

# TRIBAL SURVEY | 2013



office of  
**CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES**  
safe children | strong families

## **Section I: 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, 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.

## **Section II: Methodology**

---

The survey was mailed to Tribal Groups across the state. The survey instrument contained four areas of inquiry. The areas asked about the role the Tribal Group had with cases at OCS and the quality of interactions with the agency in providing services to families. The survey also asked for suggestions on how the working relationship between Tribal Groups and the agency could be improved to better serve families. The Tribal Groups were also asked to provide comments regarding the over representation of Alaska Native families in the families that OCS serves and how this concern could be addressed. The survey concluded with asking participants to provide any other additional information and comments that they believed would be helpful.

The survey instrument was mailed to 229 Tribal Groups. An initial mailing of the survey was made with two follow up mailings by postcard to non respondents encouraging a response. The Tribal Groups were assured that responses would be compiled with other responses so that no individual respondent could be identified.

The data collected from the survey was analyzed and the findings are presented by question. As each Tribal Group did not respond to every question, the number of respondents is given for each presentation. The findings are presented in tables 1-21. The narrative comments were reviewed for content and subject area and are summarized.

Table 1

<b>Surveys Sent and Tribal Groups Responding By Region, Number, and Percent</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Sent</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Northern	71	23	32%
Southcentral	80	16	20%
Western	53	18	34%
Anchorage	6	2	33%
Southeast	19	10	53%
Total	229	69	30%

### Section III: Findings

---

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

Table 2

<b>Involvement of Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation By Number and Percent</b>		
Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Formal Intervention by Tribe	58	84%
Court Appearances	37	54%
Provide Direct Services	29	42%
Other Roles Indicated	11	16%

N=69

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

Table 3

<b>Respondents' Title of Position in Tribal Agency By Number and Percent</b>		
Title of Position	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Social Services Director	5	7%
ICWA Worker	41	61%
Caseworker	1	1%
Administrative	5	7%
Other	5	7%
Not Employed in an Agency	10	15%

N=67

- **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.**

Table 4

<b>Service Collaboration Has Strengthened the Quality of Services by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	17%	48%	26%	4%	4%
Southcentral	14	7%	79%	7%	7%	0%
Western	17	18%	65%	18%	0%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	10%	30%	50%	10%	0%
Total	66	14%	58%	23%	5%	2%

- **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.**

Table 5

<b>Tribes are Involved in Relative Searches By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	17%	48%	22%	9%	4%
Southcentral	15	13%	73%	7%	7%	0%
Western	17	24%	53%	24%	0%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	60%	20%	20%	0%
Total	67	15%	58%	18%	7%	1%

- **When Alaska Native 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.**

Table 6

<b>Tribes are Involved in Placement Decisions for Alaska Native Children By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	17%	43%	13%	22%	4%
Southcentral	15	7%	80%	0%	13%	0%
Western	17	29%	35%	6%	29%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	30%	40%	20%	10%
Total	67	15%	46%	13%	22%	3%

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

Table 7

<b>Efforts are Made to Place Children in ICWA Preference Settings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	9%	52%	17%	9%	13%
Southcentral	15	13%	67%	7%	7%	7%
Western	16	13%	56%	13%	19%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Southeast	10	10%	20%	50%	20%	0%
Total	66	11%	52%	18%	14%	6%

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

Table 8

<b>Siblings are Placed Together When Possible By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	26%	43%	17%	13%	0%
Southcentral	15	13%	80%	7%	0%	0%
Western	17	18%	53%	18%	12%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	40%	30%	20%	10%	0%
Total	67	22%	54%	15%	9%	0%

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

Table 9

<b>Tribes Received Timely Notice of Reviews and Meetings By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	9%	43%	26%	17%	4%
Southcentral	15	7%	53%	13%	27%	0%
Western	17	0%	71%	12%	18%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	10%	40%	40%	10%
Total	67	4%	48%	21%	24%	3%

- **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.**

Table 10

<b>The Administrative Review Process is Helpful to Parents By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	9%	65%	22%	0%	4%
Southcentral	15	7%	73%	13%	7%	0%
Western	17	6%	71%	24%	0%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	10%	40%	40%	10%	0%
Total	67	7%	66%	22%	3%	1%

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

Table 11

<b>Tribal Groups Participate in Initial Case Decisions and Monitoring of Families' Progress By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	17%	52%	17%	9%	4%
Southcentral	15	13%	60%	7%	20%	0%
Western	17	18%	59%	18%	6%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	30%	50%	20%	0%
Total	67	13%	51%	19%	15%	1%

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

Table 12

<b>Tribal Groups Participate in Ongoing Case Decisions By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	13%	70%	4%	9%	4%
Southcentral	15	13%	67%	7%	13%	0%
Western	17	24%	59%	6%	12%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	40%	30%	30%	0%
Total	67	13%	61%	9%	15%	1%

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

Table 13

<b>Concurrent Planning is Used Effectively for Permanency By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	13%	43%	26%	9%	9%
Southcentral	15	7%	67%	27%	0%	0%
Western	17	18%	41%	29%	12%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	40%	40%	20%	0%
Total	67	10%	48%	30%	9%	3%

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

Table 14

<b>Active Efforts are Used to Reduce Risk of Harm to Children By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	9%	35%	22%	26%	9%
Southcentral	15	7%	67%	13%	13%	0%
Western	17	6%	59%	24%	12%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	40%	20%	40%	0%
Total	67	6%	51%	19%	21%	3%

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

Table 15

<b>Work with Alaska Native Families Reflects Understanding of Cultural Traditions and Values By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	9%	26%	43%	17%	4%
Southcentral	15	7%	47%	27%	13%	7%
Western	17	12%	47%	24%	18%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	20%	40%	20%	20%
Total	67	7%	36%	34%	16%	6%

- **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.**

Table 16

<b>Cultural Continuity of AK Native Children is Being Maintained in Out-of-Home Care By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	4%	30%	26%	22%	17%
Southcentral	13	8%	38%	31%	15%	8%
Western	17	0%	35%	47%	18%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	10%	40%	40%	10%
Total	65	3%	31%	34%	23%	9%

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

Table 17

<b>Referral Information is Sent in a Timely Manner By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	12	8%	50%	25%	17%	0%
Southcentral	9	22%	56%	0%	22%	0%
Western	11	9%	45%	36%	9%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Southeast	6	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%
Total	40	10%	53%	23%	15%	0%

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

Table 18

<b>Referral Information Supports Case Planning By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	12	8%	58%	17%	17%	0%
Southcentral	9	0%	89%	0%	11%	0%
Western	11	9%	55%	36%	0%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
Southeast	6	0%	83%	17%	0%	0%
Total	40	5%	65%	20%	10%	0%

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

Table 19

<b>Regular Contact with Tribal Providers is Maintained by the Office of Children's Services By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	12	17%	17%	42%	17%	8%
Southcentral	9	11%	78%	0%	11%	0%
Western	11	9%	55%	36%	0%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	6	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Total	40	10%	48%	33%	8%	3%

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

Table 20

<b>Workers are Prepared and Knowledgeable about Their Cases By Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	9%	30%	22%	30%	9%
Southcentral	13	31%	69%	0%	0%	0%
Western	16	0%	63%	38%	0%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	40%	50%	10%	0%
Total	64	9%	48%	27%	13%	3%

- **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.**

Table 21

<b>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</b>						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	23	17%	30%	17%	22%	13%
Southcentral	14	36%	50%	7%	7%	0%
Western	16	6%	63%	25%	6%	0%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	40%	30%	20%	10%
Total	65	15%	45%	18%	15%	6%

**Respondents were asked to provide comments regarding disproportionately and also to comment on placement of children. The survey question is provided below.**

*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 comments received.

- Respondents noted that the Office of Children's Services works well with Tribal entities. A respondent stated the agency was doing its job with no problems. The agency was noted as working better with tribes, "slowly but surely".
- It was encouraged that the agency work extensively with extended family so that in home case plans can be used. Using all available resources was seen as a helpful tool in keeping children in their own homes. The need to fully engage in active efforts was seen as important also to keeping children in their own homes. Working with the ICWA worker to provide monitoring and case visiting was seen as integral to not removing children.
- The need for a timely and early search for relatives with whom the child could be placed was identified as a concern. Collaborative work between the agency and tribes was seen as helpful to securing relative placements. It was also discussed that if more supportive services were available to relative caregivers there could be an increase in the availability of placements.
- Working with Tribal courts and supporting Tribal guardianships was seen as important to the good care of children.
- The complexity of the licensing process was seen as a barrier for relative caregivers becoming licensed. It was suggested that a review to streamline the process be considered. The background check process was seen as needing to be expedited. There were also concerns that prior criminal convictions are barriers to being licensed even when the event occurred long ago and the individual's behavior has changed.
- The extended delays before workers return calls was identified an issue. It was felt not logical that workers have private phone numbers, but then do not return calls.
- The importance of notifying ICWA workers of administrative reviews and court hearings was stressed. A respondent indicated they would like to participate in every meeting but they are not included.
- The need for workers who are hired from outside of Alaska to learn about the Alaska Native culture was stressed.

**Respondents were provided a final area for comments with the following question asked:**

Please comment on any other areas that would be helpful for us to know.

The following is a summary of the comments received.

- Several respondents noted the positive working relationship they have with the worker for their areas. These respondents noted there had been improvement in the return of phone calls and emails in a timely manner.
- Several comments were received which encouraged that all staff have complete knowledge of the Alaska Native culture as well as the Indian Child Welfare Act. Particularly there was encouragement for knowledge regarding Indian Custodians. It was noted that having an ICWA Specialist for each field office would be helpful.
- The importance of workers notifying tribes when they are scheduling a visit to a community was emphasized. It was noted this allows the tribe to do any necessary planning and work that will be needed.
- The continuing need for Alaska Native foster homes was identified. It was encouraged that outreach efforts continue so that information on the need for homes is known throughout the villages. There were concerns that Alaska Native children are placed in non ICWA homes.
- There were some concerns expressed regarding change of workers on cases. It was observed that the plan for the family tends to change with each worker causing the family to start over each time. The need for continuity in working with families was expressed so that families do not become frustrated.
- The need for increased services in rural areas was discussed. The limited services coupled with limited funds for travel to access services was identified as a barrier for families. It was suggested that perhaps the worker for the area could provide some of the needed services. The overall need for more preventative services was also identified.
- The preference for having an intake screener located in the Western Region was expressed.
- There were concerns expressed regarding the delays in having phone calls and emails returned.

### **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.