

Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children Strategic Plan Progress Report: Year One

Introduction

In May 2016, the strategic plan Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children 2016-2020 was finalized. Shortly thereafter, priority work groups were formed and work plans were developed. In October of 2016, a steering committee was established to prioritize and oversee the plan's implementation. The committee convened in January 2017 for a two day work session to ensure implementation fidelity. Work group leads shared successes and challenges in each priority area. Members felt if priorities were identified, it would help focus the work. The following goals were selected for 2017:

1. Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation
2. Tribal Self Governance
3. Tribal Consultation
4. Branding: Messaging / Education

After the goals were identified, a review of the 132 objectives/tactics outlined in the plan was conducted to determine how and/or if it supports one of the four goals listed above. The work group plans will be modified to streamline the focus areas and remove any duplicate efforts.

Progress to Date

Since the implementation of the plan, the following are highlights of our progress.

Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation: Although this is a strategic plan goal it applies to the entire state as demonstrated by the passing of Resolution 29 during the Alaska Federation of Natives conference. DHSS put forth the idea of making this a "State of Alaska" effort which was favorably received by other departments. Liz Medicine Crow stated that First Alaskans Institute is willing to help make this a priority.

Tribal Self Governance: The state obtained permission for a sole source contract to hire a negotiator funded by both the Tribes and state to explore service delivery to children and families. The first joint negotiation meeting was held on April 19th with monthly meetings continuing through September. The goal is to report significant progress on this very important topic at the October 2017 Alaska Federal of Natives conference.

Tribal Consultation: A draft policy for DHSS is under review. The SOA Tribal Liaison group will also review the policy and draft an executive order as that group is also looking at institutionalizing Tribal consultation and recognition. Consultation is planned for November 2-3, 2017.

Branding/Messaging and Education: Development and implementation of communication strategies are underway. In October, copies of the strategic plan were sent to 229 Tribes and 15 Tribal Corporations. There have been numerous *Front Line* articles (OCS's newsletter), along with presentations at the BIA Providers Conference, Tanana Chiefs Conference Summit, and most recently at the National Indian Child Welfare Conference. Additionally, some Tribal partners are writing articles for their Tribal newsletters.

Tribal State Collaboration Goals

Reduce Disproportionality

Enhance Tribal State
Relationships

Information Sharing

New Initiatives

Training

Authentic Partnerships

Increase ICWA Preference
Placements

Increase Number of
ICWA Foster Homes

Increase Reunification
Rates/Decrease Re-Entry
Rates

Increase Placement
Stability

Decrease Repeat
Maltreatment

Increase Culturally
Appropriate Service
Delivery (In-Home and
Out-of-Home)

Culturally Appropriate Services and Supports: While this priority was not selected as a “goal” for 2017, steady progress continues to develop a resource guide that will better equip OCS case workers with knowledge, information, and understanding about culturally specific services and supports to help our Alaska Native families stay connected to who they are. It is anticipated that this guide will be in final draft by June 30, 2017.

In addition to the objectives and tactics identified in the plan, OCS has developed new processes and implemented practice changes to address recommendations outlined in the report: “Ending Violence So Children Can Thrive”. The following efforts were designed to increase Tribal/State partnerships, support Tribes to provide services to their citizens in closest proximity to their community, increase ICWA Preference Placements (children placed with relatives or Tribal members) and ICWA foster homes, and decrease disproportionality:

- Two Tribal Title IV-E Maintenance Agreements are in the early stages of implementation. These agreements provide Tribes access to funds for cost associated with foster care, adoption and guardianship services, as well as recognizing the Tribes’ inherent sovereignty to provide for their children and families.
- Out-of-preference-placement review meetings are conducted early and regularly. During these meetings, the ICWA specialist and team conduct an in depth review of diligent search efforts for children to ensure that all preference placement options have been considered.
- A statewide process is in place for Tribes/Tribal Entities to request immediate permanent placement on behalf of extended family; and/or family friends and relatives may request immediate permanent placement at any time during an open case.
- As of January 1, 2017, OCS foster care licensing workers are actively assisting applicants who have been denied a foster care license, due to a barrier crime or condition, with applying for a variance if needed to achieve licensure.
- Tribal licensing agents are able to access child protection background checks for Tribal licensed foster homes. Currently there are over 100 Tribal licensed foster homes. It is OCS’ intent to develop a system that allows the state to place and pay for children in state custody in Tribal licensed foster homes. Payment regulations are in draft.
- Training is currently underway on a newly established process to better partner with ICWA workers to conduct safety evaluations of prospective foster homes and/or unlicensed relative homes to expedite placement of children.
- In order to keep children with their relatives, an emergency relief support program was designed for the Southeast region to provide time-limited financial support to relatives providing unlicensed foster care to children in OCS. Relatives participating in the ERS receive a monthly support payment in the amount of \$500.00 per child, per placement, for up to 3 months, while they pursue licensure or TANF programs. Payments will support families until they are able to complete their foster care licensing process or find another option to support the children in care. This program is now available in Western and Northern regions with hopes to extend to Southcentral and Anchorage in the coming year.
- ORCA design modifications, on-line web reports, and on demand reports were revised per Tribal input to:
 - Increase the accuracy of placement preference data
 - Accurately capture ICWA foster homes
 - Establish and maintain a process for Tribes/Tribal Entities to receive out of home placement reports on a monthly basis

Current Unresolved Items

Waiver of Sovereign Immunity: Although there has been a work group evaluating alternatives to the requirement that all Tribes must sign a waiver of sovereign immunity to receive state funds, to date resolution has been elusive. Additional information pertaining to the waiver requirement specific to the Tribal Title IV-E Administration and Short Term Training contracts has been submitted for review and consideration.

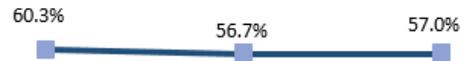
Information Sharing on Foster Homes Licensed by both the Tribe and State: Progress has been made in sharing information between the Tribes and State during the initial licensing process. The collaborative efforts have resulted in an increase of both Tribal and state licensed ICWA homes. It has been noted that applicants desiring both Tribal/state licensure have expressed frustration in the need to complete two separate licensing packets. Statutory changes are likely needed to further simplify the licensing process and for the Tribe to have access to privileged information.

Progress Towards Improving Outcomes

Members of the steering committee reviewed the Tribal/State Data Indicators through the lens of the *Ending Violence So Children Can Thrive* report. The following highlights progress towards select goals of the Tribal State Collaboration Group and the disparities related to Alaska Native children involved in the child welfare system. Over the last three years, disproportionality decreased by 2.7%, placement with kin increased 6%, while children placed in out of preference placement decreased by 6%.

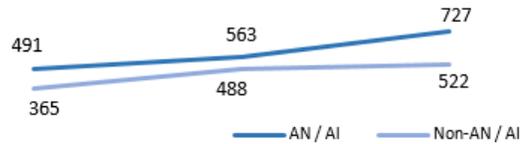
DISPROPORTIONALITY

Racial Disproportionality		2014	2015	2016
AN / AI	#	1952	2105	2351
	%	60.3%	56.7%	57.0%



PLACEMENT

Kinship Placements		2014	2015	2016
AN / AI	#	491	563	727
	%	42%	42%	48%
Non-AN / AI	#	365	488	522
	%	45%	47%	48%



Out of Preference Placements		2014	2015	2016
AN / AI	#	412	474	440
	%	35%	36%	29%



Although there has been an increase of ICWA foster homes, if efforts to implement a process to place DHSS custody children in Tribal foster homes becomes a reality, an additional 70 fully licensed ICWA homes could become available. Currently there are over 100 Tribal foster homes, 30 of these homes are also state licensed. Planning efforts are underway for an October 2017 licensing summit with the goal of providing Tribes the tools to license foster homes in accordance with federal requirements.

ICWA Foster Homes		2014	2015	2016
ICWA	#	n/a	306	348
Non-ICWA	#	n/a	944	1043

