



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

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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, August 8, 2014 Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Present: Christy Lawton, Travis Erickson, Rodreshia, Margie, Diwakar, Dana, Ben

Absent: Bettyann

Minutes

1) Update on turnover and vacancy

Christy mentioned the new recruitment video that was finally finished. The Panel had seen a draft version of this video earlier in the summer.

Christy noted that turnover and vacancy was doing surprisingly well, the numbers were lower than usual. OCS has lower numbers than other offices in the department. Of course, Bethel has the highest numbers in OCS. Travis noted that it feels like a normal rate; nearly everyone in IA in Bethel is new. Christy noted that in HSS they have to report any PCNs that have been vacant for more than 90 days and OCS only had one! OCS has been able to fill positions; they had ten vacancies last time she looked.

Starting in September all regions will be using the continuous recruitment that some regions (WRO and SERO) have already been using. The idea is to create a pool of qualified applicants. It really speeds up the hiring time by cutting the posting time out and it's more streamlined. The continuous recruitment will be standardized statewide, but it's only used for line workers. Diwakar asked if we could have the turnover data for the past year so we can look at the trends. Christy will follow up about whether that is available or not. Margie noted that in SERO, at least, she thinks the continuous recruitment is a great idea. Travis noted other states use this technique too since turnover is a problem nationwide for CPS. The only real resistance has been that people like to do their own interviews and now have to trust their colleagues and hire someone they didn't personally interview.

2) Latest IA numbers

Travis noted that the total numbers are down, but that many cases are aging. There are more cases over 90 days. On Monday there were 1,792 IAs open and 18% of those were over 90 days. He is concerned and wishes the numbers were lower going into the start of school since that traditionally generates so many PSRs. He noted it is strange to have it climbing in summer. There is no notable regional variation. He thinks it isn't more PSRs, but more being screened in that are causing the rising numbers. They have been hammering staff on getting high risk kids in. Christy noted that anecdotally this summer there have been record breaking numbers of IAs and that cases have been very severe. It's been very busy this summer. Margie concurred and noted that SERO has been crazy busy all summer.

Christy noted the strange summer. July alone had seven child deaths, nearly all from co-sleeping with intoxicated adults. For the first time ever a foster parent was murdered by their foster child. API noticed a big spike too; it's just been a weird summer all over.

3) New work plan

Diwakar noted that the Panel had created a new work plan, but that it wasn't ready to share with OCS at this point. He noted the Panel is sticking with the four goals from the previous year and added two new goals: 1) foster care and 2) data. He noted that the Panel has not narrowed down foster care yet; members know that's too broad a topic. The data topic is about understanding what OCS collects and how it is organized. Christy noted that foster care is a big strategy in the OCS five-year plan. Margie noted the Panel had discussed ways to support foster parents, methods to recruit new ones...the Panel hasn't talked to foster parents much in the past. Christy noted she will send the CFSR plan (which is online) and discussed foster families. They also have finalized foster parent and tribal survey data which she will share. (Sylvan noted she will send the link to this from the OCS homepage.)

Ben discussed the data issue, noting that the Panel is interested in what features ORCA contains to promote efficiency. He'd like to see what pre-programmed reports exist, the variables, see the schema, get some screen shots, learning what tracking features there are, etc. Christy asked if he's thinking a data dashboard? All their reports come from ORCA. Diwakar noted that many OCS staff access ORCA for different reasons and have different skill levels. The Panel is interested in part in learning how useful it is, how user friendly. Sylvan noted that the Panel did receive an overview of ORCA several years ago that was very helpful, but now nearly everyone who participated has moved on. She suggested maybe receiving that training again would be a good idea. Diwakar suggested maybe Ben could start alone to save OCS staff time.

Christy wasn't sure what we were looking for, but didn't think it existed. Workers are trained in ORCA by their supervisor. Travis noted there is basic ORCA training and then many 'how-do-I' guides as well as a help desk. Christy noted that ORCA is geared toward the front line worker and this is more about data entry than export. Diwakar noted that we're really trying to learn basics like what does ORCA collect, how is the data structured, how are things tracked. We will be more specific and concrete in a few weeks.

4) Infant deaths

Diwakar followed up on the high number of infant deaths. Christy noted that OCS heard about many after the fact; they were not kids in custody. Two died in custody because of caregiver maltreatment. All child deaths are reviewed by the medical examiner's child fatality review team. Bernita sits on that team for OCS. Diwakar asked if all the children had PSRs. Christy noted that OCS isn't part of the required notification chain if a child dies; they are only if there is concern that maltreatment was involved and there are other kids in the home. The review team looks at all PSRs.

5) Director Lawton's choice

Recruitment video The recruitment video is done. It's an updated version from that we saw in June. There is a work group trying to streamline the recruitment process.

Casey Initiative OCS did apply for the "On the Front Line" initiative with the Annie E. Casey Foundation; the application was due August 1st. It's a five year project; she doesn't know how many states will be selected. It focuses on the 'front door' of the system--how kids get into the system. Christy noted that she thinks they have a good practice model, but it only works if the screening and IA get it right. Those areas require a high level of critical thinking. Alaska staff don't have the education or experience they had assumed and thus they are overloaded. They need more tools to help guide them through the critical thinking...sort of an 'investigations for dummies.' The focus is on avoiding repeated maltreatment. It offers sophisticated case review in real time with the worker and supervisor. It's been used in NY and the former NY Commissioner is running the initiative at the Case Foundation. They use ChildStat.

The state needs a reasonable workload for IA or to be working toward a reasonable workload to be selected. That requirement gives Christy teeth to push for reducing workload. The initiative focused on TDM; it's a collaborative decision making model. Casey provides lots of training and technical assistance. The only cost to Alaska is the time to commit. Christy can send us the PowerPoint on the initiative. Casey will be onsite in September for a review. OCS can learn more about the level of commitment required if Alaska was selected. It's exciting, but the time commitment means there wouldn't be time to do other new stuff; there just wouldn't be time for leadership to focus on that. Sylvan asked if there was a Plan B if Alaska isn't selected by Casey. Christy said they would likely still start using ChildStat, implement differential response...there are national resources centers they could ask for help. She doesn't know when Casey is planning to decide. She feels like we have a good chance since Alaska has a better budget situation than other states (CPS hasn't been cut to the bone) and we have a smaller population of kids relative to other states. She will include the CRP when Casey is up evaluating, if there's an opportunity to do so.

Five-year plan The new five year plan is online; the feds fine tuned it. They pushed to keep it narrowly focused. In the past everything but the kitchen sink has been in there. Section three is what we would be interested in--the strategies and goals. It's online and includes a final progress report for the last five year plan which went through June 2014. It includes foster care, so we should look it over.

Foster care recruitment OCS has \$50K in FY15 for foster family recruitment. They are creating PSAs; that only costs about \$10K. The rest is for ad time. They could run for free, but it would be at terrible times so they pay for good air time that will reach the people they are trying to target. They are working on something for rural to address myths about who can be a foster parent, what the barriers really are, what type of house is allowed, etc. She asked that we pass on ideas for recruiting if we hear anything.

Safe sleeping campaign They are working with tribes on a safe sleeping campaign. They haven't had PSAs on this in a few years. Nearly all the cases here the adults have been under the influence. They don't want to condemn or be absolute like public health would be. They can't say, "no, never sleep with a baby," but need to let people know not to if you're not sober. They definitely need help. She's not sure if July was a one month spike or the beginning of a trend. Travis noted that nearly all the July deaths were with families that OCS had been involved with at some point--sometimes when the now parents were children.

Diwakar noted that OCS has a lot going on and much of it is exciting.

Minutes accepted by Panel on September 2, 2014.



Diwakar Vadapalli, Chair