

Tribal Survey
Department of Health and Social Services
Office of Children's Services

2011

Introduction

The provision of Child Protective Services to families in Alaska is through the Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services. The Office of Children's Services (OCS), in partnership with Tribal groups across the state, works to ensure the provision of comprehensive services for Alaska Native families which meet the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

The Office of Children's Services strives to ensure that children are able to remain in their own homes and coordinates all service efforts with the Tribe. When children are unable to reside in their own home due to safety concerns, the Office of Children's Services, as part of its statutory child protection mandate, has authority to assume legal and physical custody of children. The agency will initiate and coordinate placement decisions with the Tribe. Relatives are first sought to provide care for children. The use of relative caregivers follows the Indian Child Welfare Act in maintaining cultural continuity and family connections for children.

When children are placed in out-of-home care, the agency makes active efforts to reunite children with their families. The Office of Children's Services works to implement plans for services that meet the needs of children and parents. This work is done collaboratively with families, Tribal groups, Guardians ad Litem, and foster parents.

Tribal groups provide support and assistance to children and parents throughout the state. The Office of Children's Services works to monitor the safety of children. This work is done collaboratively with Tribes. Tribal groups also assist in identifying the needs of families, providing culturally sensitive services, and monitoring parents' progress toward increasing their protective capacities.

In order to learn about the quality and effectiveness of the Office of Children's Services' efforts to work with Tribal groups, the Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a survey of Tribal groups. The survey made inquiries regarding case notifications, service provision to Alaska Native families, and decision making for children and parents throughout the case. Information obtained will be used to assist management in reviewing and improving programs within the Child Protective Services system.

Survey Methods

The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a survey that was sent to members of Tribal groups throughout the state to solicit information and comments regarding service delivery of the Office of Children's Services. An initial mailing and two follow-up mailings to non-respondents were conducted. The Tribal groups were assured that all responses would be combined so that no individuals responding to the survey could be identified.

Survey Respondents

There were 106 completed surveys received from the mailing of 225 surveys for a response rate of 47%. Responses were received from each region of the state. The number of surveys sent and the number of responses by each region are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Responses By Region, Number, and Percent			
Region	Number of Surveys Sent	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Northern	84	36	43%
Southcentral	70	31	44%
Western	47	27	57%
Anchorage	6	4	67%
Southeast	18	8	44%
Total	225	106	47%

Findings

Information gained from the survey has been tabulated and organized for presentation. The report presents each item of inquiry from the survey with a table of the results. At the end of the report a summary of comments received from the survey participants is presented.

- **Please tell us which item(s) best describe your level of involvement in the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).**

Tribal groups were asked to identify which aspects of implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act they were involved in. Several of the Tribal groups indicated more than one area of ICWA involvement, thus the number of areas of implementation chosen exceeds the overall number of survey participants. Survey participants were also provided an area to describe any other role they have in the implementation of ICWA. Other roles identified included Tribal judges, ICWA worker, prevention services worker, IRA council representative, and Traditional Council Chief. Table 2 presents the responses.

Table 2

Involvement of Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation By Number and Percent		
Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Formal Intervention by Tribe	81	76%
Court Appearances	51	48%
Provide Direct Services	49	46%
Other Roles Indicated	24	23%

N=106

- **If you are employed in a social service agency, please tell us your title.**

There were 106 survey respondents who answered this question. Several of the respondents indicated they held more than one position within their agency. As a result, the number of positions reported exceeds the total number of those who responded to this survey question.

Table 3

Respondents' Title of Position in Tribal Agency by Number and Percent		
Title of Position	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Social Services Director	9	9%
ICWA Worker	58	55%
Caseworker	5	5%
Administrative	8	8%
Other	13	12%
Not Employed in an Agency	24	23%

N=106

- **Collaboration between Tribal workers and the Office of Children's Services in the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act has strengthened the quality of services for Alaska Native children.**

The Office of Children's Services works with Tribal groups to ensure the provision of quality services to Alaska Native children. Survey participants were asked their level of agreement with the statement that service collaboration has improved the quality of services to families. Table 4 presents the responses.

Table 4

Service Collaboration Has Strengthened the Quality of Services by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	35	17%	43%	23%	14%	3%
Southcentral	31	23%	42%	26%	3%	7%
Western	27	19%	63%	15%	0%	4%
Anchorage	4	0%	50%	25%	0%	25%
Southeast	6	33%	50%	0%	17%	0%
Total	103	19%	49%	20%	7%	5%

- **When it is necessary for Alaska Native children to come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children’s Services involves the Tribes in relative searches.**

When children come into the state’s custody, Tribal groups are a resource to the Office of Children’s Services and to families. By helping to locate extended family members, they enable the Office of Children’s Services to identify relatives to provide care for children who are in need of temporary out-of-home placement. Table 5 presents the responses.

Table 5

Tribes are Involved in Relative Searches by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	35	20%	51%	17%	6%	6%
Southcentral	31	29%	29%	19%	10%	13%
Western	27	26%	52%	7%	11%	4%
Anchorage	4	25%	25%	25%	25%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	75%	0%	13%	0%
Total	105	24%	46%	14%	10%	7%

- **When children come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children’s Services involves the Tribes in decisions regarding placement of Alaska Native children.**

Tribal groups often are aware of family networks and extended families within their own communities who may be able to care for children. The Office of Children’s Services contacts the Tribes when Alaska Native children come into the custody of the state in order to involve Tribes in placement decisions. Table 6 presents the responses.

Table 6

Tribes are Involved in Placement Decisions for Alaska Native Children by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	35	23%	46%	14%	14%	3%
Southcentral	31	26%	26%	26%	13%	10%
Western	27	22%	41%	11%	19%	7%
Anchorage	4	25%	25%	25%	0%	25%
Southeast	8	13%	50%	13%	25%	0%
Total	105	23%	38%	17%	15%	7%

- **In general, efforts are made to place children in ICWA preference settings.**

The Office of Children’s Services and the children’s Tribes work together to locate homes that meet ICWA requirements. This supports children’s cultural continuity and allows children to remain connected to their families’ traditions. Table 7 presents the responses.

Table 7

Efforts are Made to Place Children in ICWA Preference Settings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	35	14%	54%	20%	6%	6%
Southcentral	31	26%	36%	23%	10%	7%
Western	26	12%	65%	8%	12%	4%
Anchorage	4	25%	25%	25%	25%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	75%	13%	13%	0%
Total	104	16%	52%	17%	10%	5%

- **Siblings are placed together whenever possible.**

When children come into the state’s custody, the agency makes efforts to ensure siblings are placed together in foster care. The agency involves the Tribe in identifying homes where siblings are able to stay together. Table 8 presents the responses.

Table 8

Siblings are Placed Together When Possible by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	18%	53%	18%	12%	0%
Southcentral	31	16%	48%	23%	10%	3%
Western	27	15%	59%	19%	7%	0%
Anchorage	4	50%	25%	25%	0%	0%
Southeast	7	29%	57%	14%	0%	0%
Total	103	18%	52%	19%	9%	1%

- **The Tribe and or Tribal designee receives timely notification for administrative reviews and other case related meetings.**

The Office of Children’s Services seeks to involve Tribes in the ongoing management of cases and in the regular review of cases. To support Tribal involvement, the Tribal groups must receive timely notices of scheduled meetings and reviews. Table 9 presents the responses.

Table 9

Tribes Received Timely Notice of Reviews and Meetings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	6%	56%	15%	15%	9%
Southcentral	31	13%	55%	10%	13%	10%
Western	27	15%	41%	11%	26%	7%
Anchorage	4	0%	25%	50%	0%	25%
Southeast	8	13%	13%	13%	50%	13%
Total	104	11%	47%	14%	19%	10%

- **The administrative review process is helpful to parents to understand the changes and activities that need to occur and identify resources to assist them in the process.**

The Office of Children’s Services works with Tribes and families so that services are identified for the family. The agency reviews cases every six months to monitor the ongoing need for services and participation by the family. Tribal workers are invited to attend the six-month administrative review. Table 10 presents responses.

Table 10

The Administrative Review Process is Helpful to Parents by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	12%	38%	47%	0%	3%
Southcentral	31	7%	42%	32%	10%	10%
Western	27	11%	56%	19%	15%	0%
Anchorage	4	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	7	14%	57%	0%	29%	0%
Total	103	10%	48%	30%	9%	4%

- **Tribal groups are encouraged and supported to participate in initial case plan development and the monitoring of the families’ progress.**

The Office of Children’s Services and Tribal representatives work with families to develop initial case plans. The Tribes also help to support and monitor the families’ progress throughout their involvement with the Office of Children’s Services. Table 11 presents the responses.

Table 11

Tribal Groups Participate in Initial Case Decisions and Monitoring of Families’ Progress by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	12%	47%	24%	9%	9%
Southcentral	31	16%	48%	10%	10%	16%
Western	27	19%	48%	11%	19%	4%
Anchorage	4	0%	50%	25%	25%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	38%	13%	38%	0%
Total	104	14%	47%	15%	14%	9%

- **The Tribe is encouraged to participate in the decision-making for children and families throughout the different stages of the case.**

As families participate in services, there are decisions that need to be made regarding the ongoing case activities. Tribal groups are asked to participate in this process. Table 12 presents the responses.

Table 12

Tribal Groups Participate in Ongoing Case Decisions by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	15%	53%	12%	15%	6%
Southcentral	31	19%	39%	26%	7%	10%
Western	27	15%	52%	15%	15%	4%
Anchorage	4	25%	50%	0%	25%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	38%	25%	25%	0%
Total	104	16%	47%	17%	14%	6%

- **Concurrent planning is used effectively by the Office of Children’s Services to provide permanency for children and their families.**

When children are not able to be returned to their homes in a timely manner, an alternative goal is established to ensure the children achieve permanency in their lives. The alternate goal works in conjunction with the primary goal of reunification. Table 13 presents the responses.

Table 13

Concurrent Planning is Used Effectively for Permanency by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	3%	50%	35%	9%	3%
Southcentral	31	10%	32%	39%	10%	10%
Western	27	11%	41%	33%	11%	4%
Anchorage	4	0%	50%	25%	0%	25%
Southeast	7	14%	43%	29%	14%	0%
Total	103	8%	42%	35%	10%	6%

- **The Office of Children’s Services makes active efforts to work with Alaska Native families.**

The Office of Children’s Services conducts assessments to determine whether children can remain in their homes or must be removed while their parents address safety concerns. The agency makes active efforts to keep children in their own homes through the provision of services that are designed to meet the specific needs of the families. The Tribal worker is involved in identifying services that aid those families. Table 14 presents the responses.

Table 14

Active Efforts are Used to Reduce Risk of Harm to Children by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	33	12%	39%	27%	18%	3%
Southcentral	31	26%	26%	29%	7%	13%
Western	27	15%	56%	7%	15%	7%
Anchorage	4	0%	25%	50%	0%	25%
Southeast	8	13%	63%	0%	13%	13%
Total	103	17%	41%	21%	13%	9%

- **The Office of Children’s Services’ work with Alaska Native families reflects understanding of the families’ cultural traditions and values.**

The agency works collaboratively with Tribal workers in seeking appropriate services for Alaska Native families. A family’s culture and values are recognized and respected through the agency’s efforts to engage the family in needed services. Table 15 presents the responses.

Table 15

Work with Alaska Native Families Reflects Understanding of Cultural Traditions and Values by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	33	6%	36%	36%	9%	12%
Southcentral	31	23%	32%	19%	13%	13%
Western	27	11%	44%	11%	22%	11%
Anchorage	4	0%	0%	75%	25%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	38%	13%	38%	0%
Total	103	13%	36%	24%	17%	11%

- **The cultural continuity of Alaska Native children such as access to their traditional food, language, beliefs, and values is maintained while in out-of-home care.**

Ensuring children are provided opportunities to engage in cultural activities and traditions is important to the Office of Children’s Services. The agency works with families and Tribes in order to assist children in remaining connected to their culture when they must reside out of their own home. Table 16 presents the responses.

Table 16

Cultural Continuity of Alaska Native Children (i.e., food, language, beliefs, and values) is Being Maintained in Out-of-Home Care by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	12%	15%	35%	29%	9%
Southcentral	31	10%	23%	32%	23%	13%
Western	26	4%	27%	39%	23%	8%
Anchorage	4	25%	0%	50%	0%	25%
Southeast	8	0%	38%	25%	38%	0%
Total	103	9%	21%	35%	25%	10%

- **Referral information is generally sent to your agency in a timely manner.**

When families are referred to agencies to receive support and services, information about the areas the families will need to address should be forwarded to the Tribal agencies. This information should be sent in a timely manner to facilitate families receiving quality services. Table 17 presents the responses.

Table 17

Referral Information is Sent in a Timely Manner by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	26	4%	31%	39%	12%	15%
Southcentral	23	9%	44%	9%	26%	13%
Western	21	10%	43%	10%	29%	10%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	33%	0%	33%
Southeast	4	25%	25%	0%	50%	0%
Total	77	8%	38%	20%	22%	13%

- **Referral information that is sent to your agency is sufficient to support case planning for the family.**

The Office of Children’s Services shares information with Tribal agencies through the referral process. The information provided to the agencies is specific to the families’ service needs to support the agencies’ assessments and case planning. Table 18 presents the responses.

Table 18

Referral Information Supports Case Planning by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	26	0%	46%	35%	8%	12%
Southcentral	23	13%	35%	22%	17%	13%
Western	21	10%	43%	29%	10%	10%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	33%	0%	33%
Southeast	4	25%	50%	0%	25%	0%
Total	77	8%	42%	27%	12%	12%

- **In order to assess the family’s progress, the workers at the Office of Children’s Services maintain regular contact with Tribal providers.**

The caseworkers at the Office of Children’s Services maintain contact with service providers to receive progress reports on families. It is vital there is collaboration with Tribal providers to ensure families are making progress on their case plans. Table 19 presents the responses.

Table 19

Regular Contact with Tribal Providers is Maintained by the Office of Children’s Services by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	26	0%	31%	39%	15%	15%
Southcentral	23	22%	39%	17%	9%	13%
Western	21	5%	33%	33%	14%	14%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	33%	0%	33%
Southeast	4	25%	50%	0%	25%	0%
Total	77	9%	35%	29%	13%	14%

- **In your experience, the Office of Children’s Services’ workers are prepared and knowledgeable of the cases and the families with whom they work.**

To provide services that are relevant to families, caseworkers need to be knowledgeable about the families and the areas the families are working on. When caseworkers are knowledgeable about families they are working with, case planning with the families becomes more focused. This also enables the caseworkers to accurately match services to families’ needs. Table 20 presents the responses.

Table 20

Workers are Prepared and Knowledgeable about Their Cases by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	6%	53%	21%	15%	6%
Southcentral	31	13%	52%	7%	23%	7%
Western	26	4%	31%	50%	8%	8%
Anchorage	4	25%	0%	50%	0%	25%
Southeast	8	13%	50%	13%	25%	0%
Total	103	9%	45%	24%	16%	7%

- **Overall, the Office of Children’s Services and your agency or group have a strong working relationship that is supportive of children and families in the community in which you work.**

For agencies to be effective in the provision of support and services to families, agencies must work collaboratively to meet the needs of families. This support enables families to progress through the needed behavioral changes. Table 21 presents the responses.

Table 21

The Working Relationships between the Office of Children’s Services and Tribal Agencies is Supportive of Alaska Native Children and Families by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	34	3%	44%	32%	18%	3%
Southcentral	31	7%	36%	32%	13%	13%
Western	26	12%	46%	27%	4%	12%
Anchorage	4	25%	0%	50%	0%	25%
Southeast	8	25%	50%	0%	13%	13%
Total	103	9%	41%	29%	12%	10%

Respondent Comments

An area was included for respondents to provide a written response to this statement:

It is of continuing concern to the Office of Children’s Services and to Tribal groups that Alaska Native children and their families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare population. Would you please comment and share suggestions for ways or alternatives to placing children in the foster care system?

The following is a summary of the responses.

Comments were received indicating the need for more training and support for families in an effort to ensure the safety of children in the home. Some respondents indicated the need for services to be provided earlier in cases. It was also noted that more support for parents engaging in services needs to be provided. Some respondents commented on the continuing efforts to work closely with Tribes. Comments indicated that collaboration with Tribes is improving. Comments also reflected that Tribes and the OCS staff need more familiarity with other community agencies.

There were many comments reflecting that efforts to locate relatives who could provide care for children when they are not able to remain with their parents need to continue. Early effort to consult with the family and the Tribe was cited as a way for the OCS to find safe places for children to reside in their home and community without having to enter foster care. It was also suggested in some comments that making every effort to prevent children from having to be placed outside of their region is important.

Frequent communication with Tribes regarding families was noted as essential. Individual comments reflected the need for communication to happen early in the case at the time of intervention. Respondents commented on the mail system as a barrier to receiving timely notification. Some respondents indicated that courtesy and timely phone calls in advance of critical meetings and court hearings would be beneficial.

Several respondents commented on the need to recruit and retain more Alaska Native foster homes in rural Alaska. It was stressed that caseworkers need to travel to the villages often, maintain good relationships with the community, and seek to work collaboratively with Tribes to gain more foster home options in the villages.

There were some comments regarding prior criminal history that causes families to be denied licensing. It was expressed that these homes should be looked at individually. Several respondents commented that crimes committed many years ago prevent some Alaska Native homes from coming forward to become licensed. Comments reflected the need to evaluate past history of a family and their current situation more closely before a decision is made.

Additional Respondent Comments

An area was provided at the end of the survey for respondents to comment on any other areas they felt would be helpful for the Office of Children's Services to know in their work with families. The following is a summary of the comments.

Appreciation was expressed for continuing efforts between Tribes and the Office of Children's Services to build effective working relationships and partnerships at the local level. Some commented that providing joint trainings and presentations would help in local communities. The need to have joint training in the Protective Capacity Assessment model with child welfare stakeholders including Tribes, Judges, and Guardians ad Litem was further noted in one comment.

Respondents commented on the importance of communication. Many respondents noted an improvement in communication between the Tribe and the local OCS office. Comments also indicated support for continued efforts to improve response times to phone calls, email, and general case inquiries.

Respondents indicated support for efforts to place children with relatives and locally in their own communities. Some comments reflected the challenges of finding relatives for placement in small communities and that the OCS caseworkers collaborated with the Tribe in an effort to locate relative placement options for children. Some commented that efforts to keep children with relatives and with their siblings need to continue.

There were several comments regarding support for continued efforts by the Office of Children's Services in providing cultural awareness and sensitivity training to caseworkers and staff. Encouragement for the OCS caseworkers to enhance their knowledge of cultural beliefs and traditions of Alaska Native families was reflected in the comments with support for continued training in these areas.

Respondents discussed issues of caseworker vacancies, turnover, and high caseloads at the Office of Children's Services. Comments provided noted that when caseworkers change, the Tribe is not always notified. Some respondents cited the geographic coverage areas of some caseworkers as a reason for caseworker turnover. Other comments reflected that high caseloads impacted OCS caseworker's ability to travel to villages often enough, collaborate with the Tribe locally, see families, and provide support.

Some respondents indicated a need for better communication, particularly in the urban OCS offices. Comments cited that returning phone calls and emails is not always timely. Communication in the area of providing notification is also needed. Respondents cited that timely notifications of case activity, important meetings, and court hearings would allow the Tribe to provide input in the case and prevent the Tribe from missing out on important decisions.

Appreciation to Respondents

The responses and thoughtful comments to this survey by our Tribal partners are deeply appreciated by the Office of Children's Services and will be incorporated by management and staff in our work to continue to improve our ability to assist families and children.