworkers, we could not assess the timeliness of reporting missing wards to the required parties.

WHEN CASEWORKER “LEARNS”
DCFS Procedure 329.30(b)
<i>“When a worker . . . learns that a child/youth for whom the Department is legally responsible . . . is missing, the worker shall <u>immediately</u>:</i>
1) <i>Contact law enforcement . . . to verify that a missing person report has been filed [or file one if needed]. . . .</i>
2) <i>Contact the CLSU Helpline</i>
3) <i>Contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)</i>
4) <i>Notify the child’s legal parents, guardian</i>
5) <i>Complete the CFS 119 Unusual Incident Report (UIR). . . [in two working days]</i>
6) <i>Once the child has been missing for 24 hours, complete the CFS 906</i>
7) <i>Request the Juvenile Court of Jurisdiction to issue a Child Protection Warrant within two working days.”</i> [emphasis added]

One respondent in our survey noted that some workers have a very high caseload and are constantly in the field, or court, or visiting clients. These other assignments may delay beginning the search immediately, as required by procedures.

DCFS Procedure 329 states that all those involved need to work aggressively to find a missing child: “Supervisors and workers are expected to work very aggressively to locate a missing child and return the child to an approved placement” as children who are missing are at great risk of victimization and exploitation. A step needs to be added for the caseworker or his/her supervisor to reply to the CLSU to indicate if they anticipate any delays (such as due to scheduled days off or other assignments), so the CLSU is informed and can pursue alternatives if necessary. (pp. 42 – 44)

AUDIT SAMPLE OF MISSING WARDS

Audit Determination Number Two asked whether reporting requirements were completed in a timely manner. We randomly sampled 100 cases with a completed missing child report (CFS 1014) during the audit period and the average age of the wards in our sample was 17. The sample included 20 wards that DCFS marked as high risk, including wards that had several risk factors, such as mental health issues, pregnant, and parenting.

Having accurate dates for missing wards is important as noted by DCFS Procedure 329 which emphasizes finding a missing ward quickly. DCFS has established timelines for reporting to required parties either “immediately” (police, NCMEC, guardian) or within two working days (juvenile court, DCFS). Accurate dates are also needed for agency management to assess if procedures are performed in a timely manner.

Having accurate dates for missing wards is important, as noted by DCFS Procedure 329 which emphasizes finding a missing ward quickly.

Date CLSU Notified

In 39 of 100 cases sampled, the **date** the CLSU was notified about a missing ward was not available. Auditors found that in 34 of these 39 cases the CLSU was notified but could not determine the date when it was notified, while in the remaining 5 cases there was no evidence in the file to support that the CLSU was notified at all.

Other Compliance Testing

The audit found other non-compliance issues in our sample. For example there was a lack of documentation to show if photographs were provided to police and if the LEADS (Law Enforcement Agency Data System) number was obtained. Likewise, for 76 of 100 cases sampled, we could not determine if the missing ward’s photograph was provided to police as it was not noted on the CFS 1014 missing child report.

Procedure 329.30(d)(1) states that the CLSU will send the CFS 1014 Missing Children Recovery Report form to the caseworker when notified that a ward is missing. Workers are required to return it within two working days. Also, in our sample, for those cases which had dates, the CLSU sent the CFS 1014 missing child report form to caseworkers within two working days after being notified that a ward was missing.

DCFS has established requirements in its procedures for caseworkers to report missing wards to specified parties within two

RECOMMENDATION

DCFS should require supervisors to document their review.

working days. The Department should remind caseworkers of the requirements, and instruct supervisors to check and sign off on the CFS 1014 missing child report to determine if compliance has been achieved in a timely manner. (pp. 44 – 47)

INTERNAL AGENCY REPORTS

Caseworkers are required to complete internal reports and forms on missing wards; however, the audit sample found they were not always completed within the time specified in DCFS procedures (see Digest Exhibit 3):

Digest Exhibit 3 AGENCY FORMS FOR MISSING CHILDREN SAMPLED Calendar Years 2011 and 2012							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Requirement	Time to Report (Procedures)	Total	N/A	Unable to Determine	Completed Timely	Completed Late or Not Completed	
CFS 1014 Part I	2 Working Days	100	0	0	53	47	47%
CFS 1014 Part III	2 Working Days	100	4 ¹	0	94	2	2%
Medical Exam	Upon Return	100	4 ¹	0	29	67	70%
CFS 680-A	Upon Return	100	4 ¹	0	21	75	78%
Note: ¹ Two CFS 1014 (Part III) Recovery reports were not issued, 1 was pending and 1 was marked "Entered in Error."							
Source: Sample of DCFS missing children.							

- CFS 1014 (Part I) Missing Children Recovery Report –**
Procedures call for caseworkers to complete Part I of the CFS 1014 report to CLSU within two working days. The average time for completing the report for all sampled cases was six working days, with the longest being 98 working days. The CFS 1014 was completed:

 - Timely53 of 100 cases (53%)
 - Late47 of 100 cases (47%)
- CFS 1014 (Part III) Missing Children Recovery Report –**
Procedures call for caseworker to complete Part III of the CFS 1014 within two working days of receipt. For the 96 applicable cases sampled, these reports were completed:

 - Timely94 of 96 cases (98%)
 - Late2 of 96 cases (2%)
- Medical Exam –** Procedures call for the caseworker to schedule a medical exam when a ward has returned. Auditors tested whether

the box associated with the exam was checked on the CFS 1014 (Part III) Recovery report and found the medical exam box was:

- Tick marked as completed29 of 96 cases (30%)
- Not tick marked as completed.....67 of 96 cases (70%)

- **CFS 680-A Debriefing Form** – Procedures call for the caseworker to conduct a thorough follow-up interview with the ward when the ward has returned. After a ward is located, caseworkers are required to debrief (interview) the ward using a CFS 680-A form. Auditors checked whether the box associated with the 680-A form was tick marked on the CFS 1014 (Part III) Recovery report and found:
 - Tick marked as completed21 of 96 cases (22%)
 - Not tick marked as completed.....75 of 96 cases (78%) (pp. 47 – 50)

RECOMMENDATION

DCFS should ensure that all its internal forms are completed in a timely manner, as specified in procedures.

SUPERVISORY REVIEW

DCFS procedures require that when a caseworker notifies a supervisor that a ward is missing, the supervisor will immediately confirm that the caseworker has completed all the required reports and contacts (e.g., police, parent or guardian, NCMEC, juvenile court) and assist in developing strategies to locate the ward quickly.

If the ward is still missing, supervisors should continue to meet with caseworkers each week. For high-risk wards (e.g., age 13 or younger, medical condition, abducted, pregnant, parenting) that are missing, a **daily** progress report is required: *“If the child is high-risk, the worker must provide daily progress reports to the supervisor regarding efforts to locate the child.”* (Procedure 329.40(a))

<p>REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPERVISORS</p> <p>DCFS Procedure 329.30(c)</p> <p><i>“Upon notification by the worker that a child is missing, the supervisor will immediately confirm that the worker has completed all the required reports and contacts”</i></p>

DCFS Procedure 329.30(c)(2) requires that all the supervisory meetings with caseworkers be documented: *“All supervisory meetings must be documented in the case file and the supervisory file.”* Our random sample of 100 cases found that 95 percent of the cases had insufficient documentation of supervisory review (see Digest Exhibit 4).

95% of the cases sampled had insufficient documentation of supervisory review.

Digest Exhibit 4 SUPERVISORY REVIEW OF MISSING CHILDREN SAMPLED Calendar Years 2011 and 2012						
1	2	3	4	5	6	
Requirement	Time Limit to Review (Procedures)	Total Cases	Not Applicable	Sufficient Review	Not Documented	
					Cases	Percent
Initial Confirmation	Immediately ¹	100	0	4	96	96%
Weekly Meetings	Weekly	100	13 ²	4	83	95%
High Risk	Daily	100	80 ³	0	20	100%
Notes:						
¹ When procedures were required to be completed "immediately," auditors allowed one work day for the purposes of this testing.						
² Weekly meetings were not needed for wards that were found within a week.						
³ 80 cases were <u>not</u> high risk.						
Source: Sample of DCFS missing children.						

Supervisors should document their review of the work of caseworkers to ensure that caseworkers have completed their reports and contacts in a timely manner and that they are complete and accurate.

RECOMMENDATION

DCFS should comply with its written procedures which require that supervisory meetings with caseworkers be documented.

DCFS employees did not follow all procedures when searching for missing wards and the agency needs to establish stronger controls to ensure that they are complying with requirements. DCFS officials indicated that some supervisors may be maintaining their own personal files on wards. (pp. 50 – 53)

TRAINING

The CLSU (now CIRU) supports and monitors the search for missing wards. The caseworkers contact people and places where the ward may have run to previously (“grandma’s home”), or check other places where the ward could have currently gone, such as to relatives, friends, neighbors, or even jail.

Given that searching for a missing ward is a priority per Department procedure, particularly because of the risks that missing wards face, the Department needs stronger controls and better oversight, especially given the lack of documentation and compliance that was found during this audit.

DCFS has not conducted formal training for caseworkers on how to complete its forms. Formal training has not been provided in the past 10 years and should be provided to ensure that its procedures are being followed, that the CIRU is notified immediately when a ward goes missing, and that other procedures are understood and followed

so that the search can commence immediately in compliance with procedures.

In addition, the process for searching for missing wards has not been internally reviewed in years and CIRU managers have not conducted an assessment to determine if caseworkers are complying with procedures. Work that is not reviewed by managers can appear to employees to be lower management priority, which searching for missing wards is not. Given the risks posed to wards that go missing, DCFS management needs to be informed whether those involved in the search for missing wards are complying with procedure. (p. 53 – 54)

CONCLUSION

In 2011-2012, there were over 26,000 wards reported to have gone missing. Generally, these wards were missing from placement and referred to by DCFS as Whereabouts Unknown (or WUK).

DCFS procedures do not distinguish between wards that go missing chronically and those that go missing rarely or just once. The CIRU program manager said he would also like data that can show which wards are truly missing and which ones are just not where they are supposed to be.

Furthermore, some wards are older, aged 18 and older (adults), who are in independent living facilities which are not subject to daily monitoring but are checked periodically. The same procedures that apply to younger wards also apply to these older wards which may not always fit the circumstances.

Not all the search procedures were entirely clear to some caseworkers; for example, one considered the term *immediately* in DCFS procedures to mean within 24 hours, another considered it to be as soon as practical given other priorities, while others thought a month could be immediate for individuals who were in independent living. DCFS could provide clarification and training on its expectations, and procedures may be updated. (pp. 54 – 56)

RECOMMENDATION

Given the lack of documentation and noncompliance found in this audit, DCFS should:

- ***provide training to its caseworkers and supervisors on missing children;***
- ***review its search procedures; and***
- ***have a unit report compliance to management.***

RECOMMENDATIONS

House Resolution Number 120 directed the audit to determine the number of children reported missing in 2011–2012, whether reports of missing children were made in a timely manner, and

determine the steps followed to locate and recover missing children, including compliance with its rules and procedures. This audit made nine recommendations pertaining to these issues. DCFS agreed with the recommendations and stated that it would review and revise its procedures and provide training to staff.



WILLIAM G. HOLLAND
Auditor General

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This audit was conducted by the staff of the Office of the Auditor General.