

LOCAL CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM IN ALASKA'S COMMUNITIES: RESULTS FROM A SURVEY



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

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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.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

As part of its ‘public outreach’ mandate, Alaska’s Citizen Review Panel (CRP) presented an overview of its activities for the year (2014-2015) at the 24th Annual BIA Tribal Providers Conference. The Division of Human Services of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Alaska Region organizes the Human Services sessions as part of the annual conference, usually held in Anchorage in the months of November or December each year. This session is attended by more than a hundred representatives of the social services or child welfare services divisions/departments of various Alaska Native communities and/or entities from across the state.

1.1. Key findings

All participants at the session were surveyed for their opinions and perceptions on various things. This document reports the results of that survey conducted during the CRP presentation on December 3, 2015. Primary findings of the survey are:

- Most communities rate their local child protection system as being above average on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the best.
- Child protection system in most Alaska’s communities is a multiple-entity system heavily dependent upon interagency relationships and communication. These relationships currently seem to lack any institutional/organizational framework or structure, and are dependent on individual workers’ ability and desire to partner.
- Most respondents and communities they represent are unaware of the CRP and expressed a desire to participate after they heard the presentation.

2. Purpose of the survey

The CRP is interested in understanding the child protection needs and available services in communities across the state. This knowledge will inform the Panel’s review and evaluation of the policies, procedures, and practice of the child protective services (CPS) in Alaska. This survey was designed to collect information and opinions from social service leaders, administrators, and workers of various Alaska Native tribes and tribal entities in the state on three primary topics:

1. Components of child protection systems in their community, and their effectiveness
2. Working relationships between their local child protection service system (as identified in 1 above) and Alaska’s designated state-wide agency for child protection – Office of Children Services (OCS)
3. Awareness regarding the Citizen Review Panel

3. Sample

One hundred surveys were distributed at the conference session and seventy three completed surveys were received. Respondents represented 56 communities, distributed across the state from all OCS regions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of respondents by professional affiliation

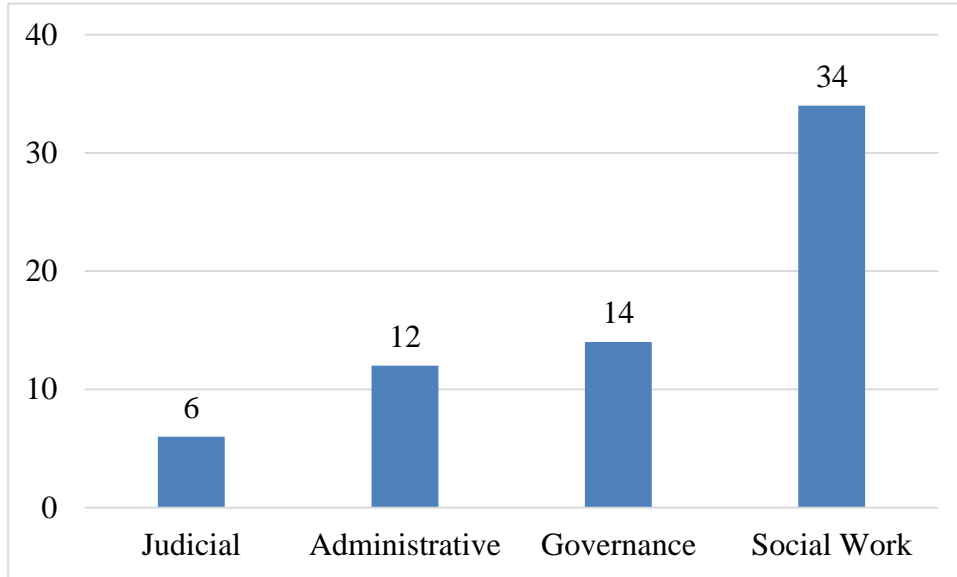
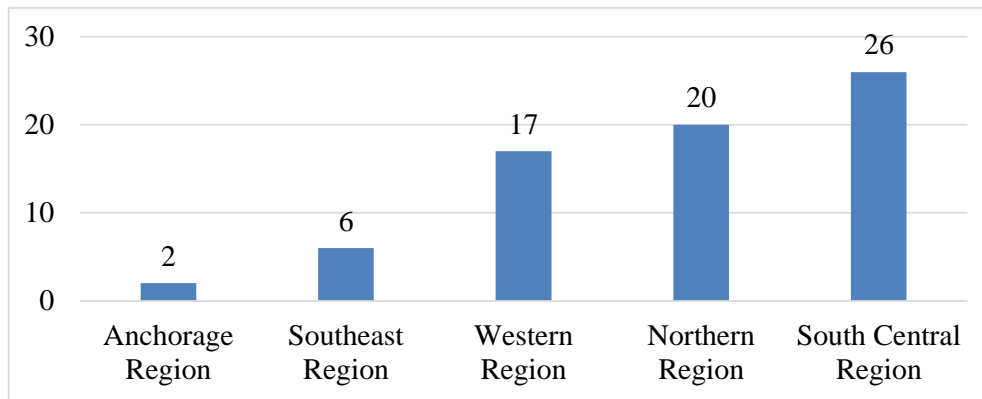


Figure 2: Number of respondents by OCS region



Respondents' professional affiliations are broadly classified into four distinct categories (Figure 2) – administration, governance, judicial, and social work.

- *Judicial* positions included tribal court judges or tribal justice program staff

- *Administrative* positions included: ‘tribal administrator’, ‘CEO’, ‘admin assistant’, ‘TANF supervisor’, ‘ICWA director’, project coordinator’, ‘self-governance director’, ‘human services director’, ‘tribal administrator’, and ‘director’.
- *Governance* positions included local governing council members.
- *Social work* positions included 21 different titles such as ‘ICWA worker’, ‘case worker’, family services worker’, etc.

4. Results

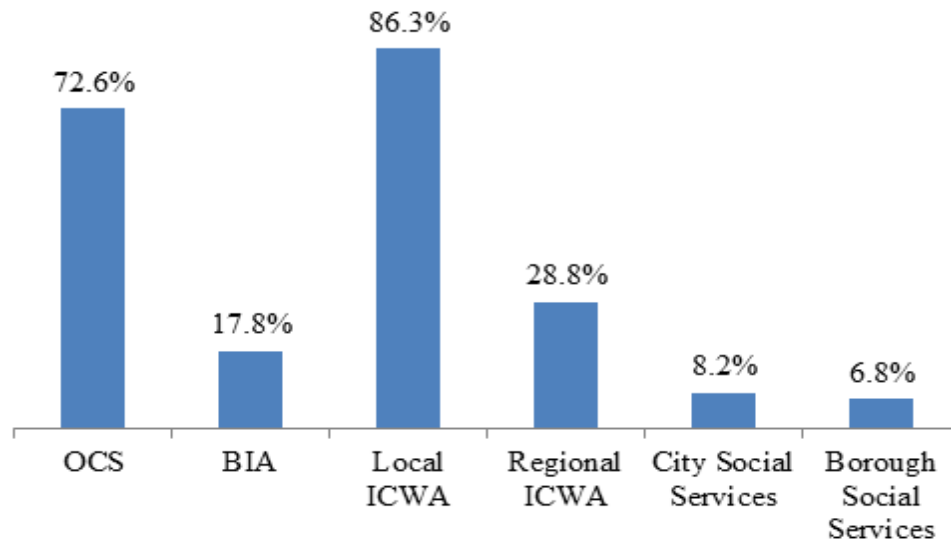
Child protection is a complex enterprise and requires collaborative working relationships between various agencies responsible for child safety. The Office of Children Services (OCS) is the designated state child protection service agency in Alaska. Federally recognized tribes and tribal entities also provide child protection services in most communities.

4.1. Local child protection system

Respondents were asked to identify what might constitute child protection system in their community. Among the first six choices offered (Figure 3), ‘Local Tribal ICWA Program’ was chosen by more than 86% (63 out of 73) of the respondents. OCS is the second most identified option. This is expected since the respondents are attendees at an ICWA conference session.

A majority of the respondents (52 out of 71 valid responses, 73.2%) chose more than one agency as constituting their local child protection system. Forty five (45) respondents identified both the ‘Local Tribal ICWA Program’ and OCS, the most frequently identified pairing of entities.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents that chose each agency as being part of their local child protection system.



In addition to these six choices, respondents also identified a diverse array of entities, individuals, and/or activities that are helping or could help in protecting children from abuse and neglect. These included

- public safety (local, regional, and state)
- school
- courts (tribal and state)
- local child protection teams
- Child Advocacy Centers
- clinic
- elders
- healthy activities for children after school
- regular and meaningful communication between various entities

With so many agencies, individuals, and activities identified, respondents rated child protection in their communities to be above the average. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being best and 1 being poor), the overall average score was 6.1, with about half the respondents ranking child protection below 6 and half of them ranking it above 6.

Among the OCS regions, respondents from the Western Region ranked child protection to be poorest with an average ranking of 5.44. In comparison, respondents from Southcentral Region ranked at 6.22 and those from Northern Region ranked at 6.00. There were too few respondents from Anchorage and Southeast regions for a meaningful comparison. It is also interesting to note that those that identified just one of the six entities as comprising the local child protection system had the highest average rating of the system. These numbers are shown in Table 1.

It is interesting to note that those respondents that identified only one entity as part of the local child protection system ranked their child protection system highest. This may mean that the one component is highly effective in their view, which may minimize the need for other possible entities as part of the local child protection system. It may also mean that other possible components may either be inaccessible or ineffective, and these communities may be focused on making the one available component most effective. Thirteen of these nineteen respondents chose ‘Local Tribal ICWA Program’ as the child protection system. Their mean rating of their child protection system is slightly higher (6.42) than the rest (6.14).

Table 1: Mean rating (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being worst and 10 being best) of local child protection system (categories with less than 5 respondents are not reported)

		<i>Mean rating</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
<i>Number of entities identified as part of the local child protection system</i>	One	6.32	19
	Two	6.19	26
	Three	5.67	15
<i>OCS Region</i>	South Central Region (SCR)	6.22	23
	Northern Region (NR)	6.00	20
	Western Region (WR)	5.44	16

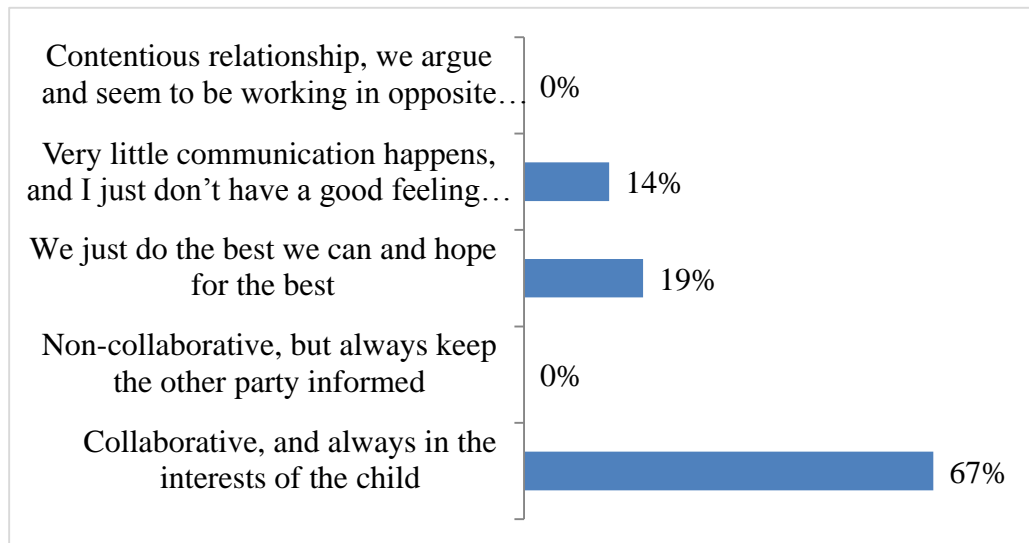
4.2. Working relationship with OCS

The CRP is most interested in the working relationships between various local agencies concerned with child protection, and Alaska’s Office of Children Services (OCS). This relationship has been consistently identified by the Panel as needing improvement over the last several years.

About half (36 out of 68 valid responses, 49.3%) of the respondents reported to be working with OCS in an official capacity. Among those who work with OCS in an official capacity, only 15 reported to be working on individual cases. Remaining respondents reported that they interact with OCS workers, but do not work on any specific cases. Overall, out of 39 valid responses, respondents’ interaction with OCS staff seems random – occasional contact (9 respondents, 23%), sometimes a lot, and sometimes very little (20 respondents, 51.2%), and regular contact (10 respondents, 25.6%). A good majority (23 out of 39 valid responses, 59%) reported that they collaborate with OCS on case planning. A good majority (24 out of 36 valid responses, 67%) also reported that they “collaborate, and always in the interests of the child.”

When asked of the most important thing they do to maintain or improve their good working relationship with OCS workers, most respondents identified communication as key. This ranged from being available to OCS workers when they are visiting the community for a family visit or in response to a protective service report (PSR), to constantly keeping in touch with OCS workers either through email or phone to ensure good communication despite high turnover on both sides.

Figure 4: Nature of the working relationship with OCS workers



The above patterns could mean that the relationship is functional when necessary. But, it can also mean that it can be just as dysfunctional in the absence of any mutually agreed upon, or desired collaboration. The Panel’s own observations during site visits over the last several years support the second scenario. In other words, the reported collaboration may be more an artifact of

individual attributes and desires of people in respective positions than an institutional or organizational relationship.

4.3. Familiarity with the Citizen Review Panel

Respondents were also asked about their familiarity with the CRP. Very few (10 out of 71) respondents were familiar with CRP or served on the Panel. Another 22 respondents heard about the panel but knew very little. A good majority (39 out of 71, 54.9%) never heard of CRP. This is an indication of how little individual communities may know about the opportunity that the Panel presents them to participate in the efforts to improve child protection system in their communities. A majority of the respondents found the presentation to the session useful, and indicated that they are more inclined to work with CRP.

5. Conclusions

This survey was conducted to gain the perspective of tribal representatives on child protection in their communities, and their relationships with the state's Office of Children Services (OCS). A majority of the respondents identified more than one institution/organization as constituting their local child protection system (CPS). As is known, local tribal ICWA program and the state OCS are the primary components of the local CPS in most communities represented in this survey.

Relationships between the staff of the community's local child protection system and OCS seems generally positive, but depends heavily on individual initiative. No structural mechanism seems to exist, at least to the extent the respondents of this survey are aware.

6. Limitations

The survey is limited in several ways. This is not a representative sample, and is limited to those who attended the BIA Human Services conference session on December 3, 2014. The sample is small and valid responses on several questions did not exceed 35 responses. Thus, analysis is limited in several ways.

Appendix

Survey Form

This is a survey to gather opinions on child protection system in your community. The Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is a federal and state mandated voluntary body to evaluate child protection systems in Alaska. This information will be used by CRP to better understand the context and circumstances of relationships that OCS has with communities and local child protection personnel. Results will be reported to you through the BIA Social Services office.

Your Professional title _____ Your Community _____

The following questions are about your community and your relationship with OCS.

1. In your opinion, what constitutes child protection system in your community? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office of Children Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Regional ICWA program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BIA Social Services | <input type="checkbox"/> City social services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Tribal ICWA program | <input type="checkbox"/> Borough social services |

2. In addition to the official child protection system, what else do you notice in your community that you think helps in protecting children from abuse and neglect?

- a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being best and 1 being poor) how would you rate child protection in your community? (Pick one number)

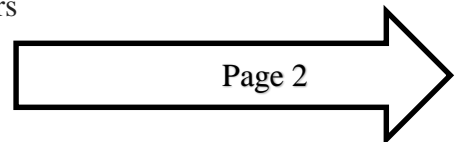
Poor _____ Best
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Do you work with (not for) OCS in any official capacity?

- Yes. Official role (if different from your title above): _____
 No (**SKIP TO QUESTION 10**)

5. What is the nature of your contact with OCS?

- I work on cases with OCS social workers and supervisors
 I interact with them but do not work on any cases



6. How frequently do you interact with OCS personnel:
- Occasional contact,
 - Contact as needed, sometimes a lot, and sometimes very little
 - Regular contact
7. If you have a case load in your official capacity, would you describe your work with OCS social workers as:
- Collaborative, and always in the interests of the child
 - Non-collaborative, but, always keep the other party informed
 - We just do the best we can and hope for the best
 - Very little communication happens, and I just don't have a good feeling about it
 - Contentious relationship, we argue and seem to be working in opposite directions
8. What is the most important thing that you do to make your relationship with OCS as strong as it is?
-
9. Do you collaborate with OCS social workers in any case planning?
- Yes
 - No

The following questions are about the Citizen Review Panel.

10. Did you know about Alaska Citizen Review Panel (check only one):
- Never heard of the CRP before
 - Heard about it but know very little
 - Familiar with CRP
 - Served on CRP/know a lot about it.
11. Was this presentation useful?
- Yes
 - No
12. After learning more today, do you think you would be likely to work with the CRP?
- Yes
 - No
13. Are there any additional topics that we should have covered that might benefit you?
-
14. After listening to the presentation today, do you have suggestions for CRP?

THANK YOU!