

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) wishes to thank the Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) for its work in the past year to ensure the safety and well being of the children of Alaska. We know that we cannot do the work necessary to prevent and reduce child maltreatment without the assistance of all of our community partners. We appreciate the CRP for their diligence in examining policies and procedures and practices that then inform recommendations toward systems improvement of the OCS.

It has been another industrious year for OCS. We continued to work diligently on improving and standardizing practice across the state related to child safety decision making and we were able to roll out *Family to Family* from Anchorage to Fairbanks. We were able to increase new worker training from 2 weeks to 4 weeks to better prepare staff to do child protective services. We were able to implement a competency-based curriculum for supervisors to strengthen their ability to better support their staff. We strengthened partnerships with other divisions within the Department of Health and Social Services to provide a better service delivery system to families that come to the Department's attention through several different doors – Public Assistance, Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice. We spent more time and effort on the prevention of child maltreatment to combat child abuse and the need for intervention from protective services.

The biggest event to happen within OCS in the past year was the Federal Child and Family Review (CFSR) in September. A great deal of time and effort went into the planning and preparation for the CFRS. That work began with the completion of a Statewide Assessment. A copy of the document can be viewed at - <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Publications/CFSRstateAssessment.pdf>. The final CFRS report has not yet been received from the Administration for Children and Families, but strategic planning for the Performance Improvement Plan has begun.

Again this year, OCS concentrated a lot of effort on Continuous Quality Improvement, including conducting statewide case reviews, quality assurance of our safety assessment implementation and the annual stakeholder surveys. The survey results can be viewed at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/QualityImprovement/QualityImprovement.htm>. The stakeholder surveys also included our annual staff survey. The staff survey produced a 77% response rate this year and a wealth of insightful comments. This year's staff survey truly indicates that OCS staff is committed to the organization's success and invested in improving service delivery to children and families!

The revision of Policy and Procedures (P/P) is a continual process within the OCS. Last year the format of our P/P was revised to become more user-friendly. This year the focus was on revisions to update P/P. A copy of all the revisions is included in Appendix A.

The following are the responses to the specific recommendations made in the CRP 2008 Annual Report:

**Recommendation 1 - Create a fifth region headquartered in Bethel.**

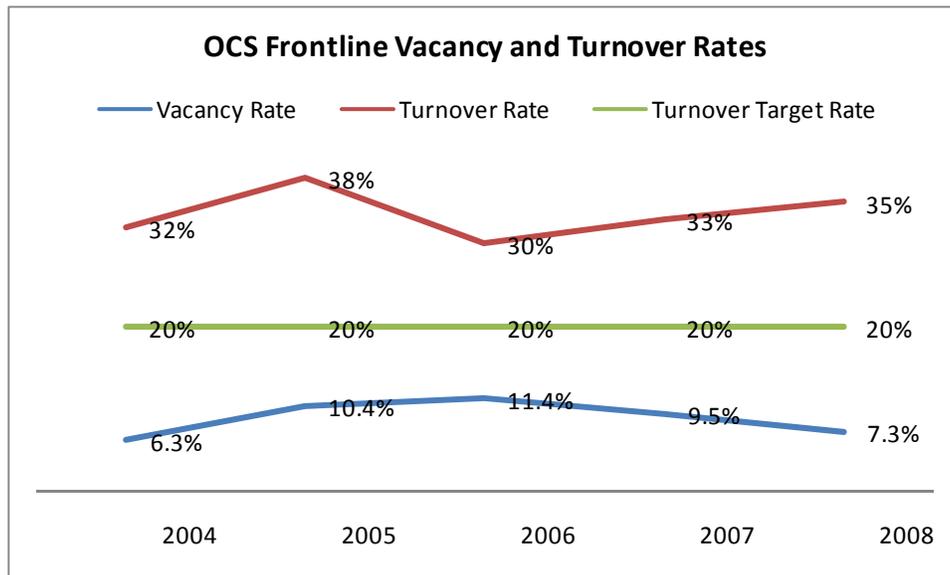
The Governor's Proposed FY2010 Budget was released on December 15, 2008, and does not include a request for funding a 5<sup>th</sup> region within OCS. OCS has made some changes that are proving to be of assistance though. There is a new Staff Manager in Bethel and a new dynamic South Central Regional (SCRO) Children's Services Manager (CSM) with several years of child protective services expertise. Additionally, an experienced supervisor transferred from Wasilla to Bethel to fill a vacancy. Teamwork within the region is more apparent than ever before and issues are being dealt with as a region, rather than Bethel standing alone as it has at times in the past. The SCRO CSM is soliciting assistance from his co-managers around the state to stand in and help with the work until vacancies can be filled.

In an effort to draw more attention and gain more information, Bethel was selected as a site to be reviewed in the Federal CFSR in September 2008. While the final report has not yet been issued, regional management has begun to follow up on areas in need of most attention. The focus has been on recruitment and hiring of new staff to fill vacancies; strengthening partnerships with tribal organizations; strengthening community partnerships; creating new ways to increase and improve communication between ICWA workers and OCS staff; and planning for cultural awareness training in January of 2009. Additionally, regional management is working with OCS licensing staff to develop a plan to fully train and license foster families in the Bethel region.

**Recommendation 2 - Implement workload study recommendations.**

The Governor has included 5 new positions for OCS in the proposed FY 2010 budget. Pending approval from the Legislature, the final phase of the recommendations from the Hornsby Zeller Associates workload study report of 2006 will be complete.

Child Protective Services is an emotionally demanding vocation. Across the nation, compassion, fatigue and vicarious trauma lead to high turnover and vacancy rates among caseworkers. In Alaska, fifty percent of the OCS front-line caseworkers have been employed with the agency for less than two years, and 20 percent have less than one year of experience. While vacancy rates have improved since 2006, turnover rates continue to slowly increase.



To institutionalize a mindful and daily focus on workforce development, the OCS formed an internal work group in the fall of 2007 to focus on retention and recruitment strategies. Workforce Goals and Strategies were developed and put into a written work plan that is constantly being revised and added to as the work evolves. (See Appendix B). The workgroup includes a representative from the University of Alaska Family and Youth Services Training Academy, the Division of Personnel, several OCS staff at all levels within the division, and a member from the Annie E. Casey Foundation that is providing technical

assistance. In addition, an executive steering committee was created in August of 2008 to provide guidance and oversight of the workgroup. Two of the members have also joined a DHSS Workforce Development Team created by Commissioner Hogan in November 2008.

The OCS internal work group has begun development of a realistic job profile DVD, intended to minimize turnover through recruitment processes that better inform applicants. A candidate for hire is sent a DVD and asked to sign a simple attestation form which states 1) they have watched the video; and 2) they *still* want to be interviewed and considered for the OCS frontline position. While this is a relatively new technique, states that have already implemented such a process are seeing an increase of new employees that truly have the competencies and the heart to do child protective services work, and a decrease of early resignations/dismissals. The OCS is also adapting its website to include virtual, realistic job profiles of current OCS employees to help job applicants understand what the job entails *before* applying for positions with the division.

A new employee exit survey was created and protocol implemented to help determine why so many workers leave service. Employee incentive techniques are being explored and alternative work weeks are being encouraged. Other strategies related to salaries, student loan forgiveness programs, and telecommuting agreements are also being explored.

The OCS is focusing on several other strategies to increase staff retention. Some of those strategies include increasing new employee training from 2 to 4 weeks to better prepare and equip new front-line workers with the skills and tools they need to do their complicated and demanding jobs. A supervisory competencies curriculum was developed and has begun to be delivered to child protective services supervisory staff. The curriculum has received rave reviews from those in attendance. The Anchorage Field Office has developed and implemented an extensive new employee orientation to supplement new worker training. This new employee orientation model has been shared with the regional managers and is expected to be adapted and implemented in the other regions as well. Due to the number of new field managers coming on board in the past year, an Orientation and Development Plan for New Managers was also developed and implemented. (See Appendix C).

The OCS used its Title IV-E contractor to thoroughly evaluate our current student stipend program with the Universities as the program has not lived up to its expectations for the retention of staff that have been paid to receive an advanced degree. That evaluation has been completed. Based on the contractor's recommendations, revisions and development of policy and procedures is underway so that a stronger and more successful stipend program is in place by the fall of 2009.

The OCS Management Information System, ORCA, is producing more management reports than ever before. One of those reports includes case load data by case worker, office and region. Assignment of new positions and reallocation of existing positions is based on that data and watching the trends of new reports and case assignments each month. Managerial reports have recently been shared with all managers in face-to-face statewide meetings. Managers have been trained how to access and interpret the reports. These ORCA reports have just recently been made available to all staff - not just managers - to encourage all staff to monitor data around the state. OCS has observed that our caseloads have come down over the past year and are far more manageable than in recent years.

The OCS has formed a stronger working relationship with the Division of Personnel (DOP) and has requested Performance Coaching training in field offices. The DOP will accompany OCS to meet with staff and union representatives in an effort to discuss and resolve work load issues. Once the DHSS Employee Recognition Program is approved by the Department of Administration, OCS will adopt and

implement those policy and procedures in their entirety. Retention and recruitment of OCS staff is a systemic challenge. Many of the options determined viable are unattainable by OCS alone and must be supported at the state level.

**Recommendation 3 - Fix the telephone system.**

In planning for FY09, OCS had put in a capital request specifically to repair/replace antiquated phone systems in field offices. We were allocated \$136,000 to do so and began the repairs in July 2008, once the funding was received. To date, the necessary repairs and/or upgrades have been completed in Barrow, St. Mary's and Aniak. In various stages of being repair and/or upgrade are Kotzebue, Ketchikan, King Salmon, Glennallen, Kodiak, Wasilla, Bethel, Dillingham, Kenai, Seward and Unalaska.

Telephone systems functionality solves many of the issues. However, as is noted in your report, adequate staffing of OCS phones is also a concern. While the preference is that a live voice always responds to the public's calls, protocols about how that happens in each field office, including the small communities with one/two person offices, will be finalized and in place by February 1, 2009.

**Recommendation 4 - Publicize and staff the toll free number.**

As recommended, the toll free number to report child abuse and neglect has been more prominently displayed on the OCS website. It will also be posted to the DHSS website on a rotating basis with other DHSS divisional information. Additionally, the toll free number has been added to the home page of the Alaska Children's Trust website. To capitalize on cost-free advertising and better inform the public, the OCS shares the toll-free reporting number (as well as the Children's Trust Parent line) with the media whenever the OCS responds to media inquiries about child abuse and child neglect issues.

Currently, the toll free reporting line operates out of Anchorage and was set up to handle primarily Anchorage business. However, if the Anchorage Intake Unit receives a call from another part of the state during business hours, they are able to take the call and transfer the information to the correct field office. After business hours, the calls to the toll-free line are transferred to an answering service. It is agreed that there needs to be continued improvements to all aspects of intake and efforts will continue in the coming year.

In the past year, the entire intake process has been evaluated and is currently under reconstruction. The National Resource Center for Child Protective Services was enlisted to provide technical assistance on this topic. They have evaluated all business processes related to receiving and screening reports of maltreatment. Focus groups were held with staff; intakes were reviewed across the state; and intake workers were shadowed to learn more about our intake processes. We learned that intake has not received the attention and focus it so richly deserves as a separate area in need of expertise. Results from the program evaluation were shared in a face-to-face managers' meeting and planning began to make short term and long term improvements. It was decided that intake policy and procedures needed a major overhaul. Revisions are currently in final draft and will be released as soon as possible in the new year.

Longer term improvements include completely revamping how intake is conducted in the state. OCS staff prefer we move to either a statewide or regional hotline system, whereby all calls would be handled by designated intake staff who specialize in doing the work full time. Case carrying workers would not be expected to perform intake in their individual offices, but rather could concentrate exclusively on their investigative and ongoing work. Ideally, the statewide intake system would be

manned 24 hours a day/7 days a week. However, it will take many more resources, i.e., staff, space and increased information technology, than OCS currently has available.

#### **Recommendation 5 - Collocation of OCS Workers**

The OCS wholeheartedly agrees with this recommendation. Collocation is achieved whenever and wherever possible with a variety of different partners, including Child Advocacy Centers, Tribal Agencies, Law Enforcement, Mental Health, Infant Learning Program and others around the state. Whenever there is an opportunity to collocate with our community partners, the opportunity is explored and if feasible, is approved.

#### **Recommendation 6 - Support for Front Line Workers**

OCS Administrators and Managers concur that there can never be enough support given to front-line workers. As stated above, in the response regarding the work load study, there has much effort toward the retention and recruitment of staff in the past year.

New efforts to respond to this recommendation include training all managers on the services provided by the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), including the individual counseling and critical stress debriefings that are available to all state employees. The managers were asked to provide the latest information learned about the EAP with all staff in their regions. In response to tragedies involving both clients and a co-worker, OCS made several requests for EAP critical stress debriefings this past year.

In 2008, the Director began attending the last day of new worker training to welcome new staff, share the agency's vision and mission and answer questions. A large part of the Director's welcome to new staff is focused on encouraging them to engage in self care so that they stay mentally fit and capable of performing this demanding work.

The recently (November 2008) unveiled Supervisory Competencies Curriculum training being offered to all social worker supervisors through the Family & Youth Services Training Academy is a very directed effort to ensure that front-line staff are receiving better support through better supervision.

OCS managers and supervisors are increasingly cognizant of the complex personal and familial responsibilities that young workers juggle in today's world. Through our annual staff surveys and employee exit surveys, OCS staff is reporting how much they value the opportunity to work for an employer that offers flexible work schedules.

As stated above, vacancy rates are decreasing. With the number of new staff being added in the past several years, caseload sizes have gone down. Managers have more management reports available to them than ever before with which to equalize caseloads and watch trends within their regions.

In summary, the OCS continues to strive toward improving in its organizational development, better equip its staff with the skills and resources needed for the job, implement best practice standards and streamline processes whenever possible. Retention and recruitment of quality staff remains a top priority. 2008 has been an exceptional year of positive institutional changes, but systems reform will continue within OCS during 2009 and each year thereafter. Alaska's children and their families deserve nothing less.