



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

Members

Diwakar K. Vadapalli, Chair
Dana Hallett, Vice-chair
Donna M. Aguiniga
Jen Burkmire
Margaret McWilliams
Bettyann Steciw

Coordinator

Sylvan Robb
Phone 907.450-2456
sylvan@iialaska.com

Mailing address

212 Front St., Suite 100
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Fax 907.450-2470

www.crpalaska.org

Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities. The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.205

SITE VISIT REPORT

Regional Office	Southeast Region
Field Offices visited	Juneau, Ketchikan, Sitka
Other Communities visited	None
Dates of visit	January 21 – 24, 2015
Members of CRP on the visit	Donna Aguiniga, Jen Burkmire, Dana Hallett, Diwakar Vadapalli

Partner Agencies consulted

Alaska Native governments or entities

*Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Douglas Indian Community
Ketchikan Indian Community*

Public Safety

Juneau Police Department (JPD); Sitka Police Department

School system

*Juneau: Auke Bay Elementary School; Glacier Valley Elementary School
Ketchikan: Houghtaling Elementary School
Sitka: Keet Gooshi Heen (Baranof) Elementary School*

Legal Community

*Attorney General (AG) Office (representing the OCS)
District Attorney's (DA) Office in Sitka*

Service Providers

*S.A.F.E. Child Advocacy Center, Juneau
Juneau Youth Services (Comprehensive behavioral health services provider)
WISH Family Services, Ketchikan
Two foster parents*

The Panel tried to reach out to several other partner agencies that either could not be reached or were not available for a meeting.

Acknowledgments: The CRP would like to thank all staff of the Southeast Regional Office (SRO) for taking time to meet with the Panel. The Panel appreciates Sharon Fleming, SRO's Children Services Manager, for allowing us to meet with her staff amidst difficult workloads. The Panel would also like to thank all local partners for their time and their honest appraisal of their working relationships with OCS.

Site visits are an important part of the annual work load of Alaska's Citizen Review Panel. Panel members consult with staff at an OCS regional or field office and their local partner agencies to assess various instrumental practice behaviors and institutional relationships. The Panel's consultations cover a broad range of topics, focusing on systemic issues and not on individual strengths and weaknesses. Questions are often open-ended, and part of a free-flowing unstructured conversation. All information shared with CRP is confidential and will be de-identified and summarized into a Trip Report. Trip reports are posted on the Panel's website.

1. Key observations:

- Relations between Office of Children’s Services (OCS) and its partners seem to be relatively positive in the region. The efforts of all parties are very encouraging. Relationships are generally more positive and constructive in Sitka and Ketchikan than in Juneau.
- Management tools employed by the state office management need to be better contextualized and made applicable to local conditions. Quality Assurance (QA) reviews and the Initial Assessments (IA) backlog tracking mechanism are two tools that the Panel is aware of, and are being examined in the local context.
 - The utility of QA reports to the frontline workers needs to be critically examined. While the precision and periodicity of the reviews is much appreciated, utility of these QA report findings to improve practice behaviors of frontline workers seems uncertain. A more systematic, constructive, and strengths-based follow-up is desired.
 - The backlog of Initial Assessments has been a challenge for OCS for several years. Local workers find that many of the overdue IAs are of the lowest priority, and better screening with local input would reduce the number of egregiously overdue cases, and would reflect well on their QA reports.
- Secondary trauma needs to be systematically addressed. All frontline workers expressed severe concerns about their heavy workload, minimal supervision, and subsequent stress-related secondary trauma. Efforts of the agency to address secondary trauma were limited to a book on the subject handed to each worker. Addressing this need could help improve retention of frontline workers. Turnover appears to be quite high in the Juneau field office during the time of this visit.
- Efforts to recruit of foster families need to be more intensive, systematic, and innovative. While the number of children in foster care and the number of available foster homes seems to match well, the Panel did not have any information on the types of foster homes (emergency, therapeutic, etc.), and many other details necessary to meaningfully assess the adequacy of foster homes. General consensus among those with whom the Panel consulted, expressed the need for more foster homes in the region, especially in the smaller communities, and more native foster homes. Efforts to recruit foster homes seem to have been limited due to lack of coordination between players.
- There seems to be some confusion about the role of OCS workers in forensic interviewing. The CAC in Juneau has staff that conducts forensic interviews, this works very well for the Juneau Field Office. However, it is expensive and logistically challenging for other field offices to utilize these services. It would be more efficient if OCS frontline workers in the other field offices were trained in child forensic interviewing.

2. Categories

The Panel examines a specific set of categories on each site visit. Below are observations on three specific categories.

2.1 Leadership

The Panel met with the CSM and all unit supervisors. The Southeast Region's (SR) leadership team seems to have had considerable experience working at OCS. It is very encouraging to note the innovative and creative approach to challenges they perceive in their work. While many challenges remain, and resources are never adequate, the SR's initiative to identify and address the issue of repeat maltreatment speaks well of their leadership.

This creative approach is needed in tackling the many challenges clearly evident from the Panel's brief visit to just three of the five field offices:

- **Communication with frontline workers:** Frontline workers clearly expressed their inability to get the guidance and supervision they need in performing their duties. They acknowledged and appreciated the effort of their supervisors in trying to be available at all times by any means possible. However, they were also clear that the current supervision time is insufficient. Lack of supervision can translate to negative outcomes on casework and, decreased worker morale, and is contributes to high turnover. No one among the current group of frontline workers in the Juneau field office have been there for longer than 3 years, and the newest person has been there for just over 6 months. A specific idea, suggested by one of the frontline workers, for the local leadership and OCS senior leadership to consider is a 'field training officer', who focused on training and orienting new workers for an extended period of time. This is akin to "shadowing" that is currently being practiced, except that the training officer would have a reduced number of active cases on his/her workload as workers are guided in managing their caseloads.
- **Employee evaluations:** While several frontline workers reported being evaluated, this seems to differ by the supervisor. Some workers reported they had not been evaluated for several years. Lack of adequate, meaningful, and timely evaluation has been a concern of the Panel on prior site visits.
- **Secondary trauma:** As busy as the supervisors are, frontline workers depend on them for support and guidance on handling secondary trauma. The Panel is aware of the agency's initiatives in addressing secondary trauma of frontline workers. However, this initiative remains nebulous to frontline workers in the SRO. They reported being disillusioned with the discussion and support material supplied to them.
- **Partner relations:** Supervisors and especially senior management of SRO must extend their positive efforts in reaching out to partners. While partner relations are generally positive and constructive across the region, one specific suggestion was an 'open house' for agencies might be beneficial. Relationships in Juneau have relatively more room for improvement compared to the outlying field offices.
- **Physical security and friendly appearance:** The Panel realizes the need for secure work space and the fine balance OCS strives to achieve between functional security and friendly appearance. While the Juneau field office building seems to be highly secure, Sitka field office does not have a working lock on their front door.

- There is a general shortage of foster homes throughout the state, particularly native foster homes. However, the Panel found it intriguing that efforts to recruit foster families have not been approved, and seem to be otherwise discouraged. The Panel could not understand the reasons to not support new recruitment initiatives.

2.2 OCS staff workload and morale

Figure 1: Board used to track workload in Sitka field office



The Panel met with most frontline workers in Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan, and as many other staff as available. While the vacancies are relatively minimal, it is evident that the staffing is barely adequate to meet the workload demands, and the turnover is quite high. Juneau field office workers in the IA unit are assigned approximately 40-45 cases per person. While caseloads are marginally lower in Ketchikan and Sitka, workers in these field offices are generalists and have multiple responsibilities on each case.

Given the above working conditions, staff morale, especially in Juneau, is uncomfortably near the tipping point. Major issues that the Panel noted are:

- Severe shortage of support staff: There is a severe shortage of SSAs that could handle many case-related functions that do not require time with children and families.
- Individual safety: Several partners expressed their dismay regarding workers' lack of training and awareness of the context on safety matters. They were concerned that workers often cannot spot threats to their own personal safety while deeply involved in case work, and, thus, put themselves in dangerous situations.
- Secondary trauma: OCS claims to be attending to the employees' secondary trauma. However, frontline workers universally expressed disillusionment with these efforts.
- Utility of the QA review process: The QA process is increasingly robust, and is modeled after the federal Children and Family Services Report (CSFR) process. However, frontline staff in all field offices seem to be uncertain how the QA process and its findings can be used to improve their performance. Specifically, workers expressed the need for efforts to connect the findings of 'strengths' and 'practice improvement' under each outcome to the ground reality of their operation. A constructively critical tone in the language of the QA report, and strengths-based follow up were desired.

2.3 *Partner relationships*

The Panel has been closely examining partner relationships over the last several visits. While there are positive signs across the state, many relationships remain ad hoc and dependent upon personality of individual workers and supervisors. Positive relationships do not seem to be grounded in OCS' central mission or culture nor do they seem ubiquitous statewide.



The Panel observed a clear distinction in the quality and depth of relationship based on the partner's relative size and role:

- With agencies that have a clear role in a case, and where statute requires OCS to collaborate, relationships tend to be constructive and meaningful. All institutions that have a legal or service provider role that directly is either stipulated by legal statute or necessary due to desired outcomes (such as medical, educational, or behavioral health) fall in this category. However, even in these relationships, it is not uncommon for partners to express disenchantment. Almost all of these non-positive perceptions can be attributed to high turnover. For example, the public safety officers and school personnel all reported the turnover among frontline workers is very challenging and makes it difficult to establish a long-term working relationship. On the other hand, in Sitka, all partners expressed highly positive feelings about their relationship with current local OCS office and acknowledged the longevity of the field supervisor and frontline worker.
- Where the partners' role is not clearly defined, the relationship depended on the relative size and influence of the partner. This is clearly noticeable in relationships with tribal partners in the region. For example, Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, the largest Alaska Native tribal organization in the region, seems to enjoy a constructive relationship with OCS. They serve seven communities, and worked with OCS on several initiatives over the years. This on-going working relationship resulted in multiple working agreements that provide a structure to their relationship. On the other hand, the partnership with smaller tribal governments seems to be less structured and less constructive.

In general, relationships in SR are constructive and there is widespread recognition by all parties to work together. As observed in other regions in the state, the lack of a structured and institutional relationship is also hampering collaboration in SR. Additionally, all partners identified high turnover among OCS frontline staff as a challenge to having sustained positive relationship.

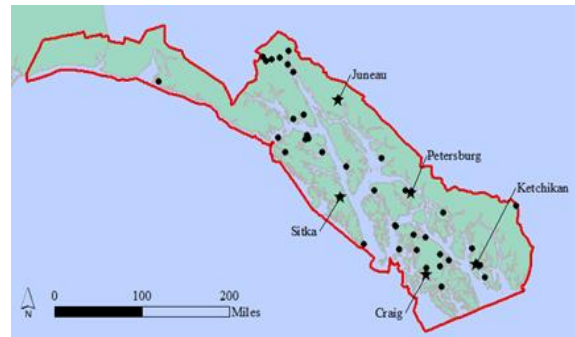
3. Southeast Region Overview

This section gives a brief background of the region to help readers understand the context of this report’s findings.

3.1 Background

Southeast regional office (SRO) includes ten different boroughs or census areas in southeast Alaska. The region is home to 71,664 people, with 28.06% 21 years or younger (U.S. Census 2010). There were approximately 164 (76 boys and 88 girls) children on an average per month in out-of-home placement situations in the region. Data on in-home services were not available. There are currently 167 (Sitka – 33, Ketchikan – 48, Juneau – 71, Craig – 10, and Petersburg – 5) licensed foster homes in the region (as reported by Alaska Center for Resource Families).

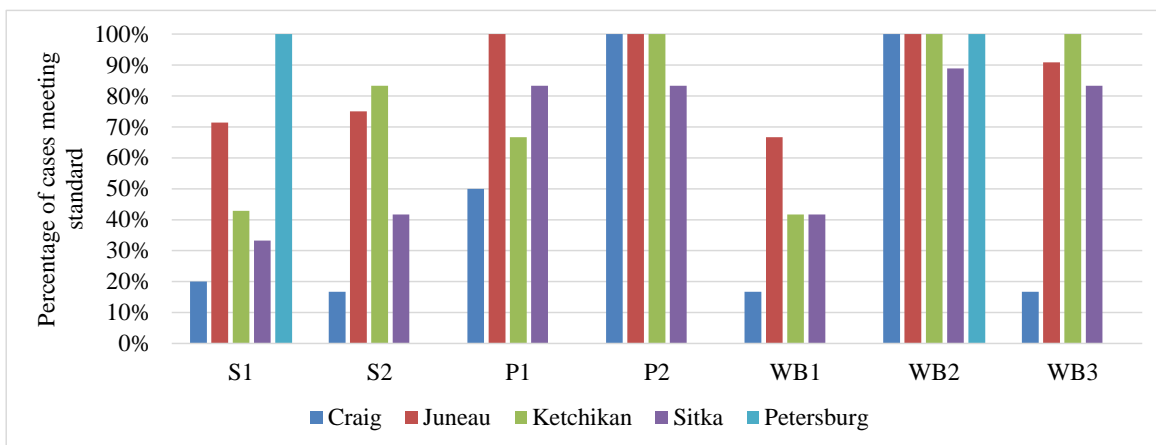
Figure 2: Southeast Region with its five field offices



3.2 Choosing field offices to visit

The Southeast region has its regional office in Juneau, and has five field offices – Juneau, Ketchikan, Craig, Sitka, and Petersburg, serving 42 communities across the region. The Panel compiled performance indicators from the region’s Quality Assurance (QA) reviews conducted by the Office of Children Services QA Unit to help focus our review.

Figure 3: Performance on seven quality assurance (QA) outcomes by field office - 2014



QA reviews follow the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), and cover seven outcomes areas – 2 safety (S) outcomes, 2 permanency (P) outcomes, and 3 wellbeing (WB) outcomes (see Table 1). Each review is based on a small sample of cases, and the score on an outcome shows what percentage of the sample of cases met the expected standard on a set of items that represent that outcome. OCS tries to review each of their field and regional offices every year. Given the small sample of cases, these reviews may not always reflect a

comprehensive picture. The Panel tried to use this information to identify field offices to visit, and to understand the challenges that each office faces.

The earliest such QA review in southern region was done in 2007 for Petersburg, and each office was reviewed at least four times since. Figure 3 shows the performance values for all seven QA outcomes for each field office in the southeast region for the year 2014. All offices except Petersburg (last reviewed in August 2013, and was being reviewed during the Panel’s visit) were reviewed in 2014. From Figure 3, field offices in the southern region appear to have had some challenges with five of the seven outcomes. They appear to have done well on permanency 2 and wellbeing 3.

Figure 4: Performance on seven quality assurance (QA) outcomes – Sitka field office, 2010-2014

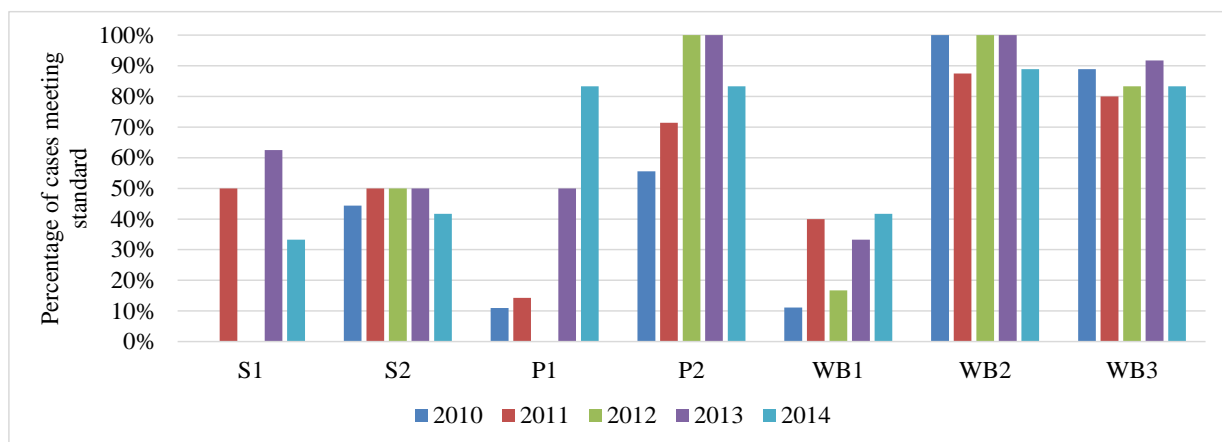
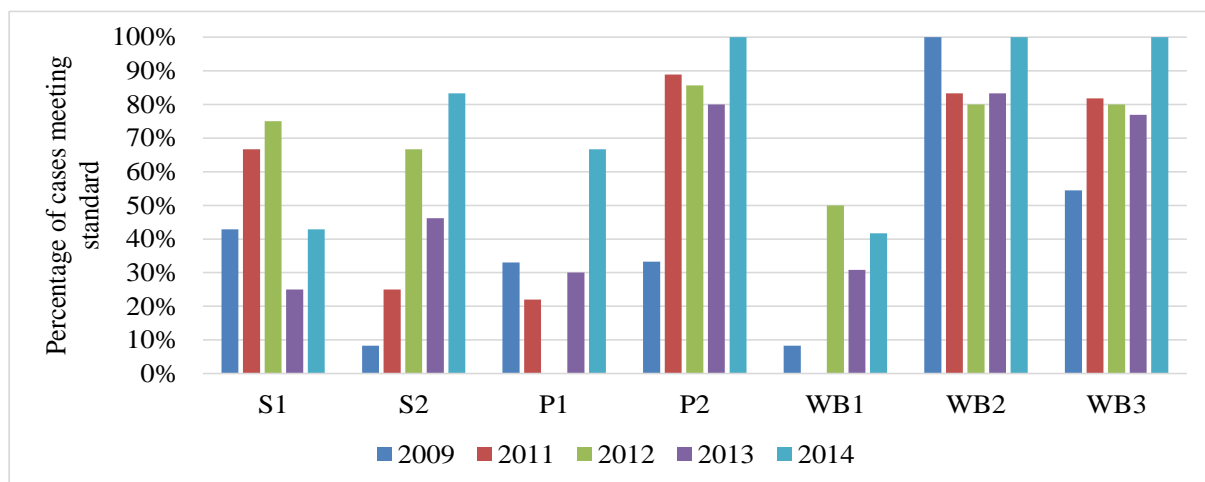


Figure 5: Performance on seven quality assurance (QA) outcomes Ketchikan field office, 2009-2014



The Panel examined data from all available reviews for each field office and identified Sitka and Ketchikan for an in-person visit. In addition to the QA data, travel cost and logistics, and the number of employees in each office also informed this choice. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the

QA performance values for Sitka and Ketchikan respectively. Each office develops a follow-up Program Improvement Plan (FO-PIP) in response to the QA review. FO-PIP identifies specific goals associated with each area of improvement identified in the QA review. The Panel did not receive the FO-PIP for any of the SRO field offices in time for an in-depth review. The site visit review was focused on the QA outcomes for each field office.

Table 1: Outcomes and Items of the Quality Assurance Review

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Item 2: Repeat maltreatment

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate

Item 3: Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

Item 4: Risk of harm to child(ren)

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situation.

Item 5: Foster care re-entries

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement

Item 7: Permanency goal for child

Item 8: Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives

Item 9: Adoption

Item 10: Permanency goal or other planned permanent living arrangement

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connection is preserved for children.

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement

Item 12: Placement with siblings

Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Item 14: Preserving connections

Item 15: Relative placement

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning

Item 19: Worker visits with child

Item 20: Worker visits with parents

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs

Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Item 22: Physical health of the child

Item 23: Mental health of the child

3.3 *Employee Profile of the SRO (supplied by SRO's Children Services Manager)*

Title	SRO	JFO	SFO	KFO	CFO	PFO
Managers	3					
Supervisors		3	1	1		
Protective Services Specialists(PSS)		11	2	5	1	1
Social Service Assistants (SSA)		3	1	2	1	
Administrative professionals	2	2				
Mental Health Clinician	1					
Psychiatric Nurse	1					
Regional Adoption Worker	1					
Independent Living Specialist	1					
Licensing Staff	2					
Intake Staff	3					
ICWA Specialist	1					
Eligibility Technician	1					
Total Employees	16	19	4	8	2	1

3.4 *Community Partners (supplied by SRO's Children Services Manager)*

Juneau Field Office (JFO): (Communities served – Juneau, Angoon, Haines, Hoonah, Skagway, Yakutat)

- Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska,
- Douglas Island Association,
- Juneau Douglas School District,
- Juneau Police Department,
- SEARHC,
- REACH,
- REACH Infant Learning Program,
- AWARE,
- AST,
- Bartlett Regional Hospital,
- Juneau Youth Services,
- Rainforest Recovery Center,
- Adult probation,
- Division of Juvenile Justice,
- Catholic Community Services (including the Child Advocacy Center and MDT),
- Lemon Creek Correctional Center,
- Assistant Attorney General's office.

Ketchikan Field Office (KFO): (Communities served - Ketchikan, Metlakatla)

- Ketchikan Indian Community,
- Gateway/Akeela,
- WISH,

- Community Connections,
- Early Learning,
- Public Safety: State troopers; Ketchikan police
- Schools,
- Hospital,
- Adult probation,
- Division of Juvenile Justice,
- Clinics.
- Metlakatla Indian Community, and their service providers through Annette Island Service Unit and the children's mental health.

Sitka Field Office (SFO): (Communities served – Sitka)

- Sitka Tribe of Alaska,
- Early Learning program,
- Youth Advocates of Sitka,
- Sitka Counseling Services,
- Sitkans Against Family violence (SAFV Shelter),
- Sitka Police Department,
- Sitka School District,
- SEARHC Clinic 2.

Craig Field Office (CFO): (Communities served – Coffman Cove, Edna Bay, Hollis, Hydaburg, Kasaan, Klawock, Naukiti, Thorne Bay, Whale Pass)

- SEARHC,
- Community Connections,
- Early Learning or the agencies providing services for adult and children's mental health and developmental type services,
- Hydaburg tribe,
- Klawock tribe,
- Craig tribe,
- Kasaan tribe.

Petersburg Field Office (PFO): (Communities served – Kake, Wrangell)

- Petersburg Indian Association,
- Petersburg School District (head start; high school),
- Petersburg Mental Health, True North Counseling, SEARHC Counseling,
- Petersburg Police Department,
- Petersburg WAVE (Working Against Violence for Everyone),
- Petersburg Medical Center,
- Reach Inc,
- Infant Learning Program,
- Public Health.
- Churches: Lighthouse Assembly; Salvation Army.