

## State of Alaska Citizens Review Panel Annual Report 2005

**Date:** June 30, 2005

### **Mission:**

The Alaska Citizens' Review Panel (CRP) is committed to reviewing and evaluating the practices and procedures of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and in making recommendations relative to their findings to insure the safety and the appropriate placement of children in need of aid.

The CRP will achieve this commitment by examining the policies and procedures of State and local agencies; examining, where appropriate, specific cases; evaluating the extent to which agencies are carrying out their child protection responsibilities; and preparing and making available to the public, an annual report.

### **Current CRP Members:**

- Fred Van Wallinga- Chair of CRP, Retired Principal
- Carol Olson- Vice-Chair, Master CASA
- Susan Heuer- Guardian ad litem, Office of Public Advocacy, Dept. of Administration, State of Alaska
- Le Florendo, Deputy Director, Child & Family Welfare Services, Tribal Family & Youth Services Department, Central Council Tlingit and Haida
- Arthur S. Hansen, D.D.S. Retired
- Shelis R. Jorgensen, ND, ANP, RN, Sunshine Community Health Center

### Former CRP Members during this report period:

Ann Dennis-Choi  
Virginia Walters  
Lois Hildenbrand

### CRP Staff Support:

Bridget Crawford, CRP Program Coordinator  
Office of Children's Services, Department of Health and Social Services, State of Alaska

### Liaison to CRP for Children's mental health issues:

Brita Bishop, LCSW- Children's Behavioral Health Specialist, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services, State of Alaska

### **Meetings and Activities:**

1. Alaska Citizen Review Panel: Merger with the Children's Justice Act Task Force. June 25, 2004
2. CRP Teleconference: August 30, 2004
3. Children's Justice Act Task Force, Teleconference July 7, 2004

4. Children's Justice Act Task Force Meeting in Anchorage September 22-23, 2004
5. CRP Town Hall Meeting in Wasilla: October 27, 2004
6. CRP Town Hall Meeting in Juneau: February 7, 2005
7. CJA Task Force Meeting in Juneau: February 8-9, 2005
8. CRP Strategic Planning Session in Anchorage facilitated by Dr. Blake Jones: March 17, 2005
9. CRP Teleconference: April 20, 2005.
10. CJA Task Force Meeting in Anchorage: April 25-26, 2005
11. CRP Town Hall Meeting in Anchorage: April 26, 2005
12. CRP Town Hall Meeting in Bethel: April 27, 2005 - cancelled due to flights being cancelled into Bethel.
13. CRP Teleconference: May 18, 2005.
14. National CRP Conference, Nags Head, North Carolina. Attended by Fred Van Wallinga, Carol Olson, and Bridget Crawford: May 25-27, 2005.
15. CRP Annual Report Meeting in Anchorage: Presentation of annual report recommendations to Tammy Sandoval, Deputy Commissioner, OCS: June 9, 2005
16. CRP Meeting in Anchorage to finalize the annual report: June 22, 2005.

**Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are being made to improve child safety.

- 1) Concern: Observations and concerns regarding staff include: low morale; a lack of supervisor support that includes a reluctance to make difficult decisions about personnel issues; the high turnover of talented line social workers who leave for reasons other than high caseloads.

Goal: Improved morale and reduce staff turnover through the implementation of Internal Quality Assurance of Personnel including Supervisors and Social Workers.

Recommendation: OCS will ensure that the Quality Assurance section is evaluating all areas of operations and being responsive to the information gathered by creating positive and proactive goals for change by:

- Following Policy and Procedure
  - Ensure accountability through supervisory case reviews and personnel related issues.
  - Establish a process for system checks- tracking adherence to Policy and Procedure,
  - Incorporate training topics into daily practice
- Provide Adequate Training:
  - Consistent implementation and training of Policy and Procedure.
  - Ensure that Policies and Procedures are applied equally across the state.
  - Clearly communicate service goals

Develop an OCS Code of Ethics in response to alleged incidents of unethical behavior.

Publicly post the Code of Ethics to make it available to line workers and the public.

- Employee Satisfaction:
  - Conduct annual employee satisfaction surveys.
  - Conduct exit surveys for all staff
  - Compile, implement and track survey results and report to CRP June 2006.
  - Determine if an agency independent of OCS should evaluate employee satisfaction.
  
- 2) Concern: There is a breakdown in communication with external agencies resulting in unnecessary barriers to collaboratively and effectively help children.

Goal: Improved interagency collaboration through the implementation of External Quality Assurance.

Recommendation:

- Gather information from stakeholders through surveys, including:
  - Clients/consumers
  - Foster Families
  - Community representatives
  - Collaborative Agencies
  - Foster children

Stakeholder Surveys should contain question(s) pertaining to effectiveness of staff implementation of policy and procedures.

Document how OCS is being responsive to the information gathered from the surveys.

- Improve relationships and communication with foster families.
  
- Break down barriers with stakeholders through increased training, and by consistently following Policy and Procedure. (e.g. Allow other agencies to participate in case conferences).
  
- Client and consumer resolution process:
  - Implement complaint resolution process.
  - Develop Flow chart for appeal process for public access.
  - Develop an appeals process or evaluate the existing appeal process if one already exists.
  - Implement monitoring of process of how individual complaints are addressed.
  - Insure that complaints are resolved involved in a timely manner to the greatest possible satisfaction for all.

- 3) Concern: Lack of knowledge, awareness and consideration of cultural issues among staff impacting foster care licensing, placement issues, and working with diverse populations.

Goal: OCS will decrease barriers to cultural concerns and families becoming licensed foster families.

Recommendation:

- Increase the number of minority/diverse population foster home options.
- Train of OCS workers on the regional cultural issues to increase competency of diverse populations and special needs.
- Create a cultural brown bag lunch or cultural education sessions for OCS staff.
- Make it a priority that foster families will receive adequate training on Policy and Procedures.
- Improve relationships and communication with foster families.

**Commendations:**

Good working relationship with OCS and the Alaska State Troopers in Bethel.

Public comments that OCS Policy and Procedures are good.

Good cooperation between Whaley school and OCS.

OCS Bethel office has vision statement and code of ethics posted in conference room.

Tammy Sandoval, Deputy Commissioner, OCS and CRP have a good open, working relationship.

**Committees:**

1. Budget: Fred-Chair, Shelis, Carol
2. Recruitment: Le-Chair, Carol, Susie, Fred
3. Staff Person/Job Description and Recruitment: Shelis-Chair, Art, Fred

**Looking Ahead:**

1. Develop Goals and Activities for fiscal year 2006.
2. Consider breaking into small groups to cover areas of the state: Southcentral, Northwest, Southeast, Interior, Southwest.
3. Develop a CRP web page that will allow people to have access to CRP activities and the annual report.
4. Develop methods for public outreach including: town hall meetings; focus groups; surveys, and input through the CRP web site.
5. Review of information gathered from public outreach efforts and identify how it will be used.
6. Continue the CRP recruitment process.
7. Hire a part time CRP staff person.

**Acknowledgements:**

Wasilla High School for providing the Wasilla Town Hall meeting space.  
Mat-Su Telephone Association for providing meeting space for the CASA and foster parents meeting.

Anchorage Police Department for reserving the Loussac Library for the Anchorage Town Hall Meeting.

Anonymous community member for donating and reserving space at Centennial hall for the Juneau Town Hall Meeting.

Bethel City Hall for the Bethel Town Hall Meeting.

Tundra Women’s Coalition Child Advocacy Center for providing meeting space in Bethel.

Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska for providing meeting space for the Juneau CASA meeting.

Office of Public Advocacy for providing meeting space.

Dr. Blake Jones, University of Kentucky for providing technical assistance.

**Attachments:**

General Themes from Public Comment Activities.

Respectfully submitted by the Citizen Review Panel:

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Fred Van Wallinga, Chair Date

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Carol Olson, Vice Chair Date

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Leonora Florendo, Member Date

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Shelis Jorgensen, Member Date

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Arthur S. Hansen, Member Date

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Susan Heuer, Member Date