

AFCARS—ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS AND REPORTING SYSTEM Fact Sheet

Answers an Automated Data System Should Not Determine

Since 1994, federal law and regulation have required states to collect case-level information on all children for whom the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement, care, or supervision and on children adopted under the auspices of the state's public child welfare agency. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) includes information on foster and adoptive parents. The information required by AFCARS is what a social worker would normally collect during the course of assessment, planning, and service provision, so workers do not need to collect additional information solely for the purpose of meeting AFCARS requirements. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) uses the data for many purposes, such as responding to requests from Congress and the public for current data on children in foster care or those who have been adopted; policy decisions; budget decisions and state allocations; monitoring; and technical assistance for states.

The information collected and reported via AFCARS is critical to the federal government. The government uses it to determine a state's level of compliance with the national standards on child safety, permanence, and well being. In connection with these standards, all states have undergone a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and have developed a CFSR-related Program Improvement Plan. The government either has reviewed or will review the automated information systems of states with an operational Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, and at some point, expects all states to have an AFCARS Assessment Review.

The following discusses errors identified during the AFCARS Assessment Review process. This information is intended to assist reporting agencies in improving the quantity and quality of the information that they report via AFCARS.

Answers for Individuals

- Was the mother married at the time of the child's birth? (AFCARS Adoption Element 18)
- Has child ever been adopted? (AFCARS Foster Care Element 16)
- What was the child's age at previous adoption? (AFCARS Foster Care Element 17)

Only individuals knowledgeable about a child's family history should answer the questions listed above. "Unable to determine" is appropriate only if the child was abandoned and no one is available to provide the required information. An automated information system should not attempt to derive the answers to these questions based on information from other sources.

For AFCARS extraction and submission purposes, information not collected or not available for a particular client record (for whatever reason) is mapped as all blanks (not all zeros, all 9s, etc.). Information that is missing or not collected should never be mapped to any valid AFCARS value.

Technical Assistance: Readers may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT). The resource center can be contacted at 877/672-4892, or at its Web page: <http://nrccwdt.org>. If you wish to request onsite technical assistance from the NRC-CWDT, contact your ACF Regional Office.



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