

## Alaska Citizen Review Panel

### Members

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The Citizen Review Panel is a statewide group of volunteers mandated by federal and state law to provide oversight to the Office of Children's Services.

### Teleconference with OCS Staff

Friday, October 12, 2014

Noon to 1:00 p.m.

**Present:** Christy Lawton, Travis Erickson, Margie, Diwakar, Dana, Ben, Reshia

**Absent:** Bettyann

### Minutes

- 1) Christy shared a spreadsheet with the vacancy and turnover numbers for the first quarter of FY15. Diwakar noted that he had compiled all the old numbers Christy had shared in order to help see trends. The Panel is trying to figure out what data we want that will allow us to provide meaningful feedback. Christy confirmed that she gets the data quarterly, but said the regions might get their own data more frequently. She noted that quarterly makes more sense than monthly since it smooths the trends. It was also agreed that getting data quarterly allows for more time to discuss other issues—vacancy and turnover discussions have dominated our joint meetings for months.

Christy described the turnover figures as representing 'churn'. Travis noted that the vacancy rate is for the entire state. OCS has a waiver to carry more extra positions than other departments. E.g., OCS is funded for 100 positions, but advertising trying to fill 104. They are allowed to do so because they will never be 100% staffed. OCS is allowed to be 4.5% above funded due to their high turnover rate while all other departments are only allowed to be 3%. Christy offered that she could have Myria come talk to us if we want to know more.

Christy noted that Western and Anchorage are struggling right now. Anchorage is struggling more than normal. Diwakar asked how 20% became the standard. Christy said she will email to explain, but noted that 70% of the people who leave OCS resign from state employment. Others transfer with many people transferring from rural areas to urban OCS offices, especially people recruited from Outside.

Christy noted CPS turnover is a national problem. Travis said the issue has been studied nationally, locally, backward and forward because it's been such an intractable problem. The staff survey

asked people why they leave and why they stay and what would help them stay. The top five answers are all workload related. Diwakar wondered what the next step is.

Diwakar noted we heard through the grapevine that Michael Isom left. Travis reported that there have been major changes in Bethel. They have filled two of the three supervisory positions with OCS veterans. The recruiting is going well and he is hopeful that Michael's replacement will be hired shortly (maybe an internal promotion and they can get someone hired on the first round). Christy praised how well Travis has stepped up in dealing with this crisis. OCS has been sending people out to cover since the workload doesn't stop. Sharon Fleming, CSM of SERO, but formerly of Bethel is covering. It really helps that she knows the community. She's managing as well as she can. Travis noted that Western keeps him up at night. Christy said that the new supervisors are either line workers who have been promoted or folks who left OCS, but are returning.

Diwakar noted that we'd be happy to do anything we can to help, but we hadn't planned to visit Bethel this year. Christy said the staff are stressed and there have been so many unfamiliar faces out there, that it might be better to wait until the new CSN is hired and has six months to settle in. She noted tribal partners are helping with the hiring process. Christy noted that tribal partners are noting the regional challenges, the tragedy. YKHC has reduced its workforce which impacts OCS. OPA is going to turn over the GALs out there.

## 2) Latest IA numbers

Travis noted that there is a trend summary tab on the spreadsheet he sends. All the numbers are there so he can see immediately how things are going. Unfortunately, it's on the same trend it has been for the past 5-6 months. There are now are 2,000 open IA; we're not headed in a good direction. Many cases are aging. He anticipates that when Western and Anchorage are stabilized that will head in a better direction, but until then he doesn't expect it. Maybe it'll turn around by the end of the year.

Christy noted that Anchorage has had turnover at the management level. They recruited good, but green people. When they were making the decisions on where to put the additional positions OCS got they decided to add 6 SSAs in the IA unit in Anchorage. That way each IA unit will have two SSAs. They spend tons of time driving kids and getting paperwork. She's hoping they can do more paraprofessional work like going to see kids at home, making collateral contacts, making referrals, and just supporting the case workers. They are trying to figure out how to measure if the additional SSAs yields improved safety for kids and improved morale for workers.

## 3) Anchorage site visit

Diwakar noted that we just recently completed the site visit and hadn't gotten our reflections together yet, but said the site visit report will be available next week. Reshia asked about the minimum qualifications and whether they could be relaxed. She noted one SSA who was eager to move up, but didn't meet the requirements. Christy noted that there is no degree requirement to be an SSA and that many SSAs have been promoted to line workers over time. The process and requirements are not overly cumbersome. It would be very challenging to

change as the job title is shared with other divisions. Plus she noted the standards are already so low, she's not inclined to lower them anymore. Travis noted that it would be a long conversation to discuss it, but noted they have removed built in barriers so people can climb through the chain since the education requirements can be replaced by equal years of experience.

Dana noted that he heard a familiar story about lack of communication, a difficult IA worker, and that ICWA workers had rocky relationships with OCS, but now things are more collegial and there is information sharing.

Ben praised the dedicated liaisons for partner agencies and having new workers go introduce themselves to partners. Christy noted that the introduction element is a requirement everywhere. Reshia noted that workers' availability had helped bridge communication issues. Ben discussed the potential for streamlining, new technology. Diwakar noted that partners were not thrilled with their relationships with OCS, but that no one questioned the workers' intent. They were universally recognized as having a very hard job and working hard under challenging conditions. Travis said that was really good to hear since they aren't getting an additional \$20 million, they will have to continue to be stretched and overworked so it's good the message is out there.

#### 4) ORCA

Diwakar stated that our work plan for this year contains the four items from last year and two new issues: ORCA and foster care. Ben wants to collect information about what information ORCA collects, see a schema, learn what data is required. Diwakar noted the reason we are eager to get this started is that Ben is likely moving out of state, so it will probably slow after his departure. Christy offered to help facilitate a meeting with Tim Morse which should be workable since Ben's in Juneau. Christy reminded us that there are limitations on IT. If the request isn't to meet a federally mandated requirement, it's not happening. The bulk of what gets done are things required by the feds, financial related, or to respond to lawsuits. Christy will give Tim a heads up that Ben will be contacting him; Ben will email Christy so she'll have his address to send documentation and training information.

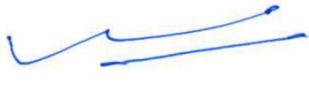
#### 5) OCS choice

Christy noted there is no other good news. Another foster parent was killed. Sometimes it feels like the sky is falling: the number of kids in custody is going up, there is additional pressure on the system. It doesn't need more now; it will cause new challenges.

#### 6) AKEN (Alaska Evaluation Network) presentation

Diwakar note that he is presenting about CRP to the AKEN on October 15<sup>th</sup>. There is a lot of misunderstanding of the role of citizen panels and it's been bothering him. He's trying to figure out what the CRP's role is. He will send the information on the presentation.

*Minutes accepted by Panel on November 4, 2014.*

V.k. 

*Diwakar Vadapalli, Chair*