

Caregiver Family Structure: Foster Care Element 44

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.

Errors Identified During AFCARS Assessment Reviews

Caregiver family structure (Foster Care Element 44) represents the structure of the family from whom the child was removed *at the time of removal*. If the structure of the home from which the child was removed was a couple, whether married or unmarried, then both Elements 45, first primary caregiver's birth year and 46, second primary caregiver's birth year, must have a valid value. These are not necessarily the child's parents, but are the individual or individuals that the child was living with at the time of his or her removal.

Recommended Solution

In instances where the "removal home" consists of a male and female couple, AFCARS expects, as a general rule, that the primary caregiver in the home was the woman. For example, in a home where the child is removed from the father and the grandmother, the grandmother is generally considered the one providing the direct care of the child.

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.



A Service of the
Children's Bureau/USDHHS
CWLA • XTRIA • NICWA

Continued ►

In the eight official AFCARS Assessment Reviews and in three of the pilot reviews conducted to this point, this foster care element was one of the more challenging. The average rating for this element on the four-point AFCARS rating scale was 2, with all 11 states receiving this rating. The ratings are based on the AFCARS standard 1–4 rating scale (1, *AFCARS requirement has not been implemented*; 2, *technical system requirements for AFCARS reporting do not fully meet the standards*; 3, *technical system requirements for AFCARS reporting are in place, but there are data entry problems affecting the quality of the data*; and 4, *all of the AFCARS requirements have been met*).

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.