



# Pipeline

By and for the  
Office  
of Children's Services

## ... the flow of OCS

Sean Parnell, Governor • Bill Streur, Commissioner

### From ... Christy's Desk



Photo courtesy Doe Zantamata

Often, in this work we set expectations for ourselves that are too high, or feel the pressure from others to be a superhero. While the expectations should be high, since the stakes most certainly are, the reality that we aren't superheroes bears remembering. We have the ability and skills to help families change their lives if they are motivated to do so. We have the ability and skills to keep kids safe when they are determined not to be. We have the ability and skills to foster good working relationships with Tribes and other stakeholders who need to be a part of the team. We do not have the ability or skills to leap tall buildings, save the world, or make other people change who aren't ready.

I know that all of you are doing the very best you can every day to do your job well and meet the needs of your families. That is all I can ask of you, to keep coming to work every day and doing the very best to help us serve the families who need us.

This holiday season I'm especially grateful for all of the staff at OCS

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## New Year, New Name, New Newsletter

Just off your party hats, because this OCS newsletter will celebrate its five-year anniversary next month! It was the brainchild of then-director Tammy Sandoval and Mike Lesmann, and the first issue went out to staff in January 2007.

Over the 59 issues of the Pipeline since then, you've had comments and suggestions. Some of you wanted it to feature more stories from the field. Many of you asked for more photos, self-care tips and humor.

Come January, you'll see a new version of the OCS newsletter that will better reflect those requests.

A new newsletter also needs a new name, right? We put it out to a vote, and the results were resounding: **Frontline** it is,

receiving three times the votes of the other top contender.

However, for those of you who wrote in saying that you thought we should keep the name Pipeline, since it describes the purpose of a newsletter so well, we heard you! Starting in January, OCS will begin producing a new, **external** newsletter, to carry our message to partners, stakeholders and the general public. The name of the new external newsletter? Pipeline!

But back to Frontline for a moment. We need your contributions and help with several new features of the newsletter. We plan to have columns with self-care tips, recipe ideas, letters to the editor (for Christy Lawton to answer), important accomplishments of OCS employees, humorous tidbits, and more.

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## Indian Child Welfare (ICW) Corner



By Jamie Kokoszka  
Children's Services  
Specialist III,  
TDM Facilitator

Here's another positive story to share regarding OCS and a Native village working together to meet the needs of a child. A TDM was held for a baby whose parents were unable to keep him. The child's mother had signed relinquishment paperwork, and his father was out of the country and unable to return. He had also planned to relinquish his rights in the

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If you'd like to send us contributions to any of those upcoming columns, please do this:

- Put the topic of whichever column it is you're submitting to in your subject line (recipes, self-care, letters, accomplishments, humor, etc.).
- Identify yourself, your office, and your job title.
- Please just include one tip per email.
- Please keep it under 50 words or so.
- Send your submissions and tips for any of those columns to [susan.morgan@alaska.gov](mailto:susan.morgan@alaska.gov).

And before we forget, let's all pat ourselves on the back for having the longest running monthly division newsletter anyone around here can remember. The newsletter stayed relevant and interesting thanks to monthly submissions from dozens of OCS employees over the years.

Thanks to everyone, and here's to the next five years!

**ICW continued from page 1**

best interests of his child. Unfortunately, communication with the child's father had been extremely difficult for various reasons and he was unable to attend the meeting or maintain contact with the Department. Because of the child's young age, the Tribe, OCS, and GAL, all agreed that he should be placed in a permanent home as soon as possible. There were four members of the tribe present in the TDM and all of them spoke up on behalf of this child. OCS and the tribe searched high and low to find a permanent placement for this child, searching relatives, anyone from the child's area, other ICWA compliant homes, and could not find a placement meeting ICWA requirements.

An adoptive home was identified in a different region of the state. The adoptive family was very open to tribal and cultural involvement and was very excited about adopting this child and equally excited about working with the tribe. The tribal members offered to make special things for the child, offered to visit the child and his new family, and offered to provide tribal and cultural information to the family. The tribal members also expressed their deepest thanks to the OCS worker Ivory McDaniel for doing everything she could to make sure the child was cared for. They thanked the foster family and the adoptive family for everything they were doing to take care of this child. Their gratitude was made very clear in the meeting, as was their willingness and desire to remain a part of this child's life.

It was an honor to be able to serve this family through the TDM process, and a privilege to have witnessed this harmonious working relationship between the tribal people, OCS, the GAL, and foster family for the best interest of the child.

## The OCS Interview

Name: Joe Hall

Job Title: Administrative Operations Manager

Birthplace: Juneau

Years with SOA: 1

Last movie watched: "The Thing"

Book/s currently reading: "The Fifth Witness" by Michael Connelly

5 QUESTIONS for Joe Hall

**What do you believe is the most important thing OCS does for Alaskans?**

I believe the most important thing OCS does for Alaskans is assist children in dangerous living conditions.

**What are your priorities?**

Having been on the job less than a week, my priorities are to figure out what my priorities are and then: get organized, build a good team, and have some fun along the way.

**How would you describe your personal work style?**

My personal work style is one in which I try to be organized and tackle problems in a calm, logical manner.

**What's something people would be surprised to learn about you?**

I'm the youngest of seven kids, raised by a single mom who put herself through school and always worked multiple jobs to provide for her children.

**What single thing would you like to tell the employees of OCS?**

Always put your best foot forward in whatever you do in life.

**BONUS: What's the oldest thing in your refrigerator?**

I'm not sure but I threw it out to make way for Thanksgiving!



Hall

**CHRISTY continued from page 1**

and the work you do. Without you, the agency couldn't fulfill its mission to assure child safety, permanency, and well being for Alaska's most vulnerable children. Happy Holidays to you and yours! May your holiday season be filled with joy and peace.

*Christy*

Christy Lawton, Director  
Office of Children's Services.



# Resource Family News

By **Kathy Ensor, Foster Care Program Coordinator**

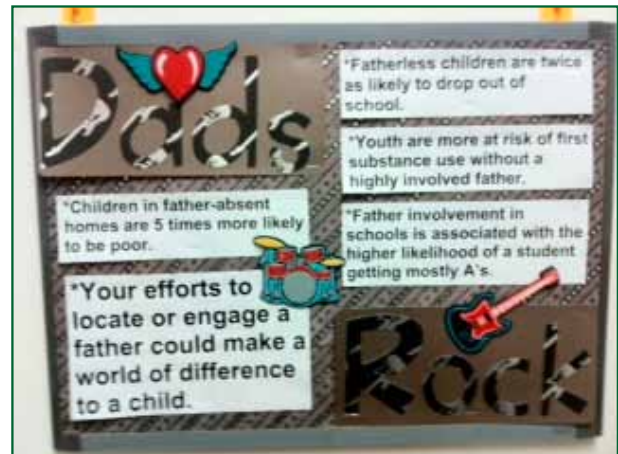
Season's Greetings! Alaska's Resource Family Handbook has been updated and is at the printers! It is designed to give practical information regarding care for children in out-of-home placements. Guidance includes:

- Use of cell phones
- Computers
- Driving
- Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT)
- Family Contact Plans
- Head Start Program
- How to read the Foster Care/Subsidy check stub
- Meeting the Criminal Justice Clearance requirements
- School lunches
- Smoking
- Variances
- More!

This handbook will be sent to all licensed foster families, unlicensed relatives who have placements, and adoptive and guardianship families. In addition, it will include a questionnaire that was created for foster parents. Foster parents who complete this questionnaire can earn 2.0 hours of credit towards their annual

training requirements. This is a good time for everyone to check ORCA to ensure mailing addresses are correct.

Thank you to those who were involved in reading, re-reading, making suggestions, editing and providing insight necessary to make this handbook a helpful guide to resource families, staff, and others. If you haven't already seen it, please be sure to review it at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Publications/pdf/ResourceFamilyHandbook.pdf>



This visual reminder of the importance of dads was designed by a creative Fairbanks OCS staff member.

## Tribal Cultural Events — December 2011

### BIA providers conference

- Nov. 28–Dec. 2, 2011
- Anchorage
- Gloria Gorman, 800-645-8397 ext. 22

### Undoing Racism workshop — Provided through CCTHITA

- Dec. 6–8, 2011
- Juneau
- Inquiries to: Francine Eddy Jones, CCTHITA
- \*this event is by invitation only

### Undoing Racism workshop — Provided through AVCP

- Dec. 7–9, 2011
- Bethel
- Inquiries to: Cheryl Offt, AVCP, [cofft@avcp.org](mailto:cofft@avcp.org)
- \*this event is by invitation only

### Undoing Racism workshop — Provided through AVCP

- Dec. 12–14, 2011
- Anchorage
- Inquiries to: Cheryl Offt, AVCP, [cofft@avcp.org](mailto:cofft@avcp.org) or Dennis Swain, OCS, [dennis.swain@alaska.gov](mailto:dennis.swain@alaska.gov)
- \*this event is by invitation only

### Knowing Who You Are Workshop

- Jan. 9–10, 2012
- Fairbanks
- Sandra Medina, 786-6720, [smedina7@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:smedina7@uaa.alaska.edu)

### Knowing Who You Are Workshop

- Jan. 10–11, 2011
- Kenai
- Sandra Medina, 786-6720, [smedina7@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:smedina7@uaa.alaska.edu)

### Ongoing Anchorage Area events:

- Eklutna Tribe located at Eklutna Village, Tribal Community Hall. Main Office: (907) 688-6020.

# Who Am I?

**By Jennifer Maier**  
Social Services Program Officer, OCS Service Array Section

## **If someone asked you to describe your racial and ethnic identity what would you tell them?**

My racial and ethnic identity has in some ways been a mystery to me. With a variety of ethnic origins in my family, it is difficult to articulate my racial and ethnic identity when asked. This is the case of many young people of mixed ethnicities, as the transmission of culture through the generations has been interrupted for various reasons throughout our history.

I am predominantly German from my mother's side, although there is a mix of ethnicities too deep to decipher. My grandfather's parents moved to Alaska in the 1800s and opened a dairy farm here in Juneau. I know little about them, but am one of very few in the family who still carry the family name.

On my father's side, I am full Tlingit. My father's people originate from the Raven Bone House in Angoon on his mother's side. He is a Raven/Beaver. On his father's side, he is a child of the Wooshkeetaan Eagle/Shark people originating in Hoonah.

## **What influences have affected your racial and ethnic identity? What has the impact been for you?**

There have been many influences, some positive and some negative. Growing up, I was the only one in the family that was Alaska Native. There were times, because of the relationship my parents had, that I was ashamed of being Alaska Native because of the negative things that were sometimes communicated by others around me. I grew up having this negative perception of my own identity, which was at times reinforced by the absence of Tlingit people in my world. At times, there were efforts to inform me about my Tlingit heritage and what a rich culture they had; I was sure lucky to be part of it. This seemed positive, but had the opposite meaning to me because I was excluded from that rich culture and had no opportunities to be part of the Tlingit family I was born from.

When I was 12 years old, I had the opportunity to meet my father for the first time. He introduced me to my grandmother, who then brought me in to this large family. Some of those people I had known for many years and didn't know that I was related to them. While the idea of that seems sad, it is the reality for so many young people today. It wasn't until I was 18 years old that I began to participate in the culture, immersing myself through my work and my education into knowing about my Tlingit Identity. Even now, many years later, I am still learning about my father's people and building my identity in

the family I was raised outside of for many years. It is important that my children know that piece of themselves.

## **What is one thing that brings you pride about your racial and ethnic identity?**

The Tlingit people, and all Native peoples of the Americas, have been survivors. The resiliency of the Native peoples is amazing to me, considering the events of their history in America. Even the current state of things today, with extreme poverty; the interruption of their way of life; and the continued occupation of their lands, the Native peoples still persist.

## **What do you wish others know about your racial and ethnic identity?**

The Tlingit people are some of the most giving people. And the most humorous. I miss the days working for the Tribe and being part of the team. Laughing so hard together that we would cry ... and crying hard together when things were difficult for one of us. The Tlingit values communicate that support of each other in many ways, with each value speaking to the *respect* we show to self and others; the *patience* we offer; *humor*; and the duty to *hold each other up*.

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## Mid-January launch for Staff Advisory Board

By Naomi Harris  
Community Relations Manager

Many of you may recall Christy's article from the last issue of the Pipeline. The topic was about recruiting staff representatives (any staff positions except supervisory and management) representing various job types and geographical locations to sit on a Staff Advisory Board which will have a direct link to senior leadership. What a great response from staff! I was overwhelmed by the number of people interested, but what was most informative were the reasons why people were interested. OCS staff, across the board, is committed to providing a high quality of care for the families they work with, their colleagues, and the mission of the agency. We are excited to launch the Staff Advisory Board because, as Christy said, "the possibilities to make lasting and systemic change are endless." While we are still

in the initial stages of developing the Staff Advisory Board, we hope to officially launch it by mid-January. Much of the initial work to establish the group will be left to the new leaders of the Staff Advisory Board, but the Senior Leadership Team is very excited about a direct link to field staff and the impact this group will have.

One of the goals of this group is to create a forum to increase communication across all levels, programs and regions of OCS. With this collaboration we believe it will create systemic changes at OCS and increase our capacity to continue providing an incredibly high quality of care to the families we work with, our stakeholders, and each other.



This photo was taken in early November during the NRO supervisors/managers regional meetings that were held in Fairbanks.  
Back row, left to right: Yurii Miller, Tim Stewart, Brennda Cash, Misty Brammer, Jon Markkanen, Myron Hosier, Shar Wharton, Brian Houston.  
Frontish Row: Mindy Swisher, Linda Fiechtl, Sheila China, Jaylene Day, Sara Alden (resting), JoAnne Simmerman, Coleen Turner, Mary Anderson, Judy Ringstad.