

Child and Family Services Review Alaska Statewide Assessment



Joel Bennett Productions

Alaska Department of Health & Social Services
Office of Children's Services
July 2008

**Statewide Assessment
Child and Family Services Review**

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Statewide Assessment	
Section I: General Information	
Name of State Agency	
<i>State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Office of Children's Service</i>	
Period Under Review	
Onsite Review Period:	Foster Care: 4/1/07-9/8/08 In-Home: 4/1/07-9/8/08
Period of AFCARS Data:	4/1/06-3/31/07
Period of NCANDS Data:	4/1/06-3/31/07
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The Office of Children's Services

Mission

Promote Stronger Families, Safer Children

Introduction

The Office of Children's Services works in partnership with families, Tribes and communities to support the safety, permanency and well being of Alaska's children and youth through the provision of a wide range of services and support systems. These services include child abuse and neglect prevention services, child protective services, foster care, residential care, family support and family preservation services, permanency planning, independent living, and post-adoption and guardianship. Services focus on enhancing families' capacities to give their children a healthy start, to provide their children with safe and permanent homes, to maintain their cultural connections, and to help them realize their potential.

The Office of Children's Services builds on the strengths of the past while exploring opportunities and goals for the future. OCS continues to work to bring together the three programs that support children, youth, and families:

- Child Protection and Permanency
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Planning
- Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program

Core Services

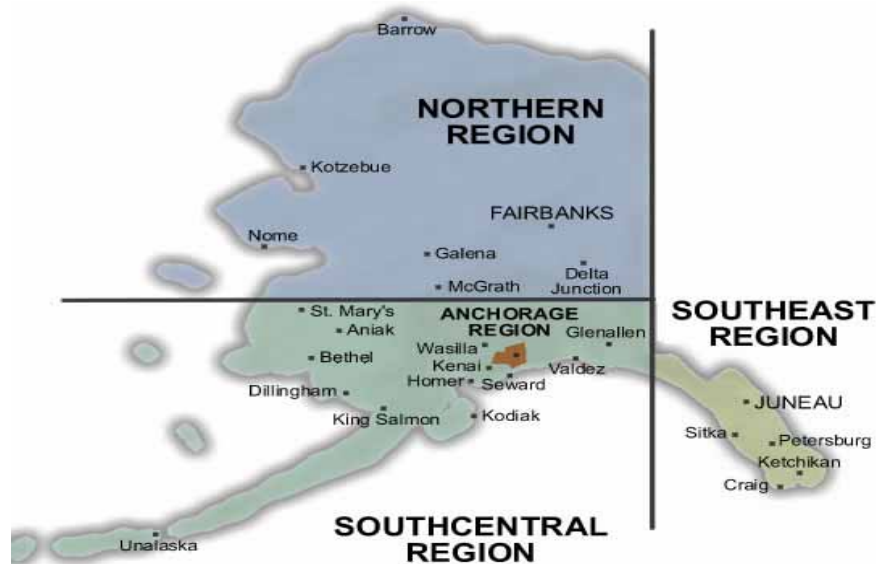
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect through home visitation by early intervention programs;
- Investigate child protective services reports, provide in-home services, ensure that children are safe in their own homes and arrange for services when necessary;
- Child protective services to prevent and remedy child abuse and neglect through safety assessment and facilitation of treatment services;
- Family preservation and family support to allow, when appropriate, a child to remain safely with their families;
- Develop permanency plans for children in out-of-home care;
- Support, develop, recruit, and train foster and adoptive families, to ensure that if children must be removed from their homes, that they are placed in a loving and safe environment;
- Develop and support placement options to preserve a child's connection to family, culture, and community that will also meet the child's physical and mental health needs;
- Enhance residential treatment options to include behavioral rehabilitation services for youth who need mental health care;
- Provide transitional living services to adolescents in care as they prepare for independent living and adulthood that assists in the youth's ability to achieve success at the age of independence; and
- Provide post-adoption and post-guardianship services and support to ensure that children and families who achieve permanency through adoption or guardianship have necessary support services after the finalization.

Department Structure

The Department of Health and Social Services has a total of 14 divisions: Financial Management Services, Office of Children Services, Behavioral Health, Office of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Public Health, Public Assistance, Juvenile Justice, Health Care Services, Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Governor’s Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Alaska Mental Health Board, Alaska Pioneer Homes, Alaska Commission on Aging, and Senior and Disabilities Services.

Office of Children’s Services Regions and Field Offices

The Office of Children’s Services is organized into four regions for the provision of services to children and families. The Northern Region service area includes areas north of Denali National Park and extends to the North Slope. The Southcentral Region service area includes communities located in the Prince William Sound area, and extends west through the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Kenai Peninsula to the Aleutian Chain. The Anchorage Region service area includes communities within the Anchorage Municipality. The Southeast Region service area includes the communities along Alaska’s Inside Passage from Ketchikan to Juneau and north to Haines including the coastal community of Yakutat. There are currently 26 field offices in the state. The map below shows the four regions and the field offices within the state.



Note: Map is not to scale. Not all communities served by the Office of Children’s Services are shown on the map.

Alaska’s ability to achieve and maintain national child welfare outcomes is impacted by a number of factors. Challenges that affect more than one outcome identified during the statewide assessment process include service array, consistent implementation of the safety decision making model, achieving permanency outcomes and the need for clarity in policy. These challenges are addressed in Section III of this assessment. In addition, the following factors also impact the ability to serve Alaskan children and families:

- population growth
- increased number of children in foster care
- caseload, vacancies and turnover
- disproportionality
- staff training

Population Growth

Alaska is the largest state in the nation, one of the fourth least populated states along with North Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming. Alaska's population is estimated to have increased by approximately 50,000 since the 2000 census that listed the total population of Alaska as 626,932. Approximately half of the population is located in Anchorage. In 2006, Alaska's population is estimated to be approximately 670,000. Section V of this assessment outlines the specific population information for the review sites.

Children in Foster Care

Alaska continues to experience growth in its foster care population. Increases are due in part to population growth, a heightened awareness of child abuse and neglect, and continued increasing rates of substance abuse in some areas of Alaska. The following chart illustrates the number of children in foster care from 2005 to April 2008.

Date	Number of Children in Foster Care (Point in Time)	Percent Change from Prior Year	Percent Change from November 2005
November 2005	1,730		
November 2006	1,951	+12.8%	+12.8%
November 2007	2,024	+3.7%	+17.0%
May 2008	2,035	+0.5%	+17.6%

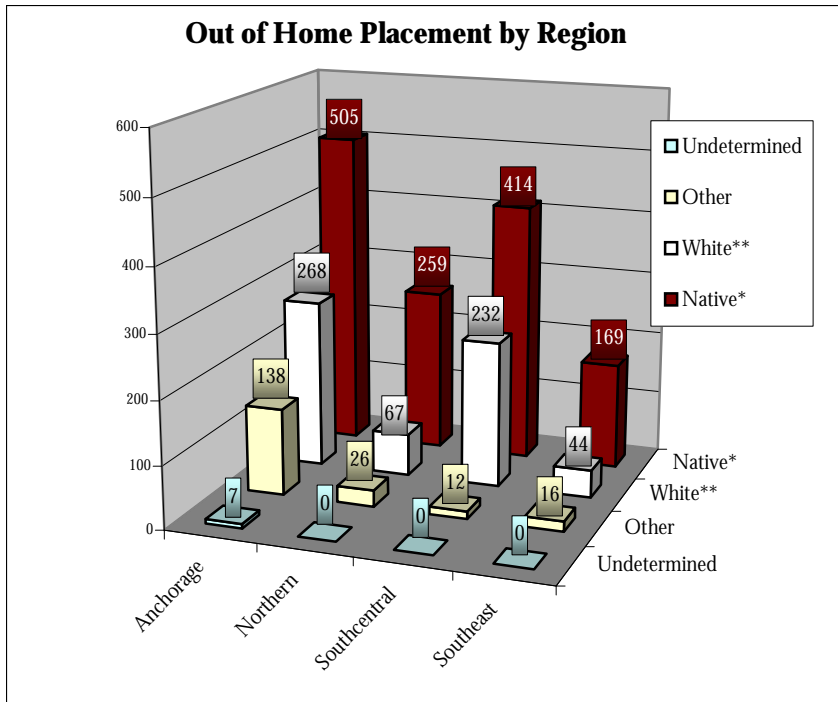
Source: Department of Health and Social Services; Office of Children's Services. On-line Resources for Children in Alaska (ORCA) SACWIS System. May 2008.

Distribution of Children by Age in Foster Care		
Age Group	Number of Children	Percentage
under 1	116	5.70%
1-5	681	33.46%
6-11	624	30.66%
12-18	597	29.34%
19+	17	0.84%

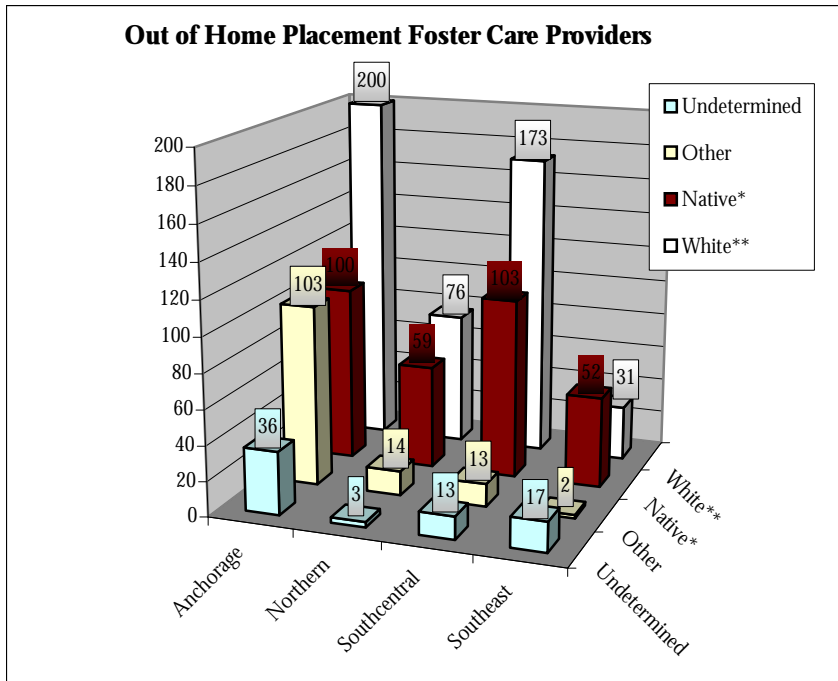
Source: Department of Health and Social Services; Office of Children's Services. On-line Resources for Children in Alaska (ORCA) SACWIS System. May 2008.

Disproportionality, Race/Ethnicity in Alaska Foster Care and Foster Care Providers

Below is a chart illustrating the percent of Alaska's foster children and foster care providers by racial and ethnic group. In Alaska, American Indian/Alaska Native children are overrepresented in Alaska's foster care population. In Anchorage, Alaska Natives or American Indians represent approximately 10.5 percent of the general population, while just over 55 percent of Anchorage's children in care are of Alaska Native and/or American Indian heritage in April 2008. In Juneau, the largest community in Southeast Alaska, the Alaska Native or American Indian population is approximately 16.6 percent of the general population, while approximately 73 percent of Juneau's children in care are of Alaska Native and/or American Indian heritage. In the other two services regions in Alaska, numbers of Alaska Native children are over represented as well.



**NOTE: Alaska Native or American Indian alone or in combination of other races; **White excluding all other races*
 Source: Department of Health and Social Services. Office of Children's Services.
 On-line Resources for Children in Alaska (ORCA) SACWIS System. April 2008.



**Native is any mention of Alaska Native or American Indian.*
***White is the only race reported.*
Other includes 'African American/Black', 'Asian', and 'Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander'

OCS and Tribal Partners are actively implementing strategies to address the disproportionate levels of children in care who are of Alaska Native and/or American Indian heritage as well as increase the number

of Native foster homes. Planning to fill these gaps occurs at tri-annual Tribal State meetings and bi-weekly Tribal/State co-chairs meetings as well as other forums described in Section III of this assessment. Tribes and the State have committed to working together to:

- Increase Native Foster Homes
- Expand tribal case management services
- Develop family group conferencing as a tool for decision making to empower families
- Increase tribal capacity to advocate for Native Alaskan Families

OCS Case Load and Workload Issues

The OCS has recognized that a key factor in the successful implementation of the OCS mission is a well-qualified and stable work force with manageable caseloads. In response to legislative concerns and Citizens’ Review Panel Findings, the Department contracted with Hornby Zeller Associates Inc. (HZA) in 2006 to conduct a 6-month workload study and analysis. HZA was asked to determine whether or not the front line caseworkers have sufficient time to meet the basic requirements of their jobs: protecting children and serving families. The outcomes of the HZA study were based on the time needed to handle a case appropriately, the time available for case-specific work, and caseloads per worker. The results of the workload study indicated a need for 17 additional OCS front-line caseworkers, for a total of approximately 255 front-line workers. Additionally, the HZA workload study revealed that front-line workers spend an average of 12.4 percent of their time on administrative tasks; therefore, the recommendations included the need for additional support staffs for front-line workers.

In SFY08, OCS was allocated six additional caseworker positions in the state budget in response to the workload study. The SFY09 state budget includes funding for an additional seven front-line positions and three administrative staff workers. The following charts illustrate average caseloads by region if all positions are filled.

<i>Investigations</i>			
Region	Workers	Cases	Cases/Worker
Anchorage	21.0	184	8.76
Northern	14.0	89	6.36
Southcentral	23.5	149	6.34
Southeast	8.5	64	7.53
<i>Total Statewide</i>	67.0	486	7.25

Note: excludes intake workers and backlogged investigations.
Numbers based on an average of new investigations over a six month period (9/07-2/08)

<i>Out of Home and In Home Cases</i>			
Region	Workers	Cases	Cases/Worker
Anchorage	42	590	14.05
Northern	18	252	14.00
Southcentral	31	488	16.00
Southeast	14	171	12.21
<i>Total Statewide</i>	105	1,501	14.36

Numbers based on an average of new investigations over a six month period (9/07-2/08)
Includes In-home cases

While the charts above illustrate manageable caseloads, they do not take into account the underlying issues of staff turnover and vacancies. Stakeholders on numerous work groups cited “unmanageable caseloads” as factors impacting positive outcomes for children and families. The charts below were created using 60 percent of the total number of workers accounting for a vacancy rate that hovers around 10 percent and a 30 percent turnover rate. There have been periods of time when the vacancy rate and staff turnover percents have been higher.

Investigations			
Region	Workers	Cases	Cases/Worker
Anchorage	12.6	184	14.60
Northern	8.4	89	10.60
Southcentral	14.1	149	10.57
Southeast	5.1	64	12.55
<i>Total Statewide</i>	40.2	486	12.09

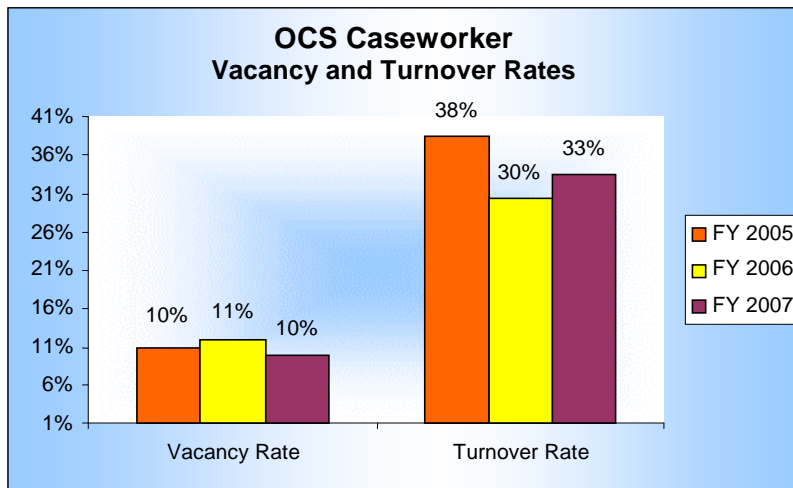
Note: excludes intake workers and backlogged investigations. Based on 60% work force. Numbers based on an average of new investigations over a six month period (9/07-2/08)

Out of Home and In Home Cases			
Region	Workers	Cases	Cases/Worker
Anchorage	25	590	23.41
Northern	11	252	23.33
Southcentral	18	488	26.67
Southeast	8	171	20.36
<i>Total Statewide</i>	63	1,501	23.94

Numbers based on an average of out of home and in home cases over a six month period (9/07-2/08). Based on 60% work force.

OCS Staff Vacancy and Turnover

Child protective services is an emotionally demanding, labor-intensive vocation. Across the nation, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma lead to high staff turnover and vacancy rates among caseworkers. The OCS has been experiencing consistent vacancy and turnover rates since 2000. It has been an on-going challenge to maintain full staffing levels, train staff to proficient levels of competency and institutionalize the agency's core mission and standardize a practice model when turnover and vacancy rates have been consistently high. Nearly 50 percent of the OCS front-line caseworkers have been employed with the agency for less than two years. More significantly, nearly 20 percent of the front-line caseworkers have been with the agency for less than one year. The turnover rate at the end of SFY07 was 33 percent. The vacancy rate at the end of SFY07 was approximately 9.5 percent. As a comparison to the statewide rates, in FY 07 the turnover rate for Anchorage was 32.5 percent and the vacancy rate was 8.76 percent. The turnover rate for Bethel was 66.67 percent with a vacancy rate of 11.23 percent, while Juneau's turnover rate for FY07 was 36.36 percent with a vacancy rate of 13.33 percent.



OCS Staff Training

Successful and quality training for new child protection services workers is key to each and every outcome within the child welfare system. The ability to assess and meet the needs of families requires a strong knowledge base and effective practice skills in child protection. Initial and on-going training is critical in helping staff develop the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the job professionally, efficiently, to perform their job safely, feel confident, valued and motivated.

The importance of quality training has been identified as an issue for OCS recruitment and retention through multiple sources including: a 2007 study by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., a national child protective services organization; a brief completed by the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) School of Social Work; and current OCS employees via a recent survey. OCS survey results indicate 52 percent, of more than 350 staff responding, identified initial and ongoing training of staff, as requiring the most immediate attention in order to improve the effectiveness of the organization.

The OCS currently offers two weeks of mandatory training to prepare newly hired child protective services caseworkers. Funding increases in the SFY09 will allow OCS to expand new caseworker training by two additional weeks, bringing Alaska's OCS training program in line with other states nationwide, and in keeping with recommendations from the University of Alaska Study, Tribal partners, and agency managers. Please refer to Section IV, Item 33 Ongoing Staff Training for current training information.

OCS Staff Retention and Recruitment

In addition to enhanced training, the OCS formed an internal work group in the fall of 2007 to focus on retention and recruitment strategies. The work group includes a representative from the UAA Family and Youth Services Training Academy, several levels/disciplines of OCS staff and a consultant who is providing technical assistance through the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The work group created a new Employee Exit survey and implemented written protocol for its use in February of 2008. The work group has also been working on development of a realistic job profile DVD. A candidate is sent a DVD and asked to sign a simple acknowledgement form, which states that 1) they have watched the video, and 2) they *still* want to be interviewed and considered for the opening. While this is a relatively new technique, states such as Arizona, Michigan, Maine and North Carolina are experiencing increases in the numbers of new employees that truly have the competencies and the heart to do child protective services work, and a decrease of early resignations/dismissals with the utilization of this tool.

Section II: Safety and Permanency Data

Alaska's Data Profile: March 24, 2008

CHILD SAFETY PROFILE	Fiscal Year 2006ab						12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007						Fiscal Year 2007ab (Not yet submitted)					
	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%
I. Total CA/N Reports Disposed¹	5,755		9,500		8,050 ^A		5,476		9,037		7,662							
II. Disposition of CA/N Reports³																		
Substantiated & Indicated	2,142	37.2	3,481	36.6	3,122	38.8	1,957	35.7	3,289	36.4	2,921	38.1						
Unsubstantiated	3,250	56.5	5,414	57.0	4,508	56	3,137	57.3	5,127	56.7	4,313	56.3						
Other	363	6.3	605	6.4	420	5.2	382	7	621	6.9	428	5.6						
III. Child Victim Cases Opened for Post-Investigation Services⁴			948	27.2	810 ^B	25.9			955	29	774 ^B	26.5						
IV. Child Victims Entering Care Based on CA/N Report⁵			772	22.2	661 ^B	21.2			822	25	657 ^B	22.5						
V. Child Fatalities Resulting from Maltreatment⁶					C						C							
STATEWIDE AGGREGATE DATA USED TO DETERMINE SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY																		
VI. Absence of Maltreatment Recurrence⁷ [Standard: 94.6% or more; national median = 93.3%, 25 th percentile = 91.50%]					1,290 of 1,393	92.6					1,144 of 1,261	90.7						
VII. Absence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care⁸ (12 months) [standard 99.68% or more; national median = 99.5, 25 th percentile = 99.30]					2,632 of 2,656	99.10					2,774 of 2,786	99.57						

Additional Safety Measures For Information Only (no standards are associated with these):																		
	Fiscal Year 2006ab						12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007						Fiscal Year 2007ab (Not yet submitted)					
	Hours				Unique Childn. ²	%	Hours				Unique Childn. ²	%	Hours				Unique Childn. ²	%
VIII. Median Time to Investigation in Hours (Child File) ⁹	D																	
IX. Mean Time to Investigation in Hours (Child File) ¹⁰	D																	
X. Mean Time to Investigation in Hours (Agency File) ¹¹	199 ^E						N/A											
XI. Children Maltreated by Parents While in Foster Care. ¹²					38 of 2,656	1.43					37 of 2,786	1.33						

CFSR Round One Safety Measures to Determine Substantial Conformity (Used primarily by States completing Round One Program Improvement Plans, but States may also review them to compare to prior performance)																		
	Fiscal Year 2006ab						12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007						Fiscal Year 2007ab (Not yet submitted)					
	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%
XII. Recurrence of Maltreatment ¹³ [Standard: 6.1% or less]					103 of 1,393	7.4					117 of 1,261	9.3						
XIII. Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care ¹⁴ (9 months) [standard 0.57% or less]					12 of 2,532	0.47					7 of 2,645	0.26						

NCANDS data completeness information for the CFSR			
Description of Data Tests	Fiscal Year 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007	Fiscal Year 2007ab (Not yet submitted)
Percent of duplicate victims in the submission [At least 1% of victims should be associated with multiple reports (same CHID). If not, the State would appear to have frequently entered different IDs for the same victim. This affects maltreatment recurrence]	10.15	10.90	
Percent of victims with perpetrator reported [File must have at least 75% to reasonably calculate maltreatment in foster care]*	100	100	
Percent of perpetrators with relationship to victim reported [File must have at least 75%]*	99.70	99.50	
Percent of records with investigation start date reported [Needed to compute mean and median time to investigation]	Not reported	Not reported	
Average time to investigation in the Agency file [PART measure]	Reported	Not reported	
Percent of records with AFCARS ID reported in the Child File [Needed to calculate maltreatment in foster care by the parents; also. All Child File records should now have an AFCARS ID to allow ACF to link the NCANDS data with AFCARS. This is now an all-purpose unique child identifier and a child does not have to be in foster care to have this ID]	100	100	

*States should strive to reach 100% in order to have confidence in the absence of maltreatment in foster care measure.

FOOTNOTES TO DATA ELEMENTS IN CHILD SAFETY PROFILE

Each maltreatment allegation reported to NCANDS is associated with a disposition or finding that is used to derive the counts provided in this safety profile. The safety profile uses three categories. The various terms that are used in NCANDS reporting have been collapsed into these three groups.

Disposition Category	Safety Profile Disposition	NCANDS Maltreatment Level Codes Included
A	Substantiated or Indicated (Maltreatment Victim)	“Substantiated,” “Indicated,” and “Alternative Response Disposition Victim”
B	Unsubstantiated	“Unsubstantiated” and “Unsubstantiated Due to Intentionally False Reporting”
C	Other	“Closed-No Finding,” “Alternative Response Disposition – Not a Victim,” “Other,” “No Alleged Maltreatment,” and “Unknown or Missing”

Alternative Response was added starting with the 2000 data year. The two categories of Unsubstantiated were added starting with the 2000 data year. In earlier years there was only the category of Unsubstantiated. The disposition of “No alleged maltreatment” was added for FYY 2003. It primarily refers to children who receive an investigation or assessment because there is an allegation concerning a sibling or other child in the household, but not themselves, AND whom are not found to be a victim of maltreatment. It applies as a Maltreatment Disposition Level but not as a Report Disposition code because the Report Disposition cannot have this value (there must have been a child who was found to be one of the other values.)

Starting with FFY 2003, the data year is the fiscal year.

Starting with FFY2004, the maltreatment levels for each child are used consistently to categorize children. While report dispositions are based on the field of report disposition in NCANDS, the dispositions for duplicate children and unique children are based on the maltreatment levels associated with each child. A child victim has at least one maltreatment level that is coded “substantiated,” “indicated,” or “alternative response victim.” A child classified as unsubstantiated has no maltreatment levels that are considered to be victim levels and at least one maltreatment level that is coded “unsubstantiated” or “unsubstantiated due to intentionally false reporting.” A child classified as “other” has no maltreatment levels that are considered to be victim levels and none that are considered to be unsubstantiated levels. If a child has no maltreatments in the record, and report has a victim disposition, the child is assigned to “other” disposition. If a child has no maltreatments in the record and the report has either an unsubstantiated disposition or an “other” disposition, the child is counted as having the same disposition as the report disposition.

1. The data element, “Total CA/N Reports Disposed,” is based on the reports received in the State that received a disposition in the reporting period under review. The number shown may include reports received during a previous year that received a disposition in the reporting year. Counts based on “reports,” “duplicated counts of children,” and “unique counts of children” are provided.
2. The duplicated count of children (report-child pairs) counts a child each time that (s)he was reported. The unique count of children counts a child only once during the reporting period, regardless of how many times the child was reported.
3. For the column labeled “Reports,” the data element, “Disposition of CA/N Reports,” is based on upon the highest disposition of any child who was the subject of an investigation in a particular report. For example, if a report investigated two children, and one child is found to be neglected and the other child found not to be maltreated, the report disposition will be substantiated (Group A). The disposition for each child is based on the specific finding related to the maltreatment(s). In other words, of the two children above, one is a victim and is counted under “substantiated” (Group A) and the other is not a victim and is counted under “unsubstantiated” (Group B). In determining the unique counts of children, the highest finding is given priority. If a child is found to be a victim in one report (Group A), but not a victim in a second report (Group B), the unique count of children includes the child only as a victim (Group A). The category of “other” (Group C) includes children whose report may have been “closed without a finding,” children for whom the allegation disposition is “unknown,” and other dispositions that a State is unable to code as substantiated, indicated, alternative response victim, or unsubstantiated.
4. The data element, “Child Cases Opened for Services,” is based on the number of victims (Group A) during the reporting period under review. “Opened for Services” refers to post-investigative services. The duplicated number counts each time a victim’s report is linked to on-going services; the unique number counts a victim only once regardless of the number of times services are linked to reports of substantiated maltreatment.
5. The data element, “Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Report,” is based on the number of victims (Group A) during the reporting period under review. The duplicated number counts each time a victim’s report is linked to a foster care removal date. The unique number counts a victim only once regardless of the number of removals that may be reported.

6. The data element “Child Fatalities” counts the number of children reported to NCANDS as having died as a result of child abuse and/or neglect. Depending upon State practice, this number may count only those children for whom a case record has been opened either prior to or after the death, or may include a number of children whose deaths have been investigated as possibly related to child maltreatment. For example, some States include neglected-related deaths such as those caused by motor vehicle or boating accidents, house fires or access to firearms, under certain circumstances. The percentage is based on a count of unique victims of maltreatment for the reporting period.
7. The data element “Absence of Recurrence of Maltreatment” is defined as follows: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment allegation during the first 6 months of the reporting period, what percent were not victims of another substantiated or indicated maltreatment allegation within a 6-month period. This data element is used to determine the State’s substantial conformity with CFSR Safety Outcome #1 (“Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect”).
8. The data element “Absence of Child Abuse/or Neglect in Foster Care” is defined as follows: Of all children in foster care during the reporting period, what percent were not victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by foster parent or facility staff member. This data element is used to determine the State’s substantial conformity with CFSR Safety Outcome #1 (“Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect”). A child is counted as not having been maltreated in foster care if the perpetrator of the maltreatment was not identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff. Counts of children not maltreated in foster care are derived by subtracting NCANDS count of children maltreated by foster care providers from AFCARS count of children placed in foster care. The observation period for this measure is 12 months. The number of children not found to be maltreated in foster care and the percentage of all children in foster care are provided.
9. Median Time to Investigation in hours is computed from the Child File records using the Report Date and the Investigation Start Date (currently reported in the Child File in mmddyyyy format). The result is converted to hours by multiplying by 24.
10. Mean Time to investigation in hours is computed from the Child File records using the Report Date and the Investigation Start Date (currently reported in the Child File in mmddyyyy format). The result is converted to hours by multiplying by 24. Zero days difference (both dates are on the same day) is reported as “under 24 hours”, one day difference (investigation date is the next day after report date) is reported as “at least 24 hours, but less than 48 hours”, two days difference is reported as “at least 48 hours, but less than 72 hours”, etc.
11. Average response time in hours between maltreatment report and investigation is available through State NCANDS Agency or SDC File aggregate data. "Response time" is defined as the time from the receipt of a report to the time of the initial investigation or assessment. Note that many States calculate the initial investigation date as the first date of contact with the alleged victim, when this is appropriate, or with another person who can provide information essential to the disposition of the investigation or assessment.
12. The data element, “Children Maltreated by Parents while in Foster Care” is defined as follows: Of all children placed in foster care during the reporting period, what percent were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by parent. This data element requires matching NCANDS and AFCARS records by AFCARS IDs. Only unique NCANDS children with substantiated or indicated maltreatments and perpetrator relationship “Parent” are selected for this match. NCANDS report date must fall within the removal period found in the matching AFCARS record.

13. The data element, “Recurrence of Maltreatment,” is defined as follows: Of all children associated with a “substantiated” or “indicated” finding of maltreatment during the first six months of the reporting period, what percentage had another “substantiated” or “indicated” finding of maltreatment within a six-month period. The number of victims during the first six-month period and the number of these victims who were recurrent victims within six months are provided. This data element was used to determine the State’s substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #1 for CFSR Round One.
14. The data element, “Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care,” is defined as follows: Of all children who were served in foster care during the reporting period, what percentage were found to be victims of “substantiated” or “indicated” maltreatment. A child is counted as having been maltreated in foster care if the perpetrator of the maltreatment was identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff. Counts of children maltreated in foster care are derived from NCANDS, while counts of children placed in foster care are derived from AFCARS. The observation period for these measures is January-September because this is the reporting period that was jointly addressed by both NCANDS and AFCARS at the time when NCANDS reporting period was a calendar year. The number of children found to be maltreated in foster care and the percentage of all children in foster care are provided. This data element was used to determine the State’s substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #2 for CFSR Round One.

Additional Footnotes

- A. There are 34 percent more investigations reported in FFY2006 than FFY2005.
- B. In September 2004, Alaska implemented its SACWIS. Services data prior to that date is not available, so complete data on children receiving family preservation services and family reunification services within the past five years will not be available until FFY 2010.
- C. Alaska does not report fatalities in the Child File. In FFY2006, 2 fatalities were reported in the Agency File.
- D. In FFY2006, AK did not report on Investigation Start Date in the Child File.
- E. In FFY2006, data on time to investigation were collected using a stratified sample.

POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE	Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)		Federal FY 2007ab	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
I. Foster Care Population Flow						
Children in foster care on first day of year ¹	1,750		1,904		2,050	
Admissions during year	906		882		897	
Discharges during year	684		719		732	
Children discharging from FC in 7 days or less (These cases are excluded from length of stay calculations in the composite measures)	47	6.9% of the discharges	36	5.0% of the discharges	30	4.1% of the discharges
Children in care on last day of year	1,984		2,076		2,221	
Net change during year	234		172		171	
II. Placement Types for Children in Care						
Pre-Adoptive Homes	54	2.7	40	1.9	54	2.4
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	572	28.8	610	29.4	657	29.6
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	773	39.0	850	40.9	931	41.9
Group Homes	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Institutions	179	9.0	191	9.2	209	9.4
Supervised Independent Living	10	0.5	7	0.3	5	0.2
Runaway	21	1.1	22	1.1	23	1.0
Trial Home Visit	179	9.0	135	6.5	235	10.6
Missing Placement Information	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent year)	196	9.9	221	10.6	107	4.8
III. Permanency Goals for Children in Care						
Reunification	861	43.4	953	45.9	1,054	47.5
Live with Other Relatives	22	1.1	18	0.9	12	0.5
Adoption	642	32.4	660	31.8	717	32.3
Long Term Foster Care	58	2.9	66	3.2	54	2.4
Emancipation	54	2.7	53	2.6	61	2.7
Guardianship	140	7.1	148	7.1	139	6.3
Case Plan Goal Not Established	204	10.3	174	8.4	181	8.1
Missing Goal Information	3	0.2	4	0.2	3	0.1

POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE	Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)		Federal FY 2007ab	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode						
One	437	22.0	469	22.6	507	22.8
Two	395	19.9	408	19.7	506	22.8
Three	313	15.8	331	15.9	340	15.3
Four	201	10.1	240	11.6	258	11.6
Five	148	7.5	138	6.6	156	7.0
Six or more	490	24.7	490	23.6	454	20.4
Missing placement settings	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
V. Number of Removal Episodes						
One	1,478	74.5	1,551	74.7	1,673	75.3
Two	354	17.8	355	17.1	365	16.4
Three	114	5.7	104	5.0	101	4.5
Four	23	1.2	20	1.0	18	0.8
Five	1	0.1	1	0.0	1	0.0
Six or more	3	0.2	2	0.1	3	0.1
Missing removal episodes	11	0.6	43	2.1	60	2.7
VI. Number of children in care 17 of the most recent 22 months² (percent based on cases with sufficient information for computation)	373	40.7	437	43.1	487	42.3
VII. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care (of children in care on last day of FY)	17.0		18.3		17.8	
VIII. Length of Time to Achieve Perm. Goal	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge	# of Children Discharged	Median Months to Discharge
Reunification	392	9.0	418	10.1	373	13.2
Adoption	164	29.6	173	31.5	230	31.5
Guardianship	27	29.2	26	33.4	28	33.6
Other	87	26.3	93	31.8	94	35.4
Missing Discharge Reason (footnote 3, page 16)	0	--	0	--	0	--
Total discharges (excluding those w/ problematic dates)	670	17.2	710	17.6	725	23.2
Dates are problematic (footnote 4, page 16)	14	N/A	9	N/A	7	N/A

Statewide Aggregate Data Used in Determining Substantial Conformity: Composites 1 through 4			
	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)	Federal FY 2007ab
IX. Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification [standard: 122.6 or higher]. Scaled Scores for this composite incorporate two components	State Score = 124.5	State Score = 122.4	State Score = 107.6
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	10 of 47	12 of 47	34 of 47
Component A: Timeliness of Reunification The timeliness component is composed of three timeliness individual measures.			
Measure C1 - 1: Exits to reunification in less than 12 months: Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the year shown, who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, what percent was reunified in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) [national median = 69.9%, 75 th percentile = 75.2%]	68.1%	67.3%	54.2%
Measure C1 - 2: Exits to reunification, median stay: Of all children discharged from foster care (FC) to reunification in the year shown, who had been in FC for 8 days or longer, what was the median length of stay (in months) from the date of the latest removal from home until the date of discharge to reunification? (This includes trial home visit adjustment) [national median = 6.5 months, 25 th Percentile = 5.4 months (lower score is preferable in this measure ^B)]	Median = 6.1 months	Median = 7.0 months	Median = 10.2 months
Measure C1 - 3: Entry cohort reunification in < 12 months: Of all children entering foster care (FC) for the first time in the 6 month period just prior to the year shown, and who remained in FC for 8 days or longer, what percent was discharged from FC to reunification in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) [national median = 39.4%, 75 th Percentile = 48.4%]	23.7%	32.2%	25.5%
Component B: Permanency of Reunification The permanency component has one measure.			
Measure C1 - 4: Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months: Of all children discharged from foster care (FC) to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the year shown, what percent re-entered FC in less than 12 months from the date of discharge? [national median = 15.0%, 25 th Percentile = 9.9% (lower score is preferable in this measure)]	7.7%	7.5%	8.4%

	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)	Federal FY 2007ab
X. Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions [standard: 106.4 or higher]. Scaled Scores for this composite incorporate three components.	State Score = 76.5	State Score = 81.1	State Score = 94.1
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	36 of 47	32 of 47	25 of 47
Component A: Timeliness of Adoptions of Children Discharged From Foster Care. There are two individual measures of this component. See below.			
Measure C2 - 1: Exits to adoption in less than 24 months: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in the year shown, what percent was discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home? [national median = 26.8%, 75th Percentile = 36.6%]	29.3%	22.0%	22.2%
Measure C2 - 2: Exits to adoption, median length of stay: Of all children who were discharged from foster care (FC) to a finalized adoption in the year shown, what was the median length of stay in FC (in months) from the date of latest removal from home to the date of discharge to adoption? [national median = 32.4 months, 25th Percentile = 27.3 months(lower score is preferable in this measure)]	Median = 29.6 months	Median = 31.5 months	Median = 31.5 months
Component B: Progress Toward Adoption for Children in Foster Care for 17 Months or Longer. There are two individual measures. See below.			
Measure C2 - 3: Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year: Of all children in foster care (FC) on the first day of the year shown who were in FC for 17 continuous months or longer (and who, by the last day of the year shown, were not discharged from FC with a discharge reason of live with relative, reunify, or guardianship), what percent was discharged from FC to a finalized adoption by the last day of the year shown? [national median = 20.2%, 75th Percentile = 22.7%]	17.8%	16.4%	20.0%
Measure C2 - 4: Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months: Of all children in foster care (FC) on the first day of the year shown who were in FC for 17 continuous months or longer, and were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, what percent became legally free for adoption during the first 6 months of the year shown? Legally free means that there was a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father. This calculation excludes children who, by the end of the first 6 months of the year shown had discharged from FC to "reunification," "live with relative," or "guardianship." [national median = 8.8%, 75th Percentile = 10.9%]	6.8%	8.5%	13.0%
Component C: Progress Toward Adoption of Children Who Are Legally Free for Adoption. There is one measure for this component. See below.			
Measure C2 - 5: Legally free children adopted in less than 12 months: Of all children who became legally free for adoption in the 12 month period prior to the year shown (i.e., there was a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father), what percent was discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 12 months of becoming legally free? [national median = 45.8%, 75th Percentile = 53.7%]	31.5%	40.8%	48.5%

	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)	Federal FY 2007ab
XI. Permanency Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time [standard: 121.7 or higher]. Scaled Scores for this composite incorporate two components	State Score = 130.4	State Score = 125.4	State Score = 123.6
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	6 of 51	11 of 51	14 of 51
Component A: Achieving permanency for Children in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time. This component has two measures.			
Measure C3 - 1: Exits to permanency prior to 18th birthday for children in care for 24 + months. Of all children in foster care for 24 months or longer on the first day of the year shown, what percent was discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday and by the end of the fiscal year? A permanent home is defined as having a discharge reason of adoption, guardianship, or reunification (including living with relative). [national median 25.0%, 75th Percentile = 29.1%]	23.9%	20.6%	26.4%
Measure C3 - 2: Exits to permanency for children with TPR: Of all children who were discharged from foster care in the year shown, and who were legally free for adoption at the time of discharge (i.e., there was a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father), what percent was discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday? A permanent home is defined as having a discharge reason of adoption, guardianship, or reunification (including living with relative) [national median 96.8%, 75th Percentile = 98.0%]	100.0%	99.4%	97.8%
Component B: Growing up in foster care. This component has one measure.			
Measure C3 - 3: Children Emancipated Who Were in Foster Care for 3 Years or More. Of all children who, during the year shown, either (1) were discharged from foster care prior to age 18 with a discharge reason of emancipation, or (2) reached their 18 th birthday while in foster care, what percent were in foster care for 3 years or longer? [national median 47.8%, 25th Percentile = 37.5% (lower score is preferable)]	30.4%	35.7%	41.5%

	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)	Federal FY 2007ab
XII. Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability [national standard: 101.5 or higher]. Scaled score for this composite incorporates no components but three individual measures (below)	State Score = 71.9	State Score = 73.1	State Score = 78.8
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	46 of 51	46 of 51	42 of 51
Measure C4 - 1) Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months. Of all children served in foster care (FC) during the 12 month target period who were in FC for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings? [national median = 83.3%, 75th Percentile = 86.0%]	64.7%	65.8%	69.7%
Measure C4 - 2) Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months. Of all children served in foster care (FC) during the 12 month target period who were in FC for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings? [national median = 59.9%, 75th Percentile = 65.4%]	48.4%	50.7%	54.3%
Measure C4 - 3) Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months. Of all children served in foster care (FC) during the 12 month target period who were in FC for at least 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings? [national median = 33.9%, 75th Percentile = 41.8%]	27.8%	25.8%	27.6%

Special Footnotes for Composite Measures:

- A. These National Rankings show your State’s performance on the Composites compared to the performance of all the other States that were included in the 2004 data. The 2004 data were used for establishing the rankings because that is the year used in calculating the National Standards. The order of ranking goes from 1 to 47 or 51, depending on the measure. For example, “1 of 47” would indicate this State performed higher than all the States in 2004.
- B. In most cases, a high score is preferable on the individual measures. In these cases, you will see the 75th percentile listed to indicate that this would be considered a good score. However, in a few instances, a low score is good (shows desirable performance), such as re-entry to foster care. In these cases, the 25th percentile is displayed because that is the target direction for which States will want to strive. Of course, in actual calculation of the total composite scores, these “lower are preferable” scores on the individual measures are reversed so that they can be combined with all the individual scores that are scored in a positive direction, where higher scores are preferable.

PERMANENCY PROFILE FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP	Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)		Federal FY 2007ab	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
I. Number of children entering care for the first time in cohort group (% = 1 st time entry of all entering within first 6 months)	374	85.8	409	85.4	353	87.6
II. Most Recent Placement Types						
Pre-Adoptive Homes	4	1.1	2	0.5	1	0.3
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	96	25.7	95	23.2	85	24.1
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	131	35.0	164	40.1	126	35.7
Group Homes	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Institutions	33	8.8	22	5.4	31	8.8
Supervised Independent Living	4	1.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Runaway	1	0.3	2	0.5	2	0.6
Trial Home Visit	67	17.9	64	15.6	88	24.9
Missing Placement Information	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent yr)	38	10.2	60	14.7	20	5.7
III. Most Recent Permanency Goal						
Reunification	272	72.7	312	76.3	280	79.3
Live with Other Relatives	6	1.6	2	0.5	2	0.6
Adoption	35	9.4	25	6.1	24	6.8
Long-Term Foster Care	1	0.3	3	0.7	3	0.8
Emancipation	2	0.5	5	1.2	7	2.0
Guardianship	5	1.3	8	2.0	3	0.8
Case Plan Goal Not Established	53	14.2	53	13.0	33	9.3
Missing Goal Information	0	0.0	1	0.2	1	0.3
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode						
One	146	39.0	163	39.9	148	41.9
Two	92	24.6	117	28.6	79	22.4
Three	55	14.7	60	14.7	55	15.6
Four	28	7.5	37	9.0	34	9.6
Five	15	4.0	15	3.7	20	5.7
Six or more	38	10.2	17	4.2	17	4.8
Missing placement settings	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

PERMANENCY PROFILE FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP (continued)	Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)		Federal FY 2007ab	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
V. Reason for Discharge						
Reunification/Relative Placement	96	97.0	86	93.5	55	90.2
Adoption	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Guardianship	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	3.3
Other	3	3.0	6	6.5	4	6.6
Unknown (missing discharge reason or N/A)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Number of Months		Number of Months		Number of Months	
VI. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care	12.9		not yet determinable		not yet determinable	

AFCARS Data Completeness and Quality Information (2% or more is a warning sign):						
	Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)		Federal FY 2007ab	
	N	As a % of Exits Reported	N	As a % of Exits Reported	N	As a % of Exits Reported
File contains children who appear to have been in care less than 24 hours	2	0.3 %	0	0.0 %	1	0.1 %
File contains children who appear to have exited before they entered	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %
Missing dates of latest removal	12	1.8 %	9	1.3 %	6	0.8 %
File contains "Dropped Cases" between report periods with no indication as to discharge	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %
Missing discharge reasons	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %
	N	As a % of adoption exits	N	As a % of adoption exits	N	As a % of adoption exits
File submitted lacks data on Termination of Parental Rights for finalized adoptions	31	18.0 %	9 see note pg	5.0 %	7	3.0 %
Foster Care file has different count than Adoption File of (public agency) adoptions (N= adoption count disparity).	32	15.7% more in the official adoption file.	30	14.4% more in the unofficial adoption file.	23	9.8% fewer in the preliminary adoption file.
	N	Percent of cases in file	N	Percent of cases in file	N	Percent of cases in file
File submitted lacks count of number of placement settings in episode for each child	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %

* The adoption data comparison was made using the discharge reason of "adoption" from the AFCARS foster care file and an *unofficial* count of adoptions finalized during the period of interest that were "placed by public agency" reported in the AFCARS Adoption files. This *unofficial* count of adoptions is only used for CFSR data quality purposes because adoption counts used for other purposes (e.g. Adoption Incentives awards, Outcomes Report) only cover the federal fiscal year, and include a broader definition of adoption and a different de-duplication methodology.

Note: These are CFSR Round One permanency measures. They are intended to be used primarily by States completing Round One Program Improvement Plans, but could also be useful to States in CFSR Round Two in comparing their current performance to that of prior years:

	Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007 (06b07a)		Federal FY 2007ab	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IX. Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, what percentage was reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home? (4.1) [Standard: 76.2% or more]	237	59.7	239	56.9	171	45.7
X. Of all children who exited care to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home? (5.1) [Standard: 32.0% or more]	48	27.9	38	21.2	51	21.7
XI. Of all children served who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home, what percentage have had no more than two placement settings? (6.1) [Standard: 86.7% or more]	664	66.6	670	67.3	701	71.1
XII. Of all children who entered care during the year, what percentage re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode? (4.2) [Standard: 8.6% or less]	48	5.3 (86.4% new entry)	66	7.5 (86.2% new entry)	88	9.8 (85.2% new entry)

FOOTNOTES TO DATA ELEMENTS IN THE PERMANENCY PROFILE

¹The FY 06, 06B07A , and FY 07 counts of children in care at the start of the year exclude 17, 26, and 25 children, respectively. They were excluded to avoid counting them twice. That is, although they were actually in care on the first day, they also qualify as new entries because they left and re-entered again at some point during the same reporting period. To avoid counting them as both "in care on the first day" and "entries," the Children's Bureau selects only the most recent record. That means they get counted as "entries," not "in care on the first day."

²We designated the indicator, *17 of the most recent 22 months*, rather than the statutory time frame for initiating termination of parental rights proceedings at *15 of the most 22 months*, since the AFCARS system cannot determine the *date the child is considered to have entered foster care* as defined in the regulation. We used the outside date for determining the *date the child is considered to have entered foster care*, which is 60 days from the actual removal date.

³This count only includes case records missing a discharge reason, but which have calculable lengths of stay. Records missing a discharge reason and with non-calculable lengths of stay are included in the cell "Dates are Problematic".

⁴The dates of removal and exit needed to calculate length of stay are problematic. Such problems include: 1) missing data, 2) faulty data (chronologically impossible), 3) a child was in care less than 1 day (length of stay = 0) so the child should not have been reported in foster care file, or 4) child's length of stay would equal 21 years or more. These cases are marked N/A = Not Applicable because no length of stay can legitimately be calculated.

⁵This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay was 12.9 in FY 06. This includes 2 children who entered and exited on the same day (who had a zero length of stay). If these children were excluded from the calculation, the median length of stay would still be 12.9.

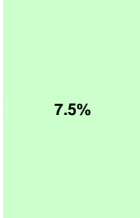
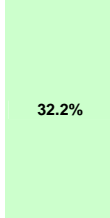
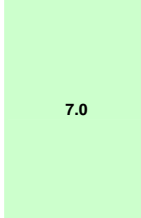
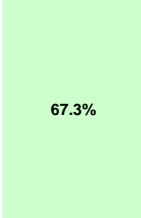
⁶This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay was Not Yet Determinable in 06B07A. This includes 0 children who entered and exited on the same day (who had a zero length of stay). Therefore, the median length of stay would still be Not Yet Determinable, but would be unaffected by any 'same day' children. The designation, Not Yet Determinable occurs when a true length of stay for the cohort cannot be calculated because fewer than 50 percent of the children have exited.

⁷This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay is Not Yet Determinable for FY 07. This includes 1 child who entered and exited on the same day (the child had a zero length of stay). If this child were excluded, the median length of stay would still be Not Yet Determinable. The designation, Not Yet Determinable occurs when a true length of stay for the cohort cannot be calculated because fewer than 50 percent of the children have exited.

⁸ Alaska Note: These cases were reviewed and it was noted that there were appropriate termination orders in the file that were entered into ORCA, however, they were erroneously entered incorrectly. The Children's Bureau agreed that since Alaska did have the terminations orders that further corrections to the data system for the period 06B and 07A was not necessary.

Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification

County Name	Fips Code	Percent Of Children Who Reunify In Less Than 12 Months	Computed Standardized Score Of Children Who Reunify In Less Than 12 Months	Median Time To Reunification Of Those Children Who Reunify	Computed Standardized Score For Median Time To Reunification Of Those Children Who Reunify	Children Of an N Cohort - Percent Who Reunify In Less Than 12 Months	Computed Standardized Score For Children Of an N Cohort - Percent Who Reunify In Less Than 12 Months	Children Of X Cohort - Percent Who ReEnter Care In Less Than 12 Months	Computed Standardized Score For Children Of X Cohort - Who ReEnter Care In Less Than 12 Months	Computed Component A Derived Score	Computed Component B Derived Score	Unweighted County Composite Score	Children Served by County	Weighted County Composite Score
Anchorage Municipality	2020	69.6%	-0.11	7.0	0.01	31.3%	-0.54	7.6%	0.52	-0.14	0.52	0.19	1,165	225.05
Bethel Census Area	2050	33.3%	-2.16	15.5	-1.99	15.4%	-1.26	6.5%	0.61	-2.19	0.31	-0.94	212	-198.83
Dillingham Census Area	2070	0.0%	-4.04	12.3	-1.23	0.0%	-1.97	50.0%	-3.21	-3.41	-3.71	-3.56	47	-167.41
Fairbanks North Star Borough	2090	79.1%	0.43	3.9	0.72	20.0%	-1.05	4.3%	0.80	0.32	0.91	0.61	242	148.55
Juneau City and Borough	2110	69.2%	-0.13	7.9	-0.20	38.1%	-0.22	16.7%	-0.28	-0.25	-0.31	-0.28	280	-79.08
Kenai Peninsula Borough	2122	70.6%	-0.05	1.4	1.30	20.0%	-1.05	9.1%	0.38	0.30	0.48	0.39	202	79.29
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	2170	47.4%	-1.36	12.7	-1.33	21.7%	-0.97	14.8%	-0.12	-1.53	-0.33	-0.93	198	-183.91
Nome Census Area	2180	76.5%	0.28	2.0	1.18	83.3%	1.85	5.0%	0.74	1.30	0.86	1.08	44	47.48
Northwest Arctic Borough	2188	70.8%	-0.04	4.6	0.57	76.7%	1.54	7.7%	0.51	0.76	0.55	0.65	74	48.27
Rolled Up County	2600	92.3%	1.17	4.5	0.59	15.4%	-1.26	0.0%	1.18	0.59	1.36	0.97	96	93.31
Rolled Up County	2601	73.7%	0.12	7.2	-0.04	11.1%	-1.46	0.0%	1.18	-0.24	1.23	0.49	98	48.21
Rolled Up County	2602	70.0%	-0.09	8.8	-0.42	42.9%	-0.01	0.0%	1.18	-0.08	1.17	0.55	79	43.36
													2737	104.29
														0.04



Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoption

County Name	Fips Code	Of Children Exiting To Adoption - Percent Who Exit In Less Than 24 Months	Computed Standardized Score Of Children Exiting To Adoption - Who Exit In Less Than 24 Months	Median Time For All Adoptions	Computed Standardized Score For Median Time For All Adoption	Of Those Children In Care 17 Or More Months As Of The First Day Of The Year - Percent Who Exit To Adoption By The End Of The Year	Computed Standardized Score Of Those Children In Care 17 Or More Months As Of The First Day Of The Year - Who Exit To Adoption By The End Of The Year	Of Those Children In Care 17 Or More Months As Of The First Day Of The Year - Percent Who Become Legally Free Within Six Months Of The First Day	Computed Standardized Score Of Those Children In Care 17 Or More Months As Of The First Day Of The Year - Who Become Legally Free Within Six Months Of The First Day	Of Those Children Who Become Legally Free(LF) During A Year - What Percent Are Adopted Within 12 Months of Becoming LF	Computed Standardized Score Of Those Children Who Become Legally Free(LF) During A Year - Who Are Adopted Within 12 Months of Becoming LF	Computed Component 1 Derived Score	Computed Component 2 Derived Score	Computed Component 3 Derived Score	Unweighted County Composite Score	Children Served by County	Weighted County Composite Score
Anchorage Municipality	2020	21.7%	-0.38	31.5	0.07	17.6%	-0.34	3.5%	-0.45	0.28	-0.65	-0.17	0	-0.57	-0.3924127	1,165	-457.16
Bethel Census Area	2050	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	0.0%	-1.50	1.6%	-0.59	0.00	-1.54	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	212	0.00
Dillingham Census Area	2070	100.0%	2.34	24.0	0.65	3.7%	-1.26	3.7%	-0.44	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	47	0.00
Fairbanks North Star Borough	2090	42.9%	0.36	31.2	0.10	15.4%	-0.49	9.8%	-0.01	0.30	-0.57	0.30	0	-0.66	-0.1976556	242	-47.83
Juneau City and Borough	2110	19.6%	-0.45	31.3	0.09	31.9%	0.60	31.0%	1.48	0.63	0.45	-0.05	1	0.20	0.50221413	280	140.62
Kenai Peninsula Borough	2122	0.0%	-1.13	49.1	-1.26	16.7%	-0.40	8.3%	-0.11	0.69	0.67	-1.29	0	0.62	-0.368583	202	-74.45
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	2170	40.0%	0.26	28.1	0.33	9.4%	-0.88	20.8%	0.77	0.25	-0.74	0.53	0	-1.13	-0.1530678	198	-30.31
Nome Census Area	2180	0.0%	-1.13	42.5	-0.76	25.0%	0.15	22.2%	0.87	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	44	0.00
Northwest Arctic Borough	2188	0.0%	-1.13	46.4	-1.05	10.0%	-0.84	0.0%	-0.70	0.00	-1.54	-1.16	-1	-1.40	-1.1581831	74	-85.71
Rolled Up County	2600	50.0%	0.60	24.4	0.61	7.4%	-1.01	4.3%	-0.39	1.00	1.64	0.64	-1	1.34	0.37335269	96	35.84
Rolled Up County	2601	0.0%	-1.13	77.6	-3.41	8.0%	-0.97	0.0%	-0.70	0.00	-1.54	-2.44	-1	-1.36	-1.6799419	98	-164.63
Rolled Up County	2602	0.0%	-1.13	25.8	0.50	16.7%	-0.40	23.5%	0.96	0.80	1.01	-0.18	0	0.60	0.30283696	79	23.92
																2737	-659.71
																	-0.27
		22.0%		3154.0%		16.4%		8.5%		40.8%							

Permanency Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time

County Name	Fips Code	Children In Care 24+ Months As Of The First Day Of The Year - Percent Who Achieve Permanency By The End Of The Year	Computed Standardized Score For Children In Care 24+ Months As Of The First Day Of The Year - Who Achieve Permanency By The End Of The Year	Of Those Children Discharging Care Who Are Legally Free - Percent Discharging To Permanent Homes	Computed Standardized Score For Those Children Discharging Care Who Are Legally Free - Who Discharge To Permanent Homes	Of Those Children/Youth Who Emancipate Prior To Age 18 or Turn 18 Years Of Age While In Care - Percent Who Had Been In Care 3 Or More Years	Computed Standardized Score For Those Children/Youth Who Emancipate Prior To Age 18 or Turn 18 Years Of Age While In Care - Who Had Been In Care 3 Or More Years	Computed Component 1 Derived Score	Computed Component 2 Derived Score	Unweighted County Composite Score	Children Served by County	Weighted County Composite Score
Anchorage Municipality	2020	23.2%	-0.16	100.0%	0.43	29.4%	0.55	0.18	0.42	0.30	1,165	348.58
Bethel Census Area	2050	6.7%	-1.12	#NULL!	#NULL!	66.7%	-0.73	#NULL!	#NULL!	#NULL!	212	0.00
Dillingham Census Area	2070	0.0%	-1.51	100.0%	0.43	33.3%	0.42	-0.54	0.11	-0.22	47	-10.28
Fairbanks North Star Borough	2090	15.6%	-0.60	100.0%	0.43	42.9%	0.09	-0.02	-0.09	-0.05	242	-12.68
Juneau City and Borough	2110	36.3%	0.60	100.0%	0.43	33.3%	0.42	0.61	0.39	0.50	280	140.02
Kenai Peninsula Borough	2122	26.5%	0.03	100.0%	0.43	41.7%	0.13	0.33	0.04	0.18	202	36.96
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	2170	10.0%	-0.93	100.0%	0.43	22.2%	0.80	-0.27	0.56	0.15	198	28.81
Nome Census Area	2180	30.8%	0.28	100.0%	0.43	33.3%	0.42	0.43	0.35	0.39	44	17.22
Northwest Arctic Borough	2188	11.1%	-0.86	100.0%	0.43	66.7%	-0.73	-0.07	-0.92	-0.50	74	-36.70
Rolled Up County	2600	0.0%	-1.51	75.0%	-0.84	75.0%	-1.01	-1.34	-1.01	-1.18	96	-112.90
Rolled Up County	2601	21.1%	-0.28	100.0%	0.43	25.0%	0.70	0.09	0.55	0.32	98	31.67
Rolled Up County	2602	5.6%	-1.19	100.0%	0.43	0.0%	1.56	-0.49	1.27	0.39	79	30.74
											2,737	461.46
												0.18
		20.6%		99.4%		35.7%						

Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability

County Name	Fips Code	Of Those Children In Care Less Than 12 Months - Percent With 2 Placements or Less	Computed Standardized Score For Those Children In Care Less Than 12 Months - With 2 Placements or Less	Of Those Children In Care For 12 But Less Than 24 Months - Percent With 2 Placements or Less	Computed Standardized Score For Those Children In Care For 12 But Less Than 24 Months - With 2 Placements or Less	Of Those Children In Care 24 Or More Months - Percent With 2 Placements or Less	Computed Standardized Score For Those Children In Care 24 Or More Months - With 2 Placements or Less	Unweighted County Composite Score	Children Served by County	Weighted County Composite Score
Anchorage Municipality	2020	70.9%	-1.00	47.8%	-0.57	27.2%	-0.37	-0.79	1165	-915.05
Bethel Census Area	2050	47.7%	-2.97	36.5%	-1.13	25.8%	-0.44	-1.83	212	-387.35
Dillingham Census Area	2070	50.0%	-2.77	16.7%	-2.12	16.1%	-0.89	-2.34	47	-110.19
Fairbanks North Star Borough	2090	70.3%	-1.05	54.5%	-0.23	14.8%	-0.96	-0.90	242	-217.19
Juneau City and Borough	2110	58.7%	-2.03	62.3%	0.15	34.6%	-0.03	-0.76	280	-211.91
Kenai Peninsula Borough	2122	55.0%	-2.35	61.0%	0.09	37.5%	0.11	-0.85	202	-172.37
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	2170	73.8%	-0.75	61.3%	0.10	23.5%	-0.55	-0.48	198	-94.19
Nome Census Area	2180	81.0%	-0.14	12.5%	-2.33	6.7%	-1.34	-1.56	44	-68.74
Northwest Arctic Borough	2188	66.7%	-1.36	40.0%	-0.96	8.0%	-1.28	-1.45	74	-107.27
Rolled Up County	2600	75.0%	-0.65	63.6%	0.22	10.7%	-1.15	-0.63	96	-60.10
Rolled Up County	2601	45.2%	-3.18	56.5%	-0.14	6.9%	-1.33	-1.85	98	-181.52
Rolled Up County	2602	59.3%	-1.98	50.0%	-0.46	37.5%	0.11	-0.94	79	-74.03
									2737	-2599.91
		65.8%		50.7%		25.8%				-0.95

Section III: Narrative Assessment of Child and Family Outcomes

A. Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Item 1: Timeliness to initiating investigations of report of child maltreatment. How effective is the agency in responding to incoming reports of child maltreatment in a timely manner?

Previous Rating

During the 2002 CFSR, this item was given an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS (now known as OCS) responded to maltreatment reports in a timely manner in 70 percent of the cases. Stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern about the absence of policy guidelines regarding face-to-face contact.

Policy Description

The Office of Children's Services policy defines the following timeframes:

- **Priority 1 (P1) reports** mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 24 hours of the initial report to OCS. Priority 1 reports are defined as reports that indicate a present danger to the child and requires an immediate response.
- **Priority 2 (P2) reports** mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 72 hours of the initial report to OCS. Priority 2 reports are defined as reports where the situation is serious; however, information available does not indicate the child is in immediate danger.
- **Priority 3 (P3) reports** mandate that a response to, and an investigation of, a report must be made within 7 calendar days of the initial report to OCS. Priority 3 reports are defined as reports in which a delay in assessing the situation will not result in significant additional harm to the child.

Policy also establishes criteria for an approval process for any deviation from the adherence to the mandatory timeframes. In Anchorage, Nome and Mat-Su Priority 3 reports may be referred to the Differential Response Program.

Practice Improvements

In response to the 2003 Program Improvement Plan, OCS revised policies relating to the investigative process, and clarified requirements for initiation and face-to-face contact with children who are the focus of maltreatment reports.

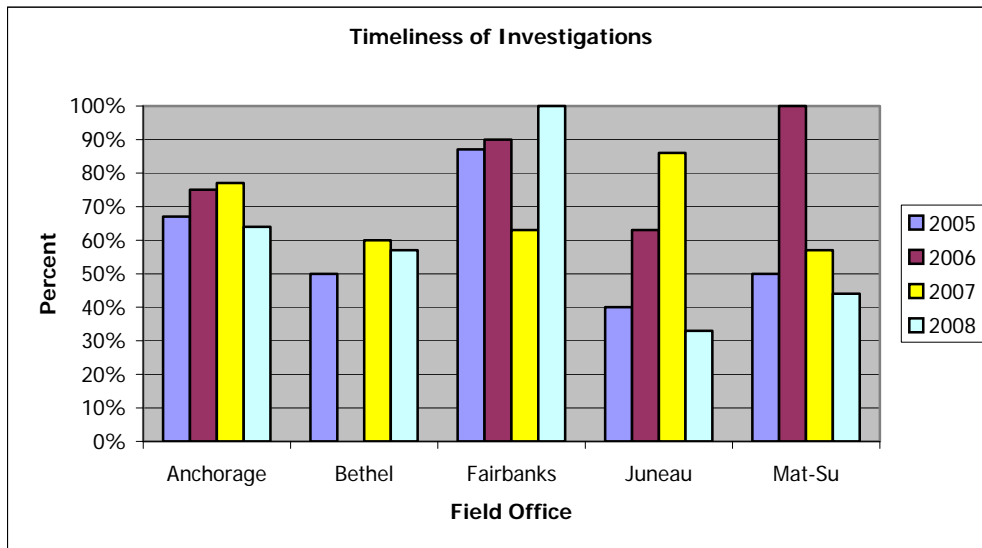
Alaska began implementation of a new safety assessment model in the spring of 2006 by training all staff in the model. This model is described in Item 2 of this assessment.

In addition, Alaska is in the process of examining its intake criteria to ensure that cases are correctly identified for assignment. This review process includes examination of a centralized intake system versus the current intake process that is conducted in local field offices. Additionally, this will address the problem of staff coverage in smaller offices and allow for a reporter to speak with a person when s/he makes a report of suspected abuse and neglect.

Data

OCS has a Continuous Quality Improvement Unit (QA team) which conducts routine quality assurance reviews for Items 1 through 23 using a modified replica of the federal review instrument. The QA team reviews approximately 235 cases each year and reviews all offices in the state over a two year period. Anchorage, the largest office in the state, is reviewed at least twice each year.

The following chart illustrates the QA team's results regarding compliance with timeliness of initiating reports of maltreatment for Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Mat-Su areas. Anchorage represents a little under half the state, so together with Fairbanks, Bethel, Juneau and Mat-Su over 75 percent of the state is represented.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st.
Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

The QA reviews noted that P1 referrals are consistently responded to and investigated in a timely manner. However, the QA reviews also noted that challenges occur with meeting the response timeframes for P2 and P3 reports. The challenges with meeting response times for P2 and P3 reports is impacting the overall results on compliance with timeliness to investigations.

Strengths

As discussed in Practice Improvements above, Alaska is currently redesigning its intake process to better match the OCS business process statewide. This standardization and retooling will help ensure that investigators are able to begin their work with the best possible information from the reporters and collaterals if necessary, which will only improve their ability to ensure timely investigations.

A newly established, Child Welfare Administrator position is dedicated to overseeing the implementation efforts for safety decision making through the life of a case and standardization of practice from entry to exit of the child welfare system. OCS is fully utilizing the technical assistance available from the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services. This technical assistance occurs monthly and has been regularly occurring since early 2007.

Additionally, the blending of specialties and a collaborative approach has fostered an increase in community education related to prevention and child safety. On the OCS Web page of the State of Alaska Web site, visitors can view an interactive training or request a free CD on Reporting Child Abuse in Alaska. By educating professionals, teachers, judges and the public about reporting child abuse, OCS believes it will increase the accuracy and timeliness of reports of abuse or neglect and screen out reports that do not meet the criteria for investigation.

Alaska operates a Differential Response (DR) program (an alternate system for responding to protective services reports) in Anchorage, Nome, and the Mat-Su Valley. When a protective services report is referred to a DR program, DR program staff responds to the report through face to face contact within seven calendar days of receiving the report. DR program staff assesses the child(ren)'s safety and develops case plans if deemed appropriate with the family. After 90 days of service the case is closed with or without referrals for additional services. An extension beyond 90 days requires approval by an OCS supervisor. The program provides a closing summary to OCS within 10 working days of closing the case. The DR program refers the case back to OCS if the family refuses DR services or if the program determines that safety is of concern.

Challenges

While P1 reports are occurring in a timely manner, P2 and P3 reports are not consistently responded to within the mandated timeframes. In these cases, efforts to locate the family or the child are usually made in a timely manner, but when the efforts to locate the child or family fails, the case can fall between the cracks and a follow-up effort does not take place until the required timelines have been exceeded. Additionally, stakeholders noted travel time between offices and homes to initiate investigations as a challenge, especially in rural areas. While Alaska faces geographically related challenges, the QA team reported that in the cases reviewed, weather and/or remoteness was seldom the reason an investigation failed to be initiated in a timely manner.

Staff turnover, position vacancies, high workloads and inexperienced front-line caseworkers are on-going challenges that are also contributing to the delayed response times. Anchorage, Bethel, Juneau and Mat-Su were all experiencing high staff turnover and vacancy rates during the first half of SFY08, while Fairbanks staff turnover has decreased from prior years.

Finally, a significant part of this challenge may be correlated to the lack of standardization in Alaska's intake process. Too often, protective service reports are delayed due to workers' inability to collect additional information, track down collateral contacts, or waiting for a supervisor to make a screening decision. These delays increase the time it takes for the investigator to initiate the investigation and interview the child face-to-face.

Summary

It has been challenging over the past few years to improve the rate of timely responses to investigations in Alaska. Some improvement has been seen in areas where staff turnover has been minimal but in other areas the challenges are significant. It is hoped that full implementation of the safety model will assist in establishing standardization of the intake process. Currently, the practices of intake appear to be unknowingly undermining the ability of the investigation workers to initiate face-to-face contact in a timely manner. As mentioned above, in March of 2008 OCS started an evaluation process and consideration of new approaches to improving the intake process.

Item 2: Repeat Maltreatment. How effective is the agency in reducing the recurrence of maltreatment of children?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR Review, this item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. During the CFSR, it was determined in 74 percent of cases reviewed did not have a substantiated/indicated maltreatment report during the period under review that occurred within six months of another substantiated/indicated report. The incidence of repeat maltreatment reported in the 2002 State Data Profile was 23.6 percent.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that when screening a protective service report (PSR) the worker will review all prior reports and case history, utilizing those prior PSRs to assist in determining the priority rating. If it is known that the family has lived in another state, the worker is also required to make diligent efforts to obtain CPS information and records from the other state. If a prior PSR had a substantiated finding within the past six months, the new PSR is critically reviewed before initiation of new investigation. If the intake supervisor who makes the screening decision determines that the new report will be screened out, the supervisor is required to clearly document the reason for the screen out decision in ORCA.

Practice Improvements

The 2003 PIP included action steps to establish a protocol to review repeat maltreatment cases for all investigations, and to reassess, clarify, and operationally define all definitions for screening and to provide consistency in determining which reports are screened in and out for investigations.

In spring of 2006, Alaska implemented its new Safety Decision Making model. OCS has committed to ongoing improvement of child protection practices through the implementation of the use of this model to improve and standardize all levels of practice and service delivery.

The Safety Assessment is a comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of maltreatment, child and adult functioning and general parenting and disciplinary practices of the family.

This assessment distinguishes between risk factors and safety threats that may be operating in the family. If the child is determined to be unsafe, the Office of Children's Services becomes involved by developing either an in home or out of home safety plan with the family. The safety assessment and planning process allows for workers to identify parents' protective capacities to ensure a child's safety in their own home, in an effort to prevent the child's removal from the home. When removal of children is necessary, the information collected during the assessment identifies issues related to child safety and helps to determine appropriate interventions to resolve those safety threats which are incorporated into the family's individualized case plan. Accurate identification of individual needs of children and families assists in determination of appropriate services including services from other agencies including substance abuse and mental health providers, domestic violence shelters, child care providers and a wide range of other community services.

Since that time, Alaska has been receiving ongoing consultation and assistance from the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services and ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., focusing on implementation of the new practice model; targeting supervisors, managers, tribal partners, and the workgroups that make up the framework for implementation of the new standards.

In order to guide implementation, five core workgroups were established in summer of 2006, one of which is solely focused on policy and procedures. By January 2008, policy changes were made to provide guidance to OCS investigative staff in collecting sufficient information to make a reasoned and well-informed safety assessment of the family to facilitate decision-making on the appropriate intervention(s) needed.

During the initial contact with the family, the worker gathers information to determine whether there is present danger to the child, in which case the worker ensures that an immediate protective action is taken to protect the child. The initial assessment is based on interviews with parents, child, and collateral sources, and the worker's observation of the parents and child, in addition to historical information of previous involvement with OCS or child protection agencies in other states. An initial safety plan is established in all cases where children are determined to be unsafe. Supervisory review and approval is required for each step in this process.

Data

The 2002 CFSR reported an incidence rate of 23.6 percent of repeat maltreatment in Alaska. According to the March 24, 2008 CFSR Data Profile, Alaska's incidence of repeat maltreatment had significantly improved to an incidence rate of 9.3 percent. While, Alaska's rate does not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent, Alaska has reduced the rate of repeat maltreatment by 14.3 percent since the last CFSR.

Strengths

Due in large part to the implementation of the safety assessment model, workers are learning to better target issues during the investigative process. OCS has taken a team approach to investigations and ensuring safety, by including Tribes whenever possible. The assessment process also highlights the importance of worker rapport with the family to gather the necessary information to make a thorough assessment and plan, if needed. Through the use of a comprehensive safety assessment model, the incidence of repeat maltreatment is declining.

OCS has focused on partnering with Tribes during investigations and the provision of in-home services utilizing tribal resources when available. Over the past year, Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) began investigating other collaborative processes such as Family Group Conferencing (FGC) model which also develops a “family team” to actively address concerns of safety, support safety plans, identify resources, and enhance protective capacities with parents to care for the own children. This process is being considered in conjunction with the Team Decision Making meetings for placement change decisions.

Challenges

While OCS has made remarkable improvements in reducing repeat maltreatment since the 2002 CFPSR, more progress is needed. Staff turnover is a critical issue because cases can be overlooked when caseloads are not covered and there are delays in assigning a new worker to follow-up. The QA team noted that when repeat maltreatment is identified in the review, generally, repeat maltreatment occurs in cases in which an investigation occurred but services were not provided and the case was eventually closed. Lack of ongoing monitoring and follow-up post-investigation appears to contribute to the repeat maltreatment incidents that occur in these cases.

Further, staff turnover and vacancy rates add to the difficulty in timely completion of contacts and documentation, which result in delays in identifying family needs and resources. This in turn, makes it more difficult to serve families with complex needs. Anchorage, for example, reported that during SFY07 and the first half of SFY08 staff turnover and vacancy rates were higher than previous years, which could directly impact increased incidences of repeat maltreatment in Anchorage. Fairbanks, on the other hand, reported stability in the work force during the first half of SFY08, which may be contributing to the notable absence of repeat maltreatment.

Finally, as workers transition to an improved process for assessment and planning for safety, they continue to struggle with meeting the minimum standards for information collection, which are far more comprehensive in nature than previous policy required.

Summary

Overall, Alaska has demonstrated improvement in repeat maltreatment rates since 2002. Based on QA results, repeat maltreatment rates are improving in three of the four OCS regions. On-going training efforts for the safety assessment process have likely increased OCS’ ability to reduce the incidence of repeat maltreatment through better information collection and identification of needs and linkages, and the provision of better supports and services for children and families. QA reports further indicate that the incidence of repeat maltreatment could be further reduced with adequate staff monitoring and follow-up, were adequate and stable workforce available to meet the needs of the identified children and families.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Item 3: Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care. How effective is the agency in providing services, when appropriate, to prevent removal of children from their homes?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFPSR Review, this item received an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 69 percent of the cases reviewed, OCS made diligent efforts to provide services to ensure children’s safety while preventing placement in foster care or while maintaining children in the home.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires workers to provide family support services to children and their families to maintain children in their own home and prevent out of home placement. Family support services may be provided by OCS or by the community, Tribe, a church, or other service organizations. Services may include

counseling, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, assistance to address domestic violence, visitation with family members, parenting classes, in-home services, temporary child care services, and transportation.

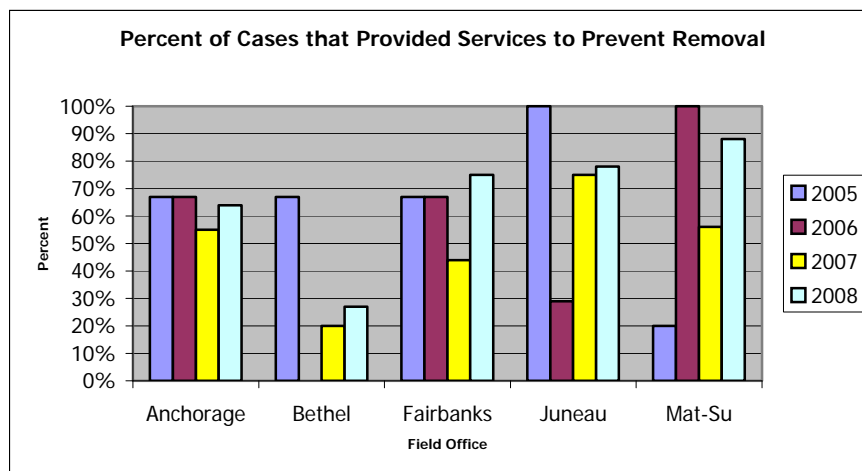
Practice Improvements

The 2003 Program Improvement Plan (PIP) included action steps to clarify policy, procedures, and definitions for in-home cases. As a result, new policy was issued to provide clarification regarding requirements for in-home cases, including the requirement to use Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessments for in-home case planning. Further, clarification was provided regarding situations in which an in-home case plan is required and the timelines required for developing and reviewing in-home case plans.

In 2006, the new safety assessment model replaced one of the three tools contained in SDM process. The new model provides an in-depth collection process that better guides workers in determining underlying issues that lead to abuse and neglect. The goal is to gather enough information to identify any safety factors and put in necessary services needed to ensure safety to the child. By spending time learning more about the family as a whole, the caseworker is better able to develop and implement a safety plan if needed.

Data

The following chart illustrates the results of QA reviews for Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Mat-Su, which represent over 75 percent of the state.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

Strengths

A number of efforts have been made over the past few years to improve the provision of services to maintain children in their homes whenever possible. OCS has worked closely with tribal partners and community stakeholders to develop and engage in a more open and transparent decision-making process. In the Anchorage region, Team Decision-making Meetings (TDM) are utilized to consider all options available to keep the child safe. In other areas of the state, OCS staff are being more inclusive in assessing options with those that can support and strengthen the family. Safety plans are structured to identify resources to support the safety of children in their own homes, and are geared to be time-limited and control for present and impending danger threats in accordance with the new practice model.

Alaska Native Tribes and Tribal entities have collaborated with OCS to provide valuable services to keep families intact. There are 229 federally recognized Tribes in Alaska, many of which have active social services programs (and a few with active tribal courts) that manage child welfare cases. In partnership

with the OCS, they provide services to protect and maintain children in their homes, either to prevent removal of the child, or to assist a child and family when a child is returning from out-of-home care.

In 2007, approximately \$1 million in state general funds was granted to three tribal partners in the Southeast and Northern regions to provide services to tribal families. In addition, approximately \$1 million in Title IV-E funding was reimbursed to nine Tribal Title IV-E Partners for services to tribal children involved in the State Child Welfare System. Tribes or Tribal entities provided advocacy services, case management, family support and family preservation to families, as well as developing family genealogies and supporting compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Along with state resources, many Tribes bring in revenue from federal and private funding streams that provide valuable resources to promote family stability

In addition to tribal funding, approximately \$2 million in resources is invested across the State of Alaska to fund family support and family preservation services to children and families at risk of child abuse and neglect.

Challenges

There are many possible reasons why services are not being provided to families and children to prevent removal. OCS and stakeholders agree that obtaining and gathering collateral information is key to identifying underlying issues and recommending appropriate services so removal is not necessary. Stakeholders suggested that some children with safety threats are removed when comprehensive services could have been provided to prevent removal. Additionally, OCS is concerned that the lack of staff training may lead to overly cautious decisions by OCS investigators to remove children.

Stakeholders recognized that high caseloads for investigators across the state make it difficult to provide in home services to ensure safety. Accessing services that meet the complex needs of families tends to be a challenge as well. Stakeholders felt there were not enough prevention services available in some communities to address the needs of families with children at risk of out-of-home placements. However, the QA team has observed that cases that have significant safety concerns often get the necessary services that address the safety needs of the family. In other cases where the safety concerns are not present, the necessary services can be overlooked.

Summary

OCS recognizes the increasing number of children in out-of-home placement and wants to ensure that services to prevent removal of children from their homes are fully utilized and available. As the regulation of our new practice standards continues to be fine tuned, it is anticipated that front-line workers will gain skills and knowledge to better assess safety threats and provide appropriate interventions.

Item 4: Risk assessment and safety management. How effective is the agency in reducing the risk of harm to children, including those in foster care and those who receive service in their own homes?

Previous Rating

During the 2002 CFSR, this item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that the agency was effective in efforts to reduce risk of harm to children in 68 percent of the applicable cases.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires, as part of the investigation of a protective services report, that workers complete a safety assessment to determine whether present and impending danger to the child(ren) exists. The safety assessment includes identifying safety threats to children and evaluating the caregiver's protective capacities. If it is determined that the child is not safe in the home a Safety Analysis and Safety Plan is developed that addresses services needed to keep the child safe. The safety plan identifies actions, tasks, and services aimed at keeping the child safe at home or in out-of-home placement.

OCS' contact policy (Item 19) requires that children are seen by OCS staff on a regular basis. For children placed at home and receiving CPS childcare services, the CPS childcare provider also monitors the child's safety by reporting any concerns about the child to the OCS worker.

Reference Items 41, 42, and 43 for additional information about OCS' policies and procedures for assessing foster and adoptive homes to promote safety for children in care.

Practice Improvements

In April of 2006, OCS implemented the safety assessment model that provides continuing assessment and evaluations of risk and safety.

In 2006, the Alaska State Legislature passed statutory changes for foster care licensing. Many of these improvements have strengthened OCS' ability to utilize the licensing standards to initially evaluate and monitor safety in licensed foster homes. Reference Items 41, 42, and 43 for additional information regarding these changes.

Data

In the 2002 CFSR final report Alaska's rated 98.09 percent on the absence of maltreatment in foster care. In 2008, Alaska's rate of absence of maltreatment in foster care is now 99.57 percent, which is better than the national median of 99.5 percent. This represents an overall improvement from the 2002 CFSR.

Strengths

According to the QA review team, children are generally safe in foster care. They receive quality care and abuse in foster care is rare. Further, they report that in the cases reviewed, children in foster care are also provided services in accordance with their needs. In some instances, Tribes have purchased beds, clothes and other items for children in foster care.

OCS and stakeholders recognized that Tribes provide local community supports to children in their own homes and those support services provide valuable assistance in maintaining children in their own homes. Many Tribes have prioritized services to families when there are safety concerns or when the family is involved with OCS. Additionally, tribal partner services, family support, time-limited family reunification and family visitation services are available in many areas in the state which assist in providing services to children and families in their own home.

Child-specific case plans are developed for all children in the family. These cases receive diligent monitoring to ensure the safety of the children who remain in their own home as well as those in out-of-home care.

Challenges

QA reviews illustrate the struggle that OCS has with effectively reducing risk of harm to children in their own home. Case reviews reveal that often families who are receiving in-home services are seen only once in several months. Additionally, the lack of consistent ongoing monitoring can weaken OCS' ability to ensure the safety of children in their own home.

Summary

Alaska is slightly above the national median of 99.5 percent in repeat maltreatment in foster care. Alaska has shown improvements in repeat maltreatment in foster care since the 2002 CFSR review. Alaska recognizes that implementation of the safety assessment model clearly impacts outcomes for risk of harm to children. As the safety assessment process is further refined and improved, its consistent approach will assist Alaska in improving the quality of care for children and reducing risk of maltreatment to all children who are served.

B. Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Item 5: Foster care re-entries. How effective is the agency in preventing multiple entries of children into foster care?

Previous Rating

Alaska exceeded the national goal for substantial conformity on this measure in the 2002 CFSR, with a re-entry rate of 4.6 percent. OCS continues to excel in preventing multiple entries of children in foster care. Currently, Alaska continues to perform better than 75 percent of states with a reentry rate of only 7.5 percent. Over 92 percent of all children discharged from care do not re-enter foster care within 12 months from discharge.

Policy Description

OCS policy regarding safety assessment, case planning, and case closure positively affects OCS' ability to prevent re-entries of children into foster care.

Practice Improvements

There has been a continued emphasis and careful review of decisions to move children and return them home. In addition, the Team Decision Making process, which began in the Anchorage region in 2006, further supports a comprehensive review of decisions to return children home. This process provides a way of reviewing the decision to remove a child from their home in a manner that would allow more discussion and input from the family, extended family, and community service providers and is designed to prevent multiple entries in foster care whenever possible.

Data

The March 24, 2008 Alaska Data Profile indicates that Alaska's re-entry rate was 7.5 percent for the period under review. Alaska consistently shows a re-entry rate well below 10 percent while the National average is 15 percent.

Strengths

OCS and stakeholders recognized efforts to prevent re-entries into foster care is a strength for OCS. It was noted that one reason OCS may be doing well in this area is that workers mitigate the safety threats for children and determine that needed changes have taken place before the child is returned home; thus, reducing the number of foster care re-entries. In addition, in some instances, limited access to services cause delays for rural families.

Challenges

Stakeholders noted the lack of preventative or in-home rehabilitative services to families, prior to removal, were a significant reason that children were coming into care; however, once children are in care, services and supports are provided to the child and family.

Stakeholders expressed concern that the strength noted in this area may be gained at the cost of "length of time in care". Additionally, there was consensus among stakeholders that when children and youth are first returned home, more supervision and post-placement services would be helpful. OCS does provide some post-placement services primarily during trial home visits.

Summary

OCS and stakeholders agree that preventing foster care re-entries continues to be a strength.

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement. How effective is the agency in providing placement stability to children in foster care (that is, minimizing placement changes in foster care)?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR identified stability of foster care placement as an Area Needing Improvement. This item scored 70.6 percent, which was significantly lower than the national average of 86.2 percent.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that the assessed needs of the child and the abilities of potential placement resources be considered when choosing a placement setting. Workers are required to provide information about the child to the prospective placement to assist the resource family to make an informed decision whether to accept a particular child. OCS caseworkers are required to utilize resource families who are relatives and /or ICWA placement preference homes, if the home is available to the child.

Practice Improvements

In 2005, the TDM process in the Anchorage region was implemented to identify potential resource families for the child, should placement outside of the home be necessary. Stakeholders felt this change in practice has been an improvement to OCS' ability to maintain placement stability for children in care.

The Support, Development, and Recruitment (SDR) workgroup in Anchorage, as a part of the Family-to-Family project, is focusing on areas of support, retention, and recruitment of families. This group is focusing on ways support existing resource families because the current resource families are the best source of recruiting new families.

Data

The quality assurance reviews indicated that the OCS is not consistent on a statewide basis in providing stability in foster care placements to children in care. TDMs provide a more comprehensive analysis of placement options which supports stability; however, TDM has had limited impact on the placement stability in Anchorage as TDM is in the beginning stages of implementation. According to the TDM coordinator, placement stability appears to be stronger when TDMs are conducted. TDMs are being utilized in approximately 60 percent of Anchorage cases.

Currently, the national standard for placement stability is 101.5 or higher. OCS had a state score of 73.1 for the period under review. The data profiles show improvement in this item; however, OCS continues to be below the national standard.

Strengths

Stakeholders have identified that the TDM process has been helpful in identifying relative placements or placement options that are familiar to the child when children needed to be removed from their homes. By identifying relative and familiar homes and by making more deliberative placement decisions, placement moves are reduced.

On a positive note, one youth stakeholder indicated that during her last TDM, she had been offered two different foster homes and had been allowed to choose the one she was most comfortable with. She was able to hear the rules of the home that she would be required to abide by prior to her placement and viewed the TDM process as a positive experience.

Challenges

The lack of available resource families for youth has been identified as a challenge; this is supported by data from the data profiles in which 14.7 percent of youth between ages 13 and 16 had four or more placements. Additionally, foster parents who are trained in therapeutic foster care for children with special needs such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, mental health needs, and behavioral or emotional needs, are also lacking in Alaska. In the rural areas of Alaska, therapeutic foster home supports are limited; thus, children in rural communities that require therapeutic care often are placed outside of their home communities in order to receive the necessary treatment services. Many times, this requires that the child move to a large urban setting, away from familial and cultural supports and connections.

The QA review team has observed that children and youth who have been in care for a significant period of time are often in fairly stable placements. Children in placement for a short time often experience instability and move several times in short periods of time. In addition, those children with high needs and challenges also move more frequently. These children typically need, but do not always get, extensive levels of support services.

Many resource families, particularly in rural Alaska (which experiences the highest costs of living in the state) have difficulty keeping children in their care without the proper monetary supports for the children. Indeed, word of mouth in the smaller, rural communities can at times, discourage rather than encourage foster care placement as supports and services are slow in reaching families.

As many placements are made on an emergency basis for children in care, often times, there is not enough time for consistent and thoughtful matching of the child's needs to the placement. Stakeholders that were either foster youth or foster care alumni indicated that they did not always feel comfortable in the homes selected. They occasionally felt the rules were too restrictive and that the rules were imposed too quickly. Better matching of children's needs to placement resources is an area in need of improvement.

Stakeholders indicated that from a statewide perspective, foster parents need more information on the child that is being placed in their care. This is especially true when informing the foster parent about the child's needs and important cultural connections. The more information that is provided to the foster parents at the initial placement, the more informed and prepared the foster family can be to support the child and birth family.

Summary

OCS and stakeholders agree this as an area needing improvement even though there are legitimate reasons for multiple placements. The age of foster children, the lack of therapeutic resource families to meet the needs of the child, the lack of consistent and available support resources for families, and the turnover in OCS caseworkers, were a few of the factors that impact placement stability and the number of moves that children experience in out-of-home care. Stakeholders cited the lack of foster homes in general and those willing to care for adolescents specifically as a significant problem. For youth with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders or significant mental health issues there are not enough therapeutic foster homes.

Item 7: Permanency goal for child. How effective is the agency in determining the appropriate permanency goals for children on a timely basis when they enter foster care?

Previous Rating

This item was identified as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2002 CFSR. In 61 percent of the cases reviewed, appropriate and timely goals were established.

Policy Description

Permanency planning goal options include: reunification, adoption, guardianship, emancipation, or another planned permanent living arrangement. A permanency goal is established early on after removal and is a part of the case plan. The initial goal is typically reunification unless specific circumstances exist that result in reunification not being possible or not in the child's best interest.

Concurrent planning may be initiated at any time in a case. When a concurrent plan has been established, OCS must simultaneously pursue the primary (reunification) goal and the concurrent goal and continue to provide reunification services to the parents unless the court determines that such services are no longer required.

Practice Improvements

The 2003 PIP included an action step to standardize practice for setting and changing permanency goals when concurrent planning occurs. OCS has improved the structure of administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences, with enhanced focus on permanency goals and concurrent planning.

The continuous quality assurance review system has been expanded and improved since the 2002 CFSR. The Regional Adoption Specialists are now part of the administrative and permanency planning reviews to ensure that goals are established in a timely manner and documented. This also allows for changes, or the establishment of a concurrent plan, to occur during the standard review process or sooner when appropriate.

Data

The data profile indicates that the establishment of permanency goals has increased from 86.8 percent to 90.3 percent, most recently. This increase is substantial and reflects the efforts of OCS' focus on the establishment of permanency goals for children in care. Reference the data profile for additional information.

The quality assurance reviews throughout the state also show an improvement in establishment of permanency goals. However, the QA team observes the establishment and subsequent follow through of permanency goals continue to pose challenges for OCS. Case reviews reveal that follow through is the key missing element in achieving permanency goals. Many permanency outcomes take too long and often caseworkers do not understand the complexities of maintaining a consistent plan with a family and monitoring it to completion.

Strengths

Many stakeholders felt this item has improved since the 2002 CFSR. Stakeholders thought that the case plans being developed now are more realistic for children and families and updated in a timely manner to better facilitate goal achievement. Additionally, the incorporation of Regional Adoptions Specialists in administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences has increased the timeliness of goal establishment for children in out-of-home care.

Challenges

Stakeholders expressed concern that OCS caseworkers did not understand the purpose or role of concurrent plans. Additionally, stakeholders indicated that concurrent plans were not being developed as early as they could be in some cases and felt that additional OCS staff training is needed in the development, use, and purpose of concurrent planning. Refer to Item 28 for further discussion of concurrent plans.

Stakeholders also discussed the need to train caseworkers to work with parents and children to develop strong case plans, with measurable goals and outcomes, as it is difficult for families and team members to determine what the goal should be.

Staff turnover was again noted to be an obstacle for permanency planning as new workers often wanted to give parents "another chance" in spite of the fact that the parents had been given appropriate resources to remedy issues that lead to their children being in placement in the past. Inherent in this process is that new workers often have little time to read the history of the child's file before beginning work on the case.

Some youth and alumni reported that they did not have much input into permanency planning goals, while some agreed that the correct decision had been made.

Summary

Generally, OCS has improved in establishing permanency goals for children and youth in care for the federal fiscal year 2006; however achievement has declined since 2007. Concerns continue regarding use of concurrent planning and effective case plan development by OCS caseworkers. Case plans need to be

well-defined with measurable goals and outcomes that children, youth and families can attain. Similarly, the impact of high staff turnover and the multiple caseworker changes have impacted the effective and coordinated case planning efforts, which impact upon the timeliness of case planning goals and changes. Refer to Item 28 for further information regarding timeliness of filing termination of parental rights petitions.

Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives. How effective is the agency in helping children in foster care return safely to their families when appropriate?

Previous Rating

This item was identified as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2002 CFSR because in 31 percent of the cases reviewed diligent efforts were made to achieve the goals of reunification or guardianship in a timely manner. In addition, the state data profile from the 2002 CFSR indicated that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (58.3 percent), did not meet the 2002 national standard of 76.2 percent.

Policy Description

OCS is required to make timely, reasonable efforts to families and their children in custody so that parents have the opportunity to remedy parental conduct or conditions in the home that placed the child at risk of harm and/or an unsafe situation. For Alaska Native children, active efforts must be made for remedial services and rehabilitative programs designed to prevent the break up of the family.

Use of the safety assessment, the continuing safety plan, as well as the case plan identify which services, activities, and tasks are needed to make it safe for the child to return home.

Practice Improvements

The 2003 PIP included an action step to strengthen administrative reviews to examine permanency goals and concurrent plans. Concurrent planning training is included in the initial TONE training for all front-line workers. Concurrent plans are considered for every case during the three-month Family and Child Early Conference.

Through the TDM process in Anchorage region, relative placements are being identified early in the placement process, so that children are placed with relative care providers whenever possible. The TDM process is also being utilized to determine when reunification is appropriate and to develop post-placement services.

Data

The data profile indicates that the percentage of the children in care who had a permanency goal of reunification has increased from 76.3 percent to the most recent data of 79.3 percent. However, Permanency Composite 1: C1-1 which measures the number of children reunified within 12 months indicates that the percentage of timely reunification as decreased from 68.1 percent to 54.2 percent based on the most current data. The National Median is 69.9 percent and Alaska is below the national median.

OCS exceeds the national standard for achieving permanency prior to the 18th birthday for children in care for 24 months or more. The national median is 25 percent and Alaska's most recent data indicates that 26.4 percent of Alaska's children/youth in care exit to permanency prior to their 18th birthday.

The data profile further indicates that the median length of stay for children in foster care has increased from 6.1 months to 10.2 months according to the most recent data demonstrating that children are staying care on an average of 4.1 months longer. Please see the data profile in this report for further information.

Strengths

A strength for OCS is that there is a primary focus on reunification with parents or other family members as a permanency goal even though numbers have decreased over the past year. A stakeholder survey report from 2006 confirms the agency's commitment to reunification. When parents were asked what the permanent plan was for their child, 69 percent of the parents interviewed indicated that the plan was reunification. Additionally, the timely achievement of reunification with family members has been declining over the past three reporting periods.

In rural areas especially, OCS uses relative placements whenever possible and encourages strong relative searches and licensing and/or approval of family members as placement resources. In all parts of the state, permanency with relatives is always pursued if reunification is ruled out. Guardianships are pursued only when more permanent placement options have been eliminated.

Challenges

Alaska has placed emphasis in the past few years on the early establishment of permanency goals. The national data indicates and the QA review team agrees that there are challenges in moving cases to permanency. The QA review team observes that some treatment processes simply take longer than expected. Drug and alcohol treatment was noted as taking longer due to wait lists and general availability of the service especially for in-patient treatment. Once in a program, recovery can take much longer than 15 months and termination of parental rights must be considered often when parents, who are eager to regain custody of their children, begin showing improvement. Additionally, the achievement of permanency goals, such as timely reunification, is thwarted by the lack of consistent practice due to high staff turnover.

The timely establishment of permanency goals such as reunification, guardianship and permanent placement impacts the increased median length of stay with in care. As previously stated, guardianship is cautiously considered in Alaska. Additionally, guardianships currently represent less than 1 percent of children in care; this is a decrease over the last two years. This could be due in part that guardianships are only considered once adoptions are ruled out.

Finally, there is a tendency to utilize the first relative that becomes available for a child in need of placement. In some cases, children move from one relative to another and stability and permanence in relative placement eludes them. An early diligent relative search and assessment to find the best possible relative placement early in the case is preferable. When this is done, there is more likelihood of successful permanent relative placement when it becomes the appropriate alternative to reunification.

Summary

The data profiles reflect that OCS remains committed to establishing reunification of children with parents or family members as a primary permanency goal for children. However, despite OCS' commitment to reunification, OCS has not been timely in achieving reunification.

Item 9: Adoption. How effective is the agency in achieving timely adoption when that is appropriate for a child?

Previous Rating

This item was identified as an Area in Need of Improvement in the 2002 CFSR. The final report indicated that of all of the children who exited care to a finalized adoption, 30 percent exited in less than 24 months. The national standard in 2002 was 32 percent or more.

Policy Description

Alaska statutes and OCS policy outlines processes for improving timeliness to adoption by addressing timeframes for terminations of parental rights, as well as outlining processes for expedited adoptions. Statutes and policy requires that when a child has been placed out-of-home for 15 out of the last 22

months, a petition for termination of parental rights must be filed unless there are compelling reasons for not filing a petition. Additionally, Alaska's statutes and policy address the consent to adoption by parent, which provides expedited achievement of timely adoptions particularly in cases of Alaska Native children. This process offers parents the opportunity to consent to adoption without a relinquishment or TPR.

Practice Improvements

Since the 2002 CFSR, OCS has developed the practice that allows for adoptions to proceed without a termination of parental rights hearing as described in the policy description above. While slow to start in all of the OCS service regions, this practice is becoming a more common way to achieve permanency for children.

Recently, OCS created the Alaska Adoption Exchange and is experiencing early success in finding homes for children in Alaska. Children are simultaneously presented in the Alaska Adoption Exchange as well as the Northwest Adoption Exchange and AdoptUSkids. Additionally, since the implementation of ORCA, Regional Adoption Specialists are more accurately tracking permanency planning goals for adoption. This assists in better tracking of cases that have exceeded ASFA requirements bringing attention to these cases.

Data

The national standard for timeliness of adoptions is 106.4 or higher. Alaska has demonstrated a steady increase in performance in this composite from 76.5 to most currently, 94.1. However, Alaska continues to remain below the national standard for timeliness of adoptions. The median length of time for children being adopted (from date of initial placement in out-of-home care) in Alaska increased from 29.6 months to most recently 31.5 months. Alaska is currently taking longer than the national percentile of 27.3 months or less, to achieve adoption for children for whom adoption is the permanent plan.

Strengths

OCS has made steady improvement in timeliness to adoptions as reflected in the data profiles. Changes in OCS practice that allow for adoptions to be finalized without a lengthy termination of parental rights proceeding, has, in part, assisted with improved outcomes. In some selected offices additional temporary staff have been utilized to assist in finalizing nearly completed adoption cases. The QA team reports that such efforts reflect positively in QA reviews.

Challenges

Stakeholders expressed concern over the delays that occur after homestudies are requested. This was particularly true when requests were made to another state through the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children (ICPC) process.

There is agreement between OCS and stakeholders that delays in adoption could relate to staff training and that newly assigned caseworkers may resist moving toward termination of parental rights. Instead, new caseworkers sometimes want to give parents additional chances to reunify with their child. This is especially problematic when cases move from one worker to another due to staff turnover. Newly assigned caseworkers can be hesitant to move forward with terminations on unfamiliar cases. Lag times often occur.

The lack of available mental health and substance abuse services for OCS families was seen as an obstacle for timely termination of parental rights. The QA review team observed that there are a number of factors that may be present that impacts the timeliness of adoptions. Concurrent planning is not often considered early in a case even when there is little hope of successful reunification. Some courts will not accept concurrent plans until 15 months of placement has passed even in poor prognosis cases. Finally, a limited number of cases get lost in the system when cases are transferred from one caseworker to another. These cases may appear stable to the new caseworker and therefore do not get the attention needed to finalize an adoption.

Summary

While OCS is making steady improvement in the meeting the standards for timeliness for adoption, there continue to be areas in which delays are hampering timeliness for children in custody. Stakeholders identified the delays in the homestudy process, both for ICPC and adoption, as a significant concern. Additionally, concerns for staff training about when to terminate was also expressed. Finally, stakeholders identified the lack of available mental health and substance abuse programs for birth families as a significant problem in the delays for timely adoptions.

Item 10: Other planned permanent living arrangement. How effective is the agency in establishing planned permanent living arrangements for children in foster care, who do not have the goal of reunification, adoption, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives, and providing services consistent with the goal?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR, this item was found to be an Area Needing Improvement. There were only two cases included in the review; one was rated as a strength.

Policy Description

OCS policy includes the permanency goals options of reunification, adoption, guardianship, emancipation, and other planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). An Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) is to be completed annually for all children 14 or older who are placed in out-of-home care. The case plan must include an objective that addresses the life skills necessary for self-sufficiency as an adult. Regardless of the child's permanency planning goal, necessary life skills are addressed in the transition plan based on the results of the ACLSA.

An exit plan must be developed for every child in custody by her/his 16th birthday. The plan focuses on how the youth will successfully transition into adulthood and self-sufficiency, and it identifies goals and programs, services, knowledge, skills, and supports that will help prepare the youth for adulthood.

Practice Improvements

Since the 2002 CFSR, the OCS has established Regional Independent Living Specialists (RILS) in each of the four OCS regions. The RILS work with foster youth and youth no longer in custody on independent living transitional services. The RILS participate in reviews to ensure that the identified needs are addressed prior to releasing custody and that custody be maintained if those needs have not been addressed.

The OCS has awarded an Independent Living grant to Covenant House Alaska to provide life skills training to youth in custody and assistance to alumni of the foster care system who are in need of assistance in finding a job or identifying needed community resources. This grant is currently only available in the Anchorage service region. However, Anchorage does serve as a hub for youth who relocate there from other regions of the state. Often, youth come to Covenant House where a broad base of services is available.

Data

Data from the OCS Continuous Quality Improvement Unit indicates that the use of an APPLA permanency goal is rare in the case samples drawn for review.

There are, however, youth that reach their 18th birthday and are released from custody after having been in foster care for 3 years or longer. The data profile indicates that the national median for this group of youth is 47.8 percent, while Alaska performs better with only 36 to 41 percent of youth "aging out of foster care" at age 18 after having been in foster care for 3 years or more. See data profile.

Strengths

The addition of the RILS has been seen as a positive improvement for youth in care. Through the work and advocacy of the RILS, more youth are exiting the OCS with transitional and exit plans for adulthood.

The establishment of a grant service (Covenant House) in the Anchorage service region has been seen as a positive service in the transitional and exit planning for youth. The grantee attended training in Texas to improve the provision of life skills training in the Anchorage region. In the other OCS service regions, the life skills training is provided by the RILS.

OCS has, as a matter of policy, listed adoption as the most preferred permanency goal for children and youth, when reunification is not possible. For this reason, APPLA is not the preferred permanency goal for OCS.

Challenges

Foster youth that leave state custody without an identified support system many have a difficult time. Although the Chafee Foster Care Independent Living Act has provided funding to assist these youth, the funding is limited and cannot provide all of the needed assistance to youth whose needs include: housing, employment, transportation, education, and medical/mental health services.

Stakeholders support OCS' view that there is a need for an increase of transitional living programs in the state. Many foster youth and alumni have developmental needs that will require ongoing, specialized services for an extended period of time. In some cases, foster youth and alumni may need lifelong services and supports. There is a significant need for assisted living programs that can offer these ongoing specialized services to foster youth and alumni.

Summary

Data profiles indicate that this item is a strength for OCS. The establishment of RILS in each of the OCS service regions has been a positive improvement to practice for foster youth and alumni as they transition to adulthood. However, stakeholders indicated that the limited availability of independent living services, transitional living programs and specialized ongoing, perhaps lifelong services are significantly lacking statewide.

Policy needs to clearly identify when a child is emancipating or has another planned living arrangement. Generally, foster youth in care do not emancipate from the OCS, as the legal requirements for emancipation are difficult to attain. Thus, the vast majority of foster youth who leave OCS do so through a permanency goal of APPLA. Therefore, parameters regarding how APPLA is determined, as opposed to other permanency plans, should be further clarified.

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement. How effective is the agency in placing foster children close to their birth parents or their own communities or counties?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rates this area as a Strength, because in "100 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives or placement in another community was justified based on the child's needs".

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that when it is necessary to place a child out of home efforts be made to place the child:

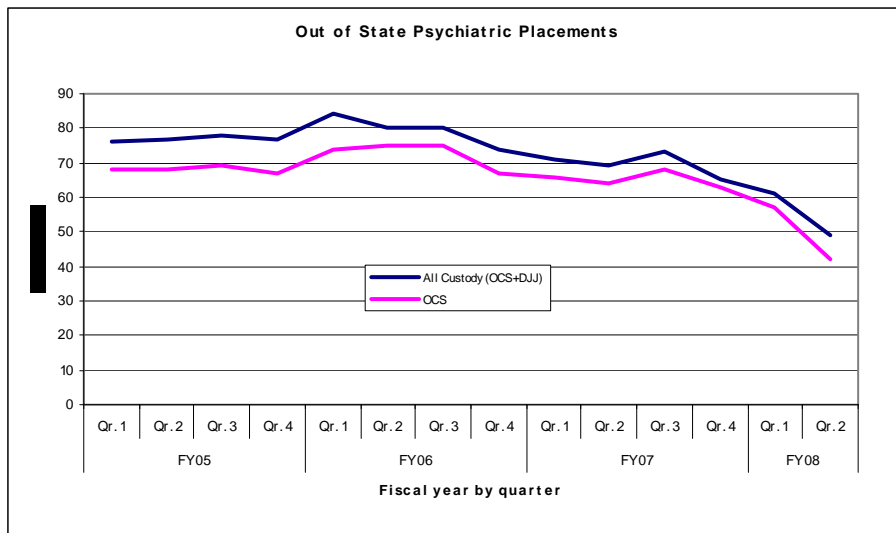
- 1) With relatives or family friends (for Native children, the ICWA placement preferences apply),
- 2) Together with siblings (unless it is not in the best interest of the children,

- 3) In close proximity to the home of the parents or Indian custodian,
- 4) In the least restrictive setting that meets the child's needs, and
- 5) In a placement that allows the child to remain in the same school.

Practice Improvements

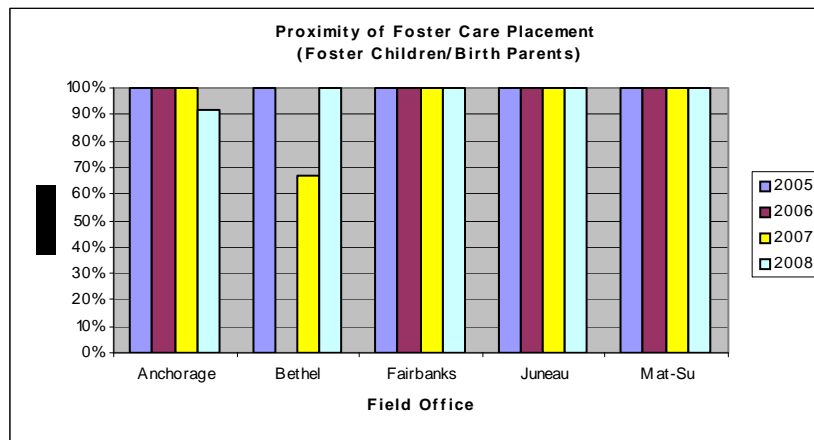
In 2005, the Alaska State Legislature passed the Family Rights Act that outlines in statute the legal requirements for relative placements. This law outlines that adult family members are considered the first placement choice for children. While this had been a standing practice with the OCS prior to the passage, the law codified this practice for the courts.

In addition, since 2005, the Bring the Kids Home (BTKH) initiative has been utilized to better screen children before they are placed out of state as well as to evaluate those children that are already out of state, to determine if a plan can be developed to provide the resources these children need within their home communities. Emphasis is placed on retaining or returning these children to their own home and community whenever possible. Over the past four years there has been a steady decline in the number of Alaska's children placed in out-of-state facilities.



Data

QA reviews indicate that OCS is very effective in placing foster children close to their birth parents or their own communities. In the vast majority of QA case reviews most field offices are consistently performing well in this area.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

A 2006 OCS Stakeholder Survey of 140 parents indicated that 70 percent of the parents surveyed indicated that their children were placed within their home community. 19 percent indicated that their children were placed in another region within the State of Alaska, while only 11 percent indicated that their children were placed out-of-state.

Strengths

Stakeholders indicated that this area remains a strength. OCS strives to place children within proximity to their parents in order to better facilitate contacts between the child and the parent. Use of relative care placements enhances the efforts of keeping children within close proximity to their parents and familial connections.

Stakeholders also indicated that when the child's tribe and OCS work collaboratively together on the child's placement and case planning needs, that the success of the child's reunification is more successful and permanent. In a 2007 survey of 130 Tribal organizations, 69 percent of the respondents indicated that when there is collaboration between Tribal workers and the Office of Children's services on the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (inclusive of placement preference guidelines) that the quality of services for Alaska Native children is strengthened.

Challenges

Stakeholders recognized that in some instances, keeping a child in their home can be difficult if the community cannot provide for the child's safety. For these children, efforts are made to place the child within a village or community where the child's connections to family and/or culture can be maintained. Often, a relative can be found in a neighboring community or village that can assist with the maintenance of cultural and familial ties for the child. In larger urban communities, efforts to keep the child in the community are supported, but the child may not be able to be placed with relatives as the relatives often reside outside the urban area. In these cases, keeping the child close to the birth parent, but in non-relative placement, provides access to ongoing visitations and treatment services and is sometimes the best way to promote reunification.

The involvement of the child's tribe in placement of a child in close proximity to the parents was seen as crucial to stakeholders. The child's tribe is best able to identify placement options for children within the home community. In some instances, tribal participants indicated that when emergency placement is required, workers may be too quick to remove a child from their home community and place with a relative in another community. At times, this occurs when relative placement efforts in the home community have not been exhausted; making efforts to maintain contacts between child and parent as well as support reunification efforts more difficult.

Summary

This item continues to be a strength for OCS. Whenever possible, OCS is able to place children in care within their home communities and within proximity to parents. OCS actively involves tribal partners in the identification of relative or tribal homes for a child in care. Difficulties arise when either the child or the parent must be placed outside of the community for treatment services, due to the lack of services in their home communities.

Item 12: Placement with siblings. How effective is the agency in keeping siblings together in foster care?

Previous Rating

This item was rated as a Strength in the 2002 CFSR final report. In 90 percent of the cases reviewed, siblings were either placed together or the separation of siblings was deemed necessary to meet the needs of the children.

Policy Description

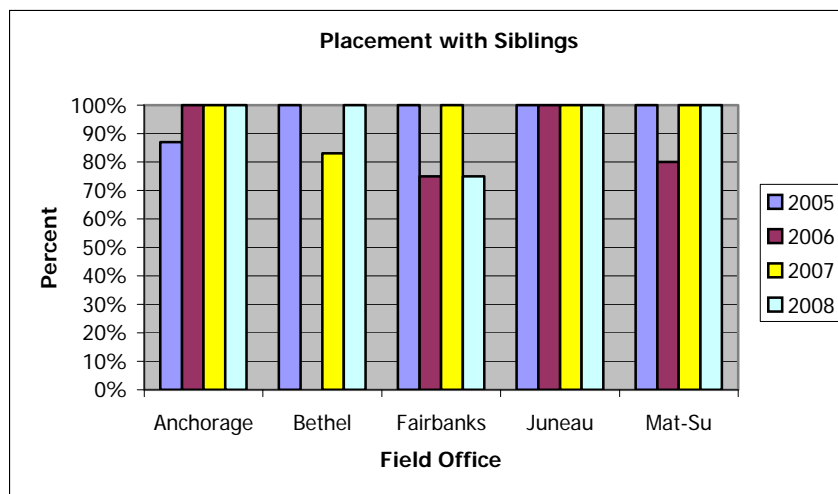
OCS policy requires that every effort be made to place sibling groups together, provided it is in the best interests of the children. Placing or keeping siblings together is reviewed at administrative reviews and at the permanency planning conference.

Practice Improvements

The TDM process is utilized in the Anchorage service region to identify placement options where siblings can be placed together. In the other service regions, there is active collaboration between the OCS and the child's tribe to identify available relative and/or tribal placements for sibling groups.

Data

Quality assurance review data indicates that OCS is placing siblings together in the majority of cases. The following chart shows that OCS is successful in placing siblings together in the majority of the cases reviewed.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

Additionally, in the 2007 OCS survey of 130 tribal groups, 75 percent of the tribal respondents groups indicated that they strongly agree or agreed that siblings are placed together when possible.

Strengths

Stakeholders identified that one of the strengths of the placement process in Alaska is that siblings are placed together in the majority of cases. OCS works with Tribes and communities to identify relatives and locate families that can be placement resources for family groups. Tribal members indicated that it is customary to keep children together even in situations of family disruption that do not involve OCS.

Stakeholders stated they believe that when the Tribes and OCS work together to identify placements for siblings together, the children are more likely to reunify more quickly with their parents. However, there are no data that currently measures the effect of this collaboration.

Challenges

Some of the challenges that are faced in the placement process have to do with the placement of large sibling groups or in the placement of half-siblings with non-related relatives. For instance, in some of the rural settings, finding one placement for large sibling groups can be difficult. In these instances, the children's tribe and OCS works together to identify multiple placements within the community. Thus, the placement may be within a village but with several different families.

One concern observed by the QA review team is that when there are siblings that are not placed together, the issue is often that one or more of the children have behavior challenges. In this instance, the challenging child is placed separately from the siblings absent an adequate effort to provide services to that child in the same home as the siblings.

Summary

Placing siblings together is seen as a strength for OCS. Quality assurance reviews support that OCS is consistently placing sibling groups together. While stakeholders were able to identify the challenges that OCS faces in placing siblings together, stakeholders agreed that this was an area of strength for OCS.

Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care. How effective is the agency in planning and facilitating visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings placed separately in foster care?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report identifies this item as an Area in Need of Improvement, because in only 73 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that OCS had made diligent efforts to promote visitation with parents and siblings in foster care. Factors that contributed to non-conformity included:

- 1) visitations with siblings were not of sufficient frequency to meet the child's needs;
- 2) the agency had not made sufficient efforts to locate the father to promote visitation;
- 3) the quality of the visitation with parents was not sufficient to promote the child's goal of reunification;
- 4) visitation was limited to one hour of supervised visitation per week;
- 5) there was a lack of "family friendly" facilities; or
- 6) when sibling are separated, there is little visitation.

Policy Description

OCS policy states that regularly scheduled visitation between parents and siblings should be encouraged. Policy mandates that OCS consider the nature and quality of the relationship that existed between the child and the family member before the child was removed from the home in developing visitation plans. If visitation does not place the foster family at undue risk of harm, the foster parents are asked to provide regular opportunities for the parents to visit their child.

OCS may deny visitation to the parents, guardian, or family members if there is clear and convincing evidence that visits are not in the child's best interests. If visitation is denied, the worker will inform the parent, adult family member, Indian custodian, or guardian who is denied visitation of the reason for the denial and that they have a right to request a review hearing in court.

Practice Improvements

The 2003 PIP included an action step to increase the capacity for visitation through clarification and streamlining of visitation policy and procedure. New policies were issued in October 2005 which clarified: 1) the foster parents' responsibility for providing regular opportunities for the parents to visit their child; and 2) process for denial of visitation by parents, Indian custodian, guardian, or adult family member and the worker's responsibility to inform them about the reason for the denial and their right to a review hearing.

As a part of the Family-to-Family Initiative in the Anchorage region, "Icebreakers" are utilized so that parents and foster parents can meet to discuss the needs of the child in foster care. This is an opportunity for the parent and foster parent to establish communication from the onset of the placement and to make sure that the visitation schedule is outlined for the child's placement. Currently, OCS has one grant for visitation services with the Cook Inlet Tribal Council in Anchorage. This allows the Cook Inlet Tribal Council to assist families with supervised visitation.

Cook Inlet Tribal Council Visitation Program

State Fiscal Year	Families Served	Children Served
2006	33	65
2007	34	62

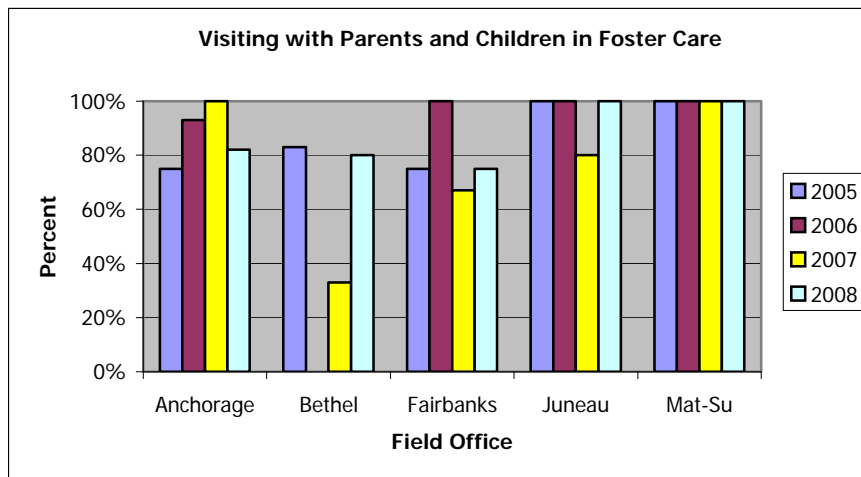
Source: State of Alaska, OCS Annual Grant Reports

Data

In the 2006 Stakeholder Survey of 140 parents, visitation with parents was addressed. 62 parents reported that they had supervised visitations, 45 parents reported that they have unsupervised visitations, 23 parents reported that they had open visitation with their children, while only 10 parents stated that no visitation was allowed. Additionally, these respondents were asked to estimate the number of hours they visited with their child during a week. 36 parents reported that they visited for 1-2 hours each week; 27 reported that they visited for 3-5 hours each week, 59 reported that they had open visits while 18 reported no visits. The results of this survey indicate that OCS is providing a wide range of visitation based on the individual needs of the parents and their children involved.

When asked if they were satisfied with the visitation schedule, 50 parents out of the 140 interviewed indicated that they were satisfied with the visitation schedule while, 82 parents indicated that they were not satisfied with the visitation schedule.

The quality assurance reviews indicate that compliance with visitations between parents and siblings varies throughout the state, although overall this is a strong area for OCS. The QA team noted that workers' efforts to engage fathers in visitation was an area that has significantly improved over the past few years. The following chart outlines OCS' compliance with this requirement; in 2008, the Juneau and the Mat-Su offices were in 100 percent compliance.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

Strengths

Throughout the state, Tribal ICWA workers have provided supervised visitations for parents and foster children. The Tribes will arrange for staff to work a flex schedule, so that the visitations can occur at times that are convenient for the parents and children. In smaller communities, visitations are scheduled around community or school-wide events, so that the parent and child can visit as a part of a cultural or school activity in the community.

Visitation is usually scheduled regularly and plans are made between the caseworker, the parent, and the foster parents so that everyone knows which days to expect the visitation. Caseworkers make every effort to have the visits occur as often as possible. Involvement of foster parents, whenever possible is critical to successful visitation plans. Foster parents who are aware of a child's extended family in a community are

encouraged to support visitations between the child and the extended family as well. Relative visits can be utilized as a bridge to contacts with the birth parent as well.

Challenges

Stakeholders recognize the need for visitation to be in a family-like setting whenever possible. Visitations are encouraged to include an opportunity for parents to prepare meals or engage in activities that are familiar. OCS recognizes that visitation rooms are generally not conducive for these visits. In Anchorage, there is a visitation grant with a local Tribal organization that provides a family setting in the Anchorage region. However, visitation grants are not available in any other OCS region at this time.

An additional challenge is coordinating visitations between parents and siblings when parents or the children reside in different communities. OCS supports transportation costs to facilitate visitation in these situations; however, opportunities for frequent visitation is lessened when parents and children live in different communities.

Summary

Despite the challenges, the QA team reports that good visitation plans are being developed all over Alaska. This is a strength area from the QA review team's perspective and they report that they seldom see cases in which there is a failure to develop quality visitations plans with families. While the visitation center in Anchorage provides an optimum environment for visits, other offices in the state do very well in "making do" with available facilities and generally maximize the utilization of tribal ICWA workers, foster parents and other resources to make sure visitation occurs frequently.

Item 14: Preserving connections. How effective is the agency in preserving important connections for children in foster care, such as connections to neighborhood, community, faith, family, Tribe, school, and friends?

Previous Rating

This item was rated as an Area in Need of Improvement in the 2002 CFSR. In 74 percent of the foster care cases reviewed in 2002, the OCS made diligent efforts to preserve a child's connections to family, community, heritage, faith, and friends while the children are in foster care. This was seen as a critical issue in the 2002 CFSR final report as 70 percent of the cases reviewed were children who were Alaska Native.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that when it is necessary to place a child out of home efforts be made to place the child in close proximity to family, relatives, and tribal connections when applicable, close to the child's school and within the child's community whenever possible.

Practice Improvements

In Alaska, tribal connections for children of Alaska Native heritage in placement must be maintained and nurtured. Statewide 62 percent of the children in out-of-home placement are of Alaska Native heritage; for these children, maintenance of tribal connections are critical. The Tribal-State Collaboration Group has been meeting for many years to address the issues of disproportionality of Alaska Native children in the OCS out-of-home-care system. In February 2006, the Tribal-State Collaboration Group finalized a disproportionality plan to address the systemic needs to improve the outcomes for children in out-of-home care of Alaska Native heritage. This plan outlines the following goals as a part of this plan:

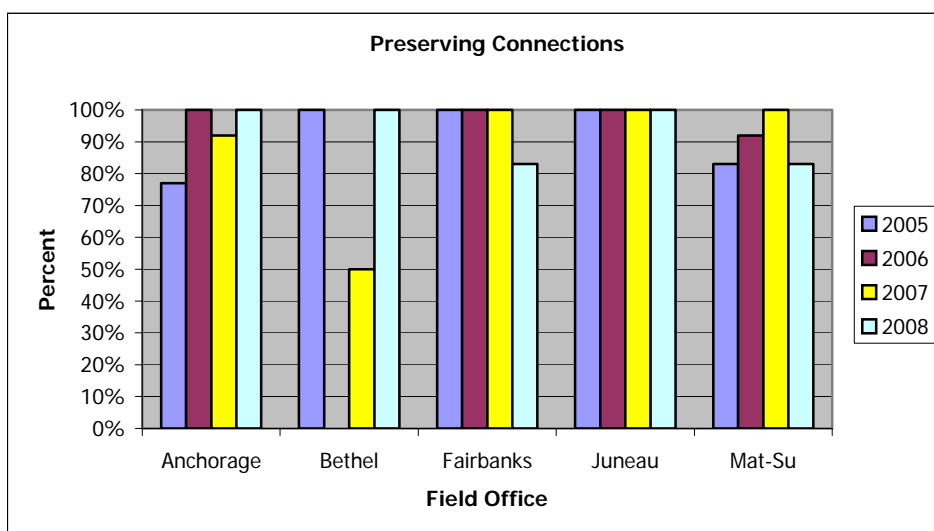
- 1) Cross-Cultural Communication and Competency;
- 2) Wellness;
- 3) Families and Communities are Primary Resources;
- 4) Coordination of Services and Alleviation of Barriers; and
- 5) Data.

The Tribal-State Collaboration Group meets three times a year to discuss the progress towards goal achievement of the Disproportionality Plan. Additionally, State-Tribal co-chairs meet twice a month telephonically to discuss progress on the goals and resolve issues that may arise.

In 2007, OCS and the DHSS Office of Faith-Based Initiatives began a workgroup called FLAME (Faith-led Alliance to Maintain and Empower). FLAME is a workgroup of faith-based leaders in the Anchorage area whom have met over the past year, to enhance support services and recruitment strategies and approaches for resource families in the Anchorage area. This has been the first major effort in Alaska to engage the faith-based community to support children in out-of-home care.

Data

The quality assurance case reviews indicate that OCS has been improving preserving connections across the state. Some communities have done better than others with Anchorage and Juneau performing well consistently and Bethel improving. The QA review team looks for a wide array of connections including tribal connections for Native children. Additionally, they look for connections being maintained in school, church, and other community areas. The QA review team hold offices to a very high standard and report that Alaska consistently performs quite well statewide.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

The 2006 Consumer Survey results outlined in Item 13, also indicate the level of continued connections for children in care. Of 140 parents surveyed in a 2006 Consumer Survey report, 45 percent of the parents reported that their children were able to remain in the same school while in foster care. 60 percent of the parents surveyed indicated that their children were able to maintain community activities while in out-of-home care. 65 percent of the parents reported that their children's cultural activities had been supported and maintained while in out-of-home placement.

Strengths

The case review data shows that OCS has made improvements in preserving cultural connections for children in out-of-home care. Additionally, the development of the disproportionality plan with the State-Tribal Collaboration group has put the cultural issues for children in care in the forefront of OCS policy, procedures and practice. Stakeholders acknowledged that there is a growing awareness with OCS staff of the importance of continued cultural connections for children in out-of-home care. The QA team reports that both tribal and a wide array of other connections are consistently maintained by OCS whenever possible.

Challenges

Stakeholders indicated that OCS understands the need for maintaining community connections but gaps exist. Some staff lack cultural understanding specifically in the tribal arena. Non-traditional tribal supports, available in some rural areas, are not always recognized nor fully utilized. There is sometimes hesitancy on the part of OCS to place children in rural settings with the belief that children need therapy and/or counseling that is not available in rural settings. Stakeholders felt that non-traditional supports are not recognized as a substitute for traditional counseling and/or therapy. Additionally, cultural diversity within Alaska's Native community (with 229 federally recognized Tribes) creates cultural differences between tribal groups themselves.

Other challenges also exist when placement resources are simply not available near a child's school or social circle. Some foster parents are not aware of the importance of maintaining a child's connections to her/his culture and/or community.

Summary

The QA data shows that OCS has made improvements since the 2002 CFSR in preserving cultural connections for children in out-of-home care. OCS is working actively through the Tribal-State Collaboration Group to enhance practice and educate staff about the importance of preserving cultural connections for Native children. In addition, OCS has been actively involved in the FLAME, faith-based initiative in Anchorage to enhance faith-based supports to children in out-of-home care. Finally, as evidenced by the QA review team, other key connections, such as school and community activities, are being recognized as important for children in out-of-home care by OCS staff.

Item 15: Relative placement. How effective is the agency in identifying relatives who could care for children entering foster care, and using them as placement resources when appropriate?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report identified this item as an Area Needing Improvement. 70 percent of the cases demonstrated diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationship for children in foster care by adequately searching for relatives who could care for children entering foster care. The 2003 PIP outlined the lack of sufficient search for paternal relatives; a limited exploration of potential relative placements, not going beyond immediate relatives; inconsistent interpretation of role and responsibilities among Tribes regarding relative search as factors contributing to non-conformity.

Policy Description

Alaska statutes and OCS policy requires that "adult family members" be given first consideration as placement resources for all children who are taken into custody. For Alaska Native children, the ICWA placement preferences apply. "Placement preference" means that there is an order to searching for relatives and when close relatives cannot be located for an Alaska Native child, others who can most likely maintain cultural connections are to be pursued. This includes, but is not limited to, placement with family friends or distant relatives or even those in other tribal communities if available.

Practice Improvements

Prior to the July 2005 statute amendment, state law prohibited placement of children in a foster home or in the care of an agency or institution providing care for children if a relative by blood or marriage requested placement of the child in the relative's home, unless OCS determined that placement of the child with the relative would result in physical or mental injury. OCS' policy has always been that placement with relatives is preferred. The state statutory requirement to place children with an "adult family member" whose definition expanded the available placement options to kin relationships. This statute amendment was effective July 1, 2005 and policy reflecting this requirement was issued.

Since 2002, OCS has implemented the practice of immediate paternity testing for all children who enter out-of-home care. While there is no data to show that the improved processes for paternity testing have improved the relative search outcomes, the quality assurance case review data does report that OCS has made improvements in efforts to identify relatives, particularly paternal relatives, for children in care.

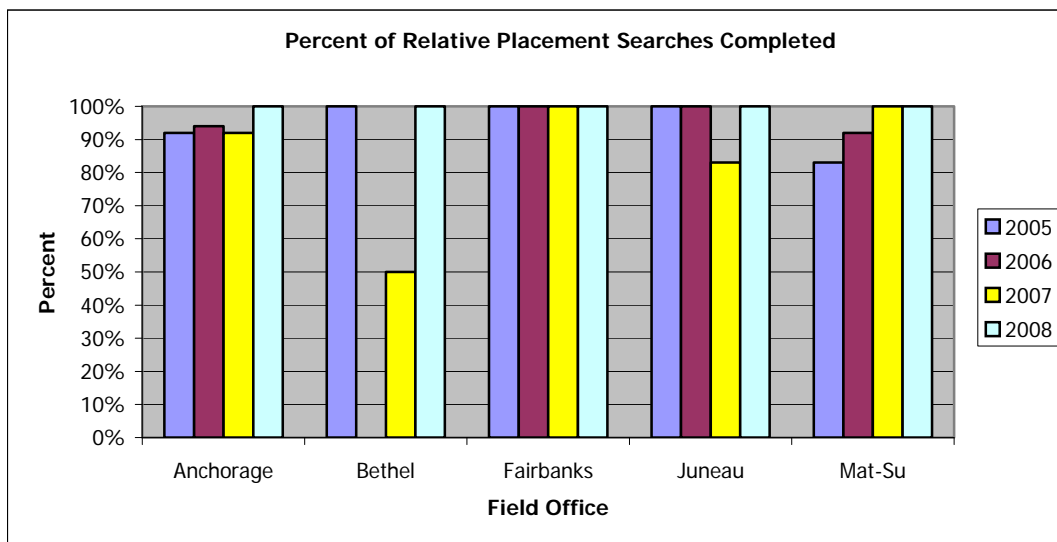
Data

The data profile reflects a steady increase in the number of children in out-of-home placement who are placed with relatives. The report indicates that 29.4 percent of all children in out-of-home care are placed with relative caregivers, which is consistent with national averages. However, that number goes up to 42 percent when only those children in foster care are compared with those children placed with relatives.

A 2007 survey of 130 Tribes indicated that 63 percent of respondents stated that they strongly agree or agree that the OCS makes efforts to place children in an ICWA preference placement setting with relative or Tribal care providers. Additionally, the 2007 Tribal survey report indicated that 75 percent of the respondents either strongly agree or agree that the OCS involves the Tribes in relative searches for children in care.

Quality Assurance case reviews demonstrate that the OCS is generally making efforts to search and identify relatives in the majority of cases that were reviewed. Additionally, for the last quality assurance review period for each region, 100 percent of the cases that were reviewed showed that concerted efforts were made to place the child with relatives when appropriate. Again, the increased emphasis on paternal searches is clearly evident in the QA reviews.

The following chart documents this progress on this item. It indicates that all major areas of the state are showing improvement in the area of searching for relatives as placement resources. In the most recent review in early 2008, 100 percent of the cases reviewed in all sites indicated that the search for relative placements was adequate. Note: This does not mean that children were placed with relatives 100 percent of the time.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents September 2007 through May 2008.

Strengths

Since Team Decision Making has been utilized for placement decisions in the Anchorage region, the Tribe's input on the identification of relative care or cultural placements are identified and explored. Tribes who have participated in TDMs have indicated placement decisions through TDMs are more positive and culturally appropriate for the child in the early identification of a relative placement, and seem to have a higher likelihood of success for the reunification efforts.

OCS staff are required to conduct relative searches in all cases. Often, Tribal Title IV-E Partners assist in identifying relative placements. OCS staff, as part of a stakeholder group, indicate that when thorough relative searches are conducted, the success of the case in both relative placement and timely permanency (either through reunification or an alternative permanency option) is greatly improved, although hard data is not available to support this observation.

Challenges

Stakeholders identified a challenge with defining “who is a relative?” Within the Department of Health and Social Services “relative” is defined differently for individual programs. Specific to children in foster care, a relative for TANF benefits must be a relative within the fifth level of consanguinity in order to qualify for benefits. Tribes, however, define families based on generations of Tribal lineage and cultural connections, so that the Tribal definition of relative is far broader than the western notions of immediate and extended family members. Thus, while a Tribe may define someone as a relative placement for a child, the TANF definitions of relative may not apply. In these cases some relatives outside the levels of consanguinity must become licensed foster families in order receive adequate funding. In some cases, these families may not wish to become licensed, or they may not qualify for licensure based on the state licensing standards. Thus, potential Tribal relatives may be lost as options for children in care.

While relative searches are required on every case; how searches are conducted is not consistent statewide. Additionally, stakeholders indicated that there were times when relative caretakers needed more information about the child being placed in their care. In the 2007 QA survey conducted on unlicensed relative care providers, 73 percent of respondents indicated that they received background information on the child at the time of placement.

Identification of relative placement options for adoptive families beyond foster care is also an important consideration that is not formally outlined in OCS policy or practice. Stakeholders felt that the assumption is often that the current relative foster care placement is a permanent placement option for the child. However, there may be other relatives that are willing to be an adoptive parent for a relative child, but were reluctant to be considered for foster care. Stakeholders indicated that OCS should formalize a process that allows for a formal consideration of all relative placements to be considered when a permanent placement for the child is needed.

Finally, stakeholders indicated concerns that recent changes in state licensing regulations, particularly as it relates to barrier crimes, is providing tighter restrictions on which relatives can be considered a placement option for a child. A review of the state barrier crimes by the stakeholders group recognized that state barrier crime listings are more stringent, but that a variance process is in place that would allow for a relative placement to be considered as a placement resource for a child, as long as safety is not jeopardized. State barrier crimes are more stringent than the federal barrier crimes. See Item 43 for further information on barrier crimes.

Summary

OCS has made improvements since 2002 on the search for, and identification of, relative placements for children in care. Quality assurance data as well as consumer and Tribal surveys demonstrate that OCS is making efforts to search for potential relative placements for children. Despite the good work that OCS is doing to identify relative placement options for children in care, the community stakeholders identified challenges related to the consistency and thoroughness of the relative searches and the need for increased financial supports and services for relative caregivers.

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents. How effective is the agency in promoting or helping to maintain the parent-child relationship for children in foster care, when it is appropriate to do so?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFPSR final report this item was rated as an Area in Need of Improvement, because reviewers determined that in 81 percent of the applicable cases, OCS made diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. The key concern expressed by the reviewers was the inconsistency of the OCS efforts to locate absent fathers and to promote relationships between children and fathers.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires consideration of placement to be near parents whenever possible and also requires visitation between child and parent(s). The assigned worker is responsible for assessing and documenting the child(ren)'s medical, dental, vision, and mental health needs in the case plan, and ensuring that referrals to services are made to meet the child's assessed needs. This includes ensuring that parents are consulted about and apprised of all medical and mental health care proposed for their children, prior to service provision if possible.

Practice Improvements

As a part of Family-to-Family in the Anchorage region, some staff utilize the Icebreakers approach with birth parents and foster parents. This approach allows for staff to bring together the child's birth parents and foster parents to discuss the needs of the child. For instance, they are encouraged to discuss medications that the child may be taking, the child's favorite foods, favorite activities, and bedtime routines.

In addition, since the 2003 PIP, additional efforts have taken place in all communities to further support visitation and maintenance of contact between parents and their children in out-of-home care. This is evidenced by the improvements that have been seen across the board by the QA team in the area of increased contact with fathers and the extended paternal families as well as increased visitation and involvement of parents in the lives of their children while in foster care.

Data

The QA reviews outline the levels of compliance with maintaining relationships between children in care with their parents. The majority of field offices have been performing at or near 100 percent consistently across the state. The QA team reports that they evaluate a broad spectrum on this item and find that relationships with parents have significantly improved in the last five years. They report that this is clearly an area of strength for Alaska.

Strengths

OCS continues to rate well in promoting and maintaining the parent-child relationship according to the data and QA team reports.

Challenges

Parents have indicated concerns that the high turnover of OCS staff impacts the consistency of contacts with their children, the timeliness of reunification, and the ability to have case plans effectively met in a timely manner. The 2006 Consumer Survey Report included comments expressing concern from 51 of 130 parents interviewed. Several expressed concern that they have multiple caseworkers due to worker turnover. Concerns about delays in children returning home and lack of contact were mentioned due to the amount of time it takes to transfer their case between workers.

Summary

The data indicates that OCS is doing well in the area of supporting the parent-child relationship when children are in foster care. The identification of absent parents is improving especially in finding fathers. There is concern that that the high turnover in OCS is limiting the quality of parent-child relationships.

C. Child and Family Well-Being

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents. How effective is the agency in assessing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents, and in providing needed services to children in foster care, to their parents and foster parents, and to children and families receiving in-home services?

Policy Description

OCS policy requires workers to make timely reasonable efforts to assess the needs of, and provide services to, the child and parents, Indian custodian, or guardian of the child and foster parents that are designed to prevent out-of-home placement of the child and/or to enable the safe return of the child to the family. The services offer parents the opportunity to remedy parental issues or conditions in the home that resulted in the child's placement in out-of-home care or placed the child in an unsafe or high-risk situation requiring in-home services. For Alaska Native children, active efforts must be made to provide remedial services and rehabilitative programs designed to prevent the break up of the family.

The initial assessment of needs and services is based on interviews with parents, child, and collateral sources, the caseworker's observations of the parents and child, and historical information about the family's previous involvement with OCS. Needs of and services for children, parents, and foster parents are addressed in the case plan, which is reviewed on a regular basis and revised when appropriate. Additional information may be provided by medical or mental health providers, or other service providers, to further enhance the case plan. (see Items 21, 22, and 23).

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that OCS was effective in assessing the needs and providing appropriate services to children, parents, and/or foster parents in 52 percent of the cases. A key concern was that inadequate assessments resulted in a failure to capture and address underlying problems for both children and parents. Additionally, the lack of provision of assessments of and services to fathers was noted.

Practice Improvements

The 2003 PIP included an action step to enhance policy and procedure for administrative review feedback to administration; this revised policy was issued in July 2005. In addition, procedures were added to allow a participant in a conference to object to the recommendations when cases were reviewed.

Case planning protocols were also developed to establish required services. Recently, new policy was issued to provide protocols for assessment of services through the safety assessment model that occurs throughout the life of a case.

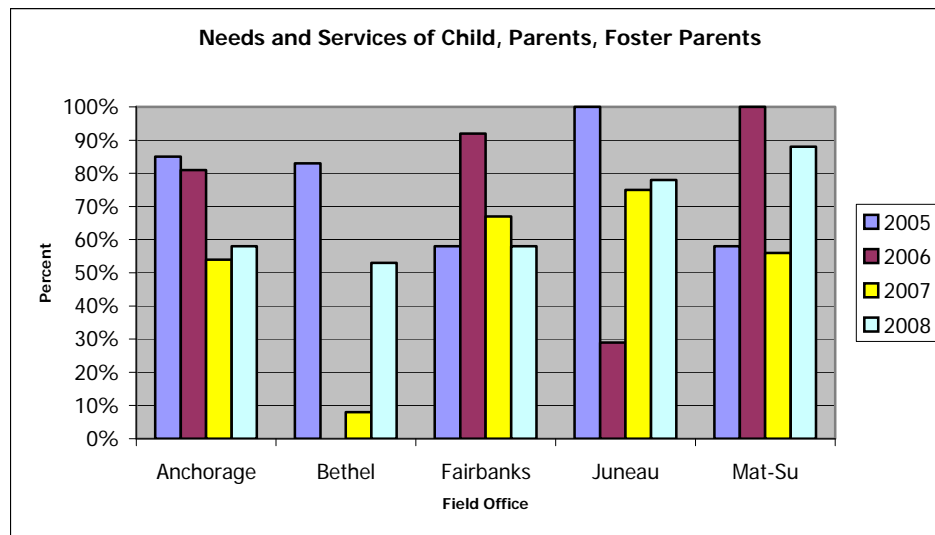
OCS worked with the training academy to strengthen worker training in conducting initial assessments. Supervisors are expected to work with their staff regarding the assessment of child and family needs, and the incorporation of these needs into a strengths-based case and service planning process. In addition, an assessment of foster parents' needs is addressed as part of the case plan.

Data

A 2007 survey of 130 tribal groups indicated that about half stated that information provided to tribal agencies that work with OCS families was adequate.

Based on quality assurance reviews, Alaska's adequate assessment of needs and services of child, parent and foster parents has declined in most of the state since 2006. OCS speculates that staff turnover and the struggle with implementation of the safety decision making model are significant contributing factors. Again, challenges do not seem to be limited to a specific area or group and are more the result of

uncovered cases and cases with new or overworked caseworkers who falter in maintaining consistent contact and follow-through with the provision of needed services.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

Strengths

Stakeholders felt that TDM is working very well in Anchorage in identifying appropriate services for children, parents and foster parents for the families it serves. The TDM process involves including birth families, relatives, Tribes, family support members, foster parents, and community representatives in all child placement decisions that are made after a family has come to the attention of the agency.

Implementation of a safety decision making model in Alaska reflects a significant practice change from incident/allegation-based approaches to an information/analytical driven approach. During the course of a safety assessment, basic and well being needs are identified and met in ways that the family identifies to be most helpful. If well-being needs continue beyond the need for safety intervention, those needs are met by other community providers. Due to the infancy in the implementation of the safety assessment model, data does not yet show its benefits.

When children are in placement, the focus is on assessing safety in the placement home and continuously focusing efforts on determining when children may safely be returned home with an in-home safety plan if needed. This shift in practice better tailors services to the underlying cause of the abuse or neglect issues.

Focus groups involving members of Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA) have taken place to obtain information regarding their experiences in foster care. Membership is comprised of youth currently in the system as well as alumni and was established in 2003. This information is being utilized to determine how to improve assessing needs and providing appropriate services to children and families. For instance, this information has influenced how Chaffee Funds are utilized in Alaska.

Challenges

Conducting individualized assessments that identify underlying issues continues to be a learning process. While emphasis on a better assessment of the family is required during investigation of a new protective services report, more work needs to be done to improve practice after it is determined that the case needs to open for ongoing services. Additionally, high staff turnover and workload issues add to the challenge as a thorough assessment takes time and requires trained staff. Many of the cases reviewed by the quality assurance team demonstrated services have been available to meet the needs of the case participants, however, the follow-through and support from the agency was missing to connect the family to the

services. In other instances services were not available, primarily in rural areas. Although a wide array of services is available in Alaska, due to the vastness and geographical challenges of the state, providing necessary services in all areas will continue to be a challenge.

OCS and stakeholders concur that getting substance abuse assessments done in a timely manner is a significant problem statewide. All agree that this is related to wait lists and unavailable services. In some cases, parents have no hope of fulfilling their case plan (an example would be a case plan that calls for mandatory AA meetings when the parent lives in an area where none are offered) which relates to the ongoing challenge of attempting to match appropriate and available services in all areas of safety, permanency and well-being.

Summary

The implementation of the safety policy, Family to Family in Anchorage, and increased training improved this rating from our 2002 CFSR rating by approximately 20 percent during 2005-2006, however a slight decline is showing in 2007-2008. OCS is now fine-tuning the training to improve implementation as well as continuing to provide additional training on conducting initial assessments and identifying needs within the investigative phase of working with a family. Increasing caseworker visits would assist in assessment of needs and frequent contact would enable workers to monitor progress and update case plans with family members as needed.

Item 18: Child and family involvement with case planning. How effective is the agency in involving parents and children in the case planning process?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that OCS appropriately involved parents and/or children in the case planning process in 48 percent of the cases. The Statewide Assessment Team acknowledged this problem and attributed it to workload issues and difficulties engaging some parents.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that a case plan be developed for all cases that are open for services. Case plans are required to be developed in face-to-face meetings with the parent(s), legal guardian(s) or Indian custodian, and, if age appropriate, the child. For Native children, the child's tribe is invited to be actively involved in all case planning activities.

Policy requires that out-of-home case plans be reviewed with the family at least every six months and at every formally required case conference, and revised when significant changes have occurred. The parents, child (if age and developmentally appropriate), tribal representative (for Native children), and extended family (at the worker's discretion) are invited to all case conferences. In-home case plans are reviewed with the family regularly, as well as by the worker and supervisor after 90 days, to measure the family's progress to determine whether the case can be closed. One additional extension of no more than 90 days may be granted.

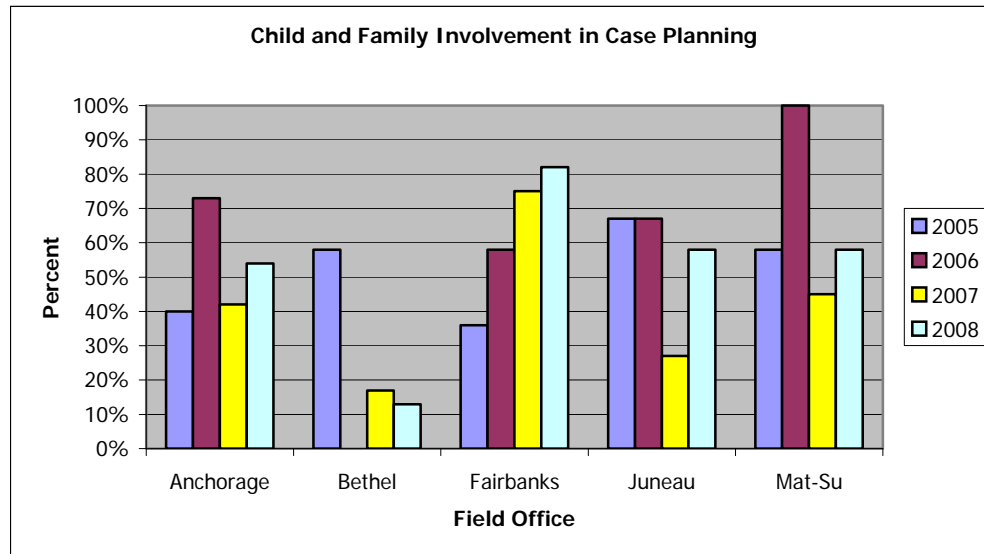
Practice Improvements

The 2003 PIP included an action step to enhance worker and family contact in case planning. In March 2005, OCS issued a policy that required the deadline for completing an in-home case plan be changed from 60 days to 30 days after opening a case and that case planning must occur in person and families will be actively involved in all case planning activities.

OCS implemented TDM in Anchorage as a means to better engage parents in all phases of OCS involvement including case planning. Although QA review data doesn't show significant improvements in the Anchorage area, stakeholders feel case planning involvement efforts are stronger for those cases involved in the TDM process.

Data

The results of OCS' quality assurance review indicate that Alaska has room for improvement in this area. Based on the data, Alaska continues to struggle with involvement of families during case planning. Although some offices exceed the 48 percent rating from the CFSR – Round 1, other offices struggle with meeting that goal. In particular, Bethel's low level of compliance in this area may be related to staffing and workload issues. Fairbanks, which performs better in this item, may be able to contribute success to a more stable work force. The following chart illustrates the results of continuous quality assurance reviews for Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Mat-Su that represent approximately 75 percent of the state. Only those cases that were viewed as successfully involving all parties in a meaningful way in the development of the case plan were rated as a strength.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

Strengths

Stakeholders noted that TDM and Family Group Conferencing were two methods of engaging families in case planning that are working well. It was mentioned that although TDM is only available in Anchorage; the TDM model will be rolling out in Fairbanks in Fall of 2008.

All regions are attempting to schedule case planning and case reviews after school hours to encourage increased youth participation.

Challenges

Stakeholder discussions regarding parent/child involvement in the case planning process brought up several challenges being faced in this process. There was a sense that often younger children aren't involved in the process in order to protect them and that even children (14 and above) have no idea what is in their case plan. Stakeholders noted communication as a problem for case planning including language barriers and that some parents do not have an expectation that OCS will allow them to participate in a meaningful way.

Summary

OCS struggles with improving this measure statewide. Although TDM meetings are a method of involving parents and children in the case planning process, the meetings are voluntary and are only available to a limited population in Anchorage. Increasing caseworker visits will assist in increasing child and parent participation as there would be frequent contact and discussion regarding case planning.

Item 19: Caseworker visits with child. How effective are agency workers in conducting face-to-face visits as often as needed with children in foster care and those who receive services in their own homes?

Previous Rating:

In the 2002 CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. In only 28 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency. Stakeholders attributed problems to high caseloads, worker turnover, weather, and transportation problems.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that an OCS worker have face-to-face contact at least once a month with any child with an open case who resides in Alaska and who is placed either in his or her own home or in an out-of-home placement. This contact must occur in the home in which the child resides at least once every other month. The contact may occur in an alternate setting (examples include school, during a transport, in the office) every other month. Regardless of setting, the contact must allow for discussion with the child regarding their current placement, activities on the case plan, and any safety or well being issues that have been identified.

For children who are placed in another region, collaborative case management (team) applies. Workers who are team-managing a case must communicate directly on a regular basis and exchange information regarding each others' contacts with the family members.

Once a month contact is mandated also for children placed in in-state residential placements; however, communication can be telephonic for children placed in another region. If the residential facility is within an office's jurisdiction the visits will be face-to-face.

Once a month telephone contact is mandated for children placed in another state. Monthly visits by the supervising agency in the other state with quarterly written reports are requested through ICPC.

If the required contact standards cannot be met, the worker must document the reasons why in the ORCA case file.

Practice Improvements

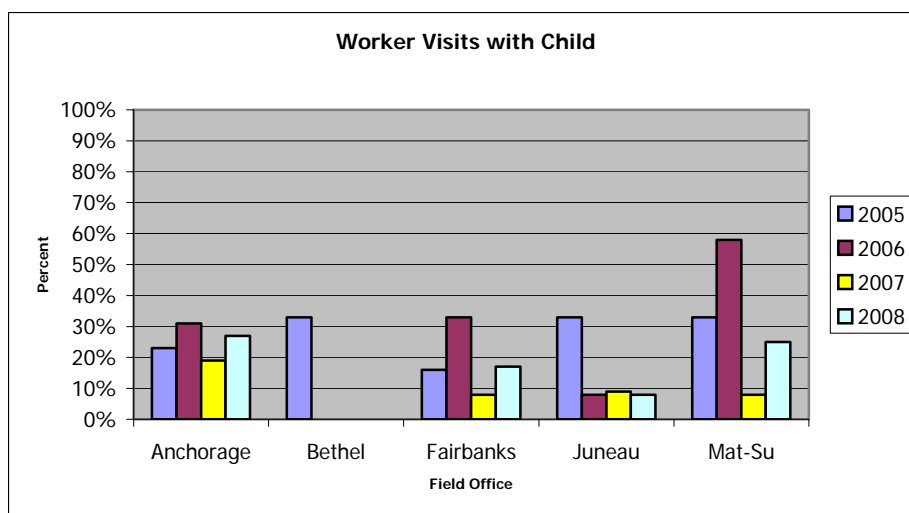
In October 2007, ORCA was modified to provide better reporting fields to assist in accurate tracking of caseworker visits with children and parents. A Program Instruction was issued in November 2007 notifying workers of the ORCA modification and provided guidance for documentation of the visits.

In November 2007, OCS' Continuous Quality Improvement Unit provided field workers with a "case worker planning template" in order to better plan their visits.

As of April 2008, ORCA caseworker visit reports are being sent to regional managers monthly in order for staff to determine if the data is accurate or if there continues to be a recording issue in ORCA. Some staff report that they conduct their visits but it takes too long to enter the data into ORCA. While this may be true for some workers, quality assurance data does not support this theory on a statewide basis.

Data

The results of OCS' quality assurance reviews from 2005-2008 indicate that Alaska has great difficulty conducting monthly caseworker visits.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

The following chart illustrates the percent and number of caseworker visits for Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Mat-Su that are documented in ORCA. The statewide percentage for March 2008, for all regions and field offices was 18.9 percent for children in custody. ORCA data does not include visits with children receiving in-home services while the QA data does include visitation with children in-home and those in out-of-home placements.

Worker Visits by Field Office - March 2008			
Office	Children Visited	Children in Custody	% Visited
Anchorage	202	886	22.80%
Bethel	29	174	16.67%
Fairbanks	26	186	13.98%
Juneau	46	145	31.72%
Mat-Su	22	146	15.07%

Note: This is based on children in custody and does not reflect in-home cases.
Source: ORCA

Strengths

OCS' recently improved ORCA system for tracking caseworker visits will be invaluable in developing strategies to increase caseworker visits. In addition, the planning tool that was issued in November 2007 will assist in better scheduling of caseworker visits.

Challenges

Stakeholders felt that one of the major factors in increasing the frequency of face-to-face visits with children and parents may be related to workload issues. In addition, workers in rural Alaska who must travel by small plane to visit children in remote villages face unique challenges due to Alaska's geography and climate.

Summary

OCS recognizes this area as needing improvement and will continue to work on increasing visits with children. Despite current emphasis on the need for caseworker visits to dramatically improve, state and field management will continue to explore the barriers to compliance with required home visits.

Item 20: Caseworker visits with parents. How effective are agency workers in conducting face-to-face visits as often as needed with parents of children in foster care and parents of children receiving in-home services?

Previous Rating

Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in the 2002 CFSR. In 28 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that visits with parents were frequent enough and of sufficient quality to promote the safety and well-being of the child or enhance attainment of case goals.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that the assigned worker have face-to-face contact with both of the parents, or Indian custodian, with an open case at least once a month. This contact must occur in the home in which the parent(s)/Indian custodian reside(s) at least once every other month and may occur in an alternate setting every other month (AS 47.10 086(c)). Active efforts are continued in ICWA cases, unless the court rules no further active efforts. If the required contact standards cannot be met, the worker must document the reasons why in the ORCA case file.

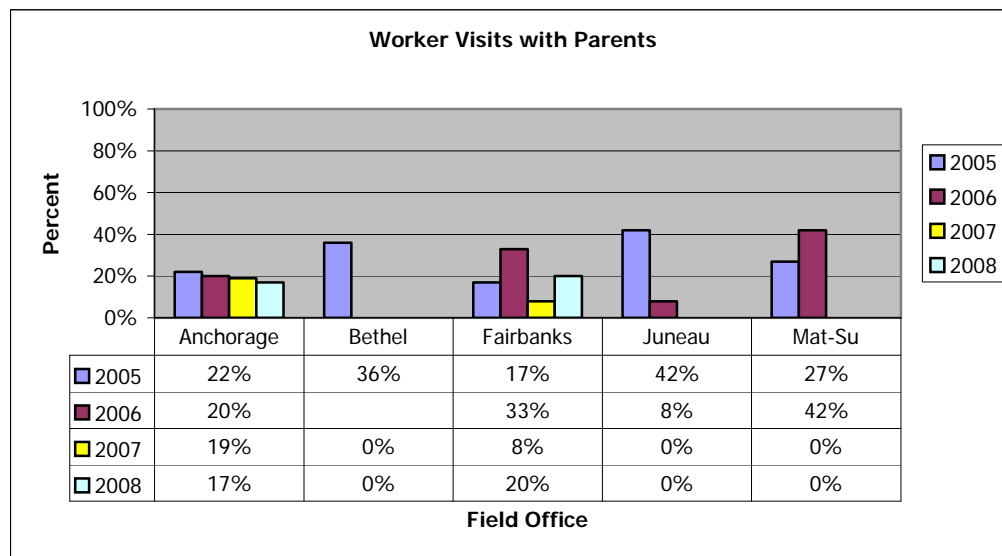
Practice Improvements

In October 2007, ORCA was modified to provide better reporting fields to assist in accurate tracking of caseworker visits with children and parents. A Program Instruction was issued in November 2007 notifying workers of the ORCA modification and providing guidance for documentation of the visits.

In November 2007, OCS’ Quality Assurance Unit provided field workers with a “case worker planning template” in order to better organize their time and plan their visits.

Data

The results of OCS’ quality assurance reviews from 2005-2008 indicate that Alaska has great difficulty conducting monthly caseworker visits with parents.



Note: OCS’ Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents September 2007 through May 2008.

ORCA reports are currently being designed to capture caseworker visits with parents. Workers enter their visits into ORCA currently so the data is being collected, but reports showing an analysis of this data is not currently available.

Strengths

OCS' recently improved the ORCA system for tracking caseworker visits which will be invaluable in developing strategies to increase caseworker visits. In addition, the planning tool provided the QA team that was issued to field in November 2007 assists in better scheduling of caseworker visits.

Challenges

OCS and stakeholders believe that one of the major factors limiting the frequency of face-to-face visits with parents, could be attributed to workload issues. In addition, workers in rural Alaska must travel by small plane to visit children in remote villages. These are unique challenges due to Alaska's geography and climate.

Summary

OCS recognizes this area as needing improvement and management is currently working with the field on development of a plan to assist workers increase quality worker visits with parents.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Item 21: Educational needs of the child. How effective is the agency in addressing the educational needs of children in foster care and those receiving services in their own homes?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that OCS was effective in meeting children's educational needs in 79 percent of applicable cases. The key concern identified pertained to in-home services cases in which reviewers determined that OCS was not responding to children's education-related issues.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that the case plan addresses the goal of child and family well-being, which includes the outcome that children in custody will have their educational needs met. When a child enters custody, the worker is required to obtain education information from the child's parent(s) including whether or not the child has been determined eligible by the special education or infant learning programs for services. The worker will utilize the information in developing case plans and placement plans.

A child's education records are part of the case plan and must be provided to the foster parent and birth parent or Indian custodian. Required education information: school name and address, child's grade level performance (at, above, or below grade level), IEP (Individualized Education Plan) if applicable, report card should be in case record, and other relevant education information about the child (including known educational problems, and whether the child is receiving special/remedial services).

Policy requires workers to refer the child to the school district for an evaluation if there is reason to believe the child may need special services to address issues such as poor performance, performance below grade or developmental level or behavioral problems. The worker is also required to communicate with the school regarding the child's custody status and planned moves which result in change of school, and ensure that a child who receives special education or infant learning program services continue to receive such services. All children under 3 years of age who are victims of substantiated abuse or neglect will be referred to the Infant Learning/Early Intervention program for screening.

Policy also requires efforts will be made to ensure whenever possible, the child's continued attendance at the school that the child attended at the time of placement. Currently, OCS policy does not address education needs for children who are not in custody.

Practice Improvements

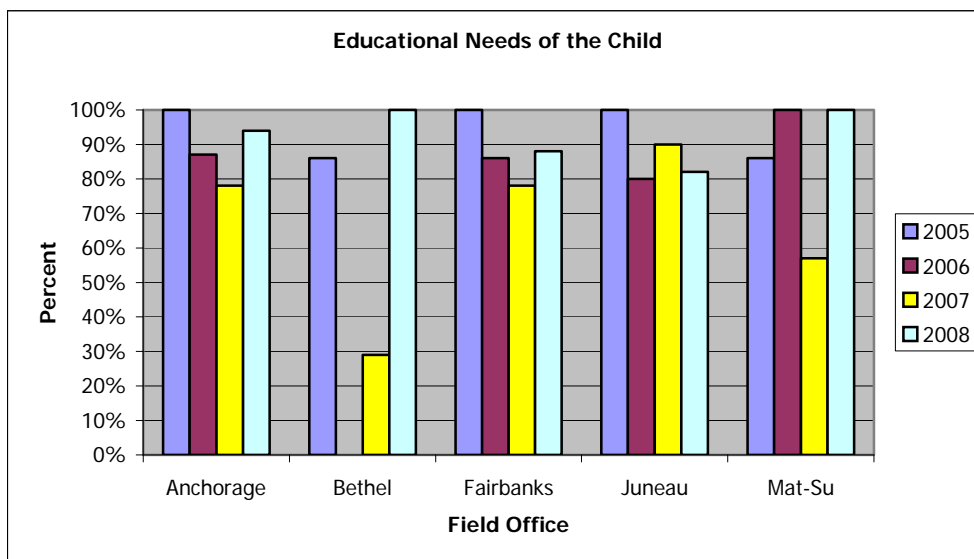
In 2007, OCS, in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, held meetings in Bethel, Barrow, Juneau, and Anchorage in an effort to improve educational outcomes for youth in state custody. Facing Foster Care in Alaska and Alaska's Youth Advisory Group participated in all of these meetings and gave input regarding the educational needs of older youth in foster care. Members from the Alaska Court System, the University of Alaska, local/regional school districts, Department of Law, and GALs also attended and provided input during these meetings. Immediate changes that occurred from these meetings included schools agreeing to provide the "new school" transcripts in a timely manner and scheduling court hearings after school hours so youth, when appropriate, could participate.

Additionally, the court improvement project has developed an educational checklist for judges that incorporates a review of school attendance and the success in the educational environment of children in care. This checklist will be reviewed at every scheduled court hearing thereafter.

Data

A 2008, Alaska Native Foster Parent survey was sent to 142 foster parents. Seventy-two foster parents responded to the following question: "Did the caseworker help you get needed services such as counseling, healthcare, or special school services?" Nearly 80 percent responded positively to the question.

The following graph represents quality assurance results from Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Mat-su. Three of the five field offices illustrated below exceed the national standard for 2008, while two are performing at 88 percent and 82 percent. All 2008 data exceeds the 2002 rating.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents 99% of all cases scheduled for review in 2008.

Strengths

OCS continually seeks to make improvements in the educational outcome area as noted in the practice improvements. The strong relationship that OCS has with school districts, courts, attorney generals, and foster care alumni and youth groups assist in identifying and implementation of positive changes to the state system.

OCS requires educational goals be reviewed during the case review meetings which helps keep the focus on education in the forefront.

Challenges

Stakeholder discussions including youth input, identified that children were sometimes being pulled out of class for visitation purposes. Others reported problems with records being transferred promptly from school to school; youth reported that there have been times when they showed up and their records were not there. Youth also stated that this can directly impact educational success.

Summary

Although QA results indicate that OCS has increased performance in this area, it is clear that work should continue to support the educational needs of children and youth in foster care including children served in their own home. Stakeholders suggested OCS follow through on the recommendation to encourage parent advocacy groups such as Parents, Inc. to more broadly advertise the training provided to assist parents and foster parents in advocating the their children's educational needs.

Lastly, OCS recognizes that increasing caseworker visits would assist in increasing the outcomes pertaining to children's educational needs. Workgroup members noted that conducting thorough safety assessments including interviews with educational personnel may also assist in better identifying educational needs for children.

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Item 22: Physical health of the child. How does the State ensure that the physical health and medical needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are address through services?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that OCS was effective in addressing children's health needs in 77 percent of the applicable cases. A key concern was that health screenings were not consistently provided at entry into foster care and preventive health and dental care was not being provided on a routine basis.

Policy Description

OCS policy requires that the case plan addresses the goal of child and family well-being, which includes the outcome that children in custody will have their medical, dental, mental health, and educational needs met. OCS policy requires that well-being issues for the child are addressed at each child and family six-month conference.

OCS policy requires that the worker explore resources for medical and mental health care, including discussing with the parents their ability to pay for medical care and mental health care through e.g. self-pay, insurance coverage, or eligibility for Native Health Services. A Medicaid application is submitted and a Medicaid eligibility determination made for each child who is taken into state custody and removed from home.

The assigned worker is responsible for assessing and documenting the child(ren)'s medical, dental, vision, and mental health needs in the case plan, and ensuring that referrals to services are made to meet the child's assessed needs. This includes ensuring that preventative medical, dental and vision care is scheduled on an annual basis. Unless it is determined to be contrary to the child's welfare, the assigned worker ensures that the parents are consulted about and apprised of all medical and mental health care proposed for their children, prior to service provision if possible.

The assigned worker is responsible for ensuring that all children, at the time of initial placement out-of-home, are screened through the EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) program by

their primary provider or, if that is not possible, by an identified community provider. The care provider must schedule this screening within 30 days of initial placement.

All children received in emergency circumstances are reviewed by the out-of-home care provider using the Emergency Shelter Care Health Review form (OCS Form #06-9372) and any necessary medical or dental treatment is secured for the child, immediately if necessary. Out-of-home care providers are expected to obtain routine medical, dental, and vision care for a child in accordance with licensing regulations and good care standards and ensure that appointments for services for the child are kept.

A child's health records are part of the case plan and are provided to the foster parent at placement to the extent that they are available and accessible. When a child is returned home, the records are provided to the birth parent or Indian custodian. Required health information include: names and addresses of the child's health providers, record of the child's immunizations, child's known medical problems, child's medications, and other relevant health information about the child.

Practice Improvements

To address the key concern from the 2002 CFSR, policy was revised in June 2004, to require workers to ensure health screenings were consistently provided at entry into foster care and preventive health and dental care was provided on a routine basis.

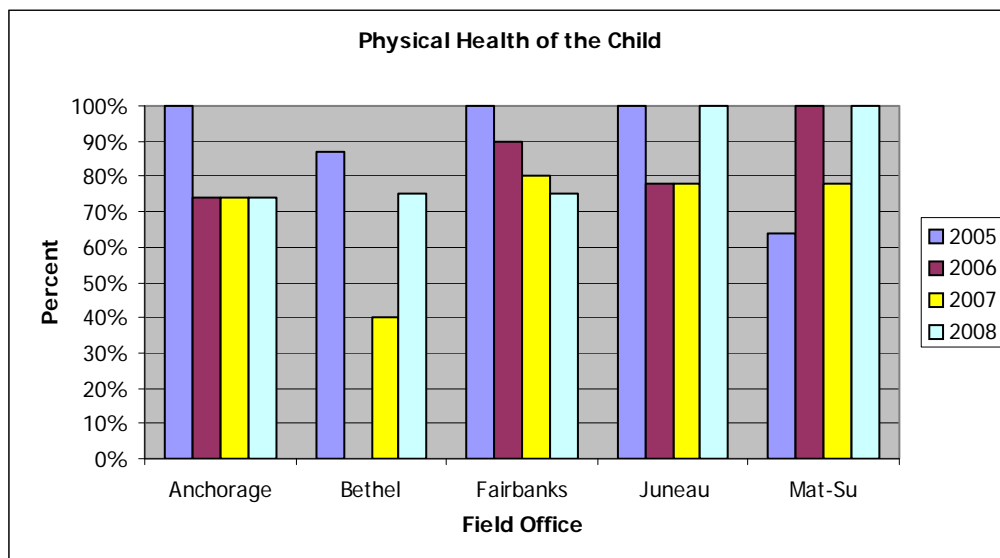
In addition, OCS has worked with the Division of Public Health (DPH) to facilitate EPSDT screenings for all children in custody within 30 days of placement.

OCS' Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program ensures that early intervention services are available for families with infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) with special needs. In addition, statewide efforts to extend mental health services to at risk children birth to age 6.

The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project promotes positive development and improved health outcomes for Alaska's children prenatal to 8 by creating a culturally responsive, comprehensive and accessible service delivery system.

Data

Data presented from the Alaska Native Foster Parent Survey in Item 21 above also pertains to this item. The following are results from OCS' quality assurance reviews during 2005-2008.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents September 2007 through May 2008.

Strengths

In addition to re-establishing OCS' partnership with DPH, Alaska's Independent Living Program in conjunction with the Attorney General's office has developed a checklist to ensure that special needs youth (over age 18) will continue to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Developmental Disability (DD) services after the departure from state custody. This protocol is currently implemented in the Northern Region and will be implemented statewide by September 2008.

In addition, OCS' Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project assists in obtaining early intervention services and improved health outcomes for children prenatal to 8 years.

Challenges

Stakeholder discussions centered on concerns that some children enter foster care without accurate medical information due to the crisis nature of the removal of the children from their home. Stakeholders felt that OCS needs to develop a better procedure to gather medical information.

Stakeholders also brought up other issues/problems which include the frequency of children being taken into urgent care for their initial exam and getting parental permission to give medication. Stakeholders felt that often physicians do not have contact information for biological parents and cannot therefore involve them in their children's medical care.

In 2007, there were 118 federally funded community health center sites throughout Alaska with some resident higher level providers and other itinerant providers. Many villages have home health aids and/or behavioral health aids that provide the first level of service. Service availability throughout Alaska is highly variable and dependant on population size and distance to larger population centers.

Stakeholders felt that problems related to adequate dental services in some of the larger areas such as Juneau and Anchorage is because many dentists are not accepting Medicaid.

Summary

Alaska recognizes the importance to continue partnership with DPH. Evaluation of current policy and procedures surrounding the medical needs of children will take place and if necessary, will be revised to ensure better medical outcomes for children. Attention will be paid to the challenges stakeholders suggested during this assessment process.

Finally, OCS recognizes that increasing caseworker visits would assist in increasing the outcomes related to the physical health of the child.

Item 23: Mental/behavioral health of the child. How does the State ensure that the mental/behavioral health needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFPSR, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that OCS was effective in addressing children's mental health needs in 66 percent of the applicable cases.

Policy Description

OCS policy states that case plans that all children in custody will have their medical, dental, mental health, and educational needs met. Policy for placement into residential care requires the worker to bring the youth's case to an interdivision team representing OCS, the Division of Juvenile Justice and the Division of Behavioral Health. This team screens and approves placement for all custody youth entering residential care. The behavioral health needs of the youth are reviewed before approving a placement.

The team is chaired by an OCS psychiatric nurse. All residential care, except emergency shelters, is explicitly for the treatment of behavioral health problems identified in the youth's case plan.

Practice Improvements

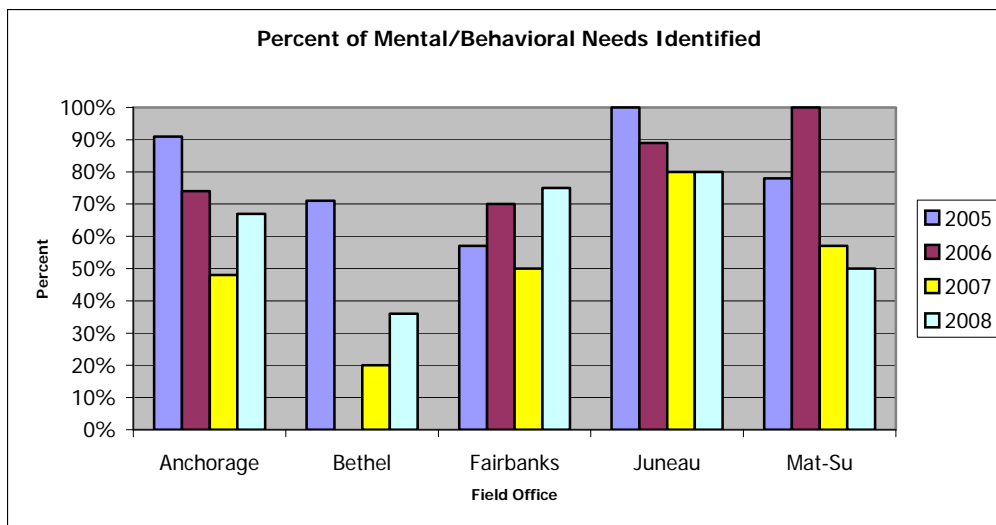
Policy was revised to require workers to assess the child's mental health needs in the case plan and ensure that referrals to services are made to meet the child's assessed needs.

OCS is involved with crafting mental health policy to provide mental health evaluations for all children entering out-of-home care and has worked on in collaboration with the Division of Behavioral Health to adequately address this area.

Establishment of Bring the Kids Home in 2005 provides OCS the opportunity to fund individual service agreements in order for children to either stay in their community or provide individualized services upon return from a treatment facility.

Data

The following are results of OCS' quality assurance reviews from 2005-2008.



Note: OCS' Continuous Quality Assurance review year begins on September 1st through August 31st. Bethel was not reviewed in 2006. 2008 data represents September 2007 through May 2008.

Strengths and Challenges

Stakeholder discussion revealed that although OCS is required to do an initial assessment, it is often times interpreted in many different ways and not always seen as a need for a formal assessment. One reason may be that the 2002 PIP did not refer to this as a formal assessment, but rather as a "worker" assessment.

All children and youth, at the time of initial placement out-of-home, are screened through the EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) program by their primary provider or, if that is not possible, by an identified community provider. This screening is designed to identify any behavioral or mental health needs of the child.

Additionally, all children less than 3 years of age who are victims of substantiated abuse or neglect to the Infant Learning/Early Intervention program which assists identification of not only medical issues, but can also shed light on possible behavioral and emotional challenges as well.

Stakeholders mentioned there have been barriers when a pediatrician tries to talk to a psychiatrist regarding a behavioral diagnosis. There have been times that pediatricians are told they cannot talk to the

psychiatrist because the GAL has to agree to information being shared; issues surrounding HIPAA were noted as affecting children receiving mental/behavioral health treatment.

Residential care as a process has several steps built in that ensure that “behavioral health needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services.” The grant agreement with residential care providers requires that all youth in shelters be assessed for behavioral issues within five days of admission to the program. All longer term programs require an assessment for behavioral issues within 15 days of admission to the program and 90 day treatment reviews.

Summary

OCS’ quality assurance reviews indicate a decline in ensuring that children’s mental/behavioral health needs are identified in assessments/case planning and that services are provided to meet their needs. OCS is committed to review existing policy and procedures to ensure that workers are given the clearest direction possible to assist in assessing and meeting the mental health needs of children. OCS will also continue evaluate mental/behavioral health service availability. Reference Items 35 and 36.

Additionally, OCS recognizes that increasing caseworker visits would assist on-going evaluation of the child’s functioning including mental/behavioral health needs and referral to services appropriate to address their needs.

Section IV: Systemic Factors

A. Statewide Information System

Item 24: Statewide Information System. Is the State operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care?

The State of Alaska uses Online Resources for Children in Alaska (ORCA) as the child welfare system of record. ORCA is used by approximately 400 staff located throughout the state and tracks every child in state foster care. In ORCA, for foster children placed in a urban area, their exact location is entered in ORCA. In rural areas where there is not a legal address, a descriptive address and mailing address is entered into the basic information section under the provider identification number for foster homes, relatives, or institutions. The child's legal and placement status can also be identified in ORCA; type of custody, pre-adoptive placement, or trial home visit, etc.

There is a wide array of characteristics available for the child's demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and tribal affiliation. Lastly, all permanency goals are identified for all children in out of home care.

The majority of the placement information and characteristics is entered in a timely and therefore accurate manner. Data entry is dependent upon worker entry of the placement data in a timely manner which does not appear to be an issue. There may be a few cases in rural areas where there is a delay due to connectivity and bandwidth issues.

Previous Rating

In the CFSR 2002 Report Alaska's Statewide Information System was found to be in substantial conformity.

Changes 2002-2008

Two years after round one of the CFSR, in 2004, Alaska began the transition from the legacy system (PROBER) to ORCA as the system of record. The systems are remarkably different and the data collected is not comparable.

In the January 2008 Advance Planning Document Update require by ACF for Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) compliance, the State of Alaska – OCS – ORCA system went from developmental to operational. That same month, Alaska produced the data required for ACF to produce a Data Profile in preparation for the September 2008 CFSR. In addition to the four data elements, ORCA supports intake, investigation, case management, adoption, and provider management. ORCA is also the system of record for eligibility determination, payment processing, and personnel functions.

Furthermore, ORCA provides payments, generates template documents, managerial reports, AFCARS Foster Care report, AFCARS Adoption report, and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) report.

B. Case Review System

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System during CFSR in 2002.

Item 25: Written case plan. Does the State provide a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan, to be developed jointly with the child, when appropriate, and the child's parent(s), that includes the required provisions?

Previous Rating

This item was rated as an Area in Need of Improvement in the 2002 CFSR final report, because of the lack of clear goal-oriented case plans and the lack of a system to consistently and actively involve parents and children in case planning.

Changes 2002-2008

Item 18 outlines the policy changes since 2002 with respect to case planning. The 2003 PIP reflects policy and procedure changes to strengthen and enhance the use of case plans that are appropriately developed with parents and children, and included changes for in-home case planning as well. Administrative reviews were also strengthened to provide focus to the case planning process.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

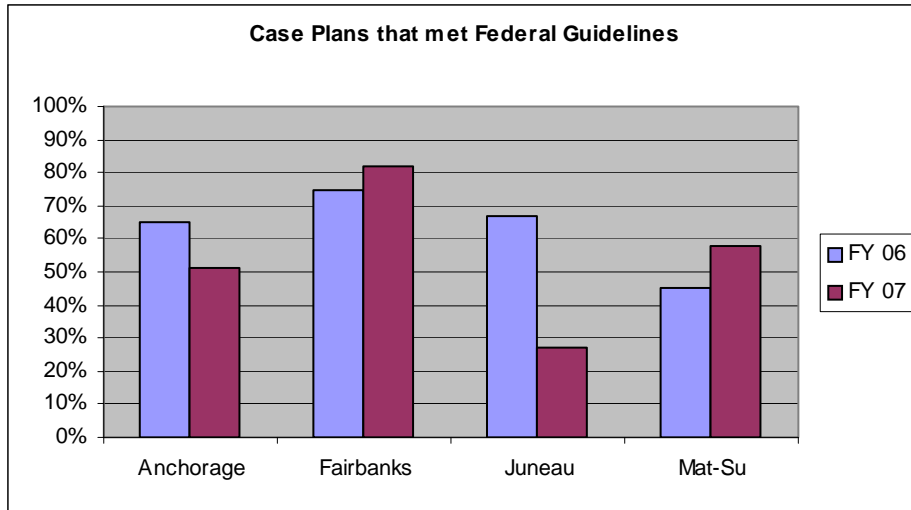
Since the 2002 CFSR, OCS has enhanced the case review processes. The 2006 consumer survey indicates OCS staff are familiarizing parents about their case plans and are giving parents copies of the case plan. However, based on the survey results, OCS staff do not always seek out or incorporate parental input in the case planning process. The survey results are illustrated below.

OCS does not have a structured way to work with parents, youth or children in the development of the family's case plan. Similarly, caseworkers do not always understand the importance and impact of case planning in relation to efforts to reunify children with their parents in a timely manner. Stakeholders indicated concern that case plans are not developed with the families or children as appropriate. There was acknowledgement that some caseworkers could be counted on to spend time developing the case plans with the families while others do not.

Stakeholders felt that case planning with family members is less likely to occur with new workers who may lack training or understanding of the value of developing case plans with family members. Stakeholders also discussed the need to train OCS caseworkers to develop strong case plans, with measurable goals and outcomes, as it is difficult for families and team members to determine what the goal should be and gauge progress when the case plan is not well-defined and measurable. The purpose, value, development and maintenance of well defined, measurable case plans was seen as a training issue for new workers.

Stakeholders indicated that youth in care were much more likely to be involved in the creation of their own exit plan than they were involved in the creation of their case plan. This was a view that was also shared by the participating youth and the alumni focus group. In Anchorage, the courts are becoming much more aware of the need for exit plans to be in place prior to youth being released from custody; however, some stakeholders felt that judicial awareness does not occur consistently throughout Alaska.

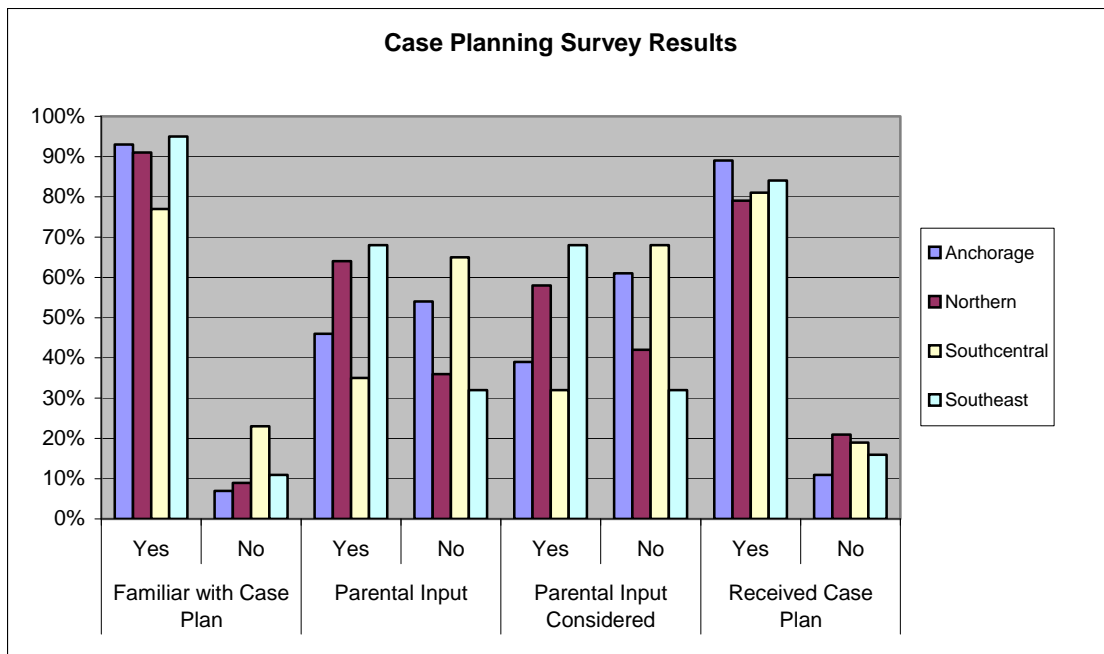
The QA team looks comprehensively at case plans and how they are developed. The findings are inconsistent across the state. The Fairbanks and Mat-Su offices are showing improvement. Declines in the quality and inclusiveness of case plan development have been occurring in Anchorage and Juneau. The following chart outlines compliance rates with this item. The compliance standard is 95 percent.



A 2006 consumer survey of 140 parents asked parents four questions about their involvement in the case planning process:

- Are you familiar with your case plan?
- Were you asked to give your ideas and suggestions when the case plan was developed?
- Did you feel that your input was considered when the case plan was written?
- Did you receive a copy of the case plan?

The table below indicates responses to each of these questions. The survey results show that the majority of consumers surveyed stated that OCS is familiarizing parents with the case plan and that parents are receiving copies of their case plans. Alternatively, participants indicated that OCS is continuing to struggle involving parents in the development of the case plans. Below is a chart that outlines the statewide results for this survey. The survey did not address child/youth involvement in case plans.



Summary

While OCS has enhanced policy and procedure to improve the case review process, concerns outlined in the previous CFSR regarding case planning continue to exist. The consumer survey indicates that parents

are familiar with their case plan and consistently receive copies of their plan, but felt that their input is not sought nor included in the final case plan. Stakeholders echoed similar concerns about the case planning process with OCS. They further expressed concern that this was not a focus in training of caseworkers.

Item 26: Periodic Reviews. Does the State provide a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every six months, either by a court or by administrative review?

Previous Rating

In the 2002 CFSR final report, this item was rated as a Strength, because periodic reviews were held in a timely manner and the quality of these reviews was reported to be excellent.

Changes 2002-2008

Since the 2003 PIP, OCS has further enhanced the administrative review processes. Regional adoption specialists in each region are now involved with all administrative hearings as well as any permanency planning conferences in which concurrent planning or a change in the goal to adoption or guardianship is being considered.

OCS policy requires case reviews at various stages in the case process for children in out-of-home care :

- Family and Child Early Conference (FACE): Held within 90 days of the probable cause finding for all children who are in custody and in out-of-home placement.
- Child and Family Six Month Conference (Administrative Reviews): Held every six months for all children in custody. These reviews meet all of the federal requirements in that parents are invited, a person not responsible for the case participates, progress is always examined, a likely date to achieve permanence is discussed/established and the appropriateness of the placement is discussed. Reviews are always held before an established panel no later than six months from the date of the most recent removal from the home and/or no later than six months from the date of the last administrative review. Administrative reviews must continue every six months until the child's return home, or the child is in a finalized guardianship or adoption.
- Permanency Planning Conference: Held within nine months of the first removal from home or earlier if indicated by court action, or whenever the worker recommends a change in the permanency plan/goal. Permanency Planning Conferences are utilized to focus on whether or not the goal should be changed from reunification to a concurrent goal or to a goal change of adoption or guardianship.
- Placement Decision Conference (Optional): Held to determine an adoptive placement for a child when there is more than one permanent family option available is to the child. This conference can be held in conjunction with the Permanency Planning Conference.
- ICWA Out of Preference Placement Review: Held every 30 days when a child of Alaska Native heritage is in an out-of-preference ICWA placement. The intent of the review is to insure that all available ICWA placement preference options are fully explored and considered for each child in out-of-preference placements.

In Alaska, efforts to consolidate the number and purpose of the reviews scheduled (as outlined above) are currently being considered in order to improve consistency with the review processes.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

The stakeholders tended to view this item as a strength because all reviews, but most notably the six-month administrative reviews, are occurring consistently; and many case participants, including the public defenders and guardians ad litem, are regularly invited. There was a consensus that more experienced caseworkers involved more case participants in the administrative reviews. Although some stakeholders did not feel the value of administrative reviews was determined by the tenure of the caseworker because; at times, newer caseworkers viewed administrative reviews as critical and particularly helpful to the case process.

Stakeholders also recognized that parents were not always available at the time of the administrative reviews even though parents and youth have the option to participate in reviews via telephone. Participating youth often felt that they were not given enough notification of the administrative reviews and the reviews were scheduled at times when youth were not able to attend. More recently, regions are making an effort to schedule administrative reviews that involve youth at the end of the school day. Although youth are encouraged to attend, they do not always feel that they understand the process nor do they think their opinions or concerns are acknowledged.

Summary

The 2002 CFSR final report identified this item as a strength; in 2008, the stakeholders continue to identify this item as a strength for OCS. Administrative reviews that conform to federal standards are held consistently across the state and occur every six months for all children in out of home care. Stakeholders expressed concern that administrative reviews are sometimes held at times that are inconvenient for the parents or the youth, nonetheless, there is a concerted effort to schedule the administrative reviews at times with the parents and youth are available.

There are other reviews that are held as well that are specific to early case planning efforts, ICWA placement preferences, and permanency goal changes, that occur outside of the administrative review process. Notably there are current efforts underway to streamline all of the review processes for efficiency and clarity for caseworkers and families alike.

Item 27: Permanency Hearing. Does the State provide a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified Court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date that the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR identified this item as an Area in Need of Improvement, because permanency hearings were not consistently held in a timely manner.

Changes 2002-2008

As part of the 2007 Title IV-E Program Improvement Plan, the Alaska Court System and OCS worked together to address the timeliness of permanency hearings. As a result, co-chairs from the Court Improvement Project issued a letter to all of Alaska's judges suggesting that the permanency hearing be scheduled at the adjudication or disposition hearing, and that permanency hearings be scheduled one to two months before the deadline to ensure that continuances would not cause the hearing to occur outside the 12-month period.

The Alaska Court System analyzed the timeliness of permanency hearings in the Anchorage, Fairbanks and Palmer courts during 2006. For all three communities, the court's analysis of the average number of days from probable cause to permanency hearing did not support a concern that permanency hearings are untimely. However, due to hearing continuances, a number of cases, ranging from 16 to 31 percent, findings were not made timely. There was no conclusive data available at that time to determine the reason why permanency hearings were continued.

Subsequent input from judges was that they most often grant continuances for reasons related to the parties' due process rights: for example, because the required report was late or missing, or because a party could not attend the hearing. Investigating these assertions, the court found a correlation between late reports and continued hearings. Specifically, in the two court locations with the longest time between probable cause and the permanency hearing, approximately 36 percent of reports were filed late. In the court with the shortest time between probable cause and the permanency hearing, only 23 percent of reports were late.

In an effort to improve timely submission of permanency reports, OCS issued a Program Instruction in Spring 2008 that mandated the time frame for submitting permanency reports to the court. The Department of Law reported in May 2008, that timely submissions of permanency reports are occurring in Anchorage, Southeast and Northern Regions. Challenges for filing timely permanency reports continue in the Southcentral region and could be due to the diverse geographical location of the region, staff turnover and the number of vacancies.

It is hoped that these changes will be positively reflected in a reduction of the number of continuances. It is anticipated that fewer continuances will result in more permanency hearings being held within the 12-month deadline.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

OCS, the Alaska Court System and the Department of Law have worked together to ensure that permanency hearings are scheduled, held, and findings are issued within the mandated timeframes. These efforts have proven effective according to the most recent information provided the Department of Law and the Alaska Court System

Stakeholders felt that all judges were aware of the mandates and timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. However, there are times when services and resources were not adequately provided to the family within the 12-month period. In these cases, judges may not have enough information to make a permanency finding in contested cases where the parent hasn't been in treatment very long, or has only just engaged with services, or hasn't been offered services. In these cases, there just wasn't enough information to make the findings, as is clearly contemplated by Alaska statute, which can delay permanency findings within the 12-month period.

Youth are encouraged to attend all court hearings, but are not always accommodated either through transportation or timing of the court hearing. When youth do attend the court hearing, the youth do not always understand what is going on or what is expected of them in court. The CINA Court Improvement Committee (CIP) created a working group that to develop educational materials to prepare youth to attend court. The CIP is working with Facing Foster Care in Alaska, which also is attempting to provide training to youth in care to help them understand the legal process, including their role and rights in the process.

Summary

Permanency hearings are occurring for every child and youth who has been in care for 12 months. Data from the Alaska Court System indicates that, on average, permanency hearings are occurring 12 months from the probable cause hearing. Over the last year, OCS has demonstrated improvements to timeliness of filing, scheduling and issuance of findings. Permanency reports in three of the four OCS service regions are being filed timely. There is no data to demonstrate that improvements in the timely filing of permanency reports has reduced the number of continuances in permanency hearings; however, it is anticipated that future results will show improvements and that permanency findings will be occurring timely on a more consistent basis.

Item 28: Termination of Parental Rights. Does the State provide a process for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)?

Previous Rating

The CFSR final report rated this item as a Strength, because the State had implemented procedures for filing for a termination of parental rights petition and was filing petitions in a timely manner.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

While Alaska has procedures in place for the timely filing of termination of parental rights petitions, impacts to filing termination of parental rights petitions can be delayed based on compelling reasons.

Summary

Alaska has a process to file termination of parental rights petitions in accordance with the Adoptions and Safe Families Act. It is the view of the practitioners, that generally, petitions for termination of parental rights are filed in a timely manner unless compelling reasons exist. Currently, OCS does not track the percent cases in which petitions were filed on time.

Item 29: Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers. Does the State provide a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report listed this item as an Area in Need of Improvement because foster parents did not consistently receive notification of permanency hearings and are not consistently provided an opportunity to be heard in accordance with ASFA.

Changes 2002-2008

In 2005, Alaska statutes were changed to require notification of all court hearings in a child's case be provided to the child, each parent, the Tribe, foster parent or other out-of-home care provider, guardian, and guardian ad litem. In some circumstances, written notice of all court hearings in a child's case must be provided to a grandparent of the child.

OCS policy was revised to require that notification of case conferences be provided to all individuals who were required to be invited to the case conference and all participants in a case conference have a right to be heard. There is no available data to measure OCS outcomes in regard to level of compliance with the notifications requirements in either court hearings or case conferences to the identified case parties.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

In the case of court hearings, the Assistant Attorneys General provided notifications for the court hearings to the legal parties of the case, parents, Tribes, and GALs; while OCS caseworkers are responsible to notify other persons, such as foster parents and grand parents of scheduled court hearings. While the notifications to the legal parties of the case are made consistently by the Attorney General's Office, the notifications that the OCS caseworkers are responsible for (foster parents, grandparents and other relative care providers) are not occurring consistently. The OCS policy group is currently working with the Attorney General's Office to revise current policy and procedures to ensure all parties are consistently and properly notified of scheduled court hearings by both the Attorney General's Office and OCS.

For administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences, there is a notification system in place within each OCS region so that an automatic written notification goes out to all parties of the case 30 days in advance of the administrative review or permanency planning conference. Generally, regional reviewers or their support staff send out the notifications for administrative reviews or permanency planning conferences to all parties on the case on behalf of OCS caseworkers.

Summary

OCS policy and Alaska state statutes outline notification procedures for all parties for court hearings and case conferences for each child in out-of-home care. In the case of court hearings, the Attorney General's Office is responsible for notifying the legal parties to the case, while OCS caseworkers are responsible for notifying the foster parents, grandparents and relative care givers of the scheduled court hearings. In the case of administrative reviews and permanency planning conferences, all notifications are sent out by OCS staff 30 days prior to the administrative review or permanency planning conference. Current data is not available to document how well OCS is complying with notification to foster parents, grandparents and other relative care givers. Stakeholders indicated that notifications are occurring, on a consistent basis to legal parties of the case.

C. Quality Assurance System

Alaska was not in substantial conformity with the factor Quality Assurance System during CFSR-1, 2002.

Item 30: Standards Ensuring Quality Services. Has the State developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report Item 30 was rated as a Strength because the State has developed and implemented the necessary standards to protect children in foster care.

Changes 2002-2008

As part of CFSR-1 PIP, OCS has revised policy and procedures to ensure that children in foster care receive quality services and protect their safety and health. OCS' policies and procedures serve as umbrella for our mission of promoting *Stronger Families, Safer Children*. Current child welfare policies that specifically address safety and quality of care for children include:

- Placements/Placement Preferences: Children's safety is ensured by requiring that when a child is placed with an unlicensed relative an evaluation of the home must be completed prior to the placement, and the evaluation including criminal background checks.
- Case Planning for In-Home and Out of Home: Case planning includes an assessment of the child's needs and what placement (in home or out-of-home) best meets the child's needs. Services needed to keep the child safe and healthy are identified and addressed in the case plan and the appropriateness of the services and placement and compliance with the plan are addressed at each review of the plan.
- Case Review System: Children's safety is ensured by OCS' case review system that includes case reviews that address the case plan, placements, needs and services of the child.
- Contact Standards: It is required that each child with an open case is seen by the OCS worker at least once a month and the contact must allow for a discussion with the child regarding the current placement, the case plan, and any identified safety issues.
- Placement Options /Procedures/Planning: The following requirements ensure children's safety and health in out-of-home care:
 - the age and developmental level and special needs of children, including medical and mental health needs, are considered when choosing a placement setting, and
 - information about the child's health and other special needs are discussed with the provider; and
 - the child's medical records are provided to the provider.
- Change or Termination of a Placement/Trial Home Visit/Return Home: All placements must be reviewed to ensure that the child will be safe and his or her needs met.
- Guardianship: Children's safety in a guardianship is ensured by the requirement that the guardian must have an approved guardianship study, which includes background checks.
- Permanent Foster Care: Children's safety in a permanent foster care placement is ensured in that the provider is a licensed foster parent and case planning, case review, and contact standard requirements continue to apply while the child remains in OCS custody.
- Adoption Study/Placement Preferences: Children's safety in an adoptive placement is ensured by requiring that all adoptive families must have an approved adoptive home study that includes a thorough evaluation of the family, including background checks. The child needs and the provider's ability to meet the child's needs are assessed. In order to remain current, adoptive home studies must be updated annually for the first two years or at any time that there is a significant change in the family's situation. At the end of the third year, a complete home study must be done.

- Court Proceedings: Alaska statutes and OCS policy ensures children’s safety via requirements for court review of case plans and placements, including permanency hearings every 12 months.
- Representation by Guardian ad Litem (GAL): a GAL is appointed by the court when the court determines that the child’s welfare would be promoted by the appointment of an attorney to represent the child. The GAL participates in court hearings and case reviews pertaining to the child.
- ICPC: The safety and health of children in custody placed out of state is ensured by OCS’ ICPC policy which includes that children are not placed in an out-of-state placement until the receiving state has approved the placement and has committed to supervising the placement.
- Health Information: The health of children in out-of-home care is ensured by the following requirements:
 - The worker gathers information about the child’s medical, dental, vision, and mental health needs, ensures that the needs are addressed in the case plan, ensures that the child is screened through the EPSDT program at the time of initial placement out-of-home, provides the child’s medical, dental, vision and mental health record to the care provider, and authorizes the care provider to consent to emergency and routine medical care for the child; and
 - When selecting an out-of-home care provider, the worker assesses the provider’s ability to ensure that the child’s health needs are met; and
 - The provider is required to ensure that the child receives routine medical care, including immunizations, during the placement in the provider’s home, request approval for major medical care when needed, maintain the child’s medical, dental, vision, and immunization records, and provide the records to the worker when the child leaves the provider’s care.
- Licensing: The licensing statutes, regulations, and policy address:
 - Standards for the foster home, including requirements to ensure the health and safety of children placed in the home and standards for the care provided to children placed in the home;
 - Foster parent’s qualifications for providing care;
 - Background checks for foster parents;
 - A process where OCS is notified when a foster parent or other household member in a licensed foster home is arrested or convicted of a crime; and
 - Required training for foster parents.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

OCS policy is readily available on-line and easy to access for workers and stakeholders. Each worker also has a hard copy binder that is updated as new or revised policies are issued. As noted in various items throughout this assessment, workers and stakeholders expressed the need for more clarity in policy. Additionally, a report from the ACTION for Child Protection, Inc. entitled, “An Expert Review of Policy that Regulates Practice and Decision Making During Investigation,” outlined a review of eight OCS policies regarding CPS intervention. Alaska’s Citizen Review Panel (CRP) 2007 annual report also noted concerns with OCS policy.

Findings from both reports mirror OCS worker and stakeholder concerns. Deficiencies in the clarity, quality of writing, organization and framework of current OCS policy and procedure structure was noted. Based on the recommendations of concerns from workers, stakeholders and both reports, OCS has established a new framework and process for the development of OCS policy and procedure. This new framework was introduced via the Statewide Policy Group in January of 2008; the same framework is now being utilized in the updating of OCS licensing policy and procedure manual as well.

The CRP, Tribal partners, and OCS managers and staff were given the opportunity to provide feedback during development of the new framework. The CRP felt that OCS’ new approach will address their concerns and provide better clarity for those involved in Alaska’s Child Welfare System.

Summary

OCS staff utilize current policy and procedures to guide their day to day practice. OCS' policy includes all standards to protect children in foster care therefore; OCS believes that this continues to be an area of Strength. Additionally, OCS' Continuous Quality Improvement Program ensures that children are provided quality services through quality assurance reviews (reference Item 31).

OCS' new framework is providing the clarity and organization, although it will take time to revise all policy sections. OCS managers and workers feel that the newly written sections of the policy are easier to follow and provide better guidance to workers.

Item 31: Quality Assurance System. Is the state operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports and evaluates program improvement measures implemented?

Previous Item Rating

During the CFSR-1 in September 2002, this item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the state did not have a statewide quality assurance process and had no formal process for clients or stakeholders to evaluate agency performance.

Changes 2002-2008

The state has moved from having no quality assurance program in 2002, to a well developed continuous quality improvement process which is implemented statewide. The program is staffed with four workers and a supervisor. The system is able to evaluate the work of the state in a consistent manner and provides outcome information to workers and supervisory staff as well as managers. The system has a feedback loop that provides the field offices an opportunity to respond and make changes in practice to improve outcomes. The findings from all quality assurance activities are compiled into reports for use by field staff and managers. This data is used to examine programs and practice and make changes as the findings indicate to improve outcomes.

The development and changes in the quality assurance program have occurred through the agency continuing to evaluate its efforts and to make adjustments to the program when indicated. The review process is a modified replica of the federal child and family services reviews. The child and family services review tool is used and community groups are interviewed during on-site visits to field offices.

A system of reviews is in place which provides review of approximately 250 cases per year. A random sample of cases is generated through the SACWIS system providing a sample of both in-home and out-of-home care cases. A written report is completed and the findings are shared within approximately two weeks. Quality Assurance staff are available to provide consultation to the field offices.

The state also developed and implemented a system to gain stakeholder information from families who are served as well as tribal and community partners. Focus groups of foster parents have also been conducted. The quality assurance unit conducts approximately 10 surveys per review year. The methodology includes mailed, phone, and electronic surveys.

Findings from these surveys and focus groups are compiled into reports which are provided to managers, supervisors, staff, and the public. The reports are available on-line at the Office of Children's Services website, <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/>.

Each region has a Continuous Quality Improvement Committee with representatives from the community. The committees meet on a regular basis and review information and data from the quality assurance case reviews, information gained from stakeholder surveys, and other data reports through the SACWIS system. The committees are able to give feedback which can be used to make needed alterations in

programming to improve practice outcomes. The committees are also able to assist regional management in planning, responding to agency issues, and to provide community perspectives which directly impact practice.

At the conclusion of each quality assurance review, an exit briefing is held with staff to inform them of the findings. This information is used by staff and supervisors to change practices which impact case outcomes.

Data from the case review process and the stakeholder information gathering is compiled by the Quality Assurance Unit and distributed in regular reports. This feedback loop provides critical findings to:

- Local field office staff
- Regional Quality Assurance Committees
- Managerial staff
- State Office Administrative Staff

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

The strengths of the Continuous Quality Improvement Program are that it is comprehensive in nature and provides for both practice review and input from stakeholders including the families who are served. It is guided by the CFSR process which insures that practice is measured against consistent standards. It provides for information gathering and a formal dissemination process through reports and consultation to all levels of staff – administration, management, supervisory, and caseworkers. The process serves to improve practice and to insure accountability through the provision of information to the public by distribution of survey reports on the agency website.

A continuing challenge in Alaska is the size of the state and number of field offices (26) and the ability of the quality assurance program to adequately serve each office. Currently, we are able to review approximately 20 field offices per year, with other field offices being rotated on alternate years. The Anchorage Field Office is reviewed at least twice yearly due to the proportion, approximately 41 percent of the state caseload being in that field office. As well, a larger number of cases are selected for review in Anchorage.

Twelve cases are reviewed in each field office with half being in-home and half out-of-home. There are difficulties in some field offices in identifying a sufficient number of in-home cases to fit the ratio of in-home to out-of-home cases.

Summary

The state of Alaska has made significant progress in the last five years in developing and implementing a statewide quality assurance program. The state has developed a system which provides for ongoing consistent measurement of the quality of practice, provides for stakeholder input, and provides for a system of data dissemination to the agency staff and public. Information for changes and adjustment to practice is now available.

D. Staff and Provider Training

Alaska was in substantial conformity with the factor of Training during the CFSR-1, 2002.

Item 32: Initial staff training. Is the State operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under Titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff that deliver these services?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report identified Item 32 as a Strength, because the agency has an initial training program and workers complete training before being assigned a caseload. Additional training was

available on a range of issues and was available in a variety of ways to accommodate both local and distance learning.

Changes 2002-2008

In partnership with the University of Alaska Anchorage, Family and Youth Services Training Academy (FYSTA), the Training and Orientation of New Employees (TONE) has continued to provide initial orientation and training to all new line staff and licensing workers. TONE is a 10-day, two-week training for all new child protection workers and licensing specialists. TONE must be completed prior to a new employee's assignment to a caseload.

In the 2007 Employee Satisfaction Survey, training generally was rated to be the issue in most need of attention by OCS administration. The OCS Statewide Training and Retention Workgroup, which consists of OCS employees and members of the community, has focused on the improvement of the TONE training to OCS staff. Several significant outcomes occurred due the efforts of this workgroup. First, OCS is specifically addressing improvements in cultural training of the OCS staff to assist with their work with families of Alaska Native heritage. To this end, the TONE curriculum was revised in 2006, for better emphasis on cross-cultural training and issues in child protection. Additionally, Tribal-State collaboration members, in partnership with the FYSTA, are revising the ICWA curriculum to better serve workers.

In addition to the TONE training, the Anchorage region has recently implemented a two-week New Employee Orientation for Anchorage regional employees, which immediately follows each TONE training. This training is a part of the initial training in the Anchorage region that focuses on the specific programs in the Anchorage region such as Family-to-Family, and expands training to the support and administrative staff as well as the front line caseworker staff.

With the addition of the ORCA system in 2004, training in the ORCA data entry processes is a requirement for all new employees. The ORCA system has an on-line, web-based training component through the online ORCA internal website. Additionally, there are training and resource guides available to the workers through the ORCA In-Site website page. All ORCA training is provided within each field office and is overseen by the respective worker's supervisor.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

During the first 12 months of employment, each new employee must complete 20.5 days of TONE training, for a total of 153.5 hours during the employee's first year. New caseworkers cannot be assigned to cases until the completion of the first 10 days of TONE training.

The following table lists number of FYSTA trainings, as a part of the initial training requirements for all new employees during the first year of employment.

First Year Mandatory Training Plan for OCS Workers

In First Month:	Length of Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tone 101 & 102– Training & Orientation for New Employees: (All workers having responsibility for cases: SW, CSS, SSA & CCLS) 	10 Days
In First Six Months:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 103 – The Effects of Abuse & Neglect on Child Development (All workers having responsibility for cases: SW, CSS & CCLS) 	
4 hours per day/ 4 days =	2 Days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 104 – Separation, Placement and Reunification (All workers having responsibility for cases: SW, CSS & CCLS) 	
4 hours per day/ 3 days =	1.5 Days
Total Training Days in First Six Months:	13.5 Days
Six Months – 12 Months:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 229 – Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (All workers having responsibility for cases: SW, CSS & CCLS) 	2 Days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 213 – Specialized Foster Care & Adoption (replaced 211; mandatory for permanency planning, “generic” workers & supervisors-all other workers, CCLS, Intake and Investigations will complete the class on a space available basis and may go beyond the twelve12-month timeline.) 	2 Days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 239 – Specialized Advanced Intensive Sexual Abuse Interviewing Skills (239-mandatory for intake, investigations, “generic” workers & supervisors – all other workers, CCLS, and permanency planning will complete the class on a space available basis and may go beyond the twelve-month timeline.) 	3 Days
Total Training Days for 6-12 Months:	7.0 Days
Total Days of Training for first 12 Months:	20.5 Days

At the completion of each course, FYSTA conducts an evaluation of the completed training. Evaluation results from FYSTA indicate that over 90 percent of trainees saw the training as useful. In particular, the child abuse and neglect training was the most well received by staff, while the court/legal training was rated lower.

In addition, the training evaluation also includes a narrative comment section for respondents. The majority of respondents spoke favorably about TONE and training in general, but almost all respondents wanted to see additional trainings in the following topics: interviewing/information gathering; family assessment; ICWA; legal issues; and cultural awareness beyond Alaska Native cultures.

Similarly, a January 2008 survey conducted by FYSTA at the request of OCS, found that the majority of training attendees, after six months of employment, reported that TONE was useful, yet there was not sufficient time to cover all aspects of the CPS work. Survey respondents consistently mentioned wanting more support making the transition from the classroom or theory aspect of training to application in the field. Respondents talked about the need for more support in the individual offices for new employees, introduction to individual communities and community resources and suggestions were made for the opportunity to shadow workers in a variety of OCS positions as well as the desire for mentors to assist

new employees. Survey results are being utilized to “fine tune” TONE curriculum. The course evaluations and the most recent survey from FYSTA indicate that while staff feel that TONE training is helpful to their work, trainees felt that they needed more training.

Supervisors new to OCS are also required to complete the initial TONE training as well as two courses specific to supervision of child protection workers, which total 6.0 hours. Both of the supervisory training courses are offered within the first year of a supervisor’s employment. Additionally, the State of Alaska through the Department of Personnel also provides a weeklong Academy for Supervisors specific to Human Resource matters within the State system generally. OCS supervisors are encouraged to attend these trainings as well.

In 2006, there were substantive changes to the statutory and regulatory requirements for licensing. While licensing workers are required to complete the TONE training as initial training, a recognized challenge for OCS is that the initial training for licensing workers does not provide a focus on the statutory and regulatory processes for licensing foster homes, foster group homes and child placement agencies. Training on the statutory and regulatory requirements for licensing has been provided annually instead through the State of Alaska Department of Law to all licensing staff.

Given the identification of expanding training needs for child protection, licensing and supervisory staff within the agency, OCS requested and received increased funding for staff training from the Legislature, beginning in July 2008. Based on this increased funding, OCS is expanding TONE training from two weeks to four and developing a mandatory new supervisory curriculum.

Summary

OCS continues to provide initial training, through the TONE curriculum, during the first year of employment to all caseworkers and licensing workers. The training components through TONE training provide useful information to the new staff; however, there is not enough opportunity to assist OCS staff with synthesizing the theory of the training and the application of practice on actual cases.

Initial supervisory training is provided during the first year of a supervisor’s employment, with additional trainings provided through the State of Alaska Division of Personnel. OCS has recognized that expanded training to supervisors is needed to meet the needs of OCS staff. Expansion of training will occur in SFY 2009.

Item 33: Ongoing Staff Training. Does the State provide for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP?

Previous Rating

The CFSR final report identified Item 33 as a Strength, because the State provides ongoing training to staff.

Changes 2002-2008

The FYSTA continues to provide an array of in-service trainings for OCS staff on a variety of topics. The following graph is an outline of the available courses.

Ongoing Training for caseworkers and licensing workers		
Course number	Course Name	Hours
110	Investigations Refresher	3.0
119	Comprehensive Family Assessment	6.0
205 ST	Legal Issues in Child Welfare	12.0
214 ST	Foster Care and Adoption: Pre-finalization	12.0
215 ST	Case Planning	1.5
216	Case Planning ORCA Refresher	3.0
240 ST	Advanced Intensive Sexual Abuse Interviewing Skills Refresher	2.0
262	Substance Abusing Families	6.0
A.R.T. 320	Helping Differently: A Guide for Worker with FASD Affected Adolescents and Adults	3.0
P.I. 402	Ethics Training for CPS workers	3.0
P.I. 407	Professional Judgment and Practice Wisdom (on-line course)	3.96
P.I. 415	Secondary Trauma	6.0
S.I. 565	Reflective Supervision (on-line course)	6.0
S.I 570	Secondary Trauma Issues for Supervisors	3.0
On line Course	Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) from National Indian Child Welfare Act Association (NICWA)	6.0

In 2006, OCS began the implementation of the safety assessment model. As a part of the effort, statewide training of the safety assessment model was provided to all OCS staff separate from the FYSTA training courses. Safety assessment trainings continue as a part of the implementation process for the safety assessment practice implementation.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

While on-going trainings are available to all OCS caseworkers and licensing staff, on-going training varies from region to region and is based on availability of funds. Stakeholders and OCS agree that on-going caseload demands and high staff turnover impact the time workers have to attend trainings. It was noted that it takes several years for a new employee to become fully trained and proficient in child protection work. When many caseworkers do not stay with the job long enough to become fully trained, it is difficult to provide consistent, on-going training options to staff. Other factors that have impacted consistent on-going training for staff include:

- Training budget constraints that limit the consistent provision of on-going training to all workers throughout the state. Often, field offices outside of Anchorage must make choices to send workers to the initial training instead of on-going training due to these budget constraints.
- Training is not readily accessible to all workers statewide. Scheduled trainings in OCS service regions outside of Anchorage occur when FYSTA sends staff to other locations to provide trainings. However, if trainings do not have enough trainee participants, trainings are cancelled; thus, prolonging workers' ability to receive the required on-going training hours.
- Staff turnover and burnout limits the opportunities for expanded training options for tenured employees, as much of the training time is spent on the provision of initial trainings.
- Worker availability to attend training limits the numbers of trainings that can be offered by FYSTA.

On-going, in-service training for supervisors is limited to two courses through FYSTA trainings and is strongly encouraged. Additional coursework through the State of Alaska Division of Personnel offers on-going supervisors training on personnel matters.

A Licensing Summit is held annually for all licensing workers and supervisors as a part of the on-going training for licensing workers. The licensing summit is also open to community child placement agencies, and tribal partners, and provides training on licensing statutes and regulations, best practices, regional needs and barriers, enhancement of resources, and other licensing issues that arise throughout the course of the year. Attendance at the Licensing Summit is mandatory for all licensing workers; OCS caseworkers are not required to attend trainings regarding foster care licensing. FYSTA has not provided specific

trainings relative to foster care licensing needs. It is recognized that licensing staff need additional initial and on-going trainings available specific to licensing functions and practice.

A stipend program is available to current OCS staff interested in pursuing continued education to obtain a Bachelor or Master of Social Work degree. Since the inception of the stipend program in the early 1990s, the program has assisted a total of 109 participants: 30 participants in the MSW program and 79 participants in the BSW program. Of the 109 participants 37.6 percent are currently employed with OCS. An additional 34.9 percent have resigned from OCS, while 10 percent have retired. There are a total of 16 participants or 14.7 percent that OCS does not have current information on their employment status, and whether or not these participants completed their required service with OCS.

Summary

OCS has had a long-standing training program for caseworkers and licensing staff. The training demands that are created by high staff turnover means that the training opportunities are more focused on initial training to new workers, rather than on the on-going training of tenured staff, limiting any enhancements or expansion of the on-going training.

While the existing on-going training is viewed as useful and meaningful to OCS workers, the respondents to the FYSTA survey have indicated that they need additional trainings in interviewing skills, family assessments, and legal training and court preparation. Additionally, stakeholders and OCS have identified the need for more extensive and specialized training opportunities for caseworkers, supervisors, and licensing staff that allow for consistent and accessible training opportunities to all staff statewide.

Item 34: Foster and Adoptive Parent Training. Does the State provide training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State-licensed or State-approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E? Does the training address the skills and knowledge base that they need to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rated this item as an Area in Need of Improvement because foster parents are not consistently receiving initial core training or completing ongoing training, and they routinely care for children prior to receiving training.

Changes 2002-2008

Alaska has continued to provide training through a grant with the Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF, formally the Alaska Foster Parent Training Center). The ACRF has offices located in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, and Wasilla. The training courses are open to all foster or adoptive families in Alaska, regardless of whether the family provides services to children in the care of OCS or not.

Training for state-licensed or state-approved residential facilities are provided through a grant with Alaska Children's Services. Initial training primarily consists of behavioral intervention strategies and building rapport with children and families. On-going training is provided according to the facilities' self assessment of their needs and based on staff skills and client profiles.

State statutes and regulations outline foster parent orientation and training requirements. OCS provides a two hour orientation to resource families. This orientation provides basic information on becoming a resource family. The orientation covers topics that introduce foster care to participants and covers topics such as the role of OCS, the role of resource families, steps becoming licensed as a foster family, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. All resource families are encouraged to complete the orientation process before placement of a child in their home. In emergency placement situations, training is initiated at the beginning of placement.

Additionally, state statutes and regulations require that foster parents complete 10-15 hours of resource family training per year: 10 hours for a single-parent family; and 15 hours for a two-parent family, with each parent completing at least five hours of training. The resource family training consists of an eight-week initial CORE curriculum, as well as specialized training for all resource families. New resource families are strongly encouraged to complete the eight-week CORE curriculum before placement, or within the first year of licensure. Specialized trainings are offered to resource families to assist them meet specific needs of the children in their care. Generally, foster parents are encouraged to utilize the specialized trainings in subsequent years to meet the yearly training requirements. The CORE curriculum is outlined below:

<i>CORE Curriculum</i>		
Session	Course Name	Credit Hours
Session 1	Introduction to the Office of Children’s Services	3
Session 2	Impact of Child Abuse and Neglect	3
Session 3	Separation, Grief and Attachment	2
Session 4	Appropriate Discipline	3
Session 5	Birth Families and Cultural Considerations	2
Session 6	Adoption and Guardianship	3
Session 7	Focus on the Family	3
Session 8	Reunification and Transition	3
TOTAL		22

Historically, training has been provided on-site at the ACRF offices, as well as by self-study mail-out courses to families who live at a distance from the ACRF offices. Additionally, ACRF staff have traveled to areas outside of the major urban hubs to provide training to resource families in other areas of Alaska such as Bethel, Dillingham, Kenai, and Ketchikan, when requested by OCS. Since 2002, OCS has recognized the need to expand training options to resource families, with a specific focus on improving accessibility to resource families in rural communities. Changes in training formats, have included:

- The development of web-based training courses;
- The development of a CORE curriculum in the Yu’Pik language;
- A “train the rural trainers” program trains ICWA workers from tribal organizations located in rural areas of Alaska in the eight-week CORE curriculum;
- A telephonic orientation course for families living in remote locations in Alaska; and
- The development of a DVD-based CORE curriculum to assist OCS workers, ICWA and tribal workers in conducting a CORE training in remote communities.

In 2002, the CFSR final report indicated that 29 percent of the foster families did not have documented training; in 2008, the rates have declined to a 23 percent average statewide for homes that had not met the training requirements. The following chart outlines the tracking data on training requirements from July 2007 to March 2008. Due to an increased focus on compliance with training standards by regional licensing staff and management, the OCS has been able to demonstrate incremental improvements on meeting training requirements in three of the four OCS service regions.

Percent of Foster Homes Not Meeting Training Requirements

Regions	July 2007	January 2008	March 2008	Region Avgs.
Anchorage	28%	23%	15%	22%
Northern	25%	30%	19%	25%
Southcentral	18%	1%	15%	11%
Southeast	34%	33%	36%	34%
Avg. % for reporting period	26%	22%	21%	23%

Other improvements include communication efforts between ACRF and licensing staff on the documentation of the compliance with training hours. ACRF has developed an extensive database that

tracks all training hours completed by individual foster parents. Each quarter, ACRF sends an electronic listing of all foster families who have licenses expiring in the next three months and require completion of training hours as a part of the licensing renewal process.

Additionally, at any time, a licensing worker may contact the ACRF and request individual training records for any foster parent. These changes in communication have assisted with the incremental decline in the numbers of foster families who have not met the training requirements, as workers are able to contact foster families proactively to ensure that greater numbers of foster families are meeting the training requirements on an annual basis.

The “train the rural trainers” program mentioned above was well received in rural Alaska; however, many of the rural trainers did not have a significant background in child protection issues or knowledge of the expectations for foster parents when children are placed in their care. Additionally, it was difficult to provide support to the rural trainers; many of the rural trainers provided the CORE training so infrequently that additional refresher courses for the trainers were needed. For this reason, the DVD-based CORE curriculum was created to assist rural trainers on an on-going basis. It is anticipated that this the DVD-based CORE curriculum will allow for trainers from Tribal organizations in rural communities to provide the CORE training to resource families in rural locations on an individual basis. The DVD-based CORE courses were implemented in 2008; as such, the impacts of the DVD-based training to improving training outcomes for rural families cannot yet be measured.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

The new Alaska statute and regulations establish a provisional foster care license issued on an emergency basis; making the process more responsive to child safety and family preparation. Rather than placing a child into a non-related, emergency shelter facility, OCS will utilize the provisional license issued on an emergency basis for up to 90 days, to license someone to care for a child in an emergency situation. Generally, provisional licenses issued on an emergency basis are utilized to allow for relative placements for children.

However, challenges due to the nature of the emergency placement, orientation and training is not completed until after the child is placed into the home. In these circumstances, foster families who become licensed under emergency conditions are encouraged to complete the training requirements before the 90-day emergency conditions.

OCS encourages foster parents to utilize trainings that are held in the foster parents’ community to meet the necessary training requirements. ACRF works with a foster parent to identify available trainings within the community that can be used to fulfill the required training hours. Routinely, ACRF sends out electronic community-based training information to all foster families.

Summary

The OCS has a long-standing, statewide training program for foster families that outlines CORE training competencies and specialized training courses to assist resource families with meeting training requirements for licensing. There have been challenges for OCS to have every resource parent complete the required training in a timely manner; however, data shows improvement in this area.

Geographical vastness of Alaska also adds to the challenge of providing training statewide. These challenges are being addressed through expanded training options such as the DVD-based CORE curriculum for foster families and through the training hours compliance quarterly tracking logs through ACRF and OCS’ quality assurance process for licensing. Incremental improvements as outlined above are a result of these efforts.

E. Service Array and Resource Development

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with the factor of Service Array during CFSR-1, 2002.

Item 35: Does the State have in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families, that determine other service needs, that address the needs of families in addition to individual children to create a safe home environment, that enable children to remain safely with their parents when placements achieve permanency when reasonable, and that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency?

Previous Item Rating:

The 2002 CFSR final report rated Item 35 as an Area Needing Improvement because services are not available in sufficient quantity in either rural or urban communities.

Changes 2002-2008

To address concerns from the CFSR Round 1, the Office of Children's Services has implemented programs to mitigate gaps in Alaska's service array and address the diverse and individualized needs of families and children. The following section describes the core services provided statewide through the Department of Health and Social Services to ensure the safety, permanency, and well being of every child. The accessibility of these services is addressed in Item 36.

Prior to service delivery, children and families are thoroughly assessed to determine if any safety threats are present. If safety threats or impending danger are identified, the process further identifies the root cause of parent's inability to provide a safe home environment for their children. At this point, services are tailored whenever possible, to address the underlying issues identified in the assessment.

In January 2005, OCS modified the grantee process for grants funded by Title IV-B and improved the availability of services provided.

- Family Support Services: Services include providing access to basic needs such as housing, in-home support and transportation services, parenting skill training/education, and fostering healthy child development. Families can be referred by community providers (such as hospitals, shelters, schools), OCS staff, or self-referred.
- Family Preservation: Services are prioritized for families with an open in-home case. Agencies work in partnership with OCS staff to provide in-home support and transportation services, hands-on parenting education and support, and monitored safety and service planning.
- Family Preservation Visitation Centers: Services include facilitation of visits between children and parents to assist in reunification efforts and enhance the child-parent relationship. Since 2002, Cook Inlet Tribal Council has operated the only state-funded Family Visitation Center in Alaska.
- Time Limited Reunification: Services include the facilitation of supervised visitation, parent/caregiver education, family mediation services, safety planning, transportation and anger management counseling.
- Differential Response Program. Family Assessment Workers offer OCS referred priority 3 cases non-adversarial, assessment & family empowering case management for three to nine months.
- Adoption Support: Alaska Center for Resource Families as part of the Resource Family Training and Support grant provide services all adoption and guardianship families (OCS and private). Services include information and referral, case management, support and mentoring and crisis intervention.

Alaska has increased the number of Child Advocacy Centers from Anchorage, Juneau and Wasilla to additional locations in Bethel, Nome, Fairbanks, Dillingham, with Glennallen and Homer starting in July of 2008. All CACs also serve children and families in outlying communities within their geographical proximity.

The Anchorage Child Advocacy Center is part of an initiative that combined Anchorage OCS staff and supervisor to work cooperatively with the Anchorage Police Department's Crimes Against Children's Unit and the Special Victim's Unit; Alaska State Troopers, Alaska Bureau of Investigations unit; and the Sexual Assault Response Team. These agencies are co-located in the University Lake Multi-Disciplinary Center that investigates all sexual abuse and severe physical abuse allegations for the Anchorage region. Stakeholders believe this one stop approach for serving children allows for better service identification and delivery.

Early Intervention and Infant Learning services are available for families with infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) with special needs. Resource Family Training and Support Services are available to all OCS foster families providing initial and on-going training to assist with meeting the individualized and unique needs of children. The Alaska Children's Trust's grantees provides a hot-line for parents to utilize and obtain services to improve knowledge, skills and understanding about child development, age-appropriate expectations and roles and responsibilities. Services also include professional counseling, parenting classes, education.

The Department of Health and Social Services began working to address the 32 percent increased requests in Alaska's child care program for children in custody between SFY06 and SFY07. It became evident that providing adequate child care services was essential to the State's ability to recruit and retain foster homes and to provide necessary services to families struggling to keep their children in their homes. Currently foster parents who are employed who require child care must apply at the Division of Public Assistance, where eligibility is based on income. If they are denied, foster parents must contact OCS to obtain child care costs. This new process, which is slated to begin fall 2008, is streamlining this process to one stop shopping.

In 2005, Alaska's Bring the Kids Home program was established within the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) across the Division of Behavioral Health, Division of Juvenile Justice, and OCS with funding partners at the Mental Health Trust, Denali Commission and the Department of Education. The focus of this project is to decrease the number of children placed in out of state residential treatment facilities and increase capacity to serve Alaska's children at home. This process has been successful in increasing the capacity of in state residential psychiatric treatment centers and expanding out patient children's psychiatric emergency services. There currently 28 residential treatment facilities that serve children in custody. Between FY06 and FY07 (including custody and non custody):

- There was a decrease of 19.8 percent in out-of-state RPTC recipients.
- There was an increase of 33.8 percent in in-state RPTC recipients.

Most recently, in 2008, BTKH obtained funds for Individualized Services Agreements to fund necessary services on a case-by-case basis that are not reimbursable through Medicaid, but are essential to address the individual needs while keeping children in the least restrictive level of care.

The Division of Behavioral Health offers a residential and outpatient mental health and substance services to address the needs of children and families. Due to limited funding for behavioral health services, provider agencies statewide have to select and prioritize services, programs and construction projects that have the greatest possible potential for effective and significant improvement to the delivery of behavioral health services for Alaskans. Staff shortages, low pay, and demanding job duties within provider agencies add to the lack of services available. While collaboration among community providers statewide does exist, there is often a focus on crisis care vs. long term therapies which are crucial to parents and children on the path to reunification. The accessibility of behavioral health services are addressed in Item 36.

These issues have spurred the DHSS and partners such as Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to do behavioral health needs assessment intended to identify the gaps in services and move toward long term solutions. The Shared Plan 2007-2011 developed by the Advisory Board on Alcoholism

and Drug Abuse and the Alaska Mental Health Board is available at http://www.hss.state.ak.us/amhb/PDF/making_it_work073007.pdf The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium is available at <http://www.anthc.org/cs/chs/behavioral/upload/Rural-Behavioral-Health-Needs-Assessment-Rev.pdf>

Physical, dental and all primary and emergency care is available through an extensive array of tribal, non-tribal, for profit, non profit, and governmental health care facilities. These facilities are available to all residents residing in urban areas and rural hubs. For residents of smaller rural areas (villages), a tiered health care system exists that provides clinic and outpatient services via a mid level practitioner. For instance, regions around the periphery of the state, rely on a 3 tiered healthcare system which often includes a hospital in the main community, i.e. Kotzebue, Bethel, Nome, Barrow, etc., and moves out to a second tier in the sub regional hubs, which provides limited clinical services, and finally to village based clinics in the most rural settings. If a higher level of care is required, the patient must travel via plane or boat to the closest hub and is always dependent on weather conditions.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

During a May 2008 Tribal/State Co-chairs meeting, it was decided to create a “TSCG Service Array” team that will assist in evaluation of existing services and based on the evaluation, make recommendations to realign services to better meet the needs of children and families statewide. TSCG is also working on developing a Tribal Resource Directory illustrating all services available in each active Tribes/Tribal representative’s region. This will compliment OCS’ Service Array efforts to not duplicate services and to fill service gaps in communities.

The Rural Social Services program is a grant offered to three tribal organizations to serve populations in the rural areas of Alaska. Services include child abuse prevention, support services to families at risk of entering into OCS custody, coordinated case management services and placement support for children who are involved in the OCS system. While services are open to all families and children, because of the large percentage of Alaska Native/American Indian children involved in the OCS system they have been the priority population for these program services.

Three agencies, including the Office of Children’s Services, joined forces to address disproportionate numbers of Alaska Native children in state care by creating development of the Native Family Preservation Unit in 2007. Alaska Native children in Anchorage are 14 times more likely than non-Native children to be involved with the state’s child protection agency. Funding has been secured for the next five years for the new Alaska Native Family Preservation Unit, comprised jointly of OCS-Anchorage, Cook Inlet Tribal Council and the Native Village of Eklutna. The unit may be the first of its kind in the United States and will work exclusively with Alaska Native families. The unit plans to serve 180 families its first year, and 240 for each of the following four years and has recently hired staff for anticipated opening in the fall 2008.

OCS recognizes that allocations of funding continue to be a challenge due to residential placements consuming the majority of limited funds that OCS would like to shift funding to serve children in less restrictive environments. This would allow additional early intervention services to keep children in their own home or reunify in a more expedient manner.

Additionally, Medicaid funding mandates that the priority populations which consist of children, pregnant women, low income families and disabled individuals, and exclude men age 22 to 64 from receiving necessary services that address their underlying issues that impact their ability care for their children. State grant funds are extremely limited in the number of services they provide to men in this age range.

Summary

OCS is committed to continuing to strengthen our service array by working closely with Tribes and service providers, analyzing and evaluating services, and making recommendations to improve practice.

In an effort to ensure that OCS is providing the best services to meet safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children, a new unit, named Service Array Section to address the availability of services and the need for measurable outcomes. The intent is to decrease out of home placements and increasing in home services. The Service Array Mural, a listing of all grants and contracts given out by OCS, has been distributed to the Court Improvement Project, OCS staff, tribal representatives, providers and other stakeholders to help inform the process of determining how we should realign our services to better meet the needs of families and children.

Alaska has an array of child welfare services, however, substance and mental services are consistently in short supply in all areas of the state: primarily in rural locations. All larger cities and rural hubs have services, however, as indicated in Item 36, the need for additional mental health and substance services exist.

Item 36: Are the services in Item 35 accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP?

Previous Item Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rated Item 36 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because services are not readily available in all communities in the State.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

Alaska continues to struggle to provide all services in all political jurisdictions of the state. The size of Alaska is more than twice that of Texas; most regions in Alaska are the size of many small states. As an example, the Southcentral region is larger than the size of Oregon, and not only lacks a road system which requires reliance on limited air and water transportation, but its population base is spread across 58 villages. This makes provision of a full array of services extremely difficult.

OCS is divided into four regions: Anchorage, Northern, Southcentral, Southeast. Family Support, Family Preservation, Time Limited Reunification, Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program, Child Advocacy Centers, Residential Treatment, and Post Adoption services are available in all Regions. A list of current grants illustrating the location of the service/program and the areas served is included after Item 45 of this section. OCS' four regions are comprised of 26 field offices. While these services are available in each region, they may not be physically located in each field office location; however, all services are accessible by road, plane, boat and in some areas snow machine.

Although, residential treatment facilities are available in all regions, psychiatric services for the most complex children and adults are located only in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. Family Preservation Supervised Visitation is only available in Anchorage, while Differential Response is only available in Anchorage, Wasilla and Nome.

OCS agrees with stakeholders including the Alaska Court System, that identified substance abuse as the "biggest" challenges in the service array sector. The need for additional services is evident as most, if not all, programs have waiting lists. Many clients must wait an average of two to three months before initiating treatment from the time they apply to and are accepted into the program. This waiting period diminishes the likelihood of the parent actually enrolling in the in-patient program. Additionally, only three programs in the state allow children to reside with parents during the course of treatment. This means that many parents attending programs far from their homes have little or no contact with their children during the course of treatment. The courts have found that they cannot fully use their power because there are no places to refer people for treatment, so clients must be incarcerated instead.

Stakeholders also noted that transition services are often lacking in both rural and urban areas for parents and children who have received treatment outside their community (substance abuse, mental health, etc.) When individuals return, transition services are difficult to find, if not entirely unavailable, to support

families with treatment follow-up. It was noted that even if funding was available to add additional services, the less densely populated communities could not support the infrastructure required to run and maintain these services.

The Department of Health Social Services working in concert with the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the Alaska Mental Health Board, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Denali Commission, and the University of Alaska is working together to address behavioral health services statewide. Reports are referenced in Item 35.

Services that address the physical, dental and all primary and emergency care for families and children are available, although there can be gaps in service if there is a workforce shortage. Department staff have indicated recruiting a stable workforce in these service areas can be challenging. Limited connectivity via telemedicine is also noted as challenge.

Summary

While there are many services accessible in Alaska, challenges primarily exist in the areas of mental health and substance abuse in urban and rural areas. Accessibility in rural villages for all services tends to be a challenge; however, itinerant services may be available.

Stakeholders and community providers' commitment to working with the Department on a statewide basis to improve outcomes for children and families is demonstrated in this section as well as in Items 38-40.

Item 37: Can the services in Item 35 be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?

Previous Item Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rated Item 37 was also rated as an Area Needing Improvement because service provision is influenced by the availability rather than the underlying needs of the children and families.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

Individualizing services begins during the investigation stage of the safety assessment model when front-line case workers assess the following areas to better understand the underlying needs and identify appropriate services.

- The extent of the child abuse or neglect: type of maltreatment; details of maltreatment (includes severity); who is the alleged offender/perpetrator finding of allegation(s)
- The circumstances surrounding the child abuse or neglect: circumstances and events associated with the maltreatment; duration of maltreatment, patterns; response of non-offender; and caregivers' attitudes of maltreatment.
- Child functioning: general behavior (includes daily routines and habits); physical abilities (includes specific special needs); child's emotional and social development (includes school and peer behavior); vulnerability; and ability to self-protect.
- Adult functioning: general behavior (including daily routines, habits, and cultural environment); social relationships; problem solving skills; abilities to manage stress; and general issues (include mental health, substance abuse)

- Parenting practices and skills: parenting style of each parent and approach; knowledge of child development; parenting satisfaction; sensitive to child's limits; and expectations.
- Disciplinary practices: discipline methods; purpose of discipline; age appropriateness; and attitudes and expectations about discipline.

Alaska has worked on providing individualized services to children and families through the use individualized service funds to keep children in their home communities. Funds are limited and approval is provided through State office. Special needs funds also support individualized needs by allowing workers to pay for services that are not available under Medicaid, not covered by the foster care base rate, and/or unattainable by the family. Examples of these services include bus passes, entry fees for camps/activities, individual counseling services, youth identification, drug screening, genetic testing for paternity, etc.

Workers must be creative by collaborating with local resources to provide services to families and children. In many rural communities there are ICWA workers that assist to keep families together. For instance, they provide transportation, access to food, shelter, heating fuel; services in their own community as well as other community, skill development such as parenting, anger management; and offer respite services.

OCS recognizes that it is critical to understand the cultural differences in order to address the individual needs of Alaska Native children and families. Although all workers are required to take the ICWA training offered through TONE, it can be difficult for agencies to consistently be staffed by workers who are aware of the cultural issues of children from diverse villages and Alaskan Native cultures primarily due to high staff turnover and limited training opportunities. Tribal State Collaboration Group is working on development of culturally appropriate training for all state employees. Additionally, OCS is working with Tribes to include cultural training requirements for OCS' grantees.

The population of Hispanic, Asian, and African Americans, vary all over the state with a greater cross sections being in such as Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks. There has been a higher rate of immigration in the Hispanic and Asian communities in the past few years. Resources are accessed from leaders in the Asian and Hispanic communities for services such as interpreters and culturally based services. Additionally, children from military families receive a wide array of services from the military base that do have not have wait lists ranging from medical to mental health.

All behavioral health services including individual counseling, family counseling, out-patient services, residential services and individual service agreements require that a treatment plan is developed and addresses each individuals underlying needs and is coordinated with their OCS case plan to ensure the long term safety of the child.

Summary

OCS works with all inter and intra departmental agencies, Tribes, service providers, and community stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcomes for children whether it be through early intervention or determining the most appropriate permanent placement for children.

Alaska's geography impacts service accessibility because in many areas services simply are not available; however, Alaska utilizes creative means to fill the service gaps to meet the needs of children and families. Based on discussion with the QA team, it was noted that oftentimes cases receive all the required services identified regardless of their location, while others do not.

F. Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Alaska did achieve substantial conformity with the factor of Agency Responsiveness during CFSR-1, 2002.

Item 38: In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, does the State engage in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child-and-family-serving agencies, and include the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rated Item 38 as a Strength because the State has an active Tribal-State Collaboration group, positive local collaboration efforts, and managers at all levels of the agency who are seen as easily accessible to the community stakeholders when questions or issues arise.

Changes 2002-2008

Alaska continues to strengthen the consultation and partnering process. The CFSP incorporates the input from individuals who represent a wide range of agencies and community partners throughout the state. OCS frequently consults with all entities involved in the CFSP' goals and objectives. These include: Tribal State Collaboration Group; Court Improvement Project; Department of Law; Alaska Citizen Review Panel; Facing Foster Care in Alaska; OCS grantees; Alaska Association of Homes for Children; State Office Administrators, Managers, Program Staff, Regional Managers and Supervisors.

Facing Foster Care in Alaska which was established in 2003 meets quarterly with OCS' Independent Living Coordinator along with the statewide Independent Living Specialists to discuss challenges facing youth as they prepare for adulthood. Membership is comprised of youth currently in the system as well as alumni. Members also have participated in other child welfare conferences and public forums. In concert with Casey Family Programs and Facing Foster Care in Alaska, OCS has worked on the full array of IL services that are part of the CFSP.

Alaska's Court Improvement Project is a collaborative effort through the Alaska Court System Child in Need of Aid ("CINA") Court Improvement Committee. Committee members include judges from each of Alaska's four judicial districts, court administrators, the head of the state child welfare agency, a representative from the Department of Law (representing the state), a representative from the Public Defender Agency (representing parents), a representative from the Office of Public Advocacy (guardians ad litem), the Children's Justice Specialist from the Tribal Law and Policy Institute's Alaska office, a representative from a tribal nonprofit agency and a supreme court justice. The project has three strategic plans in the areas of training, data and other issues. OCS in conjunction the Alaska Court System worked together to address timely permanency hearings as part of the Title IV-E Program Improvement Plan in 2007-2008.

Established in 2005, the Bring the Kids Home Initiative, as part of the CFSP, is a department-wide initiative between the Division of Behavioral Health, Division of Juvenile Justice, Office of Children's Services, the Alaska Mental Health Trust, Alaska Mental Health Board, parents and parent advocacy agencies and mental health providers to explore ways of better utilizing existing services and planning for the expansion of existing services to create a continuum of services that will be effective in preventing out of state placement. As a result, some children have been able stay in their communities rather than being sent to another area for treatment services.

Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) meetings between the Office of Children's Services and tribal representatives occur three times a year. TSCG has produced a plan and has formed several subgroups to work on parts of the overall plan between meetings. The Tribal State co-chairs meet on a biweekly basis

to plan meetings, resolve ongoing issues and monitor progress toward achieving the goals of the TSCG plan. Many TSCG plan goals are also included in the CFSP. Additionally, TSCG members are active participants all of the safety assessment implementation work groups.

Beginning in 2007, Casey Family Programs Educational Convenings are a series of meetings of local school personnel, assistant attorney generals, Office of Public Advocacy staff, foster care alumni, parents, tribal representatives, Division of Juvenile Justice representatives, Office of Children's Services staff and other interested stakeholders that meet to develop a local plan to improve the educational services received by children in custody. See Item 21 for specific examples of system reform.

In an effort to better coordinate with the Department of Law, monthly meetings are held with OCS and the DOL to address legal issues regarding child welfare issues in Alaska such as timeliness of permanency reports and hearings, confidentiality, release of information, termination, and adoption issues. OCS and DOL most recently worked together to create more individualized court orders for Order for Continuance and for Temporary Custody, Temporary Custody Order, and Findings and Order Following Permanency Order as part of the Title IV-E Program Improvement Plan.

As a result of the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003, the Children Justice Task Force was formed. Members from the Alaska Court System, Department of Law, Department of Public Safety, Office of Public Advocacy, and medical professionals meet quarterly to identify areas where improvement is needed in the statewide response to child maltreatment particularly child sexual abuse, make recommendations and take actions to improve the system. This group works closely with Alaska's Child Advocacy Centers and OCS to carry out the task force's recommendations.

Over the past four years, OCS has worked with Alaska's Citizen Review Plan to ensure that all levels of OCS are responsive to each community's child protection issues and that OCS' policies and procedures are consistent with the needs of Alaska's families.

In 2004, the Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) was transferred from the Department of Education and Early Development to OCS to ensure that early intervention services are available for families with infants and toddlers (birth to age three) with special needs. In addition, statewide efforts to extend mental health services to at risk children birth to age six in a cooperative effort between the Division of Behavioral Health and the Office of Children's Services was initiated. Interventions include consultation to parents, day care facilities and early infant learning staff along with assessment and direct services when indicated.

The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Project, a federal funded project established in 2005, to promote positive development and improved health outcomes for Alaska's children prenatal to eight by creating a culturally responsive, comprehensive and accessible service delivery system. The ECCS project brought together over 100 public and private partners from around the State of Alaska in a collaborative effort to review existing systems for young children and plan for their improvement.

The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)/Residential Psychiatric Treatment Center Demonstration Project was launched in October 2007 with the goal of reducing the number of youth, ages 14 to 21, in Residential Psychiatric Treatment Centers (RPTC) who are dual-diagnosed with FASD and Severe Emotional Disturbance. The Demonstration Project focuses on services that mirror the Alaska Native practices of *modeling* desired behaviors and *mentoring* children to learn their roles in a larger culture while *monitoring* the youth as the treatment is delivered. This is especially important because Native Americans are disproportionality represented in the target group. This project allows the state to use Medicaid waivers, similar to those used for developmentally delayed children, to serve children with FASD.

In 2007, the Department of Labor, Workforce Investment Act in conjunction OCS' Independent Living Program have increased the funding to Convenent House Alaska to assist youth, ages 16 to 21, in gaining employment to become self sufficient as they reach maturity.

OCS has a continuous quality improvement process in place that monitors its service delivery to families, assures that its programs operate at a high standard of care, and offers its stakeholders a method for providing feedback. Surveys are used to obtain feedback and assist management and staff in identifying areas for growth and development. Surveys are sent to community service providers, foster parents, Alaska Native foster parents, judicial system professionals, and parents involved in team decision making. These surveys are available at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/QualityImprovement/QualityImprovement.html>.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

Alaska's child welfare stakeholders' commitment to working with OCS to improve outcomes for children and families is demonstrated by their involvement in the numerous programs and efforts listed above. These avenues allow for a regular collection and exchange of information regarding CFSP goals.

The biggest challenge Alaska faces is arranging time to evaluate, develop and coordinate with all partner agencies. Alaska's geographical diverseness also creates a challenge due to the high cost of travel to bring stakeholders together on a regular basis for planning and implementation efforts. Although teleconferences are utilized in most instances, stakeholders noted that better collaboration occurs during face-to-face meetings.

Summary

OCS recognizes that consultation and collaboration with stakeholders is key to improving safety, permanency, and wellbeing outcomes for children and families. CFSP goals are intertwined in most, if not all, stakeholder programs and initiatives and more frequently are reviewed on an ongoing basis during regularly scheduled meetings rather than a specific "CFSP goals" meeting. OCS facilitates feedback on the CFSP formally on an annual basis. OCS has made significant progress through partnering and consulting with stakeholders over the past six years as demonstrated above. Although OCS continues to work on meeting CFSP outcomes, progress continues in developing and nurturing collaboration between stakeholders, and public and private agencies.

Item 39: Does the agency develop, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP?

Previous Rating

Item 39 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of involvement in the Child and Family Services Planning (CFSP) Process is limited to review and comment instead of active involvement in setting goals and priorities.

Summary

OCS has a strong track record of collaboration efforts with partner agencies, including local and statewide private and governmental entities. As discussed in Item 38, OCS is actively involved with all representatives that are part of the CFSP and together continually evaluates goals and strategies on an informal basis. If necessary, goals and strategies are modified to support the direction of the agency and its partners. Information for the plan is regularly obtained from the collaboration with these groups and is integrated into the Annual Services Progress Report which is developed once a year. The annual plan is shared with community partners and is available on OCS' website.

OCS may not facilitate regularly scheduled "formal" CFSP meetings, however, the agency feels that the regular contact and collaboration provides a rich ongoing exchange of information and evaluation of CFSP progress and services.

Item 40: Are the State's services under the CFSP coordinated with the services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?

Previous Rating

Item 40 was rated as a Strength because OCS has collaborative efforts among Federal and federally funded assisted programs.

Changes 2002-2008

Since 2002, OCS has increased their level of communication with agencies responsible for implementing federal or federally assisted programs that serve the same population on a regional and statewide level. Coordination efforts are on-going with the Division of Behavioral Health - Mental Health and Substance Abuse; Division of Juvenile Justice; Child Advocacy Centers; Alaska Children's Trust; Court Improvement Project; Division of Public Assistance - TANF and Child Care; Department of Revenue - Child Support; Faith Based Programs (FLAME); Department of Education - Individual Service Plans and Head Start; Division of Public Health; Division of Senior and Developmental Disabilities; Department of Public Safety; Social Security Administration; Department of Law; Department of Labor – Workforce Investment Act; and the Bureau of Vital Statistics. Please reference Item 38 for specific examples of collaborative efforts.

OCS has memoranda of agreements with the Department of Education, Department of Public Safety, Department of Revenue and numerous Tribes/Tribal Entities that outline the agency interchanges and responsibilities for children in the purvue of the Alaska's Child Welfare System.

Additionally, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Leadership Team includes all Division Directors within the Department and work cooperatively to resolve departmental issues that arise. In May 2008, the Department published its five top priorities: substance abuse, vulnerable Alaskans; health and wellness; health care reform; and long term care.

The Children's Policy Team meets bimonthly and includes representatives from DHSS Commissioner's Office, Behavioral Health, Public Assistance, Office of Children's Services, Public Health, Medicaid and Senior and Developmental Disabilities to coordinate services and programs among divisions within the department.

Summary

OCS has many cooperative partnerships as noted above and in Item 38, including numerous partners that manage federal programs. OCS has, for several years, prioritized collaboration with partner programs to address common issues impacting the safety, permanency and well-being of children. This collaboration ensures that practice, policy and implementation meet requirements for federal or federally assisted programs.

G. Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval and Recruitment

Alaska was not in substantial conformity with the factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention during CFSR-1, 2002.

Item 41: Standards for Foster Homes and Institutions. Has the State implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards?

Previous Item Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rated Item 41 as a Strength, because the State had issued and implemented comprehensive new licensing standards as of December 2001.

Changes 2002-2008

In 2004, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) was restructured and the Division of Family and Youth Services became the Office of Children's Services (OCS). As a part of the department restructure, all department licensing functions were to be consolidated. By 2008, all OCS licensing functions, except the foster care and child placement agency licensing functions, have transitioned to the department's Certification and Licensing Unit in the Division of Public Health. DPH licenses residential care and OCS licenses foster homes and foster group homes.

The new licensing standards provide adequate protection to the health and safety of children and require monitoring and home visits as part of the renewal process. The initial provisional license is issued for a period of one year. The provisional license can be fully licensed or not fully licensed; at the end of one year the license changes to a biannual license if the provisional meets all fully licensed requirements. If at any time, the license does not meet all "fully" licensed standards, the worker will change the status the license from "fully" licensed to "not fully" licensed.

In 2006, the Alaska State Legislature codified the DHSS restructure in statute, legally consolidating all of the departmental functions for licensing. Subsequent to the passage of the licensing statute, new regulations were established to further define the licensing requirements; thus, hospitals, residential care facilities, childcare facilities, assisted living homes, child placement agencies, and foster care homes, share similar licensing standards and requirements. New and revision of current regulations continue to be created to further define the statutory requirements for licensing within DHSS.

In 2007, OCS restructured the foster care licensing management from the regional children's services managers to the OCS state office, Resource Family Section. As a part of this change, a Community Care Licensing Specialist manager was hired in November 2007 to manage the foster care and child placement agency licensing supervisors and related functions statewide. This change in organizational structure has allowed for better focus and outcomes to ensure licensed foster homes are in compliance with the established licensing statutes, regulations and title IV-E standards.

In 2003, OCS implemented the resource family assessment (RFA) that would have established a common assessment process for foster and adoptive families. This implementation plan ended in 2006, because of two factors: 1) the implementation of the new licensing statutes and regulations did not take into account a common assessment for foster and adoptive families; and 2) Tribal partners voiced objections to a common assessment of foster and adoptive families for Alaska Native children.

In an effort to create an assessment tool that was culturally responsive to Alaska Native families, Casey Family Services led a group of Tribal and state partners on the development of an Alaska Native version of the Casey Family Assessment Inventory to be used by OCS licensing workers with Alaska Native resource families and children. This assessment inventory was completed in December 2007; Casey Family Services and the OCS are developing an implementation plan for the CFAI Alaska Native version.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

Over the past five years, it has been difficult to make sustainable improvements in the foster care licensing process because of the monumental changes that have occurred external to the agency. At this time, the OCS continues to utilize a standard-by-standard approach, as outlined in regulations, to evaluate foster families. Additionally, Tribal partners have indicated that the new licensing standards are creating financial barriers for relatives and Alaska Native foster homes to be licensed, due to increased costs to purchase required safety items in the home.

OCS continues to assess adoptive and guardianship families through a homestudy assessment process that is different than the foster care licensing process. Generally, a thorough assessment of resource families continues to be a challenge for OCS. The initial efforts with a common assessment process ended in 2006 as mentioned above. Given the history of Alaska Native children being removed from their family homes

at alarming rates, the challenge for the OCS is to create an integrated assessment and licensing process that is sensitive to the cultural needs of Alaska Native families. Tribal partners point out that any type of integrated assessment and licensing process must be tied to the revised placement policies that would formally identify and allow for the formal consideration of relative placement options for children in care, at each point in the case planning and placement process. The OCS remains committed to finding a common assessment process for foster and adoptive families, but which is sensitive to the expressed Tribal concerns for Alaska Native children in care.

To date, despite efforts by OCS, tribally licensed foster homes have not been established in Alaska due to various legal interpretations. OCS remains committed to working with the Tribal partners on the establishment of tribally licensed foster home standards for Alaska Native families and children in care, should legal impediments be resolved.

Summary

OCS has had significant challenges over the past five years with statutory and regulatory changes in foster care licensing. Efforts to create a common assessment process for foster and adoptive families has been difficult to implement due to the implementation of the new licensing regulations and the expressed concerns of Tribal partners. Despite these efforts, OCS remains committed to creating sustainable improvements in the assessment, evaluation and licensing of foster and adoptive families in Alaska.

Item 42: Standards Applied Equally. Are the standards applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving Title IV-E or IV-B funds?

Previous Item Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report rated Item 42 as an Area in Need of Improvement because application variances results in full licensing standards not being applied to all foster homes.

Changes 2002-2008

Statewide processes are being implemented that affect Title IV-E funding. OCS has established a quality assurance compliance review and licensing tracking log, as a part of the title IV-E Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), to ensure that licensed homes are meeting foster care standards for the safety and health of children, and that homes are in compliance with Title IV-E standards.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

All licensed foster homes, relative and non-relative, are required to comply with the same set of standards. Relatives are provided a choice of whether to be licensed or not. If relatives are not licensed, OCS likewise requires a criminal and child protection background check and a physical check of the home surroundings. Unlicensed relatives do not receive any reimbursement from OCS; however, unlicensed relatives can receive TANF funding through the Division of Public Assistance to assist with the support of the children in their homes.

A challenge for OCS is that the high cost of living in rural areas of Alaska makes it more difficult for relatives to readily accept a relative placement. Often, relatives have to make hard choices to reject a placement of the relative child since TANF and foster care payments do not provide adequate financial relief to support an additional child in the home. Beginning July 2008, OCS has increased foster care base rates by almost 30 percent in an effort to assist foster families with the cost of living increases.

Stakeholders indicated that there are geographical challenges in rural communities and many homes do not meet all of the standard-by-standard home environmental licensure requirements, especially with regards to the “physical plant” of the home. In these cases, a variance may be requested and approved in order to accommodate children’s special needs, or the best interest of children, such placement of a sibling group.

The variance process allows the particular standard to be varied, if an alternate way of meeting the standard can be identified and implemented while ensuring the child’s safety. The two most common reasons that variances are utilized are: 1) the physical plant of the foster home to meet necessary fire and safety codes (only when an alternative such as a window that can be broken can be substituted to meet the conditions of the fire code), and 2) number of children in the home to accommodate large sibling groups. OCS does not use variances for safety equipment requirements such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors. In cases of foster home capacity, variances are approved whenever possible to ensure that children are placed with a relative and/or that siblings are placed together.

Variances are requested and approved through regional variance committees. In every case, OCS is utilizing the variance process to make sure that each standard for licensure is applied equally and that each home meets the safety requirements outlined in the licensing regulations. In the event that a variance is denied, OCS may utilize funding and Title IV-E reimbursement to make necessary physical modifications to the home so that a child can be placed in the home.

Summary

Since 2002, significant changes within DHSS and OCS have occurred that have impacted the licensing standards for OCS. OCS has worked diligently to ensure that standards for foster homes are applied equally to relative and non-relative foster homes.

Item 43: Requirements for Criminal Background Checks. Does the State comply with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and does the State have in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?

Previous Item Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report identified this item as an area of Strength because criminal background checks are completed on all homes.

Changes 2002-2008

In 2006, as a part of the new licensing statutes and regulations, separate barrier crime statutes and regulations were implemented for DHSS. The regulations outline stringent criteria for barrier crimes that exceed federal guidelines for background checks. In Alaska, barrier crimes have varying levels of time by which a person cannot be licensed by the department, inclusive of foster care. The barriers are set at 1 year, 3 year, 5 year, 10 year and permanent barriers from the date of the criminal conviction. Permanent barriers include crimes such as child sexual abuse of a minor, murder, and felony assault.

The statutes and regulations allow for a variance to the permanent barriers through a departmental barrier crimes variance committee. OCS only considers variances to barriers for foster care for relative foster parents. Variances for barrier crimes that have time limits (1 year to 10 year barriers) must be approved by the OCS Director, while permanent barrier crime variances must be approved by the Commissioner of DHSS.

Additionally, statute and regulation codified the long-standing practice with the OCS that background checks include state and federal fingerprinting results, APSIN (Alaska Public Safety Information Network) checks, child protection checks through OCS PROBER and ORCA data systems, juvenile checks through the JOMIS data system, sex offender registry checks, out-of-state child protection background checks, court records checks, and other interfaces.

Criminal background clearances are required for all foster parents, unlicensed relatives and pre-adoptive or adoptive homes. The federal barrier crime regulations apply to unlicensed relatives and foster and adoptive families. The state barrier crime statutes and regulations only apply to licensed foster homes and facilities within the DHSS and are more restrictive.

As a part of the DHSS licensing reorganization, it was recognized that fingerprint scanners needed to be available throughout the State of Alaska to assist with the transmission and receipt of fingerprints. Through an agreement with the Department of Public Health, fingerprint scanners were located in all of OCS field offices and regional offices in June 2007, so that electronic transfer of fingerprints could occur in Alaska. In February 2008, a fingerprint scanner pilot project began at two OCS sites, Kenai and Bethel. Transmission and technical difficulties have been identified as a part of this pilot, so as new sites are brought online, scanners can be configured for proper transmission of the prints. Fingerprint machines in four other offices are expected to be brought on line by the end of July 2008.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

Historically, the processing of fingerprint results has been a significant impediment to timely licensing and adoption homestudy approvals within OCS. On average, the time from submitting fingerprints to the receipt of the results can average between three to six months. Should fingerprints be rejected, these timeframes are increased as families must be reprinted and fingerprints resubmitted for processing. Currently, the average time to fully license a foster home within OCS is 272 days; a significant aspect to this timeframe is the length of time to process fingerprint results. As a part of the Title IV-E PIP, the purchase of fingerprint scanners to electronically transfer fingerprints and results was completed, as OCS does not claim for Title IV-E while fingerprint results are pending.

Summary

OCS continues to require criminal background clearances for all resource families, unlicensed relatives, licensed foster homes and adoptive placements. Alaska has faced challenges in the timeliness of receiving fingerprint results, but is actively working to improve these outcomes through the use of fingerprint scanners. It is anticipated that the electronic transfer of fingerprints and results will significantly reduce the timeliness for foster care licensing and adoption homestudy approvals.

Item 44: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes. Does the State have in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive homes that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed in the State?

Previous Rating

The CFSR final report identified this item as an Area in Need of Improvement, because the State does not have an effective recruitment plan and needs more recruitment strategies.

Changes 2002-2008

From 2003 to 2005, OCS received technical assistance for the National Resource Center of Foster Care and Permanency Planning to assist with the development of a recruitment and retention plan for OCS. This process brought together statewide stakeholders to address the various aspects of the resource family recruitment and retention needs in Alaska. This recruitment and retention plan was never formalized within OCS; however, a smaller recruitment effort was developed to address the need for additional Native foster families in rural Alaska.

The Native Rural Recruitment Team (NRRT) was developed in 2006 in response to the need for more Alaska Native and rural resource family homes to prevent Alaska Native rural children being removed from their community and placed in urban areas of Alaska. These teams met with Tribes, agencies and other interested parties to develop a community-based recruitment plan for that particular community using local resources to recruit and support foster families. This approach has increased the number of

homes in rural villages available to children in need; to date, 37 foster homes in remote, village communities have been identified and licensed through the NRRT community teams.

Since 2004, OCS has been implementing the Annie E. Casey Family-to-Family Initiative in the Anchorage region. As a part of this initiative, the Anchorage region recognized that the greatest form of recruitment is support to resource families; for this reason, the recruitment and retention group has changed its focus and name to “Support, Development and Recruitment” of resource families.

Since 2002, OCS has been actively involved in the National Adoption Awareness and National Foster Care Months. As a part of the National Adoption Awareness month in 2006 and 2007, OCS funded a statewide media campaign that focused on the adoption of older youth in care. These media ads (radio and television) ran from November through May. Additionally, OCS utilized other general recruitment strategies to include advertising signs on city buses, interviews with newspapers and radio stations, as well as print media. National Foster Care month activities have included foster parent appreciation events in all of the OCS service regions. Adoption days have occurred in the Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks and Juneau courts over the past three years. Adoption days have been extremely successful in finalizing adoptions for children in foster care with 52 adoptions in November 2007.

In 2007, the DHSS Office of Faith-Based Initiatives brought together the faith-based community in the Anchorage region, to create a support network for resource families in the Anchorage region. This group has been meeting for over a year and has developed a support plan that was finalized in March 2008; however, the plan is not yet implemented.

Also in 2007, the Office of Children’s Services became a grantee of the Dave Thomas Foundation’s Wendy’s Wonderful Kids program. Through this program, Wendy’s Wonderful Kids funds a .5 FTE as a child-specific recruiter in the Anchorage region, to actively focus on six children a year who have been in foster care for the longest period of time and are legally free for adoption. In early 2008, this position was expanded by OCS to a 1.0 FTE through state funding resources, to provide recruitment efforts focused on adoption and guardianship in the Anchorage region.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

Many of the efforts outlined above have infused new energy into the staff and community partners in their focus on recruitment and retention of resource families in Alaska. Many of these efforts have been focused in the Anchorage region; while additional efforts in rural areas are needed, the Native Rural Recruitment teams are a positive way to coordinate community teams in very remote communities.

Tribal Title IV-E partners have also been recruiting and retaining Native Foster families; Kawerak sends workers to outlying villages to present and discuss the licensing process to members of their communities and Bristol Bay Native Association conducted foster parent radio ads in Yupik.

There have been several recruitment strategies that were viewed positively in the community, which include:

- A television ad that features a youth adopted at age 16 from foster care;
- Displays in many local and school libraries throughout Alaska on adoption and foster care as a part of National Adoption month;
- Berry bucket campaign as a part of the NRRT efforts;
- Various interviews with newspapers and radio stations on the need for resource families in Alaska

As part of the Rural Social Services grant, recruitment and retention of native foster homes was a service option that Tribes could choose to provide. Two of the three grantees, in Nome and Kotzebue, reported that over 35 homes were recruited and 11 became licensed during FY07.

Summary

While Alaska has invested many resources into recruitment and retention efforts over the past five years, better data tracking of these approaches to document these successes are needed to determine the outcomes of these services. Additionally, the development of a multi-year recruitment plan will better synthesize the various local and regional recruitment and retention efforts.

Item 45: State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Permanent Placements. Does the State have in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children?

Previous Rating

The 2002 CFSR final report identified this item as a Strength because the State utilizes the Alaska Exchange and Northwest Adoption Exchange to seek placements of children.

Changes 2002-2008

For many years, OCS had contracted the Alaska Adoption Exchange to Northwest Resource Associates of Seattle, Washington. In 2007, the Alaska Adoption Exchange was established as a service within the Adoption program of OCS State Office. The listing of children on the Alaska Adoption Exchange automatically lists the child on the Northwest and AdoptusKids exchanges, so that there the state is looking at both in-state and out-of-state placement options for a child simultaneously.

Since the Alaska Adoption Exchange was established within OCS, 32 children have been listed on the exchange. Additionally, all of these children have also been listed on the Northwest and AdoptusKids exchanges.

Strengths and Ongoing Challenges

OCS has continued to utilize adoption exchange services for the placement of children who are in out-of-home care with a permanent plan for adoption. One of the successes of the exchange has been to connect families from various locations in Alaska with waiting children statewide.

Summary

Alaska has been consistently utilizing adoption exchange services at the state, regional and national levels as a part of the efforts to place children for adoption. Children have been placed successfully through these services.

The following is a list of OCS grants.

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
AK Children's Trust	Statewide	Statewide (AK Children's Trust Offers 22 grants for this service)	Provide services to parents to improve knowledge, skills & understanding about child development, age-appropriate expectations & roles & responsibilities. Professional counseling, parenting classes, education.	
Bring the Kids Home	Statewide	Statewide	Troubleshooting within OCS system in regards to placement issues and other relevant areas of concern. Identify community resources and compiling gaps and needs for future infrastructure building. Help with placement options in or out of state. Troubleshooting any placement issues. Contact for residential treatment programs, including acute care, and any issues and/or problems that arise in regards to any placement. Link between Field Offices, Medicaid Contractor, and Resource Team (which includes DJJ and DBH staff).	
Child Advocacy Center	SCRO	Northern (located: Dillingham)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation
Child Advocacy Center	SERO	Bartlett catchment area, inc.; Haines, Yakutat, Hoonah (located: Juneau)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	Catholic Community Services/S.A.F.E.
Child Advocacy Center	NRO	Northern (located: Nome)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	Kawerak, inc.
Child Advocacy Center	ANC	Anchorage and other communities (located: Anchorage)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	Providence Alaska Medical Center/Alaska C.A.R.E.S
Child Advocacy Center	NRO	Fairbanks North Star Borough and Trooper Detachment "D" Area (located: Fairbanks)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	Stevie's Place/Resource Center for Parents and Children
Child Advocacy Center	SCRO	Mat-Su Borough (located: Wasilla)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	The Children's Place/Matanuska Comm Health Care
Child Advocacy Center	SCRO	Southcentral (located: Bethel)	The CAC is a safe, child friendly facility containing a forensic interview room and forensic medical examination room, which offers multidisciplinary intensive investigative and support services to children 0-18 who have experienced sexual abuse and/or severe abuse.	Tundra Women's Coalition
Differential Response	ARO	Anchorage	Family Assessment Workers offer OCS referred priority 3 cases non-adversarial, continued assessment & family empowering case management for 3-9 months.	Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Differential Response	NRO	Nome & surrounding villages	Family Assessment Workers offer OCS referred priority 3 cases non-adversarial, continued assessment & family empowering case management for 3-9 months.	Kawerak, inc.
Differential Response	SCRO	Mat-Su Borough	Family Assessment Workers offer OCS referred priority 3 cases non-adversarial, continued assessment & family empowering case management for 3-9 months.	The Children's Place/Matanuska Community Health Care
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	SERO	Juneau	Mental health consultation and Medicaid outreach to Head Start Programs and families.	Juneau Youth Services
Early Childhood Mental Health Workforce Development	Statewide	Statewide	This project provides training and ongoing support to mental health clinicians and early interventionists.	15 providers in variety of agencies

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	NRO	Fairbanks, Copper River, Glennallen, Valdez & Barrow	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Alaska Center for Children & Adults
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Bristol Bay	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SERO	Sitka	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Center for Community
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SERO	Ketchikan	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Community Connection
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	ARO / SERO	Chugiak/Cordova	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Family Outreach Center for Understanding Special Needs
Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Kenai, Soldotna	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Frontier Community Services
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Homer	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Homer Children's Services
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Kodiak	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Kodiak Area Native Association
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Mat-Su Valley	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Mat-Su Services for Children & Adults
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	NRO	Kotzebue/Point Hope	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	North West Arctic School District
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	NRO	Norton Sound	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Norton Sound Health Corporation
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	ARO	Anchorage/Whittier	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Program for Infants & Children
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	Statewide	Statewide	AK Transition Training Initiative/statewide training.	REACH
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Statewide	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Reach
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Seward	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Seaview Community Services

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO	Aleutians/Pribilofs	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Southeast Regional Resource Center
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	NRO	Fairbanks/Interior/Anaktuvuk Pall	Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Tanana Chiefs
Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program	SCRO		Early intervention services are federally governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Programs vary widely by staff and region size. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans.	Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation
Education & Training Vouchers	ARO	Anchorage	The Education & Training Vouchers services assist youth to prepare and obtain employment, receive education, training & related services & to make available vouchers for education & training to youth who have aged out of foster care.	UAA
Education & Training Vouchers	ARO	Northern	The Education & Training Vouchers services assist youth to prepare and obtain employment, receive education, training & related services & to make available vouchers for education & training to youth who have aged out of foster care.	UAF
Education & Training Vouchers	ARO	Northern	The Education & Training Vouchers tuition waiver.	UAF
Education & Training Vouchers	ARO	Southeast	The Education & Training Vouchers services assist youth to prepare and obtain employment, receive education, training & related services & to make available vouchers for education & training to youth who have aged out of foster care.	UAS
Family Preservation	SCRO	Palmer	AFS provides services both in-home and at the agency. Services may include: creating safety plans; addressing parenting skills training; relationship enhancement education; education in child development; modeling and practice of daily living skills; budget.	Alaska Family Services
Family Preservation		Statewide	Alaska Food Coalition Program food bank.	Alaska Food Coalition
Family Preservation	SERO	Juneau	Services to families and children that assist families in safety planning and developing skills that will lessen risk factors associated with abuse and neglect in the family's life.	Catholic Community Services
Family Preservation	SERO	Craig	A Safety Plan is developed within 48 hours of the first home visit and includes: identification of unsafe conditions and warning signs, and how they is resolved. COHO works with families both in their homes and at the agency.	Communities Organized for Health Options (COHO)
Family Preservation	ARO	Anchorage	Services that are designed to prevent removal and maintain children safely in their own homes.	Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Family Preservation	SCRO	Cordova	CFRC provides program support activities and client service management that includes: home visits; family relationship enhancement and communication skills; sobriety education and support; Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD) education and support.	Cordova Family Resource Center
Family Preservation	SCRO	Kenai	KPCCC works with families both in their homes and at the agency. Services are tailored to fit the family's needs. Services address family issues such as: parent/child relationship problems; deficits in child development knowledge and age inappropriate expectations.	Kenai Peninsula Community Care Center
Family Preservation	SCRO	Kenai	KIT works with families both in their own homes and at the agency. Services are set up around each family's needs. Examples of skills development services are: direct counseling, modeling, instruction, rehearsal and support in life skills, home management.	Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Family Preservation	NRO	Nome	Services are family-based and provided primarily in the home to assist families to increase their functioning in order to prevent the removal of a child from the family. NCC works with the family to design a variety of services.	Nome Community Center

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Family Preservation	NRO	Fairbanks North Star Borough	The program works with families to complete a Safety Plan to address any immediate safety issues and evaluates progress towards safety plan goals during home visit/contact; unannounced home visits to evaluate safety of home in anticipation of reunification.	Resource Center for Parents and Children
Family Preservation	ARO	Anchorage	Safety is assessed from the initial referral phone call and on a continual basis with each family. Written safety plans and transportation is provided to support clients in reaching treatment goals.	Salvation Army BOOTH Memorial
Family Preservation	SCRO	Bethel	TWC works with families both in their homes and at the agency. Programs creates safety plans and addresses child and parent social and life skills, family relationship enhancement, interpersonal skills, communication skills, job preparation skills.	Tundra Women's Coalition
Family Preservation	SERO	Ketchikan Gateway Borough	Services offered include: initial family assessments; safety assessment; parenting and skill building; strengthening positive family interaction; communication skills; education for discipline without corporal punishment.	Women In Safe Homes (WISH)
Family Preservation Visitation Center	ARO	Anchorage	Program serves children 0-7, in State custody, in out-of-home placement, and their parents, or other family members. Referrals are accepted only from OCS. Visits take place in a comfortable, large living room type setting with plenty of play materials.	Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Family Support	SCRO	Palmer	AFS provides services both in-home and at the agency. Services may include: safety planning; addressing parenting skills training; relationship enhancement education; education in child development; modeling.	Alaska Family Services
Family Support	SERO	Juneau	The program provides: Safety Planning; Child and parent(s) social and life skill development; family relationship enhancement; interpersonal skills; communication skills; job preparation skills; daily living skills.	Catholic Community Services
Family Support	SERO	Craig	Safety Plan is developed within 48 hours of the first home visit and will include: identification of unsafe conditions (domestic violence, substance abuse, uncontrollable or unmodulated emotions, severe psychiatric disability).	Communities Organized for Health Options (COHO)
Family Support	SCRO	Cordova	CFRC provides program support activities and client service management that includes: safety planning; home visits; family relationship enhancement and communication skills; sobriety education and support; Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD) education.	Cordova Family Resource Center
Family Support	NRO	Fairbanks	Services provided include: Individual counseling for children and adults; safety planning; marital, pre-marital and relationship counseling; family therapy; age-appropriate children's support groups to help them cope with divorce, family changes.	Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption
Family Support	SCRO	Kenai	KIT works with families both in their own homes and at the agency. Services are set up around each family's needs and may include: direct counseling, modeling, instruction, rehearsal and support in life skills, home management.	Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Family Support	SCRO	Kodiak	The program develops safety plans for involved families and supports families to maintain safety for the children. PKCC utilizes a variety of educational curricula to provide families with the skills necessary to provide a safe, consistent, and nurturing home.	Kodiak Counseling Center
Family Support	SCRO	Bethel	ONC works with families in their homes and at the agency to create safety plans and develop skills pertaining to key areas that impact the risk factors in the family's life while simultaneously reinforcing the family's strengths and successes.	Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC)
Family Support	ARO	Anchorage	Family Support Community-based services to promote the safety and well-being of children and families, increase the strength and stability of families (including adoptive, foster and extended families).	Salvation Army BOOTH Memorial
Family Support	SCRO	Seward	Seaview works with families in their own homes and at the agency creating safety plans and providing parent education. Educational materials used by Parent Aides are selected to best address the specific needs of the family.	Sea View Community Services
Independent Living	ARO	Anchorage	The IL Grant serves youth in custody in out-of-home placement and those who had been in out of home custody after their 16th birthday. It provides a variety of services including case management, life skills training, and preparation for employment.	Covenant House

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Independent Living	All Regions	State of Alaska	The Independent Living Program is set up to deliver resources and services to youth age sixteen and older to enable them to successfully transition from foster care to live on their own.	OCS
Independent Living	Anchorage	Statewide	Catholic Social Services provides services through their McAuley Manor and Charlie Elder House. Beds are not owned by OCS. Youth accepted into the program must be maintaining in school or holding employment.	Catholic Social Services
Native Rural Recruitment Program (NRRT)	Statewide	Statewide	Individualized, community based resource family recruitment plans with tribal, community leads and area specific resources to increase Native and/or rural resource family homes to prevent children being removed from family, school, social supports.	OCS
Northwest Adoption Exchange	Statewide	Statewide	Northwest Adoption Exchange provides child specific photo listings for any child who is legally free for adoption and has been listed on the Alaska Adoption Exchange.	Northwest Resource Associates
Permanent Families for Adoptive/Guardianship Children	ARO, SCRO, SERO	ARO, SCRO, SERO regions	Permanent Families grant provides adoptive and guardianship homestudies for children in OCS custody who have a permanency goal of adoption or guardianship.	Catholic Social Services
Permanent Families for Adoptive/Guardianship Children	NRO	NRO region	Permanent Families grant provides adoptive and guardianship homestudies for children in OCS custody who have a permanency goal of adoption or guardianship.	Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption
Residential Child Care	Anchorage	Statewide	Salvation Army Booth Memorial provides 5 level II, Emergency Stabilization and Assessment services for girls ages 12 - 18. Service include 24-hour, seven days a week to clients that are in need.	Salvation Army Booth Memorial
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Sitka)	Youth Advocates of Sitka, Inc. (Hanson House) provides 24-hour level III services for 6 youth. (ages 10 to 19) Hanson House provides individual supervision and care with planned behavior management, academic and life skill programming, recreational.	Youth Advocates of Sitka
Residential Child Care	Southcentral	Statewide (located: Bethel)	Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation's (YKHC) provides six (6) level III Emergency Stabilization and Assessments beds in their "Keys" program. Keys provides Behavioral Rehabilitation Services for youth ages 0 - 17.	Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation
Residential Child Care	Anchorage	Statewide (located: Anchorage)	Salvation Army Booth memorial provides 12 level III, behavioral rehabilitation services beds for female adolescent's ages 12 to 18 years of age. Services provided by Salvation Army include individual and group counseling, family counseling, psycho-education.	Salvation Army Booth Memorial
Residential Child Care	Anchorage	Statewide (located: Anchorage)	Salvation Army Booth Memorial, Cares For Kids (CFK) provides thirteen (13) beds for youth 0 to 10 year of age. CFK provides therapeutic intervention to the child and families.	Salvation Army Booth Memorial
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Fairbanks)	Presbyterian Hospitality House (Chena Hot Springs) provides for up to five (5) youth, residential childcare and BRS services, which include special services for children who are labeled as sex-offenders including low cognitive functioning youth.	Presbyterian Hospitality House
Residential Child Care	Southcentral	Statewide (located: Dillingham)	Anana's House is to provide a safe and secure environment for children who are in immediate danger in their present environment who need short term, temporary placement, stabilization and a comprehensive assessment of their needs.	Safe & Fear-Free Environment, Inc.
Residential Child Care	Southcentral	Statewide (located: Wasilla)	Alaska Family Services (Saxton Youth Shelter) is a Level II, Emergency Stabilization and Assessment Center that provides behavioral rehabilitation services and temporary residential care for children ages 12 - 18 who are in immediate danger.	Alaska Family Services
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Fairbanks)	Presbyterian Hospitality House (Nordin House) provides Emergency Stabilization and Assessments for up to 5 youth. The program provides behavioral rehabilitation services and residential care for children who are in immediate danger.	Presbyterian Hospitality House
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Ketchikan)	Residential Youth Care (RYC) level II Emergency Stabilization Assessment program provides for five (5) beds, which may be used by male or female residents (ages 10 - 17). This is a 15 - 30 day program with a provision to extend placement up to 90 days.	Residential Youth Care

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Residential Child Care	Southcentral	Statewide (located: Kenai)	Kenai Peninsula Community Care Center (KPCCC) provides long term treatment and specialized sex offender treatment for five youth through III program. These services will occur in a residential treatment component that enhances basic residential care.	Kenai Peninsula Community Care Center
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Kotzebue)	Maniilaq Association (Putyuk Children's Home) provides eight (8) Emergency Stabilization and Assessment, Level II beds. Children in care receive an on-site evaluation of the child identifying his/her immediate and specific needs, including an assessment.	Maniilaq Association
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Nome)	Kawerak, Inc. (Jacobs House) operates a basic care and treatment program for up to five (5) children between the ages of 4 and 18. Jacob's House is an emergency stabilization and assessment center that provides behavioral rehabilitative services.	Kawerak, Inc.
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Fairbanks)	Family Centered Services of Alaska provides 24-hour residential diagnostic "client centered" treatment services for children with debilitating psychosocial, emotional and behavioral disorders.	Family Centered Services of Alaska
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Fairbanks)	Presbyterian Hospitality House (Basic Hospitality Center) provides behavioral rehabilitation services and residential care for up to 5 children who are homeless and in immediate danger in their present environment.	Presbyterian Hospitality House
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Juneau)	Juneau Youth Services (Cornerstone) provides individualized emergency stabilization and assessment services. Services are for youth in immediate danger in there present environment, need short-term, temporary placement, and may need stabilization.	Juneau Youth Services
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Juneau)	Juneau Youth Services (Wallington House) is a 5 bed Residential Diagnostic Treatment (RDT) program that provides intensive residential treatment for boys ages 12 through 18 with adjudicated sexual offenses.	Juneau Youth Services
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Barrow)	North Slope Borough (NSB) Children and Youth Services provides behavioral rehabilitative services, level III, for up to eight (8) youth. Planned services include stabilization and needs assessment, individualized treatment planning, case management.	North Slope Borough
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Juneau)	Juneau Youth Services (Lighthouse) is a 6 bed, level IV Residential Diagnostic Treatment (RDT) Center that provides diagnostic, stabilization, and treatment services to girls ages 12 through 18 with severe emotional and behavioral disorders.	Juneau Youth Services
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Ketchikan)	Residential Youth Care (RYC) 9 bed level III, Long Term Treatment program for male and female ages 10 - 19. RYC provides residential child care for children with specialized serves needs such as severe emotional disturbances, behavioral dysfunctions.	Residential Youth Care
Residential Child Care	Southcentral	Statewide (located: Bethel)	Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation's (YKHC) provides eight (8) level III, Behavioral Rehabilitation Services for male youth ages 12 - 18. Services are provided in the McCann Treatment Center. Services include early intervention, stabilization and development.	Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation
Residential Child Care	Anchorage	Statewide (located: Anchorage)	Alaska Baptist Family Services is licensed for 16 beds, 12 of which are purchased by OCS. ABFS provides level III RCC with 24-hour behavioral Rehabilitation Services. ABFS provides six to twelve month program available to female children and youth.	Alaska Baptist Family Services
Residential Child Care	Southeast	Statewide (located: Juneau)	Juneau Youth Services (Miller House) is a 15 bed, Level III residential treatment program that provides 24-hour Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and clinical treatment for youth ages 12 through 18 with emotional and behavioral disorders.	Juneau Youth Services
Residential Child Care	Northern	Statewide (located: Fairbanks)	Presbyterian Hospitality House level III programs (3) are all individual 5 bed facilities (15 total level III beds) providing 24-hour behavioral rehabilitation service and treatment for children with emotional and behavioral disorders.	Presbyterian Hospitality House

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Resource Family Training and Support Services	Statewide	Statewide	All OCS foster families are mandated to complete 10-15 hours of foster care training each year. The Resource Family Training and Support grant provides on-going training to all foster families.	Northwest Resource Associates dba: Alaska Center for Resource Families
Runaway/Emergency Services	Anchorage	Statewide	Covenant House provides Emergency Shelter Services to OCS/DJJ when other placement options are not available. Youth in custody of OCS and DJJ frequently use the facility with in the run or awol from another youth facility.	Covenant House
Rural Social Services Program	SERO	Juneau, Klawock, Craig and Hoonah and Angoon residents residing in Juneau	Coordinated Case Management Support, advocacy and coordinated case management services for families and their children with whom the OCS is involved or at risk for OCS involvement. Facilitate Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) compliant placements for youth.	Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Rural Social Services Program	NRO	Northern	Coordinated Case Management Support, advocacy and coordinated case management services for families and their children with whom the OCS is involved or at risk for OCS involvement. Facilitate Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) compliant placements for youth.	Kawerak, Inc.
Rural Social Services Program	NRO	Northern	Coordinated Case Management Support, advocacy and coordinated case management services for families and their children with whom the OCS is involved or at risk for OCS involvement. Facilitate Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) compliant placements for youth.	Maniilaq Association
Strengthening Families	Statewide	Statewide	Family Support services through early care and education programs. Focus of program is to build protective factors around all families, not just those that are high risk.	Variety of early childhood programs
Time Limited Family Reunification	SCRO	Palmer	AFS provides supervised visitation, and the schedule is based on family individual needs. Visits are offered weekly for a minimum of one hour. Visitation is used as a time to document family dynamics and interactions, assess bonding, and identify issues.	Alaska Family Services
Time Limited Family Reunification	SERO	Juneau	Services and activities for OCS referred clients that are provided to children who are removed from their home and placed in a foster family home or a child care institution.	Catholic Community Services
Time Limited Family Reunification	SERO	Craig	Services may include: Child and parent social and life skills building; family relationship enhancement; interpersonal skills development; communication skills; job preparation; daily living skills; and other interventions that enhance family functioning.	Communities Organized for Health Options (COHO)
Time Limited Family Reunification	SCRO	Kenai	Visitations are supervised between family members within a safe environment. The Family Reunification agent works with OCS and the family to coordinate the date, time and place for the visits to occur and provides the supervision of the visit.	Kenai Peninsula Community Care Center
Time Limited Family Reunification	SCRO	Kenai	KIT provides supervised visitation. The frequency of visits will vary with each family's individualized reunification plan, and usually increase and move from the Nakenu Center's visitation room to the family home prior to actual reunification.	Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Time Limited Family Reunification	ARO	Anchorage, Chugiak	Services and activities for OCS referred clients that are provided to children who are removed from their home and placed in a foster family home or a child care institution. These services are also provided to the parents or primary caregivers.	Native Village of Eklutna
Time Limited Family Reunification	NRO	Nome	Services and activities for OCS referred clients that are provided to children who are removed from their home and placed in a foster family home or a child care institution. These services are also provided to the parents or primary caregivers.	Nome Community Center
Time Limited Family Reunification	NRO	Fairbanks North Star Borough	The program works with families to complete a Safety Plan to address any immediate safety issues and evaluates progress towards safety plan goals during home visit/contact; unannounced home visits to evaluate safety of home in anticipation of reunification.	Resource Center for Parents and Children

Name of Grant/Service/Program	Region	Area(s) Served	FY08 Services Available	Name of Agency/Grantee
Time Limited Family Reunification	ARO	Anchorage	Safety is assessed and written safety plans are developed. Reunification interventions include a visitation plan for supervised visitation. Staff establish a partnership among the children in care, their families, foster families, other caregivers.	Salvation Army BOOTH Memorial
Time Limited Family Reunification	SERO	Ketchikan	Services offered will include: initial family assessments; safety assessment; parenting and skill building; strengthening positive family interaction; communication skills; education for discipline without corporal punishment.	Women In Safe Homes (WISH)

Section V: State Assessment of Strengths and Needs

This section is based on an examination of the data in Section II and the narrative response in sections III and IV.

What specific strengths of the agency's programs has the team identified?

Safety Outcome 2

- **Risk assessment and safety management.** Alaska's score of 99.57 exceeded the national median of 99.5 for the absence of child abuse and neglect in foster care. Alaska has greatly improved since 2002; however, is .11 percent under the national standard.

Permanency Outcome 1

- **Foster care re-entries.** Alaska's composite 1 score of 7.5 percent (period under review) for foster care re-entries in less than 12-months, is well below the national median of 15 percent.
- **Other planned permanent living arrangements.** Establishing permanency for older youth is an area of practice that Alaska does well in as evidenced by Permanency Composite 3. According to the state's data profile, Alaska scored much higher than the national standard in this area.

Permanency Outcome 2

- **Proximity of foster care placement.** Stakeholder's felt that this was a strength area for Alaska. OCS strives to place children within proximity to their parents in order to better facilitate contacts between the child and the parent. QA results indicated that four out of the five offices identified in this assessment scored 100% in placing siblings together.
- **Placement with siblings.** Alaska does well in placing siblings together. QA results indicated that four out of the five offices identified in this assessment scored 100% in placing siblings together.

Systemic Factors

- **Statewide information system.** Alaska's SACWIS system was implemented in 2005 and meets all federal requirements. Data quality continues to improve as workers become more proficient in ORCA documentation.
- **Quality assurance system.** Over the past five years OCS has developed and implemented a system of continuous quality improvement which mirrors the federal review instrument and informs systems improvement work for the agency. In addition, Alaska has all standards in policy required to ensure health and safety of children.
- **Agency responsiveness to the community.** OCS has a strong collaborative and partnering process including representatives that represent a wide range of agencies and community partners throughout the state. OCS continually develops, implements and evaluates strategies to better outcomes for children with these partners.

What are the primary areas needing improvement?

Safety Outcome 1

- **Timeliness of initiating investigations.** Priority 1 reports are initiated in a timely manner; however, OCS struggles with response times for Priority 2 and 3s according to the QA team.

Permanency Outcome 1

- **Stability of foster care placements.** Alaska struggles with meeting the national standard for this outcome. As many placements are made on an emergency basis, careful matching of child's needs to the placement does not occur for all placements.
- **Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relative.** According to the data profile the percentage of timely reunification has decreased 68.1% to 54.2%; the national median is 69.9%.
- **Timeliness to adoption.** Alaska's median length of time to adoption increased from 29.6 months to 31.5 months since 2006.

Well-Being Outcome 1

- **Worker visits with children and parents.** OCS struggles with meeting the national standards for case worker visits. Barriers continue to exist such as staff turnover, weather, and geographical vastness.

Well Being Outcome 3

- **Mental/behavioral health of the child.** Currently OCS is making concerted efforts to strengthen outcomes for children's mental and behavioral needs partnering with other state agencies and stakeholders. QA results indicate that Alaska's compliance rate averages around 60%.

Systemic Factors

- **Case review system.** While Alaska does a great job in scheduling and holding reviews, more effort is needed to include parents in the case planning process.
- **Service array and resource development/service accessibility.** While Alaska has a wide array of services, it seems impossible to have every service available in every city and community in Alaska. In particular, it was noted that the lack of available substance abuse treatment was one of the greatest concerns.

What specific needs has the team identified that warrant further examination during the onsite review?

- How effective are grants/programs in assisting OCS in achieving positive safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families?
- How do local Tribes/Tribal agencies and OCS address disproportionality in their area?
- How accessible are substance abuse services in the area and how does the lack of accessibility of these services impact outcomes for families and children?
- How do community stakeholders view the availability of services to children and families in their area?
- Given the geographical challenges of Alaska, how can OCS improve timeliness of caseworker visits statewide?

- What are the reasons for placement instability? What is contributing to multiple placements?
- What are the similarities or variances in how in-home cases are handled throughout the state?
- How do community stakeholders perceive OCS' delivery of services to families that do not require out-of-home care but continue to have child protection issues?
- How are field offices working with local Tribes in the collaboration of services to keep children and families safe?
- How is concurrent planning viewed by Tribes and implemented in the courts?
- How could a joint assessment process for foster care and adoption be effectively implemented in Alaska with consideration to tribal concerns?
- How can OCS improve data entry timeliness in ORCA?
- How is OCS working with older youth in care in meeting outcomes for independent living?

Site Selection

Alaska's site choices for the CFSR on-site review were somewhat limited since most sites did not meet the in-home case count requirement to provide an adequate sample according to CFSR criteria. The guidelines narrowed down the possibilities to only a few sites eligible to be considered as a potential and representative site. Although Alaska's sites were limited due to CFSR criteria, the three sites together represent approximately 50% of Alaska's population and also includes a regional rural hub community.

The statewide assessment process and sample size availability resulted in the following three review sites:

- Anchorage Field Office, Anchorage Region, FIPS 2020
- Bethel Field Office, Southcentral Region, FIPS 2050
- Juneau Field Office, Southeast Region, FIPS 2110

City Level Data for Site Selection

To understand the component numbers below: zero equals the mean/median for counties nationwide. Each county can see how far above or below the national mean their performance is. The units are standard deviations; i.e., 68% of the counties fall between -1 to +1; 95% of counties fall between -2 to +2; and 99.7% fall between -3 to +3. That is, +3 would be a top performer and -3 would be at the bottom for performance. Simply put, any component with a score below zero is concerning and any score above zero is having a positive impact on the overall statewide performance. Also, it should be noted that any component score above +1 is seen as meeting the national standard of performance.

Composite 1: Timeliness and permanency of reunification

[Standard 122.6 or higher] **Alaska: 122.4**

County	Children Served	*Component A	**Component B	Unweighted County Composite
Anchorage	1,165	-0.14	0.52	0.19
Bethel	212	-2.19	0.31	-0.94
Juneau	280	-0.25	-0.31	-0.28

*Component A: Timeliness of reunification

**Component B: Permanency of reunification

Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions
 [Standard 106.4 or higher] **Alaska: 81.1**

County	Children Served	*Component 1	**Component 2	***Component 3	Unweighted County Composite
Anchorage	1,165	-0.17	-0.43	-0.57	-0.39
Bethel	212	Null	Null	Null	Null
Juneau	280	-0.05	1.35	0.20	0.50

*Component 1 (A): Timeliness of adoptions of children discharged from FC
 **Component 2 (B): Progress toward adoption for children in FC >17 months
 ***Component 3 (C): Progress toward adoption of children who are legally free

Composite 3: Permanency for children & youth in FC for long periods of time
 [Standard 121.7 or higher] **Alaska: 125.4**

County	Children Served	*Component 1	**Component 2	Unweighted County Composite
Anchorage	1,165	0.18	0.42	0.30
Bethel	212	Null	Null	Null
Juneau	280	0.61	0.39	0.50

*Component 1 (A): Achieving permanency for children in FC for long periods of time
 **Component 2 (B): Growing up in FC

Composite 4: Placement Stability
 [Standard 105.5 or higher] **Alaska: 73.1**

County	Children Served	*Measure 1	** Measure 2	***Measure 3	Unweighted County Composite
Anchorage	1,165	-1.00	-0.57	-0.37	-0.79
Bethel	212	-2.97	-1.13	-0.44	-1.83
Juneau	280	-2.03	0.15	-0.03	-0.76

* Measure 1: Two or fewer placement settings for children in care less than 12 months
 **Measure 2: Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months
 ***Measure 2: Two or fewer placements for children in care for 24+ months

Summary and Highlights Supporting Site Recommendations

Anchorage Field Office, Anchorage Region

Background

- The Municipality of Anchorage is the largest urban area in Alaska. The Anchorage city population is currently estimated to be approximately 282,813. Anchorage has experienced a 10% increase in population from 2000-2005.
- Anchorage's population is composed of approximately 77% Caucasian; 7.2% African American; 10.4% Alaska Native or American Native; 8.5% Asian/Pacific Islander; and 3.3% other.
- The Anchorage office works closely with Cook Inlet Tribal Council and Native Village of Eklutna.
- Cook Inlet Tribal Council received four grants from OCS in SFY08 and also receives reimbursement under their Tribal Title IV-E agreement.

- Cook Inlet Tribal Council in partnership with OCS Anchorage region has received a federal demonstration grant funding to develop and establish collocated offices for Tribal and OCS workers partner of child protection cases involving Alaska Native children in the Anchorage region.
- Anchorage, as Alaska’s largest community, is not typical of other communities in Alaska because the Anchorage Field Office receives significantly more referrals of child abuse and neglect than any other community.
- The population of children in OCS custody in the Anchorage area, is comprised of approximately 51% Alaska Native; 48% Non-Native, and 0.9% Undetermined.
- There are a limited number of placement options, especially Alaska Native placements, in Anchorage.
- Staff turnover rates in Anchorage are high. In SFY 2007 the turnover rate was 32.5%

Key Data

- There were 2,128 referrals were screened in during state fiscal year 2007.
- Anchorage had 44.5% or 1265 of all children in out-of-home care during state fiscal year 2007.
- In 2007, 51.3 % or 649 of the children, in out-of-home care in Anchorage were of Alaska Native heritage.

Rationale for Site Selection

Anchorage is the largest metropolitan area in Alaska and according to CFSR criteria must be included as a site in the review process. Like many areas of the State, Anchorage continues to struggle with placement stability and in meeting the standard of children exiting to adoption in less than 24 months.

The Anchorage region has established collocated facilities for the Child Advocacy Center (Alaska Cares) and for Tribal and OCS partnerships in child protection matters. The site review would allow Alaska to gain a further understanding of the issues involved with collocation of services and resources to better meet the needs of children.

Bethel Field Office, Southcentral Region

Background

- Bethel is a small community in Western Alaska at the confluence of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. For the past three years, the population of the Bethel census area (Bethel and surrounding villages) has been declining.

SFY	Population size	Average annual rate of change
2004-2005	17,092	
2005-2006	17,043	-.29
2006-2007	16,683	-.1.25

- Bethel’s population is composed of approximately 85.5% Alaska Native or American Native, 15.8% Caucasian; 0.7% African American; 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander; and .5% other.
- 50% of all jobs in Bethel are government positions. Commercial fishing is an important source of income; 200 residents hold commercial fishing permits, primarily for salmon and herring roe net fisheries. Subsistence activities contribute substantially to villagers’ diets, particularly salmon, freshwater fish, game birds and berries. Poor fish returns since 1997 have significantly affected the economy of the community.
- According to 1999 statistics, 11.2% of Bethel residents live below the poverty line.
- Bethel is the 9th largest community in Alaska, and the largest community for western Alaska. Bethel serves as a regional hub for 56 outlying villages, providing the main administrative, transportation, and services to the surrounding villages.

- Many Bethel residents, as well as residents in the surrounding villages, speak Yup'ik as their primary language in the home, although English is used in the schools.
- There is not a contiguous road system in western Alaska; thus, all services to Bethel and the surrounding villages must be provided by airplane (jets and small bush planes), boat, ATV or via snow machine.
- There are many Tribes/Tribal Organizations in the Bethel area and a number of villages have their own Tribal councils.
- Association of Village Council Presidents currently receives reimbursement through their Tribal Title IV-E agreement.
- Extreme weather conditions significantly impact all aspects of child protection services in the Bethel area.
- There are extremely limited placement options in Bethel and the surrounding villages, due in part to the high cost of living and the high number of families who reside at or below the poverty level.
- Staff turnover rates in Bethel are extremely high. In SFY 2007 the turnover rate was 66.67%.

Key Data

- There were 287 referrals were screened into the Bethel office during state fiscal year 2007.
- Bethel had 6.7%, or 191 of all children in out-of-home placement during state fiscal year 2007.
- In SFY 07, 100% of the children in out-of-home care in the Bethel service area were Alaska Native heritage.

Rationale for Site Selection

OCS has recognized that the Bethel community faces many challenges in meeting the basic needs of children and families in the community. Further exploration of OCS' ability to effectively identify and stabilize the workforce concerns in the Bethel office, where economic uncertainty, declining populations, and lack of consistent and supported resources could greatly enhance the workforce efforts in Bethel as well as other rural community hubs in other areas of the state. In the spring of 2008, local law enforcement reported that only two out of fifteen positions in the Bethel area were filled.

Additionally, exploration of OCS' efforts to integrate and collaborate with available community/Tribal resources and services to sustain and support children and families in the Bethel area could enhance service delivery for OCS. Stakeholders noted that accessing services was a challenge due to high degree of substance abuse and other related treatment issues facing families and children. In addition, the lack of services to address Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder was mentioned as a concern.

Stakeholders advocated Bethel to be a review site, since it serves an extremely diverse population that is geographically remote and faces challenges such as high staff turn over and economic uncertainty. Of the three recommended sites, Bethel's data profile composite scores were consistently the lowest.

The cost of living in Bethel is extremely high; the cost of home heating oil is approximately \$9.00/gallon with gasoline running approximately \$6.00/gallon. Groceries and other household necessities are also extremely expensive, which has impacted placement identification and stability for children in care. In addition, Bethel serves as the regional center for 56 villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta which make accessibility and providing services to children and families difficult.

Juneau Regional Office, Southeast Region

Background

- The City and Borough of Juneau is the capital of Alaska, and serves as a regional hub to surrounding Alaska Native villages and rural communities.
- Juneau is the third largest city in Alaska. According to the 2005 census of the City and Borough of Juneau's population was listed at 30,987.

- Juneau's population is composed of approximately 80.5% Caucasian; 1.4% African American; 16.6% Alaska Native or American Native; 7.4% Asian/Pacific Islander; and 1.8% other.
- The Central Council for Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) is actively involved with case planning and service delivery for Tribal children and families, working in partnership with OCS Juneau and other southeast offices. CITHITA currently receives the Rural Social Services grant from OCS and reimbursement through their Tribal Title IV-E agreement.
- While English is the primary language spoken in Juneau, 2.61% of the population reported speaking Tagalog (a Philipino dialect) at home, while 2.38% speak Spanish, and 1.07% Tlingit.
- As the capital of Alaska, the primary employers in Juneau are the federal, state, municipal governments, and the University of Alaska Southeast. Another large contributor to the local economy is the tourism industry. The fishing industry used to be a major part of the Juneau economy. Real estate agencies, roadwork construction, and mining are apparently still viable non-government local industries. Local mines include Greens Creek, owned by Kennecott and (soon) the Kensington, owned by Coeur Alaska.
- There are limited Alaska Native placement options in Juneau.
- Staff turnover rates in Juneau are high. In SFY 2007, the turnover rate was 36.36%.

Key Data

- There were 421 screened in reports for the Juneau office during state fiscal year 2007.
- Juneau had 7.1%, or 203 of all children placed in out-of-home care during in state fiscal year 2007.
- During 2007, a little under 75% of the children in out-of-home care in Juneau were of Alaska Native heritage.

Rationale for Site Selection

Juneau is Alaska's state capital, and the third largest city, with a diverse ethnic population. Juneau is only accessible via sea or air, and as such, is representative of the numerous coastal communities in Alaska. Cars and trucks are transported to and from Juneau by barge or ferry.

Of all of the sites identified, the Juneau office presents the greatest challenges for disproportionality issues in Alaska. While Alaska Natives make up approximately 16% of the overall population of Juneau; over 70% of the children in care are of Alaska Native heritage. It has been noted by the stakeholders that until recently, the number of Alaska Native children in care in the Juneau office was as high as 83%. The CCTHITA and OCS has established a partnership through Casey Family Programs to address the issues of disproportionality in their region.

Tribal partners strongly recommended Juneau to be selected for a review site due to the disproportionate number of Native children in care. In addition, CCTHITA felt that their strong relationship with OCS assists in providing positive safety, well-being and permanency outcomes for children and families.

Of the three recommended sites, Juneau's data composite scores were comparative to the Anchorage area.

Statewide Assessment Process

Alaska established a Statewide Assessment Team comprised of stakeholders representing a wide range of Tribal organizations, state and local agencies, and community partners. The group met on February 4th in Anchorage for a full day kickoff meeting. Representatives from Region 10, the two National Resource Centers - Organizational Improvement and Child Welfare Data and Technology assisted in facilitation of the meeting.

Six workgroups were created to further delve into analyzing and evaluating safety, permanency, and wellbeing outcomes and the systemic factors. Members volunteered for work groups based on their interest in a particular area. For instance, youth and alumni elected to work on Permanency 2 that focused

on placement outcomes. Work groups solicited additional members if specific input was required to complete their evaluation of the outcome/factor.

Workgroups continued to meet telephonically during March and April to review data, systems and practice. Overall, the input received not only shed light on new issues, but also confirmed practice and systemic related factors. A significant benefit of establishing the workgroups was the collaboration between all parties involved in making Alaska’s Child Welfare system stronger.

The Statewide Assessment Team reunited telephonically in May 2008 to review and receive input from stakeholders specific to the common themes identified throughout the assessment. OCS also sought input regarding the sites to be recommended for review. Additionally, OCS facilitated a teleconference for all Tribal partners statewide, regardless of their membership on the team, to discuss both site selection and common themes. Input from both teleconferences led OCS’ recommendations for review sites.

We would like to thank the Statewide Assessment team and every member of Alaska’s Child Welfare system in working together to improve outcomes for children and families statewide. OCS could not do this work without the active involvement and dedication of all stakeholders and community partners.

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