

Foster Care Workers Make History



SafeMeasures is VDSS' Web service that makes tracking and measuring successes and progress related to the Children's Services Transformation much easier.

More than 200 workers at the local level have been trained how to use the application. Many users, like Jennifer Behrens with Albemarle County DSS, consider SafeMeasures a very valuable tool, with important data and numbers that translate into the real lives of real children. "Information is so readily available with SafeMeasures, and it offers features that we didn't have in OASIS," said Behrens, Albemarle's Manager of the Office of Program Accountability.

Also, SafeMeasures and those who use it are being credited with reaching a significant social services milestone. For the first time in DSS history, monthly foster care worker visits are above the national mandate of 90 percent.

"For the March, April and May period, more than 90 percent of foster care workers completed their visits with children in care. That's a big deal because it's a first and a key compliance measure for the Commonwealth. States that don't reach that 90 percent goal by 2011 may face fiscal penalties," said Matt Wade, Program Manager of the Outcome Based Reporting and Analysis Unit of VDSS' Division of Family Services.

The use of SafeMeasures on the local level plays a critical role in reaching that 90 percent goal, according to Therese Wolf, VDSS Permanency Program Manager. "It prominently posts each agency's compliance with this measure in a report easily accessible to all Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS)," she said. That lets each LDSS track their progress, know where they are in reaching the mark and identify areas for improvement.

"It provides clear information as to which localities are moving ahead and making changes to achieve the outcomes we're reaching for," Wolf explained. "SafeMeasures easily lets localities know the impact of implementing the services being highlighted as 'best practices.' It has long been the case that without a tool such as SafeMeasures, locals really had no evidence of the affect of changes in practice. SafeMeasures truly helps all of us see changes in local efforts," Wolf added.

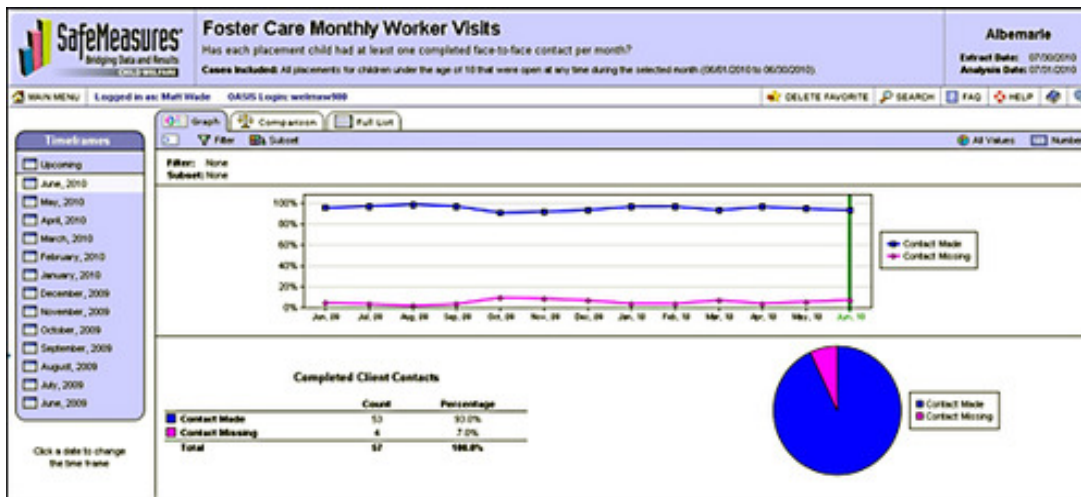
The use of SafeMeasures also shows dramatic improvements being made in the delivery of services to children and families, a key goal of the Transformation.

"It's easy to navigate and provides information we can really use. It's a way to look at how well a unit is performing and drill down to actual cases," Behrens said. That ability, she explained, means better services to children in foster care. "It definitely benefits the

kids because you can quickly figure out who’s been seen and when, what work needs to be done and why.” Having that kind of data quickly at hand is a major component in reaching the 90 percent target.

The program provides evidence of progress, as opposed to anecdotal information or estimates. “It also allows you to drill down to very detailed levels to understand what is happening in a case or an agency. SafeMeasures eliminates blaming. We can easily see where and why data is wrong and fix it,” Wolf explained.

“For the first time, we have ‘real time’ data everyone can use. We have surpassed our annual goal for increasing to the 90 percent mark. Seeing this in the SafeMeasures report lets localities know that their efforts demonstrate remarkable progress on their part. We could not reach this goal without them and their willingness to try new strategies, including SafeMeasures.”



SafeMeasures screen shot