



Alaska Citizen Review  
Panel

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The 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.

Region Visited	Southcentral Region
Communities Visited	Kodiak
Dates of Visit	October 2-4, 2019
Panelists	Bettyann Stewic

**STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED**

Office of Children’s Services (OCS)

Sun’aq Tribe of Kodiak

Kodiak Police Department

Kodiak Area Native Association

Child Advocacy Center

**INTRODUCTION**

Appreciating the challenges faced by OCS workers, the CRP endeavors to continue being more empowering and less interrogative in our approach to interviews. We gathered feedback from community partners and OCS staff during our visit. During each interview session we try to acknowledge the difficult task at hand, the social, cultural, political, logistical, and otherwise challenges that workers must face in order to strive toward the goals of child protection and family reunification. We then invited feedback under the headings of our stated priorities, giving them an opportunity both to vent frustrations and offer ideas for improvements.

**CRP ENDURING PRIORITIES**

Through the long-range strategic planning process, the panel identified five enduring priorities to guide CRP activity and inquiry over the next five years. For the 2019-2020 Work Plan the CRP will be incorporating these five priorities into site visit questions and activities.

## OVERVIEW

In 2019-2020 the panel continues to strive to become more empowering and less interrogative in our approach to interviews and site visit. We gathered feedback from community partners and OCS staff during our visit. We began each interview session with an acknowledgement of the difficult task at hand, the social, cultural, political logistical and other challenges that workers and partners in this field must face in order to work towards the goals of child protection and family reunification. We invited feedback under the headings of our stated priorities with the hope of presenting opportunities for sharing challenges while providing constructive feedback.

Those contacted through this site visit share concern and compassion for Kodiak's vulnerable children. Broadly, the community is trying to identify how to best support families and children through a trauma informed lens, within the restricting parameters of both the existing case load and funding challenges. Themes that emerged speaking with stakeholders included community concern for case overload of OCS staff, the high rate of turnover of OCS staff/leadership in the community, lack of recognition/compensation of tribal partners. The following notes focus on the external priorities of the Citizen Review Panel: Healthy CPS System, Reciprocal Engagement, and Public Outreach.

### Healthy Child Protective Services (CPS) System

The current OCS Director for Kodiak has been in this position since January 2019. Community stakeholders noted that though there has been a recent high rate of turnover in the position, the previous OCS Director for Kodiak, fostered strong relationships with community partners. Current leadership in Kodiak is data driven and has developed efficient protocols of tracking the family service, intake assessment and child visit team.

- **Physical Infrastructure:** There is not enough furniture in the Kodiak office. King Salmon office (not on Kodiak Island, but located in the same OCS region) doesn't have adequate physical infrastructure, telecommuting positions may be a possible replacement.
- **Letter of Opportunity (LOA) Workers:** Traveling LOA handoff has inefficiencies with communication and case note history completion.
- **Skills Training:** OCS staff generally liked how skills training is now presented in three segments, however it was noted that the first skill training focuses on intake

assessments, but staff responsibilities post this training covers more than just intake assessments.

- ***Mentorship Program:*** OCS staff at the Kodiak office like the mentorship program within OCS.
- ***Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Training:*** At the time of this site visit not all OCS staff had received ICWA training.

### **Reciprocal Engagement**

OCS is using individual private contractors to conduct family visits in the community, and there is a perception that private contractors are not required to provide transportation support. OCS staff noted that the Kodiak School District has a good partnership with the local OCS office. Though the school district offers parenting classes, OCS staff and other community stakeholders noted the need for additional/more inclusive parenting classes for families throughout the OCS service region. OCS staff noted that they struggle with providing services to incarcerated parents,

Hiland Correctional Facility has an OCS liaison worker that is incredibly helpful, it is difficult to contact parents who are incarcerated in federal facilities. OCS staff noted that tribal partners provide critical support, highlighting the work of Sun'aq's child protection programs. Staff stated that tribal councils are helpful, and that there are good existing relationships with tribal partners in Old Harbor and Afognak.

For those in the community who experience alcohol and/or substance dependency there is a lack of available services. This, of course, impacts families and children.

### **Public Outreach**

It was suggested that the CRP should have announced site visit in the local newspaper prior to site visit.

The disconnect between public's perception of the role of OCS and the reality of services offered to the community by OCS, using the example of community members believing OCS

can come into a household and take someone's child. As mentioned above, multiple stakeholders and OCS staff identified the need for more parenting classes.

The Panel currently doesn't have the capacity to host and facilitate community meetings in a productive/safe manner. A more accurate public perception of the role of OCS in the community is critical.