



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

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TRIP REPORT

Community visited	Kodiak, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, and Port Lions
Dates of visit	January 9-10, 2014
Members of CRP on the visit	Diwakar Vadapalli, Chair Ben Creasy Dana Hallett, Vice-chair Kristin Hull Margie McWilliams Susie Heuer Sylvan Robb (staff)

Offices covered in this visit

Regional Office	Southcentral Regional Office
Field Office	Kodiak
Communities served	Akhiok, Big Sandy, Danger Bay, Karluk, Kodiak, Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, Port Lions

Agencies consulted

Alaska State Troopers
Kodiak Alliance for Children
Kodiak Area Native Corporation
Kodiak Police Department
Kodiak Island Borough School District Personnel
Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak

Villages: Ouzinkie, Old Harbor, Port Lions
Village Health Clinic Personnel
Village School Personnel
Village Tribal Administrator
Village VPSOs

Meeting Notes

Partner A: Was very concerned with the intake processes. Mostly, the attitude of the workers taking calls was concerning and sometimes the reports were not recorded because the reporter refused to reveal or did not have information on date of birth or a physical address. Reporters would like to know that there was a follow up of their report, but never receive any information. They reported a few instances where OCS did not have documentation of a report that was made.

Despite that, they reported a constructive working relationship with OCS workers. Biggest concern with the local OCS office is the lack of collaboration on case plans, and lack of a working relationship before a client is referred to their program to determine the fit of the program to the specific client situation.

Partner B: Intake is again a concern. This partner also questioned if all reports are being documented. A client's file does not have past reports made, which can be important information in understanding the history of the case. This partner also reported a lack of collaborative relationship with OCS.

Partner C: The local school reported that communication with OCS is sporadic and offered their good communication with DJJ as a contrast. They hear about the results of a report through third parties and would like an official communication from OCS about reports they make. They never receive notices of children being moved between placements. The staff are proud of their work in preventing suicides. OCS has been a constructive partner but can do more being more responsive.

Partner D: OCS intake system is not reliable. They cannot always reach a person and suggested OCS should have people equipped with cell phones so someone can always be reached. Local collaboration varies by personnel. OCS notices to KPD does not always have sufficient information.

Partner E: Heard back from OCS on 5% of the reports over the last two years. The intake form is quite inadequate, with very little space for description. Should allow space for photographs, check boxes for drugs and follow up on the online/email option.

Village visits: Generally, collaboration with OCS is spotty. Having a long-serving supervisor helps, but changing workers is a challenge. No follow-up on reports of harm. School staff in Old Harbor are very concerned about lack of follow-up on specific cases they reported. Ouzinkie reported bad decision-making in foster placements. Port Lions reported concerns about following ICWA in seeking foster care for a child. There is a general need for more foster families and recruitment efforts need to be stepped up.

General reflections

Leadership:

The CRP was aware ahead of the visit, of some of the challenges that Kodiak office was experiencing. The CRP reviewed Kodiak's 2013 Q&A report before the trip. The Supervisor has been with OCS for almost three decades, and currently supervises three field offices – Kodiak, Dillingham, and King Salmon. Her long tenure and experience with OCS is an asset and is evident in the relationships she shares with her counterparts in partner agencies. The staff turnover in Kodiak has been a concern in recent years.

The Supervisor acknowledged several issues raised in the Q&A report, and mentioned that case documentation hasn't always been comprehensive and needs improvement. The supervisor also seemed to lack an appropriate case management tool, either within ORCA or outside. She informed us that these and other concerns raised in the 2013 Q&A report led to discussions of a program improvement plan (PIP) for Kodiak field office to be formulated and implemented. The Q&A report was completed in July 2013 and the PIP was not in place by January 7, the time of this visit, almost six months later. We also gathered that a PIP was discussed few times in the past but apparently was never documented. However, 2013-2014 PIP was expected to be documented and implemented.

On Jan 31, 2014, CRP members met with Staff Manager that supervises the field supervisor in Kodiak to assess the supervision of Kodiak field office. The Staff Manager, located in the Southcentral Regional Office in Wasilla, identified three management areas to be tracked: Case planning with families' participation; Development of case plans for Open for Services cases; and increased social worker contact with families. While pointing to the 'small sample' limitations of the Q&A report, the Staff Manager acknowledged that findings are nevertheless important and a PIP needs to be developed as a follow-up – indicating that the PIP is not yet developed.

Staff competence and morale:

The current staff are relatively new and seem quite competent. At least one staff member reported being underutilized. SKILLS training is reported to be useful but the workers suggested changes to the sequence of modules. As one worker reported: "Having Legal Day at the end of the module is kind of like teaching someone the finer points of a card game they don't know, before telling them the rules of the game. I found it to be frustrating." The independent living staffing is insufficient for the region's needs. The other concern raised through a subsequent email communication was the possible termination of the dictation service. CRP learned that the dictation service contract was extended. CRP believes that a gap in communication caused this concern, and is effectively resolved at this time.

Staff Workload:

Staff workload is comparable to other urban offices in the state. The current staff seem to be handling it quite well. However, the supervisor clearly seems overwhelmed with several management tasks, and as the Q&A report and our subsequent discussions with the Staff Manager at the regional office in Wasilla indicated, needs better tools and a clear PIP to assist her in her work.

Partner Relationships:

Working partnerships of OCS regional and field offices with their partners at the local level have been a concern across the state. Relationships with partner agencies in Kodiak are modest at best. Many partners complained that the response from OCS has been sporadic and inconsistent. Due to the current supervisor's long association with the community; many partners have a personal relationship with her. However, many institutional relationships seemed to be due to the partners being proactive and insistent rather than OCS being actively invested. A case in point is the Sun'aq Social Services in Kodiak. The ICWA staff reported that, over the years, they worked hard to convince OCS staff that consultation with them before intervening with a family of their Tribe is beneficial to the family. Although this seems to be working well at the moment, this arrangement is not institutionalized and may be discontinued when personnel change.

Other areas of concern:

Regional intake seems to be a problem in the region, as was noticed elsewhere in the state. Some partners notify the local office along with the regional intake. Some reported that regional intake does not always record their calls, and they receive no follow-up information. Some mandated reporters identified specific children/families that were never checked upon after they made a report of harm. At least one partner suggested specific changes to the intake form – including space for/accepting photographs, increasing space for description on the paper form, having an option to expect a call back from OCS about the status of the follow-up, and an option to indicate the involvement of drugs. Some reporters expressed the need for a report number to be issued for every report of harm.

Acknowledgements: The CRP would like to thank all the partner agencies for their time and insights. We greatly appreciate all that you do to ensure the safety and welfare of Alaska's children. We would also like to thank the staff in Kodiak and Wasilla OCS offices for their time. Your commitment to serving children and families in crises is a source of inspiration.