Table of Contents

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION................................................................. 3
SECTION 2 – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE .............................................. 7
SECTION 3 - PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT .................................................. 51
SECTION 5 - TRIBAL CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION ......................... 65
SECTION 6 - CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE AND ETV PROGRAM ............ 69
SECTION 7 - ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS ............................................. 77

Appendix A - Organizational Charts
Appendix B - Staff Development Plan
Appendix C - Service Array Work Plan
Appendix D - Financial CFS 101, Part I, II and III
Appendix E - Signed Certifications and Assurances
SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION
State agency administering the programs

The Governor of Alaska has designated the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children’s Services as the single state agency responsible for administering Child Welfare Services (IV-B, subpart 1), Promoting Safe and Stable Families (IV-B, subpart 2), Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Chafee Foster Care Independence and Education and Training Vouchers. The Office of Children’s Services has administrative responsibility for development and implementation of the Child and Family Services Plan, including all policies and procedures relating to child protection services in Alaska. In addition, the Office of Children’s Services administers the Early Intervention Programs and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Planning.

The Office of Children’s Service (OCS), located in the Department of Health and Social Services is responsible for child protection services in the State of Alaska. OCS has 26 child protection field offices and approximately 500 employees with five regional headquarters in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and Wasilla. Only nine of the OCS offices are accessible by the road system. The staffing at OCS field offices varies across the state from one person generalist offices to multi-unit offices offering a full range of services. All fiscal and program support and oversight are based in Juneau, the state’s capital. Organizational charts are included in Appendix A.
OVERVIEW OF OCS CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES PRACTICE MODEL

The Alaska Office of Children’s Services, Child Protection Services (CPS) program utilizes a family intervention system with a focus on child safety. The OCS Child Protection Practice Model focuses on those families where a formal intervention by the state is necessary. This model emphasizes a strengths-based, family-centered approach through the standardization of information gathering, enhanced assessment and critical thinking skills by the CPS staff. Decisions regarding needed interventions with families are based on thorough processes for initial and ongoing assessment of safety, risk, and protective capacities. The CPS program serves families who are identified as having children who are “unsafe” or at “high risk” for future maltreatment.

MISSION / VISION/ GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Fundamental to the provision of OCS services is that every family served is treated with dignity and respect, and with consideration to their family and cultural values. Intervention and services to families are in the least restrictive, least intrusive and most sustainable manner possible. In the case of Alaska Native or American Indian children, the diligent compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is critical and can only be done through full partnerships with Tribes and Tribal organizations associated with the child’s family. OCS’ mission is to work in partnership with families and communities to support the well-being of Alaska’s children and youth. Services are designed to enhance families’ capacities to give their children a healthy start, to provide them with safe and permanent homes, to maintain cultural connections, and to realize their potential.

Mission Statement

OCS works in partnership with families and communities to support the well-being of Alaska's children and youth. Services will enhance families’ capacities to give their children a healthy start, to provide them with safe and permanent homes, to maintain cultural connections, and to realize their potential.

Vision Statement

Safe Children, Strong Families

Guiding Principles

- A child’s safety is paramount.
- A determination that safety threats are present within a family does not equate with removal of a child from their home. The assessment of safety threats directs staff to make informed decisions about safety planning that will control and manage the threats identified. Relevant services will be sought with respect for and understanding of the families’ culture and specific needs.
- Partnership and collaboration with Alaska Native Tribes is fundamental to best practice.
- Families are treated respectfully, thoughtfully and as genuine partners.
- A person’s right to self-determination is valued and supported.
- A safety intervention system is congruent with strengths-based and family-centered practice. Assessing for the safety of children is what we do; family-centered practice is how we do it.
- In collaboration with the family, interventions are identified using the family’s perspective about what needs and strengths exist by engaging the family.
- By engaging in a collaborative problem-solving process with the family, case plans will be specific to the uniqueness of each family served.
Enhancing parent/caregiver protective capacities are essential for the ability of families to protect their children.

The Office of Children’s Services needs partnerships within the community and stakeholders to achieve strong outcomes for children and families.

Additionally, the Office of Children’s Services’ Child Protection Practice Model works in concert with the seven federal outcomes:

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and cultural connections is preserved for children.
- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

**Collaboration**

The Office of Children’s Services is highly invested in collaboration and coordination with our Tribal partners and stakeholders. In preparation for the development of the 2015-2019 CFSP, throughout April and May of 2014, OCS conducted 10 Community Café focus groups in 8 different communities and four statewide teleconferences. OCS was very grateful to have the support of our Tribal partners who helped to co-host the café events in five of the communities. These focus groups were comprised of a cross section of tribal partners, service providers, resource parents, Guardians ad Litem, parents, youth and OCS staff. Additionally, Community Cafés were facilitated with existing stakeholder groups with whom OCS has ongoing, collaborative working relationships, and meets regularly throughout the year to partner on practice enhancements. These stakeholder groups include:

- The Tribal-State Collaboration Group & Tribal Caucus
- The Court Improvement Project Group
- The Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force
- Facing Foster Care in Alaska
- The Resource Family Advisory Board
- Early Childhood Protective Services Committee
- The OCS Supervisory Leadership Council
- OCS Staff Advisory Board
- OCS State Office Staff
- Health Oversight Committee

During the community and targeted stakeholder meetings, participants were briefed on current CFSP outcomes related to strengths and concerns; and the OCS identified targeted priorities and goal areas for the 2015-2019 CFSP. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding how OCS could improve and build upon strengths to collaboratively keep children safe, strengthen parents’ abilities to keep their children at home, increase relative placements and stability, partner with tribal communities and retain a quality workforce. Central topics from community cafés, specifically stakeholder cafés, revolved around themes of: the use of natural supports within the community to help parents be safe, parallel or mentor parenting with families and resource families to help families learn to parent safely, community liaison to help empower a community to talk with OCS, dialogue with community members, empowerment of communities and
families, and ongoing education for both communities and OCS personnel. These themes and other identified action items heavily influenced and shaped the Office of Children’s Services 2015-2019 plan for improving its program, services and outcomes for children and families. OCS will continue to meet and work with the above-identified stakeholder groups on the implementation of the goals and objectives and in monitoring the progress of the CFSP updates over the next five years. Regional CQI teams, to include local stakeholders, will be an additional stakeholder group engaged throughout the five year period.
SECTION 2 - ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE

CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

During the 2008 Child and Family Services Review there were significant areas of concern identified. Alaska met the national standards for 3 out 23 areas of measure but failed all six of the safety, permanency and well-being outcomes and passed one of the seven systemic factors. In November 2011, the OCS successfully completed its CFSR program improvement plan which required achieving negotiated gains in 10 of the lowest performing outcome areas and implementing numerous policy and practice changes. Since 2008, OCS has continued to monitor all 23 safety, permanency and well-being items through its internal case review system. While steady gains have been made in every outcome area, several outcome items are highly apparent as still needing improvement.

During FFY11, FFY12, FFY13 Alaska exceeded national standards related to Permanency Composites, 2 (Timeliness of Adoptions), 3 (Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time). While these outcomes demonstrate Alaska’s child welfare system’s ability to achieve certain permanency domains, Alaska’s permanency composite score for Permanency Composite 1 (Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification) and 4 (Placement Stability), remain below the national standard.

OCS has a Continuous Quality Improvement Unit (QA team) which conducts routine case reviews for items 1 through 23 using a replica of the federal review instrument. The QA team reviews approximately 235 cases each year and reviews all offices in the state annually. Anchorage, the largest office in the state, is reviewed at least twice each year. These data, along with Alaska’s most recent data profile (AFCARS and NCANDS Data Profile, March 10, 2014); data extracted from ORCA (Alaska’s SACWIS database); stakeholder surveys and stakeholder interviews; were used in this assessment of Alaska’s performance.

SAFETY OUTCOME 1: CHILDREN ARE, FIRST AND FOREMOST, PROTECTED FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 during the 2008 CFSR.

ITEM 1: TIMELINESS OF INITIATING INVESTIGATIONS OF REPORTS OF CHILDREN MALTREATMENT

PREVIOUS RATING

This item was rated as an Area in Need of Improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Reviewers found that of the applicable cases, only 52% were initiated in accordance with the state’s policy requirements.

ITEM 2: REPEAT MALTREATMENT

PREVIOUS RATING

This item was rated as an Area in Need of Improvement in the 2008 CFSR final report due to the recurrence of substantiated maltreatment reports. Reviewers expressed concern about the many cases involving multiple reports (both substantiated and not substantiated) on the family during the life of the case. For example, in 12 cases there were 15 or more maltreatment reports during the life of the case, with 4 of these cases having more than 20 reports.
**Changes 2008-2014**

Following the 2008 CFSR and subsequent development of the program improvement plan, OCS issued and trained staff on new policies related to the timely assignment and initiation of protective services reports. Additionally, Alaska regionalized its intake process by creating regional call centers. Prior to this, every field office, regardless of its size, was responsible for receiving and documenting reports of child abuse reports (called protective service reports) for their respective communities. There were little policy or standardized expectations for the consistent, timely documentation of reports, or breadth and quality of information necessary to obtain during the intake process. As a result, many reports were not documented, and screening decisions were based on inadequate information. With regional intake process, reports now contain more consistent information and are being processed more quickly than ever before. Enhanced intake reports also have implications for improved worker safety since they now consistently includes CPS background check information.

**Strengths**

Case review data indicates that the implementation of regional intake with specialized, trained staff has both improved response times to initiating investigations (initial assessments); it has also allowed investigators to begin their work with the best possible information from the reporters and collaterals to support more qualitative investigations and findings. Since Alaska implemented its safety assessment model in 2006, OCS has observed an improvement and increase in the amount of information gathered at the time of the initial assessment (investigation) of families. Initial assessment summaries (previously called investigation reports); now contain more thorough information about family functioning, protective capacities, identified safety threats and child vulnerability.

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<td>Outcome Safety 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 - Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 - Item 2: Repeat maltreatment</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>73%</td>
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**Concerns**

Alaska receives a high number of child abuse reports. During 2013, Alaska’s OCS received 15,652 protective services reports of which 45.9% (7,181 children) were screened in (Figure 3). The rate of reports per 1,000 children in the state was 94.4 compared to a national rate of 46.1 (Child Maltreatment 2012 Report).
Although Alaska screened in more reports than ever in 2013, there is a concern that too few reports are actually being screened in. In 2012, several years after the implementation of regional intake, OCS leadership began to take note of and track what appeared to be high number of reports being screened out, especially in certain regions.

According to the Child Maltreatment 2012 Report published by the U.S. DHSS, ACF, Children’s Bureau, the national average screen out rate was 38%, while Alaska’s average percent for 2012 was 58.5% (only 5 other states were higher than Alaska). This data prompted a statewide “Escalated Intake Project” which took place from March 2013 until January 2014. The project required that for any intake report involving children under the age 5, with 5 - 10 prior reports or having had a prior open CPS case, regional Protective Service Managers had to review and approve each screening decision before a report meeting the above criteria could be screened out. Key recommendations from this project were identified and will be incorporated into new policies and procedures to be developed for Intake.

While removal decisions today, appear to be less incident driven than they were in 2008, there is concern that Alaska’s practice has become too narrowly focused and by the time families have reached the point of needing CPS intervention the state has missed multiple opportunities to offer prevention or early intervention services. As described above, it is not uncommon for OCS to have either received and screened out more than one PSR, and/or received, screened in and assessed a family at least once, sometimes multiple times (and in some cases making a substantiated finding of maltreatment), only to close the case with no further intervention until the next PSR is received which may or may not result in an open case and children in foster care. The net result is that OCS is repeatedly conducting safety assessments on families, gathering much information, and then closing the case without the provision of services, which leaves children at unknown risk of harm. Stakeholder interviews reiterated a high level of concern regarding the perception that it takes numerous reports, multiple investigations and a prolonged period of ongoing family trauma before OCS intervenes.

Alaska continues to struggle with repeat maltreatment rates. According to March 2014 NCANDS Data Profile, Alaska’s rate of repeat maltreatment was 12.9% for FFY2013ab up from 8.2% in FFY2011ab; more than double the national standard which is 6.1%. OCS monthly manager reviews also reveal a continued
pattern of multiple, previous screened out reports or investigations that result in much information gathered about the family, but no services or interventions offered to the family.

2010 ORCA cohort data revealed that with every report a child receives, the likelihood of that child experiencing a recurring report increases by approximately 20%. For example, out of all children who had a substantiated allegation of abuse in 2010, 25% of the children had a subsequent report in 2011. Of these children 40% had a third report in 2012 and 60% of those children had a fourth report in 2013.

Compacting the concern about Alaska’s high maltreatment rate is the belief that the rate should actually be higher because Alaska currently has a below average substantiation rate. The Anchorage OCS Office, which serves the largest population base in Alaska, and handles nearly half of the State’s total child abuse investigations, has an 8% substantiation rate. Concerns about the low rates of substantiated allegations of abuse, and the lack of statewide standardization regarding the decision-making process around making a substantiated finding, indicate that existing policy is not adequate. Current policy is very conservative with respect to how an allegation may be substantiated, such that, “A substantiated finding is one where the available facts indicated a child suffered harm as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by AS 47.17.290.” Under this framework, actual harm must have occurred while the risk of harm is not considered. Even with these conservative criteria and Alaska’s rigorous statutory definition for mental injury (used to substantiate exposure to domestic violence), Alaska still has one of the highest rates in the country for substantiated psychological abuse. The OCS is in the process of piloting a new model and new policy for substantiating allegations. The state anticipates that with this new model and policy change will allow for risk of harm to be considered; it is anticipated that the rate of substantiations will significantly increase with these changes.

**Summary**

Case review data indicates that since the 2008 CFSR the state has made improvement regarding the timeliness of investigations but is still not achieving the federal standard for this measure. Alternatively, OCS is doing worse with respect to repeat maltreatment then it did during the 2008 CFSR. OCS has several theories for why the repeat maltreatment rate is high in Alaska. Simply put, it is believed that too many reports are getting screened out at intake; that protective services staff are not using the information gathered during the initial assessment process to make the right decisions about the level of intervention needed for a family; there are inconsistent supervisory/regional management oversight of the decisions being made at this juncture in a case; and families are not receiving interventions soon enough and the intensity of available statewide in-home services is not adequate. Addressing these factors will be a central focus in Alaska’s 2015-2019 CFSP.

**Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2 during the 2008 CFSR.

**Item 3: Services to Family to Protect Child(ren) in Home and Prevent Removal.** This item addresses the issue of whether the State’s efforts to prevent removal from their homes by providing services to the families that ensure children’s safety while they remain in their homes.

**Previous Rating**

This item was rated as an area in need of improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Lack of sufficient services to ensure the safety of the child while the child remained in the home was a primary finding during the review.
ITEM 4: RISK OF HARM TO CHILD(REN). This item addresses whether the state makes diligent efforts to address the risk of harm to the children involved in each case.

PREVIOUS RATING
This item was rated as an area in need of improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Lack of ongoing safety and risk assessment in the children’s home; and continued risk concerns in the home that were not addressed and/or monitored by the agency were cited as primary concerns.

CHANGES 2008-2014
Following the 2008 CFSR and subsequent development of the program improvement plan, the agency implemented numerous strategies aimed at improving and enhancing practice standards related to monitoring and managing safety and risk for children in and out of their homes.

Separate refresher trainings were provided to all protective services staff on developing and managing Protective Action and Safety Plans to address present and impending danger. Enhancements were made to be able to track safety plans in ORCA for management and supervisory oversight. Training was also provided to all CPS staff on how to conduct a quality case worker visit through the assessment of safety, permanency and well-being of children. New policies and guidelines were established for case transfer meetings aimed at promoting critical thinking and evaluation of the decisions made thus far on a case based on the information gathered. Supervisory guidelines were developed to assist supervisors in monthly supervisory case staffings with workers. Additionally, enhancements were made to the Team Decision Making (TDM) protocols to ensure safety and risk factors are addressed in every team meeting.

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<td>38.5%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<td>S2 - Item 3: Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>S2 - Item 4: Risk of harm to child(ren)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>63%</td>
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</table>

Source: Case Review Data 2014, Alaska’s Quality Assurance Unit

STRENGTHS
With the full integration and implementation of our safety model, it is now very much ingrained as a part of the agency culture to explore every possible avenue through the use of creative safety plans and the involvement of natural family supports to maintain children in their homes for as long as possible. Offering home-based services and working with families to prevent removal is also critical for ICWA compliance purposes. Over the last five years, Alaska has implemented new policies related to the invitation, inclusion and sharing of information with tribes during the initial assessment process. By including tribes earlier in the CPS process, tribes are becoming more engaged with tribal families earlier in a case. This is important because tribes may be able to offer family support services and can be integral in engaging Alaskan Native Families in working toward addressing safety concerns. Over the last five years OCS participated in the Western and Pacific Implementation Center (WPIC), Alaska Child Welfare Disproportionality Reduction Project, for which a primary focus was the provision of technical assistance to five regionally strategic tribal consortiums for the purpose of developing and enhancing tribal in-home services. An increasing number of tribes are now providing comprehensive in-home services to tribal families involved in the child welfare system. The OCS also purchases family preservation and time limited reunification services through grantees in all designated OCS regional service areas.
CONCERNS

Under Alaska’s practice model, OCS serves “unsafe” and “high risk” families. The primary way for in-home cases to be identified and opened (prior to legal intervention) is through a process whereby a safety analysis is completed to determine whether certain conditions exist in the home to allow for the family to be served with an in-home safety plan. These conditions include: 1) a parent/caregiver residing in the home; 2) the parent/caregiver is willing to participate in an in-home safety plan; 3) the home environment is calm and consistent enough to allow for safety services; and 4) there are services/resources available to support an in-home safety plan.

Many families served by OCS struggle with substance abuse and domestic violence. Due to the chronic nature of these conditions, sustaining viable in-home safety plans is challenging and often risky. Adding to this complexity is that safety plans typically rely on family members as participants and family members are often conflicted about reporting non-compliance or agree to activities that they cannot fulfill. In spite of the fact that many safety plans fail, there are systemic pressures (such as the agency’s goal to prevent removals and the ICWA requirement to demonstrate active efforts prior to removal) on case workers to open in-homes cases reliant on marginal safety plans. Consequently, children who remain in the home are likely to have a prolonged exposure to a high level of risk.

Family support services often are not consistently available and/or they are not intensive enough in many areas of Alaska to support in-home safety plans. In-home cases require a high level of monitoring and more intensive case management services and caseworker visits than cases with children placed out of the home. Due to staff turnover and high caseloads, OCS caseworkers cannot allocate adequate attention to the in-home cases. Most offices do not have dedicated in-home case workers.

In areas where family services are available, barriers to accessing and making the linkages to these services exist. Diligent follow-through to support utilization of services is a shortcoming of today’s system and is an area that needs to be addressed.

SUMMARY

According to case review data, OCS has made improvements in Safety Outcome 2, but will fail this measure again without significant improvement. Staff turnover, high caseloads, and lack of intensive services and failure on the part of OCS to follow through on community based referrals for at-risk families continue to be perceived as barriers for why the ratings in this outcome area remain below the national standard.

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1: CHILDREN HAVE PERMANENCY AND STABILITY IN THEIR LIVING SITUATION.

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1 during the 2008 CFSR. This was Alaska’s lowest performing outcome during the 2008 CFSR, with only 15% of the cases reviewed receiving a substantially achieved rating for this outcome. The most critical concern identified was the lack of agency focus on achieving permanency in a timely manner.

ITEM 5: FOSTER CARE RE-ENTRIES. This item pertains to whether a child re-enters foster care within 12 month of discharge from a prior foster care episode.

PREVIOUS RATING

This item was rated as strength in the 2008 CFSR.
**ITEM 6: STABILITY OF FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT.** This item pertains to whether a child experiences multiple placement settings, and if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child’s permanency goal or meet the child’s service needs.

**PREVIOUS RATING**
This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. The review noted that Alaska did not meet the national median for placement stability for children in their first year of care, but exceeded the national median for children in foster care more than 24 months. Top speculations provided by stakeholders regarding the lack of placement stability included 1) a lack of foster families willing to foster children with complex issues; 2) a lack of support for licensed foster families and unlicensed relative caregivers; 3) a lack of ICWA compliant foster homes; and 4) too frequent use of emergency placements and shelters, even for children under the age of 12.

**ITEM 7: PERMANENCY GOAL FOR CHILD.** This pertains to whether the agency established a permanency goal for the child in a timely manner and whether the most current permanency goal is appropriate.

**PREVIOUS RATING**
This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. The key concerns noted by reviewers were that numerous cases did not have a permanency goal established in a timely manner, or the current goal was not appropriate given the case situation, and the agency had not sought TPR in accordance with AFSA, particularly with regard to documenting compelling reasons for not seeking TPR. Stakeholders noted that delays in establishing/ achieving appropriate permanency goals was often attributed to caseworker turnover and new caseworkers wanting to start over with the family regardless of how long the child had been in foster care.

**ITEM 8: REUNIFICATION, GUARDIANSHIP, OR PERMANENT PLACEMENT WITH RELATIVES.** This item pertains to whether the agency achieved the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner, or if the goals have not been achieved, whether the agency has made diligent efforts to achieve the goals.

**PREVIOUS RATING**
This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Some of the concerns identified pertained to problems or delays in completing paperwork, particularly for guardianships, and to a lack of visitation opportunities for parents and children.

**ITEM 9: ADOPTION.** This item pertains to whether diligent efforts have been made to finalize adoptions in a timely manner.

**PREVIOUS RATING**
This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Some of the most frequent concerns identified pertained to delays in filing for TPR, delays in completing or approving home studies.

**ITEM 10: PERMANENCY GOAL OR OTHER PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT.** This item pertains to whether the agency is making diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to APPLA.
**PREVIOUS RATING**

This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Delays in providing youth with independent living services and the lack of statewide availability of IL services and transitional living programs were noted.

**CHANGES 2008-2014**

New policies were developed and training provided statewide for the roll-out of the family services assessment model (case planning) on appropriate establishment of permanency goals, alternative planning (concurrent planning) and the timely changing of permanency goals. A flagging system was developed and implemented for administrative reviewers to notify management when permanency related timelines, outstanding action items and/or recommendations identified during administrative reviews were not met in between reviews. Family contact (visitation) policy and guidelines were developed and implemented statewide. Training was provided statewide to OCS field staff and grantee providers on the family contact guidelines. Collaborations between OCS and the Division of Behavioral Health were formed, and initiatives launched related to prioritizing and increasing access to substance abuse and mental health services for OCS clients. At the case transfer meeting, some field offices have begun to more rigorously examine case circumstances such as a prior TPR or egregious circumstances which may warrant a request to forego reunification as the initial, primary permanency goal.

The TPR policy was revised with emphasis on documenting compelling reasons and training was provided to AAGs and OCS field staff regarding the policy changes. Regional work teams were formed and developed clear instructions for how to process TPRs. The instructions, training and visual aids were provided to all OCS regions. Grants for home studies were modified to increase timeliness expectations. Revisions were made to APPLA policy to ensure the utmost scrutiny and discrimination in the selection of that goal as last resort. OCS implemented a co-team case management model for all youth with a permanency goal of APPLA. The model requires the regional independent living specialist (RILS) and primary worker to work as a team to insure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the youth. Concrete expectations for monthly activities for both the RILS and the primary worker are delineated. Numerous collaborations and partnerships have been formed to secure and obtain transitional and independent living services for Alaskan youth.

Source: Case Review Data 2014, Alaska’s Quality Assurance Unit

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<td>95%</td>
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<td>P1 - Item 6: Stability of foster care placement</td>
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<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<td>97%</td>
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<td>Composite 4: Placement Stability</td>
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<td>90.5</td>
<td>101.5</td>
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**Source:** March 10, 2014 Data Profile

**Strengths**

Since the 2008 CFSR, Alaska has made steady progress in every item that comprises Permanency Outcome 1. The most significant gains have been made around items 7 (Permanency goal for child) and 10 (Permanency goal or other planned permanent living arrangement). Additionally, Alaska is meeting the national standard for Permanency Composites 2 and 3. The disparity between Item 9 (adoption) at 39% achieved and Composite 2 (timeliness of adoptions), where Alaska leads the nation, is remarkable. Although Alaska does not diligently demonstrate strong efforts to achieve timely adoptions in fewer than 24 months (Item 9), the state excels at processing and achieving timely adoptions for children after they are in care for a longer period of time and once they are legally free. This may be attributable to the specialized regional adoption staff and a strong centralized state office adoption unit, which provides extensive support to the regions and is very efficient at processing adoption subsidies and other paperwork necessary to finalize adoptions. The considerable gains in Item 10 is the result of Alaska’s strong independent living program and the many partnerships formed over the last five years to engage youth and enhance independent living services. Alaska has an active foster youth alumni advocacy group, Facing Foster Care in Alaska. OCS’ partnership with this group in particular, has been highly advantageous in engaging youth to access available IL services.

**Concerns**

Although Alaska is a leader in completing adoptions for children who have been in care for an extended period, the state needs to continue efforts for early completion of adoptions. The impacts of children being without a permanent placement for multiple years after they are placed into out of home care are significant. Case review data indicates that contributing factors include delays in establishing and working towards alternative goals to reunification, delays in filing for termination of parental rights, and delays in completing the home studies in a timely manner.

According to the March 14, 2014 Data Profile, Alaska’s reunification rates have declined since 2008. The five year statewide average for children exiting to reunification was 52.5% total reunification with the highest percentage in year 2010 with 55.37% of children reunifying (ORCA, February 2014). The number of child exits to guardianships is also an area of concern. According to ORCA data, in 2013 only 3% of exits were to guardianships.
Additionally over the last five years, there has been little improvement in Alaska’s foster care placement stability. Of significant concern is what appears to be a high number of relative placement disruptions.

### Native Children in Out Of Home Placement as of April 22, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>Total Native Children</th>
<th>Placed w/ Relative</th>
<th>Not placed w/ Relative</th>
<th>Native Relative OOHP Rate</th>
<th>Non-Native Relative OOHP Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcentral</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Native Children in OOHP, No Current Relative Placement, Prior Relative Placement in Current Removal Episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>Total Native Children</th>
<th>1 or more past Relative OOHPs</th>
<th>Never Placed w/ Relative</th>
<th>Native w/ Past Relative OOHP</th>
<th>Non-Native w/ Past Relative OOHP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcentral</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Native Children in OOHP, At Least 1 Relative OOHP (current or past) Since Removal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>Total Native Children</th>
<th>At least 1 relative OOHP</th>
<th>Never Placed with Relative</th>
<th>Native w/ at Least 1 Relative OOHP</th>
<th>Non-Native w/ at Least 1 Relative OOHP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcentral</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This data, extracted from ORCA indicates that as of April 22, 2014, approximately 40% of all children currently in out of home care are placed with a relative. Of the children who are not currently placed with a relative, 39% of Alaskan Native children and 24% of non-native children had at least one previous placement with a relative, and for some reason that placement disrupted. Overall, an average of 63% of all Alaskan Native children in care are either currently placed or at one time were placed with a relative during the current removal episode; whereas 54% of non-white children are either placed with or have experienced at least one relative placement. This suggests that Alaskan Native children are more likely to be placed with a relative; however their relative placements are more likely to disrupt.

Some stakeholders suggested that delays in permanency may be related to the delayed identification of a viable relative placement and the reluctance of tribes to condone non-ICWA compliant placements. In a 2014 staff survey, field staff cited their heavy caseloads and the time consuming work related to searching for and conducting background assessments on relative as barriers to the early identification of relatives. Other stakeholders suggested that OCS’ lack of the use of technology such a “Skype” or video-conferencing to facilitate long-distance, timely, substance abuse or mental health assessments and subsequent follow up treatment is a major barrier to timely permanency.

**Summary**

Since the 2008 CFSR, OCS has made improvements in every item (some items reflect significant increases) that comprise Permanency Outcome 1, yet Alaska will likely fail this measure again without more improvements. Low rates of reunifications and guardianships with relatives and placement instability emerge as central areas needing ongoing focused attention and improvement. Delayed identification of viable relative placements and ineffective use of available technology may also cause avoidable delays to permanency.

**Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connection is preserved for children.**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2 during the 2008 CFSR.

**Item 11: Proximity of Foster Care Placement.** This item pertains to how effective the agency is in placing foster children close to their birth parents or their own communities or regions.

**Previous Rating**

Item 11 was rated as strength during the 2008 CFSR, and continues to be a strength area according to Alaska’s case review data.

**Item 12: Placement with Siblings.** This item pertains to how effective the agency is in keeping siblings together in foster care.

**Previous Rating**

Item 12 was rated as strength during the 2008 CFSR, and continues to be a strength area according to Alaska’s case review data.

**Item 13: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care.** This item pertains to how effective the agency is in planning and facilitating visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings placed separately in foster care.
PREVIOUS RATING
Item 13 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. The 2008 reviewers noted that in only 62% of the applicable cases, the agency had made a concerted effort to ensure that visitation was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child and family.

ITEM 14: PRESERVING CONNECTIONS. This item addresses whether the agency is effective in preserving important connections for children in foster care, such as connections to neighborhood, community, faith, family, Tribe, school, and friends.

PREVIOUS RATING
Item 14 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Lack of efforts to maintain the child’s connections to extended family, primarily with siblings was highlighted as a growth area.

ITEM 15: RELATIVE PLACEMENT. This item measure how effective the agency is in identifying relatives who could care for children entering foster care, and using them as placement resources when appropriate.

PREVIOUS RATING
Item 15 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Stakeholders during the 2008 review expressed the opinion that although relatives are often sought, some relatives who are not licensed may not have the resources necessary to care for the children.

ITEM 16: RELATIONSHIP OF CHILD IN CARE WITH PARENTS. This item pertains to how effective is the agency in promoting or helping to maintain the parent-child relationship for children in foster care, when it is appropriate to do so.

PREVIOUS RATING
Item 16 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. The 2008 reviewers noted that in only 46% of the applicable cases, the agency made a concerted effort to support and/or strengthen the bond between parents and children.

CHANGES 2008-2014
In 2010, a comprehensive family contact (visitation) policy and guidelines were developed and implemented statewide. The policy emphasizes that family contact plans should be “flexible and creative to effectuate substantive, frequent family contact.” The definition of family contact was expanded to include time that children spend with their parent, guardian, Indian custodian, siblings or extended family members in the least restrictive, least intrusive environment possible. Family contact during venues such as family celebrations, community, cultural or school events, and at extracurricular activities is also encouraged. The creation of separate contact plans are required if siblings live apart and do not see each other during contacts with other family members. Training on the new policy was provided statewide to OCS field staff and grantee providers. Additionally, case workers were given access to funds to pay for travel for family members to visit one another when not physically in the same community.

In 2012, ORCA enhancements enabled caseworkers to be able to document relatives in ORCA with ease and efficiency. Next, functionality was added to ORCA to be able to document when a relative requests placement of a child. New policies, ORCA training, and a desk guide were created and distributed to all
staff regarding the expectations for the timely documentation of relative requests for placement. Additionally, OCS implemented new policy accompanied by a statewide mandatory training for all staff in November 2013 related to relative search expectations and new tools available to assist with searches. In January 2014, OCS launched a pilot project in Bethel, which involved training Western Region tribes on a new process to have tribes document and notify OCS when a relative indicates that they are interested in the immediate placement of a child. In 2013, after recognizing the huge need for Alaskan Native foster homes in the Western Region of Alaska, where approximately 100% of the children in foster care are Alaska Native, OCS collaborated with Western Region staff and the Association of Village Council Presidents in Bethel to implement a grant targeted at support, development, and recruitment of resource families in that region. Also in 2013, licensing staff initiated an Unlicensed Relative Initiative—a systematic method of providing unlicensed relatives with consistent information about licensure, working with OCS, and supports available. Many unlicensed relatives have accepted the assistance offered to become licensed.

**STRENGTHS**
The institutionalized use of Team Decision Making (TDM) in Alaska’s 3 largest field offices (Anchorage, Wasilla and Fairbanks) ensures early collaboration and better decisions regarding child placements. TDMs increase the likelihood that children will be placed with a relative and/or in close proximity to their parents or former caregivers and support network. The number of children placed with siblings is a strength given the high number of families with large sibling groups in Alaska.

Since 2008, OCS has made Knowing Who You Are (KWYA) a mandatory training for all field staff. This training focuses on valuing each individual’s race, ethnicity and culture with a particular emphasis on the importance of helping foster care youth explore and embrace their race and identity issues and helping them build connections to their culture. This training and awareness has likely contributed to Alaska’s improvement in Item 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CFSR 2008</th>
<th>CY 2012</th>
<th>CY 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P2 - Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 - Item 12: Placement with siblings</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 - Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 - Item 14: Preserving connections</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 - Item 15: Relative placement</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 - Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCERNS**
Although there have been improvements in the items related to visitation with parents and support of the relationships between children and parents (Items 13 & 16); these areas are still insufficient with respect to meeting the national standard of 90% for each item area. As noted above in the narrative for Permanency Outcome 1, the current number of children placed with relatives is less than the overall frequency that foster children in Alaska are placed with relatives. Children may be placed with relatives, but many relative placements disrupt. Stakeholders noted Alaska’s inefficient use of technology such as Skype, Face Time or video-conferencing to allow parents and children to visit more frequently when separated by geography.

**SUMMARY**
According to OCS Case Review data, the agency has made solid gains in each of the items that comprise Permanency Outcome 2, yet Alaska will also likely fail this measure again without more improvements.
around areas related to the relationships between children and their parents and visitation with parents and siblings.

**Well-being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 during the 2008 CFSR. According to Alaska’s case review data, this is currently OCS’ lowest performing outcome.

**Item 17: Needs and Services of Child, Parents, Foster Parents.** This item pertains to how effective the agency is in assessing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents, and in providing needed services to children in foster care, to their parents and foster parents, and to children and families receiving in-home services.

**Previous Rating**

Item 17 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Reviewers found that the agency was considerably less consistent in assessing and meeting service needs of mothers and fathers than it was in assessing and meeting the needs of children.

**Item 18: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning.** Item 18 measures the effectiveness of the agency in involving parents and children in the case planning process.

**Previous Rating**

Item 18 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. Reviewers noted that the agency’s effort to involve mothers, fathers and children in case planning is an overall area of much improvement, but that for in-home services cases, the compliance rates were especially poor.

**Item 19: Worker Visits with Child.** This item pertains to how effective agency workers are in conducting face-to-face visits as often as needed with children in foster care and those who receive services in their own homes.

**Previous Rating**

Item 19 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. One of the most prevalent findings by reviewers for this area was that case worker visits were not frequent enough to meet the needs of the child and when visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertaining to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

**Item 20: Worker Visits with Parents.** Item 20 pertains to whether visits to parents occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children.

**Previous Rating**

Item 20 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR. One of the most prevalent findings by reviewers for this area was that case worker visits were not frequent enough to meet the needs of the parent and children and when visits did occur, they did not focus on issues pertaining to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.
CHANGES 2008-2014
Following the 2008 CFSR and subsequent development of the program improvement plan, new policy related to appropriate identification of needs and service provision to children, parents and resource parents was developed and issued. Field staff was trained on the new policy during a “quality case worker visit” statewide training initiative for all CPS staff. The case worker visit training emphasized the assessment and documentation of safety, permanency and well-being needs for children, parents and foster parents during every caseworker visit. The concepts from this curriculum were later incorporated into the SKILS training that all new workers receive. A new permanency planning model was implemented in two innovation sites, Fairbanks and Anchorage. The model, referred to as the “protective capacities assessment” emphasized family engagement, improved identification of case needs and involvement of the family in the development of the case plan. Staff in the two innovation sites received specialized training and increased supervisory support in the implementation of the program. In October of 2013 the agency implemented the family services assessment (formerly called protective capacities assessment) throughout the entire state. Enhancements to ORCA allow weekly managerial reports to be available regarding the status of outstanding monthly case worker visits. Supervisors and managers are now able to easily monitor and individually coach staff.

STRENGTHS
Current case review data indicates that OCS has improved by 30% with respect to achieving Item 17 since the 2008 CFSR. This strong gain is likely attributable the continuing emphasis on parent and child caseworker visits and the assessment of needs. The number of caseworker visits with children has increased in recent years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CFSR 2008</th>
<th>CY 2012</th>
<th>CY 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome WBI:</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBI - Item 17: Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBI - Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBI - Item 19: Worker visits with child</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBI - Item 20: Worker visits with parents</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCERNS
The monthly completion of caseworker visits with parents continues to be very low. Of additional concern, case review data indicates that Item 18 (child and family involvement in case planning) has remained stagnant since 2008. According to the 2013 OCS Foster Parent Survey, Alaska’s foster parents are unable to consistently reach their caseworkers. This data further supports the recognition that many foster parents are under-supported and this lack of support may be contributing to Alaska’s increase in placement instability.
Heavy workloads and burdensome amounts of paperwork and data entry were repeatedly cited in the 2013 OCS Staff Survey by case workers as barriers in achieving basic field work tasks.

**Summary**
While the assessment of need and number of case worker visits with children has improved, case review data indicates that OCS is achieving fewer parent visits and is performing about the same for involving parents and children as it did in 2008. Case workers are also not consistently achieving basic field work tasks. The low number of parent visits is most likely contributing to OCS’ low reunification rates; while the lack of responsiveness to foster parents is likely contributing to OCS’ placement instability.

**Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs**
Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 during the 2008 CFSR.

**Item 21: Educational needs of the child.** This item pertains to whether children in foster care have their educational needs appropriately assessed and whether concerted efforts are made to address identified needs.

**Previous Rating**
This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CFSR 2008</th>
<th>CY 2012</th>
<th>CY 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB2 - Item 21: Educational needs of the child</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Changes 2008-2014**
Alaska’s CPS policy regarding case planning for children was revised in December 2013 with an added emphasis on contacting and collecting information from collaterals, including school personnel prior to the finalization of the child’s case plan.

**Strengths**
According to 2013 case review data, this item is rated as a strength area. When a child enters custody, the caseworker is required to obtain educational information from the parents including whether or not the child has been determined eligible for services by the special education or infant learning programs. In recent years, Alaska has seen an increase in the number of foster care youth attending college or vocational training programs. Alaska currently serves 46 youth both in-state and out-of-state through the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. Due to the increase of case management and academic support...
available, this program is seeing increased retention and higher academic achievement by the youth served. The program is anticipated to increase by 40% in SFY15.

CONCERNS
Alaska will need to continue to be diligent in this area. During the 2008 CFSR, of the 24% of cases that were rated as needing improvement, either no efforts were made to assess the child’s educational needs or educational needs were assessed but no services were provided.

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3: CHILDREN RECEIVE ADEQUATE SERVICES TO MEET THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS.
Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 during the 2008 CFSR.

ITEM 22: PHYSICAL HEALTH OF THE CHILD. This item pertains to whether children in foster care have their physical health needs appropriately assessed and whether concerted efforts are made to address identified needs.

ITEM 23: MENTAL HEALTH OF THE CHILD. This item pertains to whether children in foster care have their mental health needs appropriately assessed and whether concerted efforts are made to address identified needs.

PREVIOUS RATING
Both Items 22 and 23 were rated as areas needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CFSR 2008</th>
<th>CY 2012</th>
<th>CY 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB3 - Item 22: Physical health of the child</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB3 - Item 23: Mental health of the child</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHANGES 2008-2014
In 2013 OCS developed and implemented a new comprehensive policy for mental health care/administration and oversight of psychotropic medication. Also in 2013, the OCS family services assessment (new case planning model) was launched statewide. Enhanced needs assessment and service planning to meet and reflect the specific developmental needs of the child is a part of the new case planning curriculum. The model includes a trauma screening and an emphasis on the assessment of child functioning (performed during the initial safety assessment process) to inform the child’s case plan. The assessment must include the child’s unique developmental stage and the influence of the child’s trauma history with respect to needed services and support. EPSDT results which screen for medical and mental health (emotional/social well-being) are also a critical component of the needs assessment. Numerous trainings on trauma and its impact on child development have been offered to agency field staff over the last several years.

STRENGTHS AND CONCERNS
Item 22 is strength according to 2013 case review data. Although OCS is making improvements with respect to assessing the mental health needs of children, case workers state that waitlists for needed mental health services for children are long. Some stakeholders express concerns that foster care youth are too frequently placed in acute mental health hospitals.
SUMMARY
The agency must continue to diligently assess and address the physical and mental health needs of children. Systemic collaborations continue to be an area of need to assure that children are able to access needed trauma-informed mental health.

INFORMATION SYSTEM

ITEM 24: STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM
This systemic factor examines whether the State is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

PREVIOUS RATING
Alaska was determined to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of statewide information system in the 2008 CFSR.

CHANGES 2008-2014
Upgrades to ORCA since 2008 include:

- Extensive work to incorporate practice model in Intake, Initial Assessment, Case Plan, and Family Contact Plan modules
- Extensive changes to eligibility module to account for federal rule changes (i.e., guardianship, adoption, and elimination of redetermination AFDC income/resource requirements)
- Extensive work to add Western Region
- Automated Notice note: For what it’s worth, the bulk of the notice this work was generic (i.e., will work for any notice we elect to automate). Automating additional notices will be far less effort
- Tickler Overhaul (decreased system ticklers to account for practice of relying on data reports more)
- Approval overhaul (allowed those not in supervision chain to approve work when appropriate)
- Many changes required as a result of CFSR, Eligibility, and AFCARS PIPs
- Medical page changes
- Conversion of system batches from COBOL to JAVA
- Conversion of Word templates to InfoPath
- New enhancements to improve documentation of relatives
- Functionality to automate placement change and denial of placement requests notices to legal parties and case collaterals

STRENGTHS
ORCA is fully SACWIS compliant. Tribal and court stakeholders have reported no concerns with current ORCA functionality, nor have they suggested enhancements. There are no ‘concerns’ regarding ORCA; there are a number of enhancements planned over the next two years that will leverage ORCA data to automate processes that are currently manually completed by field staff. These enhancements include expansions to the functionality for automating additional letters and notices to providers and/or case participants, and CPS background checks. Additional projects include increasing the number of data reports that are available on demand, and systematizing the allegation substantiation process to establish consistency and reliability.
SUMMARY

ORCA effectively and accurately identifies the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care. Alaska has a fully functioning, compliant SACWIS.

CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of case review system during the 2008 CFSR. This systemic factor addresses whether the state has a functioning statewide case review system which includes: 1) inclusively developed case plans; 2) periodic case reviews; 3) a timely process in place for permanency hearings and termination of parental rights proceedings; 4) and a process is in place for timely notice to caregivers for reviews and hearings.

ITEM 25: WRITTEN CASE PLAN. This item pertains to whether the State adheres to a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan, to be developed jointly with the child, when appropriate, and the child’s parent(s), that includes the required provisions.

PREVIOUS RATING

Item 25 was rated as an area in need of improvement in the 2008 CFSR final report, due to the parents and/or children not being involved in the case plan process. This was a particular concern for the in home cases. In both types of cases, mothers are more likely to be engaged in the case planning process than fathers. The state achieved involvement of all parties in only 37% of cases reviewed in the 2008 CFSR.

ITEM 26: PERIODIC REVIEWS. This item pertains to whether the State provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every six months, either by a court or by administrative review.

PREVIOUS RATING

Item 26 was rated as strength in the 2008 CFSR.

ITEM 27: PERMANENCY HEARING. This item pertains to whether the State provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date that the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

PREVIOUS RATING

Item 27 was rated as strength during the 2008 CFSR.

ITEM 28: TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS. This item pertains to whether the State provides a process for termination of parental rights (TPR) proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

PREVIOUS RATING

Item 28 was rated an area needing improvement during the 2008 CFSR. The key concerns noted by reviewers in 2008 were that the agency had not sought TPR in accordance with AFSA, particularly with regard to documenting compelling reasons for not seeking TPR. Stakeholders noted that delays in establishing/achieving appropriate permanency goals was often attributed to caseworker turnover and new caseworkers wanting to start over with the family regardless of how long the child had been in foster care.
ITEM 29: NOTICE OF HEARINGS AND REVIEWS TO CAREGIVERS. This item examines whether the State provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

PREVIOUS RATING
Item 29 was rated an area needing improvement during the 2008 CFSR. During the review process it was noted that there was no data available to document how well OCS is complying with notification to caregivers regarding hearings.

CHANGES 2008-2014
Following the 2008 CFSR and subsequent development of the program improvement plan, the agency evaluated the delivery of case management services and identified a model for service delivery, Protective Capacities Assessment, which emphasized engagement with the family and improved identification of case needs and involvement of the family in the development of the case plan. This program was implemented in two innovation sites, Fairbanks and Anchorage. Staff in the two innovation sites received specialized training and increased supervisory support in the implementation of the program. The ongoing case review system recorded a steady improvement in the rate of engagement of all parties in the case plan for the innovation sites. The negotiated program improvement goal of 31% was met in quarter 4. As the table indicates, improvement continued throughout the remaining program improvement process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Assurance Case Review Findings</th>
<th>Protective Capacities Program Implementation</th>
<th>Involvement of Parents and Children in the Development of the Case Plan</th>
<th>Fairbanks and Anchorage Field Offices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qtr 4 Dec 09- Nov 10</td>
<td>Qtr 5 Mar 10 - Feb 11</td>
<td>Qtr 6 Sep 10- Aug 11</td>
<td>Qtr 7 Dec 10- Nov 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qtr 8 Dec 10- Nov 11</td>
<td>Qtr 9 Mar 11 - Feb 12</td>
<td>Qtr 10 Jun 11- May 12</td>
<td>Qtr 11 Sep 11- Aug 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qtr 12 Dec 11- Nov 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

During this time, the administrative review process was provided coordinated leadership throughout the state with an emphasis on review of the case plan and involvement of all parties. A regional case review process led by the Protective Service Manager is throughout the state was implemented. This process identifies a targeted case and examines the management of the case from initial assessment through family services; it examines the quality of the case management to include assessment of need and development of the case plan. The review involves supervisory staff with standardized documentation which is forwarded to the Quality Assurance Unit for analysis and compiling of a report. This report is distributed to managers, supervisors, and line staff to allow review of the agency progress.

In 2010, the statewide case review protocols were revised to include a new tracking component for measuring the compliance of hearing notifications to relatives.

In 2011, the TPR policy was revised with emphasis on documenting compelling reasons and training was provided to AAGs and OCS field staff regarding the policy changes. Regional work teams were formed and developed clear instructions for how to process TPRs. The instructions, training and visual aids were provided to all OCS regions. Enhancements were made to ORCA to be able to extract some AFA-related data; however, OCS still does not have a process for tracking when a petition has been filed, only after the TPR process is completed.
STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES
As noted, the initial results during the program improvement plan were very encouraging for the innovation sites. The two sites have largely maintained the gains made, although there is concern for the unevenness of the case findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Assurance Case Review Findings</th>
<th>Involvement of Parents and Children in the Development of the Case Plan</th>
<th>Fairbanks and Anchorage Field Offices</th>
<th>Calendar Year 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qtr1 Jan-March 2013</td>
<td>Qtr2 April-June 2013</td>
<td>Qtr3 July-Sept 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For calendar year 2013 there has not been a similar improvement in the case review findings for the involvement of both parents and children in the development of the case plan throughout all field offices. Quarterly compiled field office data, even including the higher achieving field offices of Fairbanks and Anchorage, are not reflecting a positive trend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Assurance Case Review Findings</th>
<th>Involvement of Parents and Children in the Development of the Case Plan</th>
<th>All Field Offices</th>
<th>Calendar Year 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qtr1 Jan-March 2013</td>
<td>Qtr2 April-June 2013</td>
<td>Qtr3 July-Sept 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Field Offices</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To meet this challenge, the agency has implemented the program model of family services assessment (formerly called protective capacities assessment) throughout the state. The program was implemented in October 2013. All staff received specialized training in the model and supervisory support as the program was implemented. The program model emphasizes worker engagement with the family and assessment of needs and case planning with the family members.

The quality assurance case reviews will monitor on an ongoing basis, the level of involvement of parents and children in the development of the case plan. The case review process examines each field office at least annually and provides verbal debriefing on the findings as well as a written report. The case review process includes interviews of family members, and will include questions on the level of involvement each parent and age appropriate child had in development of their case plan. The quality assurance system will collect information on cases not meeting standard on which parties were not involved in the development of the case plan as well as the timeliness of development of the case plan. Field offices are required to prepare a field office plan of improvement (called a FO-PIP) in response to the findings of the quality assurance case reviews. Field offices will be monitored through the CQI process to ensure they are including adherence to case plan development in their plans of improvement.

To further emphasize the importance of involving all parties in the development of the case plan, the regional case review process is being revamped to encourage discussion during the case review process of how the family was involved in development of the plan. These reviews are conducted in each region monthly to examine the overall case management of selected cases. The instrument will collect information
on involvement of the parties and this will be summarized in a monthly report which will be distributed to managers, supervisors, and workers as a learning tool.

The ORCA report system provides information on each case statewide regarding the status of the case plan. The report provides information on case type, placement status, and date of case plan on a weekly basis.

The administrative case review process ensures that each out of home case receives a review at least every six months. This area was identified as strength in the 2008 CFSR. The policy and procedure for administrative reviews was updated in 2009 to facilitate consistency across the state. This review looks at federally required issues and as well reviews the involvement of all parties in the development of the case plan. OCS policy requires case reviews at various stages in the case process for children in out-of-home care:

- **Family and Child Early Conference (FACE):** Held within 90 days of the probable cause finding for all children who are in custody and in out-of-home placement.

- **Child and Family Six Month Conference (Administrative Reviews):** Held every six months for all children in custody. These reviews meet all of the federal requirements in that parents are invited, a person not responsible for the case participates, progress is always examined, a likely date to achieve permanence is discussed/established and the appropriateness of the placement is discussed. Reviews are always held before an established panel no later than six months from the date of the most recent removal from the home and/or no later than six months from the date of the last administrative review. Administrative reviews must continue every six months until the child’s return home, or the child is in a finalized guardianship or adoption.

- **Permanency Planning Conference:** Held within nine months of the first removal from home or earlier if indicated by court action, or whenever the worker recommends a change in the permanency plan/goal. Permanency Planning Conferences are utilized to focus on whether or not the goal should be changed from reunification to a concurrent goal or to a goal change of adoption or guardianship.

- **Placement Decision Conference (Optional):** Held to determine an adoptive placement for a child when there is more than one permanent family option available is to the child. This conference can be held in conjunction with the Permanency Planning Conference.

- **ICWA Out of Preference Placement Review:** Held every 30 days when a child of Alaska Native heritage is in an out-of-preference ICWA placement. The intent of the review is to insure that all available ICWA placement preference options are fully explored and considered for each child in out-of-preference placements.

A solid system is in place for the notification of caregivers of administrative reviews. The success of this process is likely because it has been partially automated through ORCA and is delegated to regional support staff. However, the responsibility for the notification of caregivers of court hearings is still a task that the assigned CPS caseworkers must complete; and, due to their heavy caseloads and competing priorities it is not consistently achieved. According to case review data, during calendar year 2012, out of the applicable hearings for which a caregiver should have received notice, only 43% had a completed notification.

ORCA data indicates that a small number of children in Alaska’s child welfare system achieve TPR status within ASFA timelines. However, it must be recognized that in Alaska, TPR status is not necessarily the best indicator of whether a child in foster care will achieve timely permanency. Approximately one-third of the adoptions processed in Alaska are finalized through a consent for adoption, signed by the parent in which parental rights are not terminated, but the child has a finalized adoption.
### Number of children in out of home care with a completed TPR in less than 15 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TPR in ≤ 15 months</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Number of children in out of home care with a completed TPR in less than 24 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TPR ≤ 24 months</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>737</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ORCA Data, June 2014

### SUMMARY

A review of OCS activities indicates that progress on involving all parties in the development of the case plan has not been consistently achieved throughout all field offices. The data indicates that the overall state achievement rate remains similar to that found during the 2008 CFSR. Some progress has been made in individual field offices, but statewide consistency remains a growth area. The agency will continue efforts to address this area. Alaska has established new protocols for documenting compelling reasons for not seeking TPR. However, currently OCS does not have the capacity to track the percent of cases in which petitions were filed on time. The notification of caregivers of court hearings also continues to be an area needing improvement.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

This systemic factor addresses whether the State has a functioning statewide quality assurance system. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the CFSR II in 2008.

#### Item 30: Standards Ensuring Quality Services.
This item pertains to whether the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

**Previous Rating.** Item 30 was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR, because it was determined that while the State had developed many standards (CPS policies and procedures) many were not being implemented on a consistent basis, or were not fully operational.

#### Item 31: Quality Assurance System.
Item 31 pertains to whether the state is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, and provides relevant reports and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

**Previous Rating.** Item 31 was rated as an area needing improvement. The state was recognized for having a QA system in place, but the system was not seen as having a process for following up on QA findings to determine whether program improvements have been implemented in response to findings and did not have a system to determine the effectiveness of the program improvements.

### Changes 2008-2014

The state continues to address the issues identified in the 2008 CFSR with respect to ensuring that set standards are fully implemented and operational. This is being achieved through the systemic review process and efforts underway to infuse a continuous quality improvement framework throughout all aspects of practice, such that when outcome data or other forms of feedback indicate that a standard is not being
met or not functioning as intended, it is analyzed, changes are implemented and the quality improvement cycle is perpetuated.

The state has continued support for a fully staffed quality assurance process. This has allowed the agency to continue a case review process that reviews each field office at least annually. The agency uses the federal CFSR review instrument which provides for a standardized review across all field offices. Use of this instrument also has kept the agency targeted on the CFSR standards throughout the program improvement plan enabling the agency to measure its progress and complete the program improvement plan. This process provides a consistent and reliable stream of information on the quality of case practice for use in program development. The use of the instrument now supports preparations for the CFSR Round III.

During this period, the response to quality assurance findings was formalized in that regions were required to prepare a field office program improvement plan for each field office in response to the quality assurance case review. This process served to focus field offices on areas needing improvement, but proved to be somewhat cumbersome for the regions with large numbers of field offices due to the many plans required. Monitoring of the data to measure changes and documentation of the changes was a challenge for the regions.

In response to ACYF-CB-IM-12-07 the agency formulated a process to comprehensively assess the status of the CQI system and develop a planning process to make needed changes. The agency conducted a gap analysis of the CQI system in 2013. This analysis identified multiple areas of need. While the agency had continued its case review quality assurance system, the issues identified in the CFSR 2008 of the system not tying program change to quality assurance findings and not having incorporated a process for evaluating program improvement measures had largely continued. A key finding of the process was that although the agency had multiple systems to collect and disseminate information with which to address quality of programming, there was a need for increased linkage between these systems. The need to formally describe the information collection and distribution systems resulting in program change was identified in order to link program changes to these findings. Work on these descriptive documents continues. The analysis also identified the need to identify the points at which data is examined and the decision points at which changes are made in response to the information. In developing this process, the agency will incorporate the framework for functional components and definition of a CQI system as described in IM 12-07.

**STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**

- **Foundational Administrative Structure:** The agency has committed to a structured process in the analysis of the present CQI system and in the further development of the process. The agency has designated CQI staff and has identified a team devoted to the work which meets regularly to conduct planning and develop systems which reflect the overall agency mission, vision, and values. This team is responsible for facilitating the establishment of consistent CQI standards and requirements to be implemented statewide. This group is responsible to ensure the standards are put into written form of policies, procedures, and practices and disseminated throughout the agency and that training regarding CQI staff is provided to staff. The team is responsible for the CQI development process and to ensure agency staff involvement at all levels and stakeholder input.

Areas of growth in the administrative structure are the need to fully inform the agency of the CQI process and to integrate the processes into the culture of the agency. The development of the needed processes and formal policy and procedures is a significant challenge for the agency. The integration of CQI standards into everyday administrative activities, IV-E compliance as well as case practice activities will be a “challenge of change” for the agency.
Quality Data Collection: The agency has had growth in the types and amounts of data collected and made available to staff and partner agencies. The SACWIS system provides a base for the location of case information and there are regular reports as well as ad hoc reports which provide information to management, supervisors, and staff. As noted in the Children’s Bureau’s status letter, the state has made extensive efforts to improve the accuracy of information and as a result the quality of data has improved.

Areas of further work are the need to develop an integrated system for information gathering in both quantitative and qualitative data. The CQI team, in conducting the initial GAP analysis, has identified several needs in data collection and dissemination. These included reports that more specifically target and respond to manager and supervisor needs specifically related to practice. The CQI team will incorporate specific planning to address this issue. This planning will include a needs assessment of managers and supervisors and then a work group to plan for response to the identified needs. There are areas of information needed regarding the statewide practice model for in home services. Presently, the in home model is not consistently applied across the state and there is no information gathering in place. Also identified in the GAP analysis was the lack of written policy and procedure in the Research Unit. There is a need to develop written procedures for the collection and resolution of data issues impacting quality. There is also a need for IV-E CQI processes to be aligned with and incorporated with CPS CQI efforts. It is anticipated that extensive analysis of the data system is needed and then a staged plan for making needed modifications. The agency will need to work with Region X in this process.

Case Record Review Process: The agency has maintained a dedicated staff to conduct a regular, systematic case review of all field offices annually. The system utilizes the CFSR instrument and closely mimics the CFSR process. The system produces regular reports of its findings by field office and provides for debriefings with staff on its findings. The unit is available for consultation to the field offices on CFSR standards. In addition, the unit provides targeted reviews as needed and participates in the state Child Fatality Team. The unit conducts annual consumer surveys of tribes, foster parents, and OCS staff. In addition, the unit conducts specialized surveys of families and staff.

Areas for further work include reviewing program needs for specialized or ongoing reviews. There is a need to examine routinely the decision process in the intake units. There is also a need to examine the decision making in initial assessment cases that are closed without further services. The agency will also be preparing for the CFSR Round III. The agency will need to decide if it will request to be considered for its own case review or will participate in a traditional review. The agency will be using the new Onsite Review Instrument when it is available. In addition, the agency has work to do regarding written policies and procedures for the case review process that fully reflects adherence to IM-12-07. Some of the areas needing documentation are training practices, conflicts of interest, and inter-rater reliability processes. The rate of parent involvement in the case review process is of concern. The agency needs to examine improved ways to encourage parent participation.

Analysis and Dissemination of Quality Data: The amounts and types of data available have increased substantially. The Research Unit has a regular schedule for development and distribution of reports. Reports are electronically posted and available to staff. Notification is made to managers and supervisors when reports are disseminated. Findings from case reviews are verbally debriefed with field offices and written reports are provided.
Areas for further work include ongoing efforts to improve the quality of data collection, development of reports, and getting that information to the appropriate OCS staff and community partners. The data process needs to be better incorporated into the CQI process so that information gathering is seen as the basis for program change or program validation, and that the data process serves and enables the agency to better serve families. A comprehensive planning process will need to occur to plan activities to achieve this level of function.

**Summary**

The state of Alaska has a strong commitment to the concept of a continuous quality improvement process to include a component of quality assurance. The agency has a strong base on which to build. The agency has identified a CQI team to plot the course for this activity and has maintained a dedicated quality assurance staff. The agency has identified the components of the program which currently support and carry out CQI functions; however, the analysis which identified the strengths of the CQI system has also identified multiple challenges for the coming years. The primary challenge is to align the information system with program improvements or changes that are made. Continuous quality improvement as “the complete process of identifying, describing, and analyzing strengths and problems and then testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions” remains a challenge for the agency in the next five years.

**Training**

This systemic factor of training incorporates an assessment of the State’s training program for new caseworkers, ongoing training for agency staff, and training for foster and adoptive parents. Alaska was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor during the 2008 CFSR.

**Item 32: Initial Staff Training.** This item pertains to whether the State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff that deliver these services.

**Previous Rating**

The 2008 CFSR final report identified Item 32 an area needing improvement because the initial training that was provided to staff was not sufficient to prepare them to carry out their responsibilities.

**Changes 2008-2014**

The OCS is just beginning its 18th year of contracting with the University of Alaska Anchorage, Child Welfare Academy (CWA) for its core training for new front line workers. In 2009, an advisory group changed the core training name to SKILS – Standards, Knowledge and Insight Leading to Success. Over the years, SKILS has had ongoing changes to meet the needs of OCS and currently SKILS is 2 weeks for initial assessment workers, 2 weeks for family services and 3 weeks for generalist workers. Although the classroom training has remained at two weeks, staff development of new front line workers has greatly expanded. Before new workers attend SKILS classroom training they are required to complete 8 introductory online modules. Those modules include: Introduction to OCS and the Practice Model, Interviewing Basics, Child Interviewing, Adult Interviewing, Adult Functioning, Permanency, ICWA and Cultural Humility. New workers start work in their offices, adapt to the culture of the agency, and take the mandatory online modules in preparation for the 2 weeks of classroom training.

SKILS classroom training consists of training on the OCS practice model beginning at intake and concluding at case closure. Safety and risk decision making throughout the life of the case, family engagement, trauma informed child welfare, motivational interviewing, permanency, working with youth,
separation, loss/grief, worker safety and resiliency, case planning and evaluation of family’s progress on case plan goals. Additionally, classroom training includes ORCA (SACWIS), legal training, licensing and foster care.

After classroom training, there is a webinar on child development and weekly teleconferences with the workers who have just completed SKILS to transfer the learning from the classroom to practice in the field. This blended learning model for new staff is a state of the art staff development model, created in response to the vacancy rates, and cost efficiencies by providing distance-delivered training given the high costs of traveling from offices to the academy in Alaska.

Field training requires supervisors to assure new staff have completed a staff development plan (See Appendix B) that includes the aforementioned online modules, classroom training and teleconferences but also several other tasks. Those responsibilities include ORCA (SACWIS) training, other various online modules (mandatory reporting, HIPAA, etc.), meeting and observing key people/processes both within and outside OCS (ICWA specialist meetings, court hearings, team decision making, administrative reviews, etc.). Some requirements are for the 6-month mark of employment and others must be completed by the end of the first year.

With the responsibility of staff development shared among CWA, supervisors, other Staff within OCS and online modules, new workers are getting a much fuller, richer experience by not having to “learn” everything all at once in a classroom setting.

In 2009, OCS added mandated supervisory training for all newly hired supervisors. New supervisors attend 2 four-day sessions of supervisory training at CWA with one month between the two sessions to practice some of the techniques learned. Training topics include: overview of supervision/leadership; supervisory roles; supervisory styles; supervision of the practice model (vision, mission, outcomes and guiding principles); and supervisory staffing guidelines. Supervisors are taught problem-solving skills, employee on-boarding, development of staff, coaching, on the job training, transfer of learning. Team building, how people change, attributes of adult learning, unit supervision, outcomes and accountability, strategic planning, systems change, trauma stewardship, resiliency, retention, evaluation and building intra-agency partnerships are additional topics included in the curriculum. The fourth day of each of the two sessions is focused on critical thinking skills. OCS also requires new supervisors to attend a 5 day course on state human resource topics, that are more administrative in nature.

In 2012, training was developed and delivered for social services associates (SSA). It had long been recognized that the SSA positions performed critical roles with and for families, similar to that of a front line worker, thus a three-day training was held in December 2012 for new and experienced SSAs. Given the turnover for SSAs is lower than that of a front line worker, training for SSAs is only held one time a year. The curriculum includes culture awareness, parent and family engagement, establishing professional values and ethics, visits between parents and children, mandatory reporting, practice model principles, working with resource families, and adult and family functioning.

In addition to the mandatory training as stated above, CWA has developed other methods of staff development to augment new workers’ learning and provide seasoned workers staff development opportunities. Monthly webinars are held on current relevant child welfare topics, and include guest speakers.

Recently, CWA has added a monthly “call-in” on a different subject each month. Rather than doing a presentation, the call-in is for OCS staff to have an open forum to ask questions about the topic. The call-in format includes an expert in the monthly topic and a CWA trainer. The subject matter expert answers the topical questions and the CWA trainer relates the answers to the practice model. While the call-ins are a
relatively new concept, field staffs have raved about having the opportunity to get consultation on a monthly basis.

**STRENGTHS**

In the past several years, the CWA provided staff many more learning opportunities using a variety of methods. The CWA is adept and nimble reacting to OCS' current issues and needs for training of staff. In the past year alone, CWA has provided family services assessment, trauma-informed child welfare and worker safety training to all staff, which required the development of all new curricula. The CWA has worked with the Infant Learning Program and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems staff within OCS to provide the child welfare staff training Strengthening Families protective factors training and on how important it is to get 0-3 year olds early intervention. The CWA also provides project management for big projects such as organizing the community café process to get statewide stakeholder input into the CFSP. Concurrently, much more training has been provided to community stakeholders about OCS’ implementation of the practice model.

**CONCERNS**

Due to the high rate of turnover, it is difficult to get staff trained and ready to assume a caseload within a reasonable amount of time. New workers start getting cases and their staff development plans become lower priority. Staffs with longevity do not have time to devote to assist or mentor a new worker as they have their own large caseloads. It is difficult to balance the needs for staff development with workload demands to assure child safety. It is also extremely challenging to respond to the individual needs of staff in a state as large, remote and diverse as Alaska. To bring staff into the CWA, or for CWA to go into the field, is extremely costly; therefore, alternatives to classroom training are critical to the effectiveness of staff development. Concurrently, tribal partners assert that OCS staff need to receive more cultural competency training; however, the current formal training requirements within staff development plan are deemed sufficient. Ongoing exposure to Alaska Native culture is available locally or is presented within local office partnerships with tribal agencies.

First Year Mandatory Training Plan for Protective Service Specialists

In First Month:
- Online Modules
- SKILS 131 & 132 – Standards, Knowledge and Insight Leading to Success
- Child Functioning Webinar

Length of Training
- 2 Days
- 10 Days
- 1 Hour

First Month – Six Months:
- Completion of Staff Development Plan

Total Training Days in First Six Months: 13 Days

Six Months – Twelve Months:
- 229 – Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
  All workers having responsibility for cases: SW, CCS & CCLS
- 235 – Knowing Who You Are
- 239 – ChildFirst Alaska
  Mandatory for initial assessment and generalist workers.

Total Training Days for Six – Twelve Months: 9 Days

Total Days of Training for First Twelve Months: 22 Days
First Year Mandatory Training Plan for Social Services Associates

First Month – Twelve Months:
  • Social Services Associates Training

Total Days of Training for First Twelve Months: 3 Days

First Year Mandatory Training Plan for Supervisors

First Month – Twelve Months:
  • 554 Supervisor Training – Part 1
  • 555 Supervisor Training – Part 2

Total Days of Training for First Twelve Months: 8 Days

Daily evaluations are collected in all trainings delivered by the CWA. See SKILS results for the past fiscal year in the chart below. Four other open-ended questions are also asked in the daily evaluations: What aspects of today’s class did you find particularly helpful? Is there anything else that would have facilitated your learning? Are there any changes you feel that should be made to today’s class? Additional comments? Trainees usually give excellent feedback and adjustments are made as needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 14 SKILS Training Evaluation Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
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New supervisors’ training showed similar results. Supervisory participants thought highly of the training, felt it was extremely useful, and appreciated the training was available to them. OCS has a supervisory leadership council (SLC) and they will be reviewing the supervisory curriculum and providing input about whether revisions need to be made given current OCS business processes.
Two larger scale surveys by CWA were done with front line staff in the past 3 years. In 2011, telephone interviews were done with front line workers who had attended SKILS in March 2010 – February 2011. Questions about how well training helped them to understand their roles, if it helped them to prepare to work with families, and how confident they were in working according to the OCS practice model. There was a lot of variation in their answers depending on previous work experiences, whether they had worked in CPS in the past or this was their first job in child welfare. What was helpful about the training, feedback about the content and what training was still needed was also asked. The responses were again very diverse, depending on the individual’s past employment. The respondents gave extremely helpful information, were free with their feedback and offered several ideas for improvement. Those suggestions were reviewed with all CWA staff and revisions were made to training, business processes and the curricular array.

The second staff development survey was electronic, completed in early 2014. The survey was targeted to new front line workers who had attended SKILS in the past year and also of seasoned workers about training opportunities overall. Of the respondents attending SKILS in the past year, 85% rated SKILS prepared them for field practice average to extremely well. There were many comments that SKILS taught theory but not day to day activities, like completing paperwork. Respondents gave several suggestions for changes to SKILS and areas needing more time and attention. Only 68% of those who participated in the survey indicated they were able to complete all the tasks on their staff development plan (SDP) within their first 6 months. They gave several different reasons for not being able to complete their SDP including; no one to shadow in the field, too many new assignments of initial assessments, too busy with their caseloads, and a few that said their supervisor did not have time to help them complete it. However, 72% of respondents said in completing the SDP, they had a better understanding of OCS and the job they were doing.

Annual staff surveys by OCS show similar results. Staff is very forthcoming with identifying their training needs, but juggle with the demands of their duties with attending some of the very training offered they have requested. The CWA has developed a list of online trainings staff can take according to their schedules; those trainings are all listed on the CWA website at: www.uaa.alaska.edu/childwelfareacademy

**ITEM 33: ONGOING STAFF TRAINING.** This item pertains to whether the State provides ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

**PREVIOUS RATING**
The 2008 CFSR final report identified Item 33 an area needing improvement due to the state not requiring workers or supervisors to receive ongoing training as a part of their job requirements.

**CHANGES 2008–2014**
Much more training and staff development opportunities have been made available to all staff, not yet newly hired front line staff. In the past several years as changes/enhancements have happened within the OCS practice model, CWA has delivered training to all staff in their local offices. Specifically, Strengthening Families protective factors and partnering with Infant Learning Program practitioners, trauma-informed child welfare, family services assessment (family engagement and case planning) and worker safety have been big initiatives in the past several years. In addition, CWA provides training as requested by field offices delivers monthly webinars and call-ins for consultation and has a library of online trainings: http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/childwelfareacademy/addtraining.cfm.

**STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**
There has been real effort made to expand the CWA curricular array so that there are available training opportunities for all staff, not yet newly hired workers. The CWA has developed a Facebook page devoted
to child welfare posts including training notices and a mobile app for all staff to use in their practice. Staff survey results indicate that staff have requested more specialized training in topics such as substance abuse, mental health and domestic violence. Now that regular training is in place for new workers, social services associates, supervisors and seasoned staff, staff development opportunities will focus on the creation of a blended learning community which will serve as a hub for all staff to meet their training needs.

**STAFF TRAINING SUMMARY**

OCS and CWA share a close partnership that allows for flexibility as needed for the staff development of OCS staff. The CWA is included in all new practice change implementation efforts and is integral in the roll-out of new change initiatives. Creative innovations are in place in Alaska to meet the ever changing and unique challenges of the Alaskan child welfare workforce, such as condensed classroom training, on the job mentoring and field shadowing; good use of technology such as the smart phone field mobile app and monthly ongoing training webinars for more experienced staff.

**ITEM 34: FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT TRAINING.** This item examines whether the State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State-licensed or State-approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E. Additionally, it examines whether the training addresses the skills and knowledge base that they need to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

**PREVIOUS RATING**

The 2008 CFSR final report rated this item as an area in need of improvement because it was determined that foster parents were not receiving sufficient training to carry out their responsibilities.

**CHANGES 2008-2014**

Since 2008, OCS has collaborated with the grantee providing training to resource families to improve the service received by resource families and aid them in providing appropriate support to children in care. In 2014 the orientation provided to interested families was updated to align with the OCS practice standards. In 2011 the CORE training provided in the first year of licensure was developed. The training program is continually updated to include new information; recent additions include a training entitled “trauma informed care giving”. Regional provider training conferences have been offered around the state since 2012, to ensure families have access to face to face training.

**STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**

OCS has a long established relationship with the current resource family training grantee, the Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF). ACRF has provided the training and related activities for resource families in Alaska for many years. This is viewed as a strength for the state and for the families.

Alaska is a very large state and the geographical challenge continues to be an area of need. It is often difficult for families to access training needed to meet the needs of children. Although training is available through a variety of methods, including, face to face, telephonic, and self-study courses, it is difficult for families in rural Alaska to have ongoing access to the training resources. Phone and internet services are not always reliable and transportation to classes can be very costly. OCS and the grantee have established regional provider conferences that provide on-site training and travel scholarships to families so that they may participate in face to face training; these trainings have been well received.

While these training opportunities are available to all resource families, unlicensed relative caregivers are not required to receive training and are not always aware of the opportunities to increase their knowledge and
skills. During 2013 OCS implemented an unlicensed relative initiative, whereby all unlicensed relatives received a phone call and letter to inform them of support and services available.

**Summary**
The Alaska resource family training program provides ongoing support and services to families caring for children in foster care. The available service provides current training and is in alignment with the OCS practice model.

**Service Array**
Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array during the CFSR in 2008.

**Item 35: Array of Services.** This item examines whether the State agency has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families, determines other service needs, that addresses the needs of families in addition to individual children to create a safe home environment, that enables children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

**Previous Rating**
This item was rated as an area in need of improvement in the 2008 CFSR final report, due to the lack of substance abuse and mental health treatment services statewide. Additionally, a lack of in-home services and basic case management services were identified as key service gaps, along with a statewide shortage of foster homes. Stakeholders also expressed a need for more frequent and specialized visitation services; increased housing supports for youth transitioning out of care; domestic violence support services; and family support for foster/adoptive parents.

**Changes 2008-2014**
Following the 2008 CFSR, the service array section was faced with budget cuts; the loss of federal funding to support the Children’s Advocacy Center programs; the statewide implementation of the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Survey Program and the associated Chafee services; and re-alignment of grant services to respond to practice changes through the implementation of the OCS practice model. While these multiple factors presented many challenges, they also created an opportunity for the section to assess the available resources and re-allocate funding to better meet the needs of families and identify the elements of best practice within the services already funded by the service array.

In 2010, the service array section implemented the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Survey Program. Alaska recognized Independent Living (IL) Program services needed to be expanded in order to support youth transitioning into adulthood. Funding was allocated through the State legislature to add two regional independent living specialists (RILS) staff to the four that were already working in the regions to provide IL services. Additional funding was received in 2010-2011 to expand housing supports; education and training vouchers; mentorship supports; and transportation to avoid a school change at placement.

In 2011, funding was discontinued for the differential response grant programs. This funding was diverted to support the in-home family services grant programs, which allowed for the expansion of Family Preservation and Time-Limited Family Reunification Services.

In 2012, the service array section worked to implement both a regional needs assessment and evaluation for each grant program under title IV-B and Chafee. The assessment of need focused on prioritizing services...
for each region, while also working with managers and stakeholders to define what skills and expertise is necessary to manage these grant programs.

In 2013, the management of the residential childcare and behavioral rehabilitation Medicaid services grants transitioned from over OCS to the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). OCS staff and families continue to utilize the services of these grant programs, but OCS no longer has a role in the service design and ongoing management of the program.

**STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**

As noted above, the service array section has grown since the 2008 CFSR. Investments of resources are better informed and align with the needs identified and the pattern of utilization by the field. Overall management of this section is improved due to the addition of staff with expertise and practical experience in the services managed.

The infusion of new funding to support the IL Program has greatly improved OCS’ ability to directly support youth through the transition to adulthood. Support and advocacy from the State legislature and Facing Foster Care in Alaska has been critical in the expansion of resources available to serve youth in transition. With the wave of new funding, administering it in a timely manner has posed a challenge to program staff.

While evaluative elements were identified for a number of service array grant programs, data from ORCA has been difficult to access. Because evaluation requires a consistent data source, it will be critical to establish a structured data request and have data available on a consistent schedule. The section continues to refine strategies and integrate new evaluation elements as practice shifts over time.

**ITEM 36: THIS ITEM PERTAINS TO WHETHER THE SERVICES IN ITEM 35 ARE ACCESSIBLE TO FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN ALL POLITICAL JURISDICTIONS COVERED IN THE STATE'S CFSP.**

**PREVIOUS RATING**

This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR final report, due to the lack of services available statewide. Contributing factors include the size of the State and the remote nature of many communities. While services may be available within a region, they may not be available to all families and access may require plane, boat or snow machines. Stakeholders also expressed that even basic child protection and case management services are not available to many children due to inconsistent staffing in rural areas.

**CHANGES 2008-2014**

In 2009, the State legislature approved funding in the amount of $2.6 million to provide continued support for the Children’s Advocacy Centers (CAC) and to establish a CAC on Kodiak Island. This funding supplanted the federal funding that had previously supported the program. As the CACs are currently the largest grant programs managed within the service array section and respond to the high volume of child sexual and physical abuse allegations in the State; the loss of these programs would have greatly impacted the section’s ability to be responsive to children and families. Funding remained flat from 2009-2013 while service delivery increased across the majority of the CACs. In 2014, additional funding was awarded through the Governor’s Choose Respect Initiative, adding $400.0 to offset the increased costs to provide services. There are two additional communities in the early stages of CAC implementation.

The infusion of new funding in to the IL Program has allowed for increased staff and community supports for youth across the State. In 2011, a RILS position was hired in the Western Regional Office (WRO) to
serve youth in Bethel and the 55 surrounding villages. A RILS was also added in the Anchorage Regional Office (ARO) to assist the existing RILS, who was carrying the largest caseload in the program.

Additional funding secured in 2013 for the family contact services center (FCSC) programs allowed the services to expand to serve two additional OCS regions. Prior to receiving additional dollars, there was only a single FCSC serving the Anchorage Region. Including the TLFR programs, roughly 13% of the OCS population of children in an out-of-home placement was receiving visitation services through the two grant programs. The new funding was allocated to serve two additional regions, to include the Southcentral and Western Regions of the State.

**Strengths and Ongoing Challenges**

With the limited amount of federal and state funding allocated to the services array section programs, it is difficult to meet the needs of children, youth and families in all communities across the State; however, as noted above, there has been growth in targeted areas and re-alignment of resources to better address priority services.

The most widely used services are the post-secondary education supports, which currently serve 46 youth both in-state and out-of-state through the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. The program expects a 30%-40% growth in SFY15 with more youth enrolling through participation in the 1-day educational conferences hosted in each of the OCS regions. This presents a challenge, as the increase in funding has been outpaced by the growth in population served.

Housing supports are also highly utilized, with the program providing direct housing support and 55 housing vouchers in multiple communities through a partnership with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC). The program is currently adding to the number of vouchers available in the Anchorage area, where the 10 available vouchers have been utilized. Housing continues to be a challenge, with housing supports not available in the remote areas of the State and the high cost of housing overall. While youth are required to live alone or report any tenants, that has proven difficult for youth and has impacted the stability of these housing supports.

**Item 37: This item pertains to whether the services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.**

**Previous Rating**

This item was rated as an area needing improvement in the 2008 CFSR final report. While there were flexible funding resources and culturally relevant services supported by the State, they were not sufficient to meet the needs of the children and families needing individualized services.

**Changes 2008-2014**

Since 2008, the service array programs have gone through re-alignment and have worked to identify the expected standards for deliverables for each service. This work was accomplished through ongoing dialogue with regional management, grantees and community partners to better understand the needs of clients served and the lack of staff specialization limiting effective service delivery. All of the services managed through the service array section are intended to be individualized to meet the needs of families and each adult, child and/or youth served. Solicitations are crafted with the local community in mind, identifying the core services being solicited while allowing the applicant the latitude to determine a community-based approach to delivering those core services.

A series of reporting tools were created to assist OCS in tracking the effectiveness of the services being funded by the agency. These tools incorporate the federal reporting requirements for IV-B I and II and the
Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) Program. Additionally, they provide guidance to providers in gathering information to help OCS determine whether these services are having an impact on the federal CFSR outcomes related to safety, permanence and well-being.

Information collected from funded providers include:

1. North Carolina Family Assessment Scale General + Reunification (NCFAS G+R) Assessments Summary (quarterly): illustrate whether providers have been successful in increasing the protective factors (life domains) based on the findings of the assessments.
2. Family Services Outcomes Quarterly Report (quarterly): These reports will provide demographic information about the family and the types of services provided to each individual family member. This report also tracks the number of home and school-based visits, the number of service hours and events such as removal, reunifications and voluntary placements of children outside the home.
3. Program Logic Model Progress Report (biannually): Provides updates on the agency’s ability to meet the goals and objectives as outlined in their service model. The information will help to determine whether the grantee was successful in meeting the objectives/outcomes.
4. Cumulative Fiscal Report (quarterly): These reports will help to track the spending of grant funds. OCS will work with individual grantees to ensure funds are expended in support of the goals and objectives of the grantee and will work with them to expend funds completely and appropriately.

Collectively, all of these reports help OCS to determine where grantees need further assistance and support in meeting all of their goals. They will provide information about each grantee’s ability to work within the funded service model and offer guidance to OCS and the grantee around any site reviews and/or corrective action plans that are necessary.

In 2011, the service array began coordinating with training and technical assistance resources in the State to offer professional development opportunities for grantee and contracted providers. It is expected that increased training and the specialization of staff in various areas of service delivery will promote individualized service delivery and promote staff retention in areas where consistency in providers is a challenge.

In 2014, the service array expanded the use of contracts to solicit services for OCS involved families. These contracts include many of the same services and supports solicited through the larger grant programs, but allow for services to be targeted to specific communities and areas of need for that population. Existing contracts are targeted in areas where there is not an OCS worker located and/or a high volume of in-home cases needing more frequent contact and support.

STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

Given the amount of funding available to support these services, coupled with the limited availability of community-based supports for families, individualized services and truly meeting the needs of families and children is an ongoing challenge. Service array is working well with regional OCS management to identify specific needs and grow specialized services in priority areas.

Developing family support teams continues to be a core service in all of the service array grant programs and is an important factor in communities with little to no formal supports readily available. Communities must be creative and willing to utilize both the formal and informal resources in their communities as they strive to provide individualized services.

SUMMARY

A review of service array indicates that this item continues to be an area needing improvement. The overall state achievement rate remains similar to that found during the 2008 CFSR. Some progress has been made
to expand services in priority areas, but the availability of individualized services in all OCS service areas remains a challenge, particularly in the area of substance abuse and mental health treatment services. Much work has been done in recent years to increase the agency’s ability to measure the quality and effectiveness of services; however, this also continues to be a growth area. Developing strong, meaningful collaborations will be critical in achieving conformity in these rating criteria. The agency will continue its many ongoing efforts to address this item.

**Agency Responsiveness to the Community**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity for this systemic factor during the 2008 CFSP.

**Item 38:** This item examines whether the States engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child-and-family-serving agencies, and included the major concerns of these representatives while developing and implementing the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

**Previous Rating**

This item was rated as an area needing improvement during the 2008 CFSR because OCS did not have a process to consistently seek input from and engage stakeholders, including local child welfare agency managers and staff in the development of its goals and objectives for State child and family services programs.

**Changes 2008-2014**

Since the 2008 CFSR, OCS leadership has proactively pursued new communication and engagement approaches to increase the transparency and accountability of the agency. These efforts include new and creative strategies to consistently offer updates regarding agency goals and objectives and seek input from internal and external stakeholders.

In 2009, the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) was created. The ESC is comprised of regional and statewide managers, a representative from the Child Welfare Training Academy, and Tribal partners. This committee functions both as a work team to develop and implement new statewide practice change and to provide input into the identification of new CFSP-related goals and objectives around improving safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.

In 2010 the OCS Supervisory Leadership Council was created. This council is comprised of regional protective service supervisors and is frequently approached by OCS leadership for input into agency goals and objectives. Also in 2010, the Resource Family Advisory Board was created as a forum to give statewide resource families access to supports, advocacy opportunities and a voice on OCS-related issues.

In 2012 the OCS Staff Advisory Board was established to help form a stronger relationship between frontline OCS staff and leadership, promote communication and transparency. Board members represent frontline staff from every OCS region. The leadership team brings issues to the board that promotes increased collaborative, decision making. The Staff Advisory Board is regularly updated on the goals and objectives outlined in the Child and Family Services Plan and offered offers valuable feedback and insight related to new initiatives, staff survey results, and new topics of interest to the field. Also in 2012, the agency began publishing an external stakeholder quarterly newsletter which provides readers with agency updates and progress on initiatives. This newsletter is also used a venue to solicit feedback as readers are frequently urged to contact the agency with their ideas or questions.
In 2014, in final preparation for the development of the 2015-2019 CFSP, OCS conducted 10 Community Café focus groups in 8 different communities and three statewide teleconferences. These focus groups were comprised of a cross section of tribal partners, service providers, resource parents, Guardians ad Litem, parents, youth and OCS staff. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding how OCS could improve and build upon strengths to collaboratively keep children safe, strengthen parents’ abilities to keep their children at home, increase relative placements and stability, partner with tribal communities and retain a quality workforce. See the Collaboration section above for more details.

**STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**

OCS leadership consistently meets and consults with key statewide external stakeholder groups during regularly scheduled monthly or annual meetings. These groups include: Tribal State Collaboration Group, Court Improvement Project, Alaska Citizen Review Panel, Facing Foster Care in Alaska, OCS grantees, Foster Parent Advisory Board and Children’s Justice Act Task Force, Early Childhood Protective Services Committee, the Staff Advisory Board, the Executive Steering Committee, the Supervisory Leadership Council, and the Health Oversight Committee. The concerns and feedback from these groups directly influence the development and implementation of CFSP goals and objectives. For example, earlier interventions with families, better collaboration with community providers, quality case plans, stronger assessment of resource families, increased placement with relatives/stronger supports for relative caregivers, retention of caseworkers and smaller caseloads for caseworkers were repeatedly identified by overlapping stakeholders as being essential to achieve in order to enhance the State’s child welfare system. Consequently, all of these concepts are incorporated into Alaska’s 2014-2019 plan for improvement. Additionally, annual statewide surveys of stakeholder groups, facilitated by the OCS Quality Assurance Unit, enable OCS to obtain detailed information with which to gauge the effectiveness of the State’s child and family services programs and identify areas for improvement. In 2013, OCS staff, Alaskan Tribes, resource families and reunified parents were all surveyed. A central theme that emerged from the information gathered from these surveys is the importance of the relationship that the OCS caseworker develops with foster parents, Tribal staff and birth parents; and that it is the quality of this relationship for which the “success” of a case is dependent. Meanwhile, staff surveys and exit interviews with case workers who have resigned from the agency, repeatedly cite heavy caseload burdens as a major reason for why they are unable to achieve meaningful field work activities.

OCS leadership routinely engages with and solicits feedback and ideas from numerous and diverse statewide Tribal partners and stakeholders. A challenge faced by OCS leaders is how to synthesize the plethora of information received from stakeholders into a comprehensive, yet achievable CFSP.

**SUMMARY**

Alaska continues to be highly invested in consulting with and partnering with a wide range of stakeholders and recognizes that consultation and collaboration with stakeholders is central to developing and implementing strategies to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. Since the 2008 CFSR, OCS has utilized new, creative methods for engaging internal and external stakeholders. The 2014-2019 CFSP incorporates many key concepts that are identified by stakeholders and tribal partners.

**ITEM 39:** This item examines whether the agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

**PREVIOUS RATING**

Item 39 was rated as an area needing improvement during the 2008 CFSR because OCS did not have a formal process for engaging stakeholders in developing annual progress and service reports.
STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

As discussed in Item 38, OCS is actively involved with numerous statewide stakeholder groups. Various groups are updated on the progress of CFSP goals and objectives through written data and oral reports. Likewise, certain strategies are routinely shared with certain stakeholder groups; for example, all of the activities related to ICWA compliance and decreasing disproportionality are reviewed annually with tribal partners at the May TSCG meeting; feedback is solicited and incorporated into the APSR. However, Alaska's 2009-2014 CFSP was so dense, and so complex, with so many goals and objectives that it was challenging to keep stakeholders holistically apprised of progress and solicit feedback in a way that could be understandable and meaningful.

SUMMARY

OCS consults with and collaborates with a variety of partner entities. Keeping them all apprised, engaged and involved in developing annual progress and service reports proved challenging given that the OCS 2009-2014 CFSP was very dense and contained many prescribed, internally focused activities aimed at PIP compliance. OCS looks forward to consultation with the Children’s Bureau with respect to how to achieve this item in the future.

ITEM 40: This item examines whether the State’s services under the CFSP are coordinated with the services or benefits of other federal or federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

PREVIOUS RATING

Item 40 was rated as a strength in the 2008 CFSR because OCS has collaborative efforts among Federal and Federally-funded assisted programs.

STRENGTHS

OCS continues to have a high level of communication with agencies responsible for implementing federal or federally-assisted programs that serve the same population on a regional and statewide level. Coordination efforts are on-going with the Division of Behavioral Health (mental health and substance abuse services); Division of Juvenile Justice; Child Advocacy Centers; Alaska Children’s Trust; Court Improvement Project; Division of Public Assistance (TANF and child care services); Department of Revenue (Child Support); Division of Senior and Developmental Disabilities; Department of Public Safety; Social Security Administration; Department of Law; Department of Labor (Workforce Investment Act); and the DHSS Bureau of Vital Statistics. OCS has memoranda of agreements with the Department of Education; Department of Public Safety; Department of Revenue and numerous Tribes/Tribal entities that outline the agency interchanges and responsibilities for children in the purview of the Alaska’s child welfare system. Additionally, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Directors work cooperatively to resolve departmental issues that arise. The DHSS Joint Management Team includes representatives from DHSS Commissioner’s Office, Behavioral Health, Public Assistance, Office of Children’s Services, Public Health, Medicaid and Senior and Developmental Disabilities to coordinate services and programs among divisions within the department.

SUMMARY

OCS has many cooperative partnerships (as noted above and in Item 38), including numerous partners that manage federal programs in Alaska. OCS continues to prioritize collaboration with partner programs to address common issues impacting the safety, permanency and well-being of children. This collaboration ensures that practice, policy and implementation meet requirements for federal or federally-assisted programs.
Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity for this systemic factor during the 2008 CFSP.

**Item 41: Standards for Foster Homes and Institutions.** This item measures whether the State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

**Previous Item Rating**
This item was rated as an area needing improvement during the 2008 CFSR because while there are licensing standards established, many licensed home with ongoing placements do not meet the full licensing standards.

**Changes 2008-2014**
Background checks are a primary part of the standards set for foster homes and institutions that may delay or hinder homes from becoming fully licensed. In 2011 the State of Alaska Background Check Program began processing and screening resource family applicants.

In 2013 OCS and Tanana Chiefs Conference began a Title IV-E pass through pilot related to tribal foster care licensing. OCS remains committed to working with the Tribal partners on the establishment of tribally licensed foster home standards for Alaska Native families and children in care.

**Strengths and Ongoing Challenges**
In 2011 the State of Alaska Background Check Program began processing and screening resource family applicants. Since 2011 the documentation and process to complete and track the needed background checks has changed significantly. The changes have required increased time for licensing staff to develop necessary skills and documentation needed, which takes away from other time to allot to other duties.

OCS continues to assess adoptive and guardianship families through a home study assessment process that is different than the foster care licensing process. OCS was utilizing a Casey Foster Family Assessment tool; however, in 2013 that tool was no longer supported online. Generally, a thorough assessment of resource families continues to be a challenge for OCS. The OCS remains committed to finding a common assessment process for foster and adoptive families, but which is sensitive to the expressed Tribal concerns for Alaska Native children in care.

**Summary**
With changes in the background check processes in Alaska, the checks are now consistent and comprehensive. OCS will continue to work on identifying and implementing a systematic, effective and comprehensive resource family assessment.

**Item 42: Standards Applied Equally to All Licensed or Approved Foster Family Homes.** This item pertains to how well the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functions statewide to ensure that state standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds.
PREVIOUS ITEM RATING
The 2008 CFSR final report rated Item 42 as a strength because the statewide assessment and stakeholders both stated that Alaska claims title IV-E funds only for children placed in foster homes that are fully licensed.

CHANGES 2008-2014
The 2012 Title IV-E review found that the foster care maintenance program was not in substantial compliance with the federal child and provider eligibility requirements, and required a program improvement plan to correct areas identified.

OCS has implemented a consistent and systematic CQI process related to foster care licensing compliance standards as a part of the performance improvement plan (PIP). The CQI process will assist to ensure that licensed homes are meeting foster care standards for the safety and health of children, and that homes are in compliance with Title IV-E standards. Additionally, in 2010, ORCA implemented the background check report to track pending and expiring fingerprint background checks as well as the “licensing caseload report” which tracks Title IV-E compliance of licensed providers.

STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES
All licensed foster homes, relative and non-relative, are required to comply with the same set of standards. Relatives are provided a choice of whether to be licensed or not. If relatives are not licensed, OCS likewise requires a criminal and child protection background check and a physical check of the home surroundings.

A challenge for OCS is that the high cost of living in rural areas of Alaska makes it more difficult for relatives to readily accept a relative placement. Often, relatives have to make hard choices to reject a placement of the relative child since TANF and foster care payments do not provide adequate financial relief to support an additional child in the home. Unlicensed relatives do not receive any reimbursement from OCS; however, unlicensed relatives can receive TANF funding through the Division of Public Assistance to assist with the support of the children in their homes.

Additionally, due to geographical challenges in rural communities and many homes do not meet all of the standard home environmental licensure requirements, especially with regards to the “physical plant” of the home. In these cases, a variance may be requested and approved in order to accommodate children’s special needs, or the best interest of children, such placement of a sibling group. OCS does not use variances for safety equipment requirements. In every case, OCS is utilizing the variance process to make sure that each standard for licensure is applied equally and that each home meets the safety requirements outlined in the licensing regulations.

SUMMARY
Since 2008, significant changes within DHSS and OCS have occurred that have impacted the licensing standards for OCS. OCS has worked diligently to ensure that standards for foster homes are applied equally to relative and non-relative foster homes.

ITEM 43: REQUIREMENTS FOR CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS. This item examines whether the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and whether the State has a case planning process in place that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

PREVIOUS ITEM RATING
The 2008 CFSR final report identified this item as an area of strength because criminal background checks are completed on all foster, adoptive, and relative placement homes.
**Changes 2008-2014**
Criminal background clearances are required for all foster parents, unlicensed relatives and pre-adoptive or adoptive homes. In 2011 the State of Alaska Background Check Program began processing and screening resource family applicants. The federal barrier crime regulations apply to unlicensed relatives and foster and adoptive families. The state barrier crime statutes and regulations only apply to licensed foster homes and facilities within the DHSS and are more restrictive.

**Strengths and Ongoing Challenges**
Historically, the processing of fingerprint results has been a significant impediment to timely licensing and adoption home study approvals within OCS. OCS does not claim for Title IV-E while fingerprint results are pending. Since November 2013, the Department has been piloting a new database to submit and track fingerprint results. Significant improvements in timeliness of receiving print results have been noted during the pilot project.

**Summary**
OCS continues to require criminal background clearances for all resource families, unlicensed relatives, licensed foster homes and adoptive placements. Alaska has faced challenges in the timeliness of receiving fingerprint results, but is actively working to improve these outcomes.

**Item 44: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes.** This item examines whether the State has a process in place for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive homes that reflects the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed in the State.

**Previous Rating**
The 2008 CFSR final report identified this item as an area in need of improvement, because the State does not have a statewide process in place to recruit foster homes despite significant shortages of all types of foster homes.

**Changes 2008-2014**
Statewide and regional recruitment and retention plans are used by OCS to prepare and plan for the diligent recruitment needed to meet the needs of Alaskan children and families. In 2013/14, active efforts have been made to establish emergency shelter homes in all five regions.

**Strengths and Ongoing Challenges**
The disproportionate rate of Alaska Native children in care is a significant challenge. The identification of relative homes that meet licensing standards and that are able to care for children can be difficult. Therefore, the recruitment of Alaska Native foster homes is an ongoing need in the state. The geographical challenges and limited services available in some communities, makes it difficult to maintain children in their home communities.

**Summary**
While Alaska has invested many resources into recruitment and retention efforts over the past five years, better data tracking of these approaches to document these successes are needed to determine the outcomes of these services. OCS works closely with community partners in the normal practice. OCS has established regular opportunities to receive feedback and input from resource families and tribal partners through participation on the Resource Family Advisory Board and Tribal State Collaboration Group. OCS works closely with grantees providing foster care and adoption support services. This input is received through...
regular meetings with the Alaska Center for Resource Families, tribal partner grantees, and Permanent Family Home study grantees. Through the community café process held throughout the state of Alaska in 2014, input was received by youth, community partners, such as guardian ad litems, therapeutic providers, and OCS staff. Additionally, licensing managers meet with protective service managers in each region of the state monthly to discuss issues specific to their communities.

ITEM 45: THIS ITEM PERTAINS TO WHETHER THE STATE HAS A PROCESS IN PLACE FOR THE EFFECTIVE USE OF CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL RESOURCES TO FACILITATE TIMELY ADOPTIVE OR PERMANENT PLACEMENTS FOR WAITING CHILDREN.

PREVIOUS ITEM RATING
The 2008 CFSR final report rated Item 45 as a strength because the Alaska is effective in using cross-jurisdictional resource to facilitate timely adoptive and permanent placements for waiting children.

CHANGES 2008-2014
OCS continues to manage the Alaska Adoption Exchange and contracts with the Northwest Adoption Exchange for photo listings of waiting children. The listing of a child on the Alaska Adoption Exchange automatically means that the child will be listed on the Northwest Adoption Exchange and the AdoptUSKids exchanges. Wendy’s Wonderful Kids (WWK) continues to be utilized in Alaska; however, the OCS is no longer the grantee for this program. Instead OCS works closely with the WWK recruiter, employed by Catholic social Services in Anchorage. In 2010 OCS developed the PARKA program to recruit, train, and assist with matching children with potential adoptive families.

STRENGTHS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES
The utilization of the adoption exchanges continues to be low by OCS field staff. The method to track legally-free children who do not have an identified permanency home is an area Alaska is working to enhance; this will allow better tracking of children who should be listed on the exchange.

SUMMARY
This continues to be an area of strength for the State of Alaska. Adoption and permanent placements for waiting children are achieved in a timely manner through the use of a variety of recruitment techniques including adoption exchanges and matching processes. The PARKA program has been an innovative way to begin a more thoughtful matching process for children with special needs. In the coming year, OCS will continue to focus on effective methods to continue to achieve permanency in a timely way through use of several tools.

POPULATIONS AT GREATEST RISK OF MALTREATMENT
OCS has identified Alaskan Native children ages 0-7 years old as having the greatest risk of maltreatment in the state. Alaskan Native children are the subject of a disproportionate number of child abuse reports, substantiated reports of abuse/neglect and custody/placements into foster care. The number of children in Alaska’s foster care system has been relatively consistent over the last five years as shown below. Although Alaska’s numbers seem steady, the disproportionate number of Alaska Native children in the state system is very concerning. In Alaska, approximately 25% of the under 18 population are Alaska Native or American Indian, but well over 60% of the children in custody are Alaska Native or American Indian.
Alaskan children overall experience a higher percentage of neglect and psychological maltreatment (exposure to domestic violence) compared to the national rates of child maltreatment types. In 2011, according to the Casey Family Programs, State Child Welfare Policy Data Base, 90.3% of child maltreatment victims in Alaska experienced neglect, whereas nationally the rate was 78.5%. Likewise, 18% of Alaskan child victims experience psychological maltreatment while the national rate for this is type of abuse is 9%. Alaska’s data for maltreatment type by race indicates a disproportionate number of Alaskan Native children are victims of neglect and mental injury as compared to the rates of maltreatment type for non-Alaskan Native child victims.

Source: ORCA 2014
The age of maltreatment victims in Alaska is also of significance. Children in younger age groups are more likely to be victims of maltreatment as compared to national rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Maltreatment Victims</th>
<th>Alaska</th>
<th>Nationally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Victims 0-3 years old</td>
<td>1,049 or 36.2%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims 4-7 years old</td>
<td>756 or 26.1%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims 8-11 years old</td>
<td>521 or 18.0%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims 12-15 years old</td>
<td>424 or 14.6%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims 16-17 years old</td>
<td>112 or 3.9%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Unknown</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2011 Casey Family Programs State Child Welfare Policy Data Base

Alaska recognizes that Alaska Native children, particularly children in the younger, vulnerable age groups as being the population at the highest risk for maltreatment. Consequently, OCS dedicates a significant amount of time and resources targeted at nurturing relationships with tribal partners, developing practice and policy strategies aimed at Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) compliance, targeted Alaska Native foster home recruitment and the purchase of culturally-appropriate family support services. These strategies are detailed in Alaska’s 2015-2019 CFSP plan for improvement and in Section 5, Tribal Consultation and Coordination.
SECTION 3 - PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT
GOALS & OBJECTIVES
Alaska has chosen, in joint planning with the Children’s Bureau, to focus on the following three priorities over the next five years. OCS believes that by focusing on these three broad priorities the agency will be able to achieve significant improvement in the outcome areas identified as needing the greatest growth.

ASSESS AND ADDRESS RISK AND NEED
This priority was chosen to address repeat maltreatment, assessment of risk, assessment of needs and services, referral/provision of services; and in turn, the memorializing of accurate assessments into quality, timely case plans for parents and children who are appropriately engaged in the process, so that identified needs can be addressed. As described and analyzed above in the self assessment, each of these areas are identified as important areas in need of growth. Achievement of this priority will improve the following safety, permanency and well-being outcomes:

Safety 1, Item 2: Repeat maltreatment
Safety 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever safe and appropriate
Perm 2, Item 6: Stability of foster care placement
Well-Being 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs (currently the State’s lowest achieving outcome)

TIMELY AND SAFE PERMANENT HOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
This priority is designed to enhance and improve community partnerships, decrease repeat maltreatment, increase reunifications, decrease removals to foster care, increase timely permanency, and increase relative placements and ICWA compliance. As described and analyzed in Section 2, Self Assessment, each of these areas are identified as critical areas in need of growth. Achievement of this priority will improve the following safety, permanency and well-being outcomes:

Safety 1, Item 2: Repeat maltreatment
Safety 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever safe and appropriate
Permanency 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situation (currently the State’s 2nd lowest performing outcome)
Perm 2, Item 15: Relative Placement
**CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

This priority is selected in order to move the agency towards the implementation of a comprehensive CQI system as described in ACYF-CB-IM 12-07. The OCS recognizes that a comprehensive, fully functioning CQI system is integral in the successful achievement of national standards for all safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.

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**Child and Family Services Plan for Improvement**

**Priority #1: Assess and Address Risk and Need**

1.A  **Strategy: Standardize and enhance decisions at Intake and Initial Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Measure of Progress and Timeline</th>
<th>Staff Training, Technical Assistance, Implementation Supports</th>
<th>Projected Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1.A.1**  | Refine and continue efforts to standardize and make safe intake screening decisions statewide. | • Standardized screening criteria policy finalized.  
• Develop and implement a CQI tool to measure the accuracy of the intake screening decisions by January 2015.  
• Screening decisions will be accurate in 70% of cases by 2017 and 90% of cases by 2019.  
• Centralize Intake statewide by 2016. |
|            | • Training for Intake staff on new policies  
• Internal and External messaging regarding centralized intake  
• Staff positions relocated |
|            | • Repeat Maltreatment rates will decrease when families with risk factors such as repeated reports are consistently identified and assessed sooner for needed services.  
• Staff burnout will be reduced when on-call workers have to manage fewer calls due to the enhanced efficiency of a 24-7 call center as evidenced by staff survey results |

| **1.A.2**  | Ensure accurate risk assessments and impending danger assessments (IDAAs) are completed and the appropriate intervention/case decision is selected. | • Case Review data monitoring (ongoing)  
• Case Review data indicates 75% achievement by June 2016 and 90% by June 2017. |
|            | • Refresher training for all staff on the FRAN (Future Risk of Abuse and Neglect) and IDAA (Impending Danger and Analysis and Assessment).  
• Supervisory training and mentorship related to accurate assessment of risk and intervention decisions.  
• Revise policy 2.2.10.3 Case Decision  
• Statewide training completed by June 2016. |
|            | • Reduce Repeat Maltreatment |

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52 | Alaska’s Child and Family Services Plan 2015-2019
| 1.A.3 | **Ensure Initial Assessments are completed in a timely and accurate manner.** | ORCA and Case Review data monitoring will indicate timely completion and accurate assessments in 75% of cases by June 2017. | • Reduce Repeat Maltreatment |

### 1.B Strategy: Timely, Quality Case Plans & Permanency Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.B.1</strong> Support implementation efforts already underway to ensure Family Service Assessments/Case Plans are completed in an individualized, timely and family-centered manner for all parents and children.</td>
<td>• ORCA data will indicate that 95% of parents and children have a current case plan and case plans were completed within 60 days of removal. Case Review data will indicate a statewide achievement of 75% (42% increase) for Well-being Outcome 1, indicating that parents and children are involved in the process, and accurately have their needs assessed and addressed by June 2017.</td>
<td>• Ongoing supplementary webinar trainings and staff mentoring to support staff development related to FSA implementation.</td>
<td>• Increase Timely Permanency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.B.2</strong> Improve the timeliness to permanency for children under the age of five through development of programming to meet the child’s specific needs.</td>
<td>90% of children under the age will be placed in a potentially permanent placement within 13 months of being in care.</td>
<td>• Establish a work group with internal and external stakeholders to explore and identify needed changes and develop a work plan by June 2015.</td>
<td>• Increase Timely Permanency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.B.3</strong> Increase timeliness of reunification and other permanency goals through implementation of alternative planning, transition planning, timely permanency goal setting and changing.</td>
<td>Case Review data will indicate a statewide achievement of 85% for Calendar year 2015, and 90% for Calendar year 2016 for Item 7 (Permanency Goal for Child)</td>
<td>• Convene a statewide “permanency summit” to train on and promote alternative planning and guardianships by December 2014.</td>
<td>• Increase Timely Permanency &lt;br&gt;• Reduce the number of children in foster/reduce caseloads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 1.B.4

Increase the quality and frequency of case worker visits with parents and children to promote progress towards case plan goals.

- Monthly visit rate for children will be at 95% and for parents at 50% by June 2017.
- Regional managers will continue to utilize regional strategies and weekly ORCA data reports to motivate and monitor compliance.
- Decrease removals to foster care
- Increase Reunification Rates
- Decrease Repeat Maltreatment

### 1.C

**Strategy: Resource Family Assessment and Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<th>Staff Training, Technical Assistance, Implementation Supports</th>
<th>Projected Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.C.1</td>
<td>Select and implement a practice model for assessing resource families (licensed and unlicensed).</td>
<td>Research and select an assessment model and develop an implementation work plan by June 2015.</td>
<td>Needed Staff Training, Technical Assistance, and Implementation supports will be identified in the work plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.C.2</td>
<td>Support relative care givers to ensure placement stability. By June 2019</td>
<td>Explore creating a “Resource Family Specialists” job class that would support both licensed and unlicensed caregivers. Explore the development of flexible funding to allow for concrete supports in times of need, and other resources/services needed to stabilize the placement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.C.3</td>
<td>Develop a system for consumer input of youth ages 12-21 to assess concerns about placement disruptions and quality of care.</td>
<td>In partnership with FFCA and RLS, develop a screening tool, policy and procedures related to placement disruptions by June 2015. Fully implement the process by December 2015.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Priority #2: Timely & Safe Permanent Homes for Children/Youth

#### 2.A

**Strategy: In-Home Services/Resource Linkages/Parent Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.A.1</td>
<td>Develop and standardize a process for making and determining the right referrals are made to community services and families are assisted with</td>
<td>Increase the participation/engagement of OCS referred clients in the Infant Learning Program (ILP) for children birth to age three with substantiated reports of</td>
<td>Work with community partners and stakeholders to develop and implement new referral policy by 2015.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2.A.2 | Standardize and enhance OCS’s statewide in-home services model. | New in-home services model will be fully implemented with fidelity by December 2016. CQI data will indicate that in-home cases are | • Revise In Home Services Policy and Procedures by June 2016.  
• Provide training to staff and community partners by December 2016.  
• Explore and develop resources and processes to allow caseworkers to access flexible funding to purchase needed family supports and services by June 2016  
• A system for collecting qualitative/case review data on in-home cases established.  
• Decrease removals to foster care  
• Increase Reunification Rates  
• Decrease Repeat Maltreatment |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2.A.3 | Establish a birth parent mentoring program to provide support to parents active in the OCS system. | • Pre and post surveys of parents involved in the mentoring program for at least 90 days will indicate an improved understanding of the OCS system and increased confidence in their ability to self advocate and achieve case plan goals. | • Secure funding and a contract with a provider to develop and support a birth parent mentorship program by June 2016.  
• Increase Reunifications |
| 2.B | Strategy: Team Meeting Restructure | | |

### Objectives

| 2.B.1 | Develop an effective, consistent structure for client team meetings. | • Establish a work group with internal and external stakeholders to explore and identify needed changes and develop a work plan by June 2015.  
• Work plan will be fully implemented by June 2017. | • Secure and initiate facilitator trainings as needed so that facilitators are able to provide a “menu” of potential meeting types (e.g. TDM, Family Group, Permanency roundtable, etc.) to meet the needs of families/cases  
• Increase timely Permanency  
• Enhance Community Partnerships |
2.B.2 Administrative Review process will be restructured and enhanced

- Establish a work group with internal and external stakeholders to explore and identify needed changes and develop a work plan by June 2015.
- Work plan will be fully implemented by June 2017.

- Increase timely Permanency
- Enhance Community Partnerships

2.C Strategy: Early Identification of Relatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2.C.1 Increase early identification of relatives. | • By June 2015 50% of children will have 2 relatives documented within 30 days of placement.  
• By June 2016 80% of children will have 3 or more relatives documented within 60 days of removal. | • Provide annual webinars for all staff on the policies, tools and resources available related to relative searches.  
• Implement statewide policies and practices based on current WRO pilot aimed at partnering with tribes to identify relatives interested in placement by December 2014. | • Increase Timely Permanency  
• Increase Relative Placements/First Preference Placements and ICWA Compliance |

Priority #3: Continuous Quality Improvement

3.A Strategy: Implementation of the OCS CQI Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Measure of Progress and Timeline</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.A.1 Finalize the CQI Policy and Procedure Manual and raise internal and external awareness regarding CQI.</td>
<td>• Manual will be finalized by December 2014.</td>
<td>• A CQI training webinar will be developed and trainings will be provided to all staff/external stakeholders and tribal partners will be briefed by June 2015.</td>
<td>• Enhance Community Partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3.A.2 Regional and Statewide CQI teams will be fully implemented, including the institutionalization of a feedback loop between the Regional, Statewide and Director’s Executive Team prior to the implementation of program changes. By June of 2015. | • A system for documenting, sharing and storing meeting notes/decisions is implemented by June 2015. | • Enhancements to internal OCS Share Point site needed. Staff training and expectations for utilization of the Share Point site provided.  
• Regional managers to receive technical support regarding developing and sustaining CQI teams. | • Enhance Community Partnerships |
3.A.3 Standardized data dashboards/higher quality and user-friendly reports/data will be developed and available for managers, CQI teams, external stakeholders and Tribal partners. • Dashboard is available on-demand in ORCA by June 2015. Dedicated ORCA Developer time. • Enhance Community Partnership

3.A.4 Integration of IV-E CQI with CPS CQI efforts will be initiated and enhanced through efforts to increase the visibility and significance of IV-E compliance with child welfare field staff. Staff training post-tests will demonstrate a statewide competency level of 90% or higher with respect to understanding key concepts about IV-E eligibility by June 2015 and annually. • All Licensing and Protective Services staff will be required to view a new mandatory webinar regarding IV-E eligibility and the significance of how IV-E supports and reinforces excellence in child welfare practice. • Increase IV-E compliance

**CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES CONTINUUM**

**Prevention**
The Office of Children’s Services has a number of programs that are focused on the promotion of well-being and the prevention of child maltreatment for young children. The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project (ECCS) has been focused on systems development to create a more coordinated, cost-effective, comprehensive approach to serving young children. One area of focus for ECCS has been increasing age appropriate mental health services for young children. This focus has resulted in an Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation system, an ECMH Learning Network, the Alaska Pyramid Project (CSEFEL model in childcare), and an annual ECMH Conference. For the next two years, ECCS will be focused on mitigating the effects of toxic stress and trauma on young children using a collective impact approach in Alaska communities. Additionally, OCS manages the Part C/Early intervention program in Alaska. This allows for a streamlined process for referring young children with a substantiated report of harm to Part C service providers. OCS is also the lead agency for the Alaska Strengthening Families program which is dedicated to embedding the Protective Factors in programs serving families.

**Intake**
Five years ago, Alaska regionalized its intake process. There are now five call-centers within the state that receive and screen reports of allegations of child maltreatment, called a protective services report (PSR). Intake continues to be a focal point for the continued development of standardized protocols for decision making.

**Initial Assessment**
An initial assessment (investigations) requires OCS to go beyond whether the reported allegations are substantiated or not substantiated. The initial assessment requires the gathering of information to make an informed decision about whether the child is safe, unsafe, or at high risk of maltreatment by the parent/caregiver. The initial assessment serves as the foundation for building the ongoing assessment of safety and the development of a case plan, and establishes parents as an equal partner in that process.

**Family Services**
During the family services phase of a case, protective service specialists work with families in need of ongoing services and supports to ensure child safety. The family services assessment utilizes a structured approach and motivational interviewing strategies to engage and involve caregivers in identifying their own
needs and the safety, permanency and well-being needs of their children for the development of a case plan. Alaska also utilizes child and parent trauma screening as part of the rigorous assessment process to inform case planning. The initial case plan requires the identification of a primary and alternative permanency goal. The family’s progress with the case plan and child safety factors are routinely assessed through the family services case evaluation process. Familial, community and Tribal partners are key resources to families at this stage.

**Resource Families**

OCS makes diligent efforts to identify, evaluate and consider relatives, family friends and those culturally tied to the family as the primary placement option. Alaska works closely with a child’s Tribe to identify relatives. When relatives cannot be a placement option for the child, OCS makes efforts to actively recruit and support foster families within the child’s home community and in as close proximity as possible to the child’s parents, to assure that the child may continue to maintain important and lasting cultural, familial, educational and community-based connections.

The resource family component of OCS works to ensure that critical child safety factors are assessed and evaluated within each relative, foster care, guardianship or adoptive home from placement through permanency. Key components are the foster care licensing and adoption or guardianship home study assessments of resource families.

**Services Array**

Services array is the component of community-based services that OCS provides through professional services contracts or grants. The services are aimed at meeting the needs of all children and families that come to the attention of the child protective services system, and to provide the necessary services and supports towards reunifying families. Funding from the federal IV-B II and II, the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), the Chafee Foster Care Independent and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, the Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force Program and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) are blended with state and private funds to support common federal and state goals of service delivery and promote ongoing efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth and families served through Alaska’s child welfare system. Service providers are located in ten hub communities across Alaska and are provided by both Tribal and non-Tribal entities.

Because of the high number of Alaska Native/American Indian children involved in the OCS system, and because young Alaskan Native children are determined to be the population at greatest risk in Alaska, there is a critical need for OCS to purchase culturally relevant services that are available to meet the needs of families in remote and difficult/expensive to serve areas. While many children reside in the urban hubs of Alaska, a significant percentage still reside in their rural communities of origin. In many of these areas, OCS must serve clients remotely and/or does not have a stable workforce to provide the close monitoring and support necessary to adequately meet the legal mandates needed to serve Alaskan Native families. The Rural Child Welfare grant program utilizes State general funds to fund service providers with a demonstrated understanding of the ICWA, and an existing infrastructure in remote/local settings to provide culturally relevant, intensive case management services. This program is designed to provide services to children and families living in rural Alaska who are at risk for out-of-home placement, and children who have been removed from their home setting.

**Service Coordination**

The services supported through the Service Array Section continually adapt to changes in field practice, which is coordinated through ongoing dialogue and engagement with the management in the five OCS regions. Additionally, other OCS collaborative efforts on statewide and regional levels ensure that available services through other federally funded programs, community-based public and private providers for
programs such as substance abuse, domestic violence, and behavioral health ensure that families served in the state child welfare services receive priority services that meet their specific needs to achieve case plan goals.

Some specific examples of these collaborative efforts include:

- **Bring the Kids Home.** OCS is collaborating with the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) to expand Family Preservation Services to serve families experiencing multiple pathologies in which one or more child(ren) has an emotional disorder or a substance abuse disorder, or families in which one or more of their parents has a chronic mental illness, a substance abuse disorder or a developmental disability and their child(ren) are at risk of developing a chronic disorder. The goals of this collaboration is to reduce trauma associated with out-of-home placement, which has shown to lead to negative long-term impacts; improve family functioning so parents can take responsibility for their children; and reduce the number of children who develop more severe disorders and require long-term residential treatment. The project will utilize the Family Preservation model supported with IV-B I and II, allowing us to expand our scope and increase OCS’ ongoing efforts to keep children in their homes.

- **Public Health Nursing.** The Public Health Nursing Program will be linked to the Family Support grant programs, providing guidance in the review and award process of grants and coming to the table as changes are made to the service model. As the Public Health Nursing Program has interest in establishing medical homes for all children in Alaska, the Family Support service model will address the coordination of medical services for families served by the program.

- **Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems/Strengthening Families.** The most effective collaboration and coordination work has been through the activities with the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Program, the Strengthening Families initiative and the Alaska Children’s Trust, who also fund Family Support Programs throughout the State of Alaska. Currently, this group is working on a Statewide Prevention Plan, which will prioritize prevention activities needed in all communities throughout Alaska. The IV-B Program Coordinator will provide input to the plan and work to incorporate the needs identified in the statewide plan into the models for service delivery.

- **Infant Learning Program.** Because the Infant Learning Program (ILP) has a strong focus on the 0-3 age group in Alaska, the Family Support Program has integrated that population as a group needing special considerations for services under the Family Support Programs, as well as the IV-B funded Family Preservation and Time Limited Family Reunification Programs. As those programs have been redesigned, the Request for Proposals now include the age range of 0-3 as a priority population and the reporting requirements for children served indicates whether a referral has been made to the ILP for screening and services through the ILP program. This provides for a direct link between these services and ensures that even the youngest family members are considered during service provision.

- **Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP).** The IV-B funded Family Support and Community Based Programs Program Coordinator is also responsible for the coordination of the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funding through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). OCS will be utilizing the technical assistance center, the FRIENDS National Resource Center, to provide training to grantees, community stakeholders and families in the areas identified through the ongoing community needs survey process. In addition we work
closely with the Child Welfare Academy, a program of the University of Alaska, Anchorage to assure training of staff and grantees in trauma, OCS procedures, and regarding goals and objectives.

- **Alaska Youth and Family Network.** The Alaska Youth and Family Network (AYFN) is an established statewide network with an active board that includes parents from communities statewide. Their mission, “Alaska Youth and Family Network advocates for families and children with social / emotional / behavioral challenges and related disabilities to be included as equal partners with professionals in developing policies, programs and ensuring adequate mental health and substance abuse services, prevention and information for Alaskan children and youth,” makes them an ideal partner in supporting the parents served by these programs. OCS will be working with the Alaska Youth and Families Network (AYFN) to identify partnership opportunities and be a continued resource for the Network. This partnership will provide opportunities and resources for parents to develop skills and receive training to support further leadership development and personal growth.

On an individual case level, services are identified through a family engagement process in which the case worker and parent work together through a multi-step process (aka *Family Services Assessment*) to thoughtfully select what services are needed to enhance the parent or caregivers’ protective capacities. Accurately identifying what current services are available and assisting families to actually access those services is an area of growth for OCS and is addressed in the plan for improvement.

**SERVICE DESCRIPTION**

**FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES (FSS)**

FSS are community-based services to promote the well-being of children and families and designed to increase the strength and stability of families (including extended families), to increase the parents’ confidence and competence in their parenting skills, to afford children a stable and supportive family environment, and otherwise to enhance child development (1993 OBRA Provisions, PL 103-66). Each member of the family is considered when coordinating services, with special attention given to young children ages’ birth to three years. The core services of the Family Support Program include:

- Daily in-home support services
- Facilitated access to resources
- Service coordination of: early childhood services, medical services, educational or employment services
- Parent education and support
- Transportation services

OCS caseworkers make referrals to family support services for families needing support for basic needs and crisis stabilization. Families referred do not have an open child protection case, and may also be referred by other services, such as schools or early education programs, medical services, other community agencies, or may self-refer.

**COMMUNITY BASED SUPPORT SERVICES TO PROMOTE SAFE CHILDREN, STRONG FAMILIES**

These services are designed to help families and children living in Alaska who are at risk of out-of-home placement and/or children who are in out-of-home placement needing services to reunify with their families.

Family Preservation Services (FP) are provided to OCS involved families to prevent the removal of children to out of home settings and support the reunification process when children are returned home from an out of home placement. These services are provided to families with an open child protection case. Time
Limited Family Reunification (TLFR) services are designed to provide ongoing family contact and transportation services for OCS involved families in the agency, home or community settings; and facilitate the reunification of the child with their biological parent(s). Family Contact Services Center (FCSC) services are designed to provide ongoing family contact and transportation services for OCS involved families needing higher levels of supervision in the agency setting; and facilitate the reunification of the child with their biological parents(s). Services are delivered in the home whenever possible and focus on engaging the family with both community and natural supports to enhance protective capacities and promote a safe environment.

All title IV-B funding received is awarded through grants and/or contracts managed through OCS. No title IV-B II funding is allocated to support planning and service coordination. The following chart provides percentages of the breakdown of Title IV-B Subpart II funds in the allowable categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Percent Allocated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service Option 1 (FP)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service Option 2 (TLFR)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Promotion</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The allocations of IV-B II funding to the respective categories is based on an analysis of utilization and service outputs in each service category; the blending of additional funding supporting each service priority; the availability of services in each category statewide; and the capacity of providers to deliver the services within each category. Based on utilization data from the previous five fiscal years, funding has been realigned to increase the services utilized most by children, youth and families.

The allocation of title IV-B II funding to family support was reduced to 5% in 2013 due to an increase in the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funding, coupled with low utilization of the program services. To address the increased utilization of TLFR services, funding was shifted from the Family Support category to expand the resources available to support the ongoing growth in need and utilization of TLFR services. As the number of children in an out-of-home placement continues to increase, the need for increased TLFR services will continue; therefore, we anticipate the funding percentages will remain consistent in 2015-2016.

**SERVICE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**

Proposals to provide title IV-B funded family support and community-based services are solicited through a competitive process, and reviewed in accordance with the applicable provisions of 7 AAC 78 State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Grant Regulations. Applications are evaluated by the Grants & Contracts support team for minimum responsiveness and technical requirements and forwarded to the Office of Children’s Services to be reviewed by the OCS Program Coordinator.

If more funding is requested by proposers than is available to fund each program, a Proposal Evaluation Committee (PEC) is formed and a review of all proposals is held. The Program Coordinator makes the recommendations for funding programs based on the outcomes of the PEC, budgetary concerns, funding regions and prior performance. Recommendations are then presented to a combined grants and contracts and OCS team. All proposals and documentation of the review process are available upon request. Recommendations include special conditions of award.
SERVICES FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE

Describe activities undertaken to reduce the length of time children in foster care under the age of five are without a permanent family. In addition, describe activities the State plans to undertakes to provide developmentally appropriate services to this population over the next five years.

Alaska is fortunate to have its Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems program situated within Alaska’s child welfare program, allowing for close collaboration and a strong interconnection between programs. OCS utilizes a variety of strategies to address the developmental needs of children under the age of five and to reduce the length of time children in foster care under the age of five are without a permanent family. OCS will continue to utilize these strategies over the next five years. These statewide strategies include:

- **Infusion of the Strengthening Families model.** Strengthening Families is a proven, cost-effective approach to building protective factors around children by supporting family strengths and resiliency. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these protective factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also “promotive” factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development. Since 2005, the highly active Alaska Strengthening Families leadership team has worked to expand the use of this framework across the state by training and supporting numerous early childhood care and learning programs. The model has been infused into Alaska’s resource parent training and Child Welfare Academy curriculums and been embraced by numerous other entities across the state including United Way, domestic violence affiliated agencies and others. The results of this work have proven to be tremendous resources and shifted the way Alaska’s family support agencies work together to support families with young children.

- **Automated referrals to Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning program.** Enhancements to ORCA ensures that every child in Alaska, age birth-to-three years of age with a substantiated finding of abuse or neglect receives automatic referral to the Part C Early Intervention program (known as the Infant Learning Program in Alaska) for eligibility determination for multidisciplinary services. Programs are strongly encouraged to enroll children identified through CAPTA under developmental delay or clinical opinion. All ILPs were provided with training on Strengthening Families and the OCS Practice Model. Additionally, protocols have been developed to help improve the referrals and working relationships between Early Intervention Infant Learning Programs and OCS Staff. Similar protocols and MOUs have been developed statewide to aid in the priority referral process of preschool aged children to Head Start programs.
  - The Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning program, administered through the OCS, assures that early intervention services are available for families with infants and toddlers (birth to age three) with special needs. Service may include: developmental screening and evaluation; individualized family service plans to outline goals for the family and their child; child development information; home visits; physical, occupational or speech therapy; specialized equipment; and/or referrals to other needed services. The Alaska EI/ILP partners with grantees around the state to provide services directly to families at a local level. EI/ILP grantees include school districts, mental health associations, Alaska Native corporations, parent associations, and other nonprofit organizations.

- **Training on Developmental Milestones.** Special attention is given to the training provided to child welfare workers related to early child development. Alaska’s Child Welfare Academy created a Field Guide to Child Functioning desk reference guide, which is a tool that accompanies mandatory training, aimed at helping workers understand child developmental milestones, and the impact of abuse, neglect and separation on infants, toddlers, preschooler, grade school and youth functioning.
Additionally, resource families have access to a wide range of training related to parenting and meeting the needs of children in this critical stage of early development. (For a complete list of all available training visit the Alaska Center for Resource Families website at: http://www.acrf.org/)

- **Grant Programs.** Time Limited Family Reunification/Family Contact Services Center program is a well utilized OCS program offered in eleven Alaskan cities/communities serving a concentrated number of children under the age of five. These services provide family contact services to families where children are placed out of the home and are structured to reduce the length a child is in out of home care. OCS staff provides consistent referrals to this program, with the average utilization of all grantees exceeding 100% of the expected level of service delivery.

- **SafeCare.** SafeCare is an evidence-based, parent-training curriculum for parents who are at-risk or have been reported for child maltreatment. Through SafeCare, trained professionals work with at-risk families in their home environments to improve parents’ skills in several domains. This model was introduced by the Infant Learning Program in Anchorage as an approach for service provision to children referred through the CAPTA requirements for the Part C program. Six home visitors were trained in SafeCare and plans are being made for the expansion of this model.

- **Early Relative Searches.** ORCA enhancements allow OCS workers more ease and flexibility around documenting and tracking relatives who are identified as being relevant to a child’s case. OCS implemented new policy accompanied by a statewide mandatory training for all staff in November 2013 related to relative search expectations and new tools available to assist with searches. Additionally, in January 2014 OCS launched a pilot project in Bethel, which involved training Western Region tribes on a new process to have tribes document and notify OCS when a relative indicates that they are interested in the immediate placement of a child. OCS is hopeful that these new strategies will increase early placements with relatives.

- **Family Services Assessment/Child Case Planning.** The OCS family services assessment/new case planning model was launched statewide in December 2013. Enhanced needs assessment and service planning to meet and reflect the specific developmental needs of the child is a part of the new case planning curriculum. The model includes a trauma screening and an emphasis on the assessment of child functioning (performed during the initial safety assessment process) to inform the child’s case plan. The assessment must include the child’s unique developmental stage and the influence of the child’s trauma history with respect to needed services and support. EPSDT results which screen for medical and mental health (emotional/social wellbeing) are also a critical component of the needs assessment.

**ADDITIONAL STATEWIDE INITIATIVES THAT BENEFIT ALASKA’S UNDER AGE FIVE FOSTER CARE POPULATION**

**Alaska Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project**

Alaska Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Project’s primary purpose is to facilitate the building and implementation of statewide comprehensive systems of care that support family and community approaches to promoting positive early development and early school success for young children. This important project is driven by a multi-disciplinary governor-appointed task force. ECCS’ mission is to promote positive development and improved health outcomes for Alaska’s children prenatal to 8 by creating a culturally responsive, comprehensive and accessible service delivery system that links service providers, empowers families, and engages communities. ECCS focuses on four critical components: health, mental health, early care and learning and family support.
Most recently the ECCS Project has been working with partners to implement strategies for fostering safe and nurturing relationships and mitigating the effects of toxic stress and trauma for infants and young children. This project is using a “collective impact approach” to work with communities. Goals include:

1) educating a cross-section of providers, caregivers, families and communities about the critical importance of human development during infancy and early childhood, the impacts of adverse childhood experiences, and their role in the mitigation of toxic stress;

2) enhancing early childhood systems focused on creating trauma informed services and improving attachment and early relationships;

3) developing projects to screen and monitor for adverse childhood experiences; and

4) expanding and coordinating networks of evidence based/informed supports and treatment services for families identified with trauma or risk for trauma.

**Early Childhood Mental Health Learning Network**

This program is designed to develop/increase expertise in existing workforce about early childhood mental health issues including trauma, diagnosis, and appropriate interventions; and create collaboration between a variety of service providers. The program provides consultation and/or professional development to mental health clinicians, family support workers, and early interventionists through a grant with Anchorage Community Mental Health Services. The focus has been on providing statewide training on the *Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood* (DC:0-3R) which has been approved in Alaska for use with birth through five year olds. Using the DC:03R as a baseline, future training will expand to include a greater focus on developmentally appropriate interventions. On-going, long-distance consultation is provided for professionals around the state who lack adequate support, training and supervision on early childhood mental health issues. The grantees providing the workforce development activities are also responsible for facilitating “reflective practice” groups for a cross-section of providers in their committees.

**Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation**

This program provides early childhood mental health consultation to early care and learning programs in Alaska. Consultation is available on two levels- the program level as well as the child level. This program is designed to provide early identification and intervention for at-risk children and decrease the number of children expelled from their programs due to difficult behaviors. Consultants work with early childhood programs and families to provide environments that support social and emotional development as well as manage challenging behaviors. Young children and families needing additional services are referred to community resources.

**Services for Children Adopted from Other Countries**

Services for adoption support are provided through a grantee. The grant specifically states that support services are crucial to ensuring the continued success of families who have adopted through private or international adoptions. For this reason, the grantee is required to provide support services for all adoptive and guardianship families, regardless of the how the adoption was finalized, so that children do not enter the public foster care system from a failed private or international adoption.
SECTION 5 - TRIBAL CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

ALASKA’S UNIQUE TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS

Alaska Native children are overrepresented in the state child welfare system. OCS works collaboratively, both on an individual case basis and a statewide level, with numerous Tribes throughout the state to enhance outcomes for Alaska Native children.

Of the 229 federally recognized Tribes in Alaska, only two Tribes exercise exclusive jurisdiction over child welfare. The state recognizes dual jurisdiction on child welfare cases; however, many Tribes struggle due to lack of resources to offer a full range of child welfare services. Therefore, the majority of child welfare services are administered by the state.

Alaska’s title IV-B Tribes, in conjunction with OCS, established the Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) in 1994 to improve outcomes for Alaska Native children and families involved in the child welfare system. The TSCG is comprised of representatives from Tribes/Tribal organizations, OCS, and federal Region X.

The TSCG meets three times a year to collaborate on issues pertaining to American Indian/Alaska Native families and youth. The group’s focus is to decrease the disproportionality of Alaska Native children in Alaska’s child welfare system, increase compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), promote healthy racial and ethnic identity within Alaska Native families, and develop authentic partnerships. A standing agenda item every May is the exchange of the state’s and tribes’ APSRs.

In the past several years, TSCG made significant progress by focusing on maintaining effective partnerships, working together for solutions, and holding each other mutually accountable to improve the child welfare system for Alaska Native children and families. The following list illustrates a few key accomplishments:

- Establishment of Tribal title IV-E pass-through agreements for administration & training. Currently there are 11 such agreements.
- Development of one Title IV-E maintenances agreement with a Tribal consortia allowing 37 Tribes to access federal funding.
- Creation of one statewide ICWA coordinator and five regional ICWA specialist positions.
- With support from Casey Family Programs, TSCG members participated in Undoing Racism and Knowing Who You Are cultural trainings. Discussions during these training sessions focused on critical thinking, a child welfare power analysis, definitions, stereotypes, discrimination, internalized racial oppression, and different forms of racism (cultural, institutional, individual). These trainings helped TSCG members to begin speaking a common language and recognizing the importance of each individual’s cultural and ethnic identity. Knowing Who You Are cultural trainings continue to be provided to new OCS and Tribal staff throughout Alaska, on an ongoing basis.
- Creation of basic ICWA training for all state caseworkers and Tribal workers. The two-day specialized training outlines historical trauma, racism, and the federal ICWA laws. It details the life span of a typical child welfare case from beginning to end, when a child is involved in state custody.
- OCS collaborated with the Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska and 15 other Alaska title IV-B Tribes, to work on a systems change initiative through the Western and Pacific Implementation Center (WPIC).
Development of a confidentiality agreement related to information sharing during the initial assessment of the case prior to intervention allowing Tribal partners to begin work on the case prior to custody.

Development of a pilot program for tribal partnership on the early identification of relatives.

Inclusion of Tribal partners in the OCS Statewide Policy Group and the Executive Steering Committee (new practice implementation group).

The WPIC work applied indigenous world views to the Child and Family Services Review outcome areas of safety, permanency and well-being to guide the project. One of the main goals was to create culturally appropriate, Tribal in-home service models for which five key Tribal entities in three strategic OCS regions of the state received extensive technical support to develop. This capacity building work with OCS Tribal partners to provide in-home services establishes a strong foundation for the innovations envisioned within this proposal.

Tribal representation from over 150 tribes participated in various venues throughout the state in the development the following goals and action steps related enhancing Tribal and State relations, cultural humility and increasing ICWA Compliance. These venues included the statewide community cafés described in Section 1, the TSCG meetings in February and May of 2014, and 4 statewide teleconferences.

Assessment of the level of compliance and progress made to improve items related to notifications, placement preferences, active efforts and the right to intervene can be found in the 2014 APSR. Progress for the 2015-2019 will begin to be monitored in the 2015 APSR.

### Enhance Tribal and State Relations, Cultural Humility, Increase ICWA Compliance

**A. Goal:** Promote positive state and tribal collaboration relations, build tribal capacity, reduce disproportionality and increase ICWA compliance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Annual Update (includes date completed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.A.1 Continue to meet with Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) 3 times per year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.2 OCS will engage in mutual updates on the CFSP with Tribal partners across the state.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.3 OCS Leadership will support the development and sustainability of Regional Disproportionality Teams.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.4 OCS will work with tribes across the state to strengthen relationships, coordinate services and explore opportunities to engage in authentic partnerships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.5 Continue Tribal State Co-Chair meetings on a bi-monthly basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.6 Explore and adopt new strategies for communicating and engaging with tribes that are currently not attending TSCG.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.7</td>
<td>Increase number of Tribal Title IV-E Agreements with Tribes/Tribal Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.8</td>
<td>Continue to provide technical assistance and support to Tribes/Tribal Organizations who access Title IV-E funding to provide child welfare related services to children that qualify under the Indian Child Welfare Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.9</td>
<td>Work with tribes to assess readiness, and develop the needed infrastructure necessary to expand and increase the number of Title IV-E Maintenance Agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.10</td>
<td>Provide information regarding how tribes can access Chafee funding for tribal youth in tribal custody on an annual basis via various modalities. This will include consultation with tribes regarding determining eligibility for benefits and services to ensure fair and equitable treatment for Indian youth under Chafee Foster Care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.11</td>
<td>Develop policy and procedures to prioritize, standardize and streamline the referral process for OCS clients to receive tribal in-home and case management services where available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.12</td>
<td>Continue to promote cooperation and collaboration on case-related matters and sharing reciprocal information through full implementation of the Tribal Confidentiality Agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.13</td>
<td>Work with ORCA Project Manager to determine feasibility of providing tribes access to AK OCS ORCA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.14</td>
<td>Conduct critical review of 20 year old Tribal State ICWA Agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.16</td>
<td>Keep OCS ICWA webpage updated to allow easy access to all pertinent TSCG efforts and ICWA information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.17</td>
<td>Continue to seek tribal participation in on-site QA reviews and other CQI related activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.18</td>
<td>Conduct ongoing OCS ICWA team teleconferences, which includes the tribes and others as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.21</td>
<td>Increase number of licensed Native foster homes and implement a process for verifying that foster parents are Native.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.A.22</td>
<td>Provide on-going ORCA data as requested by tribes.</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.24</td>
<td>Ensure tribes are notified of their right to intervene in State proceedings, or to seek transfer of the proceedings to the jurisdiction of the tribe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.25</td>
<td>Ensure/increase the notification of Indian Parents and Tribes of State proceedings involving Indian children and their right to intervene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.26</td>
<td>Increase active efforts through the use of in-home services to prevent the breakup of the Indian family when parties seek to place a child in foster care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.A.27</td>
<td>Provide capacity building support to regional disproportionality teams to develop child protection teams in rural communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 6 - CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM AND
EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHERS PROGRAM

The State of Alaska, Office of Children’s Services provides administration, supervision and oversight for the
Chafee Foster Care Independence and Education and Training Voucher programs. The State of Alaska will
coop erate with national evaluations (NYTD) of the effects of the programs in achieving the purposes of the
Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

Description of Program Design and Delivery: The following addresses how the State will design,
conduct and/or strengthen programs to achieve the purposes of the section 477(a)(1-7) of the Act.

1. Help youth transition to self-sufficiency
The Office of Children’s Services (OCS) through the Independent Living (IL) Program is designed to
support the transition into adulthood for youth ages 16-21 in out of home care. To be successful upon
departure from care, each youth will have the opportunity to learn skills based on their individual needs.
The ultimate goal for all youth, regardless of their personal plans, is to be prepared to live independently.
The IL Program will continue to focus on areas that prepare our youth to live independently. Also, the IL
Program is also committed to achieving permanency for every youth by identifying a supportive and
committed adult to make a lifelong connection for every youth that leaves state custody.
Six Regional Independent Living Specialists (RILS) in the five regional OCS offices provide case
management, support and advocacy for the youth while participating in the program. Older youth in care
have regular face to face visits with RILS in order to assess needs, engage in transition planning and deliver
services. By collaborating with community experts, foster parents and other placement managers, young
people are taught life skills which includes daily living skills, training in budget and money management,
nutrition, apartment locating/living, family planning, decision making/goal planning, employment/career
planning, educational development, health awareness and homemaking skills. Life skills training on DVD is
also available to youth in rural communities across the state.
Alaska continues to partner with state and local agencies including the Department of Labor, Alaska
Housing Finance Corporation, Covenant House and Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA) to improve
outcomes for youth as they transition out of foster care. The IL Program’s progress, strengths and needs,
goals, pursuits and challenges, as well as relevant NYTD data are reported to tribes, stakeholders,
community and legal partners, as well as OCS protective services workers and managers through yearly
newsletters, tribal state presentations, and through community and internal trainings. Our goal is to
consistently train new OCS workers, partners, and tribes about our program resources which can positively
impact the lives of Alaskan youth.

2. Help youth receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment
RILS provide one on one work with youth and young adults promoting relationships with Department of
Labor and Workforce Development programs which have led to employment matches statewide. The
RIL’s provided activities, classes, and instructional resources for communities in which they serve to better
inform youth of current job openings, resume and interviewing workshops, along with trainings on
communication and conflict management skills. On-going collaboration with transitional counselors
through Department of Vocational Rehabilitation has resulted in opportunities for higher needs young
adults (with active Individual Educational Plan’s (IEP), medical or mental health diagnosis that are a barrier
to employment) to have additional supports such as job shadowing, work place allowances (for example:
additional breaks or being in a wheel chair) and transportation assistance.

While current statistics reflect a large percentage of OCS involved youth employed (over 70% according to
workforce data), only 14% of the age 19 NYTD cohort indicate they were participating in at least one
employment related category. Plans in 2015 include attending community career fairs to increase exposure
of specialized skills and jobs in high demand in Alaska. The Anchorage Regional Office (ARO) is creatively mentoring with youth through an on-the-job shadowing program. Youth in Anchorage providing general office assistance to staff are gaining valuable work experience, while receiving an hourly stipend for the work they are performing. This has been very successful, with additional youth in the area requesting time in work mentorship activities.

3. Help youth prepare for and enter postsecondary training and education institutions
The IL Program collaborates with the Child Welfare Academy (CWA) who continues to administer the Education and Training Voucher Program on the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) campus. Financial support was made available to allow youth to maintain residence on campus during the scheduled breaks and summer months in effort to promote stability in their living situation.

Alaska’s IL Program allows youth interested in education or postsecondary training the opportunity to participate in annual education conferences hosted through a partnership with the UAA and the CWA. This conference exposes youth to college life, vocational training, Job Corps and other alternative programs statewide. In 2014 additional educational conferences were held in Bethel, Juneau and Fairbanks to meet the needs of both urban and rural youth.

Efforts will be made to strengthen understanding of the IL and ETV program requirements to OCS staff, foster parents, Guardians ad Litem, tribes, and other community supports to reinforce the importance of education as a way of improving the outcomes of youth who exit the foster care system.

4. Provide personal and emotional support to youth aging out of foster care through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults
The IL Program continues to explore creative, formal and informal mentorship opportunities for youth and provides ongoing training to OCS staff, community partners and foster parents related to the importance of youth having connections with adults who will play a significant role in their lives. RILS work with youth and alumni to identify resources and funds to help youth in their transition to adulthood while maintaining cultural connections.

The IL Program has a partnership with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Alaska to create formal mentoring opportunities for youth in custody and alumni of the foster care system. This may include educational mentoring, employment mentoring, or individual mentoring based upon the needs of the youth. There continues to be challenges engaging youth and mentors within our current grant program. Funding has been reduced in 2014, with great efforts made to increase youth and mentor engagement in the future.

Two former youth are currently being sponsored on summer internships with FosterClub All-star Program. This program brings youth and alumni together to develop leadership and communication skills using a mentorship approach. To maximize on the experience, the IL Program will continue to engage FosterClub All-star youth in opportunities to mentor other foster youth throughout the year.

5. Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from adolescence to adulthood
The youth exiting custody develops a transition plan in coordination with team decision meetings focused on creating goals, activities and identifying connections to support the youth leaving custody. These connections include mental health and medical supports, employment counselors, post secondary educational supports. The RILS provide direct financial management, skill development, one-on-one training and review a credit report annually from each of the three credit reporting companies. Housing opportunities have increased with the utilization of the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) Program.
with efforts underway to expand the number of housing vouchers available in the Anchorage area. Efforts will be made by OCS offices around the state to seek out, identify and connect youth to relatives, tribal and other cultural connections for youth before leaving custody.

The annual educational conference also acquaints alumni with vocational training programs, apprenticeship opportunities as well as Alaska’s Job Corps program. For youth in other regions that are unable to attend the annual education conferences, RILS provide resources, training, and referrals to eligible youth. During 2014, in order to provide educational training and options to our rural youth and staff, mini educational conferences were planned in Bethel, Juneau, and Fairbanks as well as a joint conference for Anchorage and Wasilla youth and alumni.

6. Make available vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary training and education, to youths who have aged out of foster care

Youth that have been in state or tribal custody on or after their 16th birthday and youth that have exited foster care as adults or who were adopted or entered a guardianship after age 16 and have obtained either a high school diploma or a GED qualify for Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds. To date, all youth who applied for funding and met the requirements received ETV funding. Assistance in applying for ETV funds is provided by the RILS and the Youth Education Coordinator at the Child Welfare Academy.

Future plans include continued collaboration with UAA-Child Welfare Academy to administer the ETV Program and building upon what is currently available to youth. It is anticipated that youth participation in the program will increase up to 40% in 2015. Efforts are underway to secure additional Presidential Tuition Waivers through the University of Alaska, increasing to 15 from the 12 currently awarded.

7. Provide the services to youth who, after attaining 16 years of age, has left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption.

Alaska serves all youth who have either exited foster care after age 18 or entered into adoption or guardianship after reaching the age of 16. In each of the older youth adoption packets there is information given on the IL Services and how to contact a program specialist.

Serving Youth Across the State

Ensure that all political subdivisions in the State are appropriately served by the program.

The Office of Children’s Services is divided into five regions. Each region has a Regional Independent Living Specialist (RILS) assigned to work with youth. Although the larger regions have more community resources available for foster youth and alumni, the IL Program makes every effort to provide equitable distribution of services and funding. The IL Program has regularly scheduled life skills activities and training opportunities for the youth and alumni that reside in each of the regional office areas: Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks, Bethel, and Wasilla. Youth in rural areas are completing life skills training by DVDs. Efforts will continue to include youth in tribal custody as part of Alaska’s IL Program.

Serving Youth of Various Ages and States of Achieving Independence

Describe how youth of various ages and at various states of achieving independence are to be served; describe how the State is serving specific age groups; and identify any State statutory or administrative barriers which need to be eliminated or amended to allow the State to serve a broader range of eligible youth.

Alaska has not identified any statutory or administrative barriers that impact providing services to youth.

For youth under the age of 16, case planning, encompasses safety, stability and permanency guide the work in their cases. Protective Services Specialists make referrals, conduct family searches, and match the youth to appropriate mental health, medical and educational supports depending on their special needs. Youth are also referred to our mentorship grantee to make lasting matches with a committed adult. Every six months the assigned CPS worker, Guardians ad Litem, supervisors, permanency specialists, placement providers,
and supports meet to review the case plan for the youth. Recommendations are made to meet special needs, future goals and permanency.

Once a youth reaches the age of 16, they are eligible for services within the Independent Living Program. The youth are provided information about the IL Program and given assistance in identifying and accessing needed services. In addition, for youth age 16 and older, it is state policy that the youth participate in yearly the Life Skills Assessment for information gathering purposes. The results of this assessment are then recorded in the case file and are to become a part of the youth’s case plan. Also for youth age 16 and older, the RILS, case worker, and youth will meet to develop a transition plan specifically addressing the strengths and needs of the youth in regards to their transitional living goals.

These services take into account the special needs of the youth and goals are identified to promote success in education, finance, housing, work, and other areas identified to promote self-sufficiency. For young adults who continue to be in custody after age 18 to 20, case management, face to face visits and strategic transition planning continues. RILS provide monthly trainings/activities for youth age 16 and above which focuses on areas that support self-sufficiency and independent living skills. Experts in the area of finance, budgeting, car repair and transportation, education, mental health support and housing give advice and presentations at these activities.

There are 3 state-wide retreats planned yearly for youth ages 16 and above; including alumni. These retreats give youth and alumni opportunities to make connections, gain strength and focus, receive education on housing, finance, community supports, post-secondary educational opportunities, and ability to be heard by voicing concerns and strengths within the system. There are also educational conferences which promote on-going focus on educational options within the state of Alaska and outside, funding sources, directions and pathways to begin the process of planning in order to make goals a reality.

All qualified youth who have a high school diploma or a GED are eligible for ETV funds. In addition, youth up to age 23 are eligible for ETV funds provided they began their education prior to turning 21 years. For youth still in state custody, assistance may include funding for categories such as education, employment, extra-curricular activities, and cultural events. For foster care alumni, often times services are needed to assist alumni to achieve post-secondary education, housing, and employment. IL funds are available to meet these needs and are available for such diverse purchases as transportation, emergency food, and initial housing needs. Alaska’s IL Program provides short term housing as described below.

Room and Board

States are required to certify that no more than 30 percent of their allotment of Federal funds will be expended for room and board for youth who left foster care because they attained 18 years of age but have not yet attained 21 years of age. The State must have developed a reasonable definition of “room and board” and provide the definition in the CFSP. Also include a description of the approach(as) being used to make room and board available to youth ages 18 through 20.

Obtaining adequate housing can be a major problem for youth leaving custody due to high costs and limited availability. An ongoing Memorandum of Agreement established between Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and OCS provides additional housing options for youth aging out of foster care in 11 areas around the state through the TBRA Program. Foster care alumni can receive IL funds for emergency food while they seek access to food stamps. The funding is limited to $100 per month for no more than three months.

Alaska’s IL Program defines room and board as short term financial assistance for housing costs used for youth to access or maintain stable housing. One time only financial assistance is available for crisis housing. Short term emergency funds are available for the purchase of food.
The IL Program provides short term financial assistance for housing costs for qualified youth that are employed, attending training, or actively seeking employment. The funding is allocated at 100% of housing costs for the first two months or 100% of housing costs for one month plus 100% of housing deposit. An additional two months of housing costs can be accessed at 50% of the costs for one month, and at 25% of the costs for one month. Crisis housing assistance is available one time only and cannot exceed the amount of one month’s housing costs. Alaska has never exceeded 30% of the Federal allotment.

A court may grant a resumption of state custody that does not extend beyond a person’s 21st birthday if the person is in need of out-of-home care to avoid personal harm, because of a person’s severe emotional disturbance, mental disability, physical disability, homelessness, the person is completing an educational or vocational program or otherwise improve the person’s successful transition to independent living. Upon coming into custody the person and RILS will develop a transition plan with goals and services to promote self sufficiency. This person will be placed in a licensed foster care placement. This option has led to young adults that may have previously been homeless or incarcerated, now, attending post-secondary education and increased stability in educational programs.

Medicaid Coverage
Discuss how the state utilizes, or plans to utilize, the option to expand Medicaid to provide services to youth ages 18 to 20 years old that have aged out of foster care.
Beginning January 1, 2014, the Affordable Care Act created a new mandatory Medicaid coverage group for former foster care children. To be eligible for Medicaid under this category, an individual must:

Be at least age 18 and under the age of 26;

Have been in state or tribal foster care in Alaska and enrolled in Medicaid upon reaching age 18 or any higher age at which the state or tribe’s foster care ended.

The eligibility determination for the Former Foster Care category is not automatic. When a foster care child in Alaska ages out of foster care, he or she will need to reapply for Medicaid if they want continued benefits. To qualify for Medicaid under this category, the individual has to have received both foster care and Medicaid in Alaska when the individual aged out of foster care.

Trust Funds
Describe the design of the State’s trust fund program for youth, if applicable.
Alaska does not offer a state trust fund. Alaska does have a permanent fund dividend program. When a dividend is received on behalf of a youth it is placed in a trust account and released after the age of 18 with a court order. These funds may be released if the youth needs assistance that OCS is unable to provide, however, court action is required to release any funding during their time in care.

Report activities performed in the past year and planned for the upcoming year to coordinate services with other “federal and state programs for youth (especially transitional living programs funded under Part B of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974,) abstinence programs, local housing programs, programs for disabled youth, (especially sheltered workshops,) and school-to-work programs offered by high schools or local workforce agencies” in accordance with section 477(b)(3)(F) of the Act.
The IL Program Collaborates and partners with Department of Labor, Alaska Finance Housing Corp, Covenant House, School Districts all around the state, legal partners, Tribes, the UAA Child Welfare Academy, and the Alaska Center for Resource Families to promote the best outcomes for our youth. Housing within Anchorage and in 11 communities statewide has been increased to meet the on-going housing needs. Partnership with Covenant House provides emergency shelter options as well as case management for our homeless young adults in Anchorage. Our tribes are using the ETV funding more consistently for Alaska Native youth in tribal custody. The Court Improvement Project (CIP) listens to the voice of youth as experts in permanency and needs to be self sufficient which have led to positive changes
youth in care. Collaboration with UAA-Child Welfare Academy has led to more young adults attending post-secondary education and completing programs. These collaborative efforts will continue on in to the future, with additional outreach expected as we continue to develop services for this population. In 2015, the IL Program will work closely with the other Service Array Programs to expand outreach and establish new partnerships in the area of post-secondary education; career preparation; and housing and household management supports. These services were identified by youth as priority supports during their transition to adulthood. While the IL Program will continue to work in all service areas financed through Chafee, it is anticipated that these priority supports will be the most utilized and impactful for youth in transition. See the Service Array Work Plan (Appendix C) to review the goals and objectives of the section in relation to each individual program. Activities specific to the IL Program will support the goals and objectives will be outlined in a separate work plan and tracked throughout the planning period. All reports of progress will be reported on in both plans as goals and objectives are achieved.

**Education and Training Vouchers Program**

Describe the State’s methods of operating the voucher program efficiently and provide assurance that the State will comply with the specified conditions.

When a youth reaches 16 years of age, a transition plan is developed. The RILS use this opportunity to discuss post-secondary education and ETV funds. When a youth wishes to access ETV funds, a packet is completed and submitted to the RILS to ensure the youth meets the qualifications. The RILS and the Youth Education Coordinator at the UAA- Child Welfare Academy are available to assist youth to complete the application packet if needed. The packet is reviewed by the RILS and the Independent Living Program Coordinator.

If the youth meets the qualifications, funds are sent to the qualified post-secondary education and training center to cover the cost of tuition, fees, books, room and board. As mentioned above, Alaska has been able to fund all ETV applicants to date. Youth receive more direct, on-campus support and have someone to assist with the struggles of attending college and securing resources for their education.

**Collaboration with other Private and Public Agencies**

Discuss how the state involves the public and private sectors in helping adolescents in foster care achieve independence.

There has been rapid growth in many service areas and in participation on work groups related to services for transition aged youth. Our collaborations have been critical in expanding the much needed services to support youth in their transition to adulthood. The array of services through collaborations includes:

- **University of Alaska** - Providing 12 Presidential Tuition Waivers annually to youth previously or currently in foster care
- **Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)** - Provided 55 housing vouchers in select communities to support youth transitioning out of care
- **Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA)** - Continues to host Independent Living Retreats for youth in care and alumni of the foster care system.
- **FosterClub** – Sponsored two youth from Alaska to attend the FosterClub All-Star program in the summer of 2014. Youth will participate in activities to increase their leadership toolkit.
- **Court Improvement Project (CIP)** – Participation on a statewide CIP Independent Living subcommittee focused on improvements to the services offered to older youth receiving state services.
- **Tribal/State Collaboration Group** – Provides ongoing information and guidance related to Chafee/ETV services for youth in Tribal custody.
• **Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP)** – Developing connections to family support services for former and current foster youth who are parenting.
• **Covenant House Alaska** – Youth homeless shelter in Anchorage, AK.
• **Big Brothers/Big Sisters** – Providing mentorship services to youth in foster care.

These collaborative efforts will continue on into the future, with additional outreach expected as we continue to develop services for this population.

**Consultation and Collaboration with Tribes**

Describe how the State consulted and coordinated with a wide range of stakeholders, including youth, other Federal and State programs for youth, and Tribes. Specifically describe how the State consulted and coordinated with each Indian tribe in the State to ensure that benefits and services under Chafee will be available to Indian children on the same basis as to other children. Address each specific area identified in the PI about which States are to consult and coordinate.

In order to ensure Chafee benefits and services are available to Native children in tribal custody, meetings have been held annually with letters and emails to follow up. In addition to seeking tribal input, the IL Program seeks input from the state’s youth advisory group, Facing Foster Care in Alaska. In the upcoming years, the IL Coordinator will attend the TSCG meetings in Juneau to discuss the available services. Quarterly teleconference meetings have been set up in order for tribes to ask questions and receive current program information.

Describe any activities undertaken to involve youth (up to age 21) in State agency efforts such as the DFSR/PIP process and the agency improvement planning efforts.

OCS Senior Leadership and IL Program staff continued to collaborate with FFCA on many projects in FY14. Quarterly leadership meetings allowed for joint planning and identification of joint goals and projects. A contract for structured Independent Living Retreats was awarded to FFCA in FY14, funding the coordination and staffing of two IL Program Retreats in the year. Through the agendas of these retreats, the IL Program and FFCA can provide instruction and facilitate feedback from the youth around efforts and priorities. Youth participants provided direct feedback to the goals and priorities of the FY15-FY19 Child and Family Services Plan over the next five years. A permanency summit including tribes, youth, OCS staff and managers, and community partners is being planned for November 2014 with the assistance of FFCA.

**Determining Eligibility for Benefits and Services**

Address how the State will use objective criteria to determine eligibility benefits and services, and for ensuring fair and equitable treatment of benefit recipients.

In order to be eligible for independent living services, Alaska has established that youth must be in foster on or after turning 16 years of age. Youth in foster care, youth who have exited foster care to guardianships or adoption after age 16, youth in tribal custody who have reached age 16, and alumni of foster care who exited foster care as adults also qualify for independent living services. This includes youth in tribal and state custody. Although more community resources are available for IL recipients in the larger areas, funds are dispersed based on need.

**Training**

Provide information on specific training planned for FY 2015 – 2019 in support of the goals and objectives of the State’s CFCIP. This information may be incorporated into the training plan section of the CFSP, and noted as CFCIP training.

The Regional Independent Living Specialists will continue to provide training to OCS staff in their region. RILS also recruits youth and alumni to participate in the training. New staff orientation includes training on the needs of IL youth and the resources available to youth at Covenant House Alaska in the Anchorage region. The IL Program will work with the resource family training grantee to further incorporate independent living components into their training curriculum. The RILS will work with FFCA to recruit...
youth panels to assist in training foster parents in their regions. The IL Program will offer training to legal partners; CASA volunteers and Guardians ad Litem, tribes, community mental health programs that coordinate treatment team plans with OCS for older youth, as well as hold trainings as requested by the community and regional offices.

**National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)**

The Independent Living Program Coordinator and OCS data staff attended both NYTD conferences and continue to keep themselves abreast of all technical changes. All youth that are part of the baseline cohort will continue to be surveyed. In an effort to ensure that youth age 19 and 21 complete the survey, IL staff will continue to make individual contact after the survey has been mailed.
SECTION 7 - ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

STANDARDS FOR CASEWORKER VISITS AND MONTHLY CASEWORKER VISIT FORMULA GRANTS

OCS policy requires that all children with an open case are visited and seen by an OCS worker at least once a month, or more frequently if needed to help meet the child’s needs. The majority of the visits must take place in the home in which the child resides. All visits should be in person, face to face, and the child must be seen alone for a portion of each visit. Children who live out of state will have at least once a month telephonic contact with the assigned worker, and for children placed out of state in foster care or with unlicensed relatives, the Deputy ICPC Administrator will request monthly visits with written reports. For a child placed in an out-of-state residential facility, face-to-face visits with the child are required every six months, and the assigned worker will have unsupervised phone contact with the child once a month to discuss the child’s placement, activities on the case plan, and any safety or well being issues.

During each visit, the worker will discuss in an age appropriate manner or assess: the child’s safety in the home in which they live, the appropriateness of the placement, the child’s permanency goal and time frames for implementing the goal, and services and activities in the case plan. The worker will reassess the child’s initial needs and assess their ongoing needs. The initial assessment of needs includes making an inquiry to the child if the services and activities in the case plan are still meaningful and helpful to the child. Conducting ongoing assessment of needs means determining through discussion with the child if there are other areas that need to be worked on or addressed through services and included on the case plan. These areas of inquiry should encompass the child’s functioning including mental health needs, physical health needs, educational needs, social needs, recreational needs, family relationships, and adjustment to the out of home placement setting.

Alaska plans to continue to use the Monthly Caseworker Visit Grant over the next five years to supplement the caseworker travel budget in the northern and western areas of state where a high number of children and their families who reside in rural, remote villages and monthly caseworker visits require expensive air travel by bush plane.

ADOPTION INCENTIVE PAYMENTS

*Describe the activities that the state plans to take over the next five years to support children adopted from other countries, including the provision of adoption and post-adoption supports.*

OCS and the grantee will develop an improved system to track services utilization specific to families and children from private and international adoptions.

*Describe the services the state expects to provide to children and families using Adoption Incentives funds.*

Adoption incentive funds will continue to be utilized to enhance services to promote safety, permanency, and well-being for children. Support grants that aid children in achieving permanency through timely completion of adoption home studies will continue through the use of adoption incentive funds. Support services to pre- and post-adoptive families, through the provision of adoption support services will continue through the use of adoption incentive funds.
Describe the state’s plan to ensure timely expenditure of the funds.

Funds will be expended for adoption-related child welfare purposes, including:
  · post-adoption support services, including support groups for adoptive families, information and referral services, trauma informed training, and crisis intervention services.
  · intensive training and preparation for potentially permanent homes for special needs children who are legally free.
  · recruitment of adoptive homes for children who may not be reunited with their parents, including through adoption or guardianship;
  · services to assist a youth in foster care to make a successful transition to adulthood.
  · training or conferences to improve adoption casework.
  · adoption assistance payments,
  · improved adoption homes studies,
  · provision of services to reunite a child in foster care with his/her parents and for services to maintain the reunification;
  · Primary prevention services, including home visiting programs and community optional preventive services.

Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Activities (Applicable States only)
OCS submitted and application for a waiver demonstration project on February 28, 2014 and withdrew its application on June 6, 2014.

Financial Information
Reference CFS-101 - Part I; CFS 101 - Part II; CFS101 - Part III. Appendix D.

Payment Limitations – Title IV-B, Subpart I
  · Alaska spent $0 of FFY2005 Title IV-B, Subpart I funds for child care, foster care maintenance and adoption assistance payments.
  · Alaska used $0 of non-federal funds for foster care maintenance payment as match for the FFY2005 Title IV-B, Subpart I award.
  · Alaska spent $0 of Title IV-B, Subpart I funds for administrative costs.

Targeted Plans within the CFSP
The following plans are attached to this submission.
  · Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan
  · Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan
  · Disaster Plan
  · Training Plan