



Office of Children's Services



Executive Summary of the 2012
Hornby, Zeller and Associates Workload Study





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Introduction:

This document serves as a high level summary of the findings and recommendations made by Hornby, Zeller, and Associates (HZA) who contracted with the Office of Children's Services (OCS) this past fall. This summary represents the reports most significant highlights and recommendations, along with how OCS will use this information going forth.

It should be noted, that in 2006, OCS contracted with Hornby, Zeller and Associates (HZA) to complete a workload study related to primarily frontline caseworkers. OCS, as a result of those findings, did request and successfully received increased budgetary increments over a period of several fiscal years, to increase the number of frontline and supervisory positions accordingly. This resulted in an increased capacity to better meet the extensive and increasing case management responsibilities the agency statutorily holds. However, the focus was case carrying positions primarily and hence, less focus was given on evaluating what, if any, other positions types might also be necessary to add in order to provide the corresponding support to align with that expanded ability to serve families and respond to alleged maltreatment. Since then it has become increasingly clear to staff and leadership that several job classes have grown very little or at all to be able meet the needs and as a result it has caused greater inefficiencies in staff time, service delivery, and our ability to ultimately ensure safety, permanency and well being for our families. The job classes that are most often identified as being understaffed are: the Social Services Associates (SSA), Office Assistants (OA) and Community Care Licensing Specialists (CCLS I/II). While less than optimal staffing levels are having varying degrees of impact on the agency as a whole, most notably, it is the low rate of retention that causes the most concerns as this directly then correlates to achieving our mandate to ensure child safety and strengthen families. It also spreads into all other areas of organizational operations that reduce our ability to meet and comply with any number of requirements and leave staff severely hampered to focus on the core duties to which they were hired to perform.

Last year, OCS once again chose to seek assistance to help evaluate in a neutral and systematic way the workloads and staffing levels we had currently in place. But, this time we focused that evaluation on the three job classes previously noted. We also sought to calculate, measure, and weigh their duties to determine what optimal ratios of would look like per case worker, by office, and/or by looking at the overall case load. For frontline case carrying staff, OCS often refers to the standards laid out by the Child Welfare League of America to use as a gauge and a target for Alaska. The CWLA does not have such standards for use in considering staffing levels of other positions that are critical to support the caseworker and the families served. This added to the difficulty of OCS being able to accomplish this independently or easily without some additional external support. Hence, OCS contracted with HZA once again in 2012 to conduct a similar study specific to the levels and need for support and licensing staff statewide.



HZA Process and Findings:

HZA utilized three methods to assess the workload needs for the identified staff: 1) random moment surveys that electronically capture and calculate the amount of time staff spend on specific job tasks; 2) time study logs, which captures the amount of time individual staff spent on specific job tasks over a six week period; and 3) information on actual caseloads for each worker. From these three data sets the following formula was utilized to assist with determining what the staffing needs were for each of the three work groups: Social Services Associates, Office Assistants and Community Care Licensing Specialists.

$$\text{Amount of time each type of case requires} \times \text{Number of cases of each type} \\ \text{Amount of time staff have available for casework}$$

Random Moment Survey Results

HZA utilized a random moment survey to measure how much time staff was devoting to case work for the agency. Random moment surveys were sent out to caseworkers, community care licensing specialists, social services associates, and office assistants. The four areas that were tracked through the RMS were: Case specific, administrative, training, leave. HZA reported at 97.4% response rate from the OCS staff in the RMS portion. Offices were also categorized as Urban, Medium or Remote, which were determined based on location and size of the individual OCS offices.

Staff Type	Case Specific	Administrative	Training	Leave	Total
Caseworkers	75.9%	8.7%	3.8%	11.6%	100%
Community Care Licensing Specialists	62.1%	17.7%	3.8%	16.5%	100%
Social Services Associates	66.3%	19.6%	1.9%	12.2%	100%
Office Assistants	23.1%	55.6%	2.4%	18.9%	100%
Total	60.0%	22.7%	3.1%	14.2%	100%

The survey results were also broken down by urban, medium and remote offices for OCS statewide, in an effort to identify regional differences in staff workloads and job tasks.



Transfer of Responsibility for Case Specific Activities

HZA also used the workload study data to identify work that could be shifted from case carrying staff to support staff. A strategy that could be employed and possibly increase efficiencies with less addition to the overall staffing levels. Using the data from the RMS process, HZA was able to identify that a monthly average of 13.2 to 14.6 hours/worker would be made available for case carrying staff to devote to case work activities, were various administrative tasks shifted away from case carrying workers, and reassigned to OA or SSA staff. A detailed analysis is presented as to what tasks should be reassigned and which should not. Based on the analysis, HZA identified a total of 2,695 hours each month that caseworkers spend on activities that could otherwise be provided by the Social Services Associates or the Office Assistants. However, HZA points out that “while the intent is to transfer full responsibility for support activities to support staff, it is unrealistic to expect that will be possible.” However, if 75% or 2,021 hours of the support activities were transferred to support staff, that there would be increased efficiencies.

HZA's recommendations for additional staff:

31 total FTEs are needed in the support positions (SSA and OA) while

13 Community Care Licensing Specialists position are also needed.

This equates to:

- 1 SSA for every 4.2 caseworkers
- 1 office assistant for every 3.9 caseworker
- 1 SSA for every 4.7 Community Care Licensing Specialists
- 1 office assistant to every 4.3 Community Care Licensing Specialists

This staffing structure would essentially enable frontline caseworkers and licensing staff to spend increased quantities and quality time in the field doing what is categorically the activity most likely to shorten length of foster care stays, increase safety of kids in both in and out of home placements and will also ensure enhanced abilities to improve outcomes for the well being and permanency needs of children served.

Workers will not be as tied to their desks completing endless amounts of data input or driving children to and from family contact or other appointments. With specialized and dedicated staff focused on administrative support to staff and social service associates providing real assistance to enormous case management duties, training can be tailored to meet those needs to increase effectiveness and quality. Those improvements will improve outcomes for the families served and those families providing temporary care.



Summary:

OCS Leadership has thoroughly reviewed the HZA Final Report. OCS has found the report useful in considering a methodology that we can use to bring more clarity to the workload issues at hand. However, OCS also found the report to be lacking in key areas, and we disagree in part with the recommended new positions required. First, the analysis of data entry functions that are currently provided by caseworkers was not fully analyzed in the HZA final report and does not assist OCS in identifying data entry functions that may be able to transfer to SSA or OA positions. Second, the methodology for determining the CCLS workloads was confusing and difficult to follow, and appears somewhat overly inflated to the actual needs of the individual regions. OCS recognizes that additional support and licensing staff positions are necessary and will use this information in concert with our own additional data and staff reports to guide decision making. Based on prior analysis, we recognize that staffing shortages are more acute in some areas of the state than others; however, these adjustments were not mentioned or factored into the final analysis by HZA. OCS has long recognized that some of the administrative burdens that caseworkers and licensing staff carry could be appropriately transferred to the SSA and OA staffs within OCS, but without a clear analysis of the day-to-day data entry functions in ORCA, this is difficult to determine without additional scrutiny.

OCS remains committed to finding ways to reduce the administrative burdens that caseworkers and licensing workers are experiencing, as well as finding ways to improve the overall balance of workload for licensing workers statewide. Increasing efficiencies and reducing the time case carrying staff spend on tasks that other job classes are designed to do better and faster will ultimately help improve the safety, permanency and well being outcomes that families are entitled to receive. Unfortunately, due to many factors in this budget cycle, including the significant early predictions of reductions in federal funding levels, impacts of sequestration, increased personnel costs resulting from the class study, and changes to IVE penetration rate calculations, the department had to focus on sustaining core services to keep basic operations running and avoid reducing services to the families we are mandated to serve. While OCS continues to benefit from support at all levels within state government, the timeliness and feasibility of successfully pursuing funding for new positions was just not reasonable or fiscally realistic. OCS leadership will continue to scrutinize the effective and efficient allocation of resources internally and will remain focused on keeping these much needed and essential staffing issues on the forefront as we look to budgetary needs for fiscal year 2015 and beyond.



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