

## **Alaska Court System CINA Court Improvement Program** **Strategic Plan FFYs 2017 – 2021**

**State Name:** Alaska

**Strategic Plan Submitted:** November 22, 2016 (revised June 28, 2017)

**Timeframe Covered by Strategic Plan:** October 1, 2016 – September 30, 2021

**CIP Mission Statement:** Improve the CINA process and outcomes for all participants.

**Priority Area #1:** Continuously improve the quality of CINA court proceedings in Alaska, including hearings and reviews, to ensure due process for all parties, provide for proper judicial oversight, and meaningful engagement by all parties.

**Need Driving Activities & Data Source:** CIP believes that its current CINA Core Curriculum project complements well with this project to continuously improve the quality of CINA court proceedings, with the concept that high-quality, multi-disciplinary training for all CINA practitioners will assist in ensuring the provision of high-quality CINA hearings and reviews. The likely data sources for the project will be related to the NACC's Training Evaluation toolkit (or similar measures), specifically those that measure the practice outcomes of training among practitioners.

**Theory of Change:** Increased overall baseline skills, knowledge and competency of all CINA practitioners (including judges) will lead to better quality court hearings and reviews, in raising the bar for child protection and advocacy by all professionals in the child welfare system.

**Project Description:** CIP has been finalizing its CINA Core Curriculum modules and working on training evaluation measures. Although OCS has consulted with CIP about possibly combining administrative case reviews with existing CINA court hearings, CIP will make further efforts to link this project, including data-sharing, with any quality assurance strategies by OCS.

**CIP Funding Stream:** Basic grant and Training grant

**Collaborative Partners:** Attorney General's Office, Public Defender Agency, Office of Public Advocacy, Tribal representatives, Office of Children's Services

**Timeframe:** October 1, 2016 and ongoing

**Anticipated Outputs/Outcomes and Results of Activity:** With enhanced competence of all CINA practitioners, as indicated by the practice outcome measurements from the CINA Core Curriculum project, the quality of CINA hearings and reviews will be continuously improved statewide.

**Goals:** The primary goals are – increased baseline proficiency of child welfare practitioners and enhanced quality and engagement in court hearings/reviews. The specific measurable data/targets will be informed by NACC evaluation toolkit (or similar metrics). CIP has not yet obtained an evaluation toolkit and does not currently have this detailed information available.

**Evaluation:** CIP has had preliminary discussions with NACC staff regarding their Training Evaluation toolkit. CIP anticipates utilizing the NACC toolkit, or similar measures, in order to both evaluate the effectiveness of its training modules and to help measure the quality of CINA hearings and reviews.

**Project status:** ongoing; update – CIP will attend the training and evaluation workshop offered by CBCC in Seattle in September of 2018 to continue to learn more about designing training evaluations.

**Priority Area #2:** Reduce the length of time in out-of-home care and minimize barriers/delays in permanency for children in state custody in Alaska.

**Need Driving Activities & Data Source:** CIP and OCS had previously discussed a joint project in this priority area. Then, in preparation for the Annual CIP meeting in August 2016, CIP and OCS conducted further review and determined to work on a joint project, the Permanency Priority Project (P3), with the goals listed above. Subject to possible revision, the initial population for the project is those children placed with relatives who have been in out-of-home placement for at least two years. The project will be data-driven, with primary data and evaluation sources from the Court System and OCS, as well as other CINA stakeholder agencies.

**Theory of Change:** While details of the theory of change are still being developed in conjunction with OCS, thus far CIP and OCS believe that enhanced judicial oversight and additional focus by CINA practitioners on this specific

cohort of children in care will help to expedite the resolution of their dependency cases with a safe permanency outcome.

**Project Description:** CIP and OCS, along with other CINA partners, will jointly use available data and qualitative measures to reduce barriers in permanency, initially prioritizing the cohort of children who are placed with relatives and have been in out-of-home placement for at least two years.

**CIP Funding Stream:** Basic grant

**Collaborative Partners:** Attorney General's Office, Public Defender Agency, Office of Public Advocacy, Tribal representatives, Office of Children's Services

**Timeframe:** October 1, 2016 and ongoing

**Anticipated Outputs/Outcomes and Results of Activity:** With the Permanency Priority Project, CIP believes that its joint efforts with OCS (and other partners) will lead to a substantial reduction in permanency delays, with a focus on children placed with relatives and in out of home placement for at least two years. CIP and OCS would then take lessons and strategies learned and apply them to the broader population of all children in state custody, in hopes of reducing the length of time to resolution of their dependency cases.

**Goals:** Subject to additional discussions to finalize the project, CIP expects that the goals of the project will be accomplished by both enhanced judicial oversight (e.g., more frequent review hearings) and more in-depth, multi-disciplinary review of these children's cases (facilitated by OCS).

**Evaluation:** Although specific data/measures are still being determined, in general CIP and OCS will look to see that the population percentage of this cohort compared to all children in care is reduced over time, as well as the time to safe and final permanency for this cohort is being reduced.

**Project status:** Ongoing. With the technical assistance provided at the CIP Region 9 & 10 meeting in Seattle in May 2017, CIP was able to further refine the scope and goals of its joint project with OCS, as well as concrete next steps to move the project forward. Update: We have selected a pilot site where we will focus on expediting permanency for children in these situations. We have a Presiding Judge in our 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District who is championing this project, and we are piloting a new Case Management Order for CINA cases which she has created. There will be an emphasis on locating fathers and parents' relatives earlier on in cases through increased judicial inquiry into the topic. Judges in the pilot site will also use a modified therapeutic court model in the CINA cases, to increase parental engagement. In addition, we are working to update a bench card/judicial checklist on permanency for judges to utilize in our pilot/test site.

Plans are in the works to provide additional training to judges on permanency/timelines.

**Priority Area #3:** Enhance the quality of parent representation in Alaska and the meaningful engagement of parents in the child welfare system as a whole.

**Need Driving Activities & Data Source:** Increasing caseloads and staff turnover lead to challenges for public counsel agencies in ensuring the provision of consistent, timely, high-quality legal representation of parents in dependency cases. CIP expects that the main data source will be the NACC evaluation toolkit (or similar set of measures) discussed above regarding Priority Area #1.

**Theory of Change:** The specifics of the theory of change are still being developed in partnership with the Public Defender Agency (PDA) and the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA), as well as other CINA stakeholder partners. CIP expects, however, that the competency of parent attorneys will be increased via CIP-hosted trainings and that parent engagement will be enhanced primarily through the support of a new parent mentor program in Alaska.

**Project Description:** Ensure that PDA and OPA parent attorneys have access to all of CIP's CINA Core Curriculum module trainings. (note: CIP hosted a 3-day Legal module training, February 22-24, in Anchorage and 10 PDA & OPA parent attorneys will be attending from around the state, with CIP funding their travel costs.) Additionally, CIP will continue to work with Alaska Legal Services (ALSC), and PDA/OPA partners, to develop a parent mentor program in Alaska. Further, CIP will support PDA & OPA efforts to ensure the timely appointment of counsel for parents, with the goal of having counsel available for a parent at the first "temporary custody" (shelter care) hearing.

**CIP Funding Stream:** Basic grant and Training grant

**Collaborative Partners:** Attorney General's Office, Public Defender Agency, Office of Public Advocacy, Tribal representatives, Office of Children's Services, and non-profit Alaska Legal Services.

**Timeframe:** October 1, 2016 and ongoing

**Anticipated Outputs/Outcomes and Results of Activity:** CIP hopes to see greater parent satisfaction with their representation in dependency proceedings, as well as parents having a meaningful voice in their child welfare case overall.

An increased level of engagement by parents will be supported by the positive modeling of “graduate” parents in the parent mentoring program.

**Goals:** CIP believes that these complementary projects will lead to cases being resolved earlier, as well as the likelihood of fewer contested matters during the life of dependency cases as parties are able to amicably resolve issues.

**Evaluation:** CIP expects to conduct surveys regarding parent satisfaction with legal representation and will also explore the metrics of existing parent mentor programs (e.g. Washington state). CIP will also likely track the overall duration of dependency cases statewide, as well as the number of contested matters/proceedings in these cases over time and the attendance of parent counsel at initial court hearings.

**Project status:** Ongoing. CIP provided partial travel scholarships for parent attorneys to attend the ABA National Parent Attorney Conference in April 2017. Update: Parent attorneys attended the three day legal training three day training on “***Child in Need of Aid Laws, Roles & Responsibilities, Practices & Procedures,***” May 30 – June 1, 2018. It took place in our 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Fairbanks. We had approximately 30 participants from interior Alaska including Aniak, Fairbanks, Bethel, Barrow, Golovin, Kotzebue, and Unalakleet. We anticipate that parent attorneys will also attend our upcoming trainings in our 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District on the Indian Child Welfare Act and Community and Culture.

### **Data & Training Grant Activities**

For the **data grant**, CIP will continue to collaborate with OCS to collect and mutually exchange data and other information, working cooperatively to ensure safe and timely permanency for children in Alaska. The CIP Coordinator and CINA CMS Analyst have been invited by OCS management to become members of their existing CQI committee and to begin attending monthly meetings.

After reviewing baseline timeliness data, as well as nationwide dependency best practices, CIP committee will establish CINA timeliness performance goals and will promote awareness of these goals with CINA practitioners statewide. Additionally, CIP will request that a CINA data dashboard be included in the Court System’s E-Filing project to encourage judicial focus on timely case processing for CINA matters. The CMS Analyst attends E-Filing Governance Committee meetings to assist in the development of screens for clerical staff and

judges will utilize to process CINA cases electronically. The CINA CMS Analyst will continue to be involved in the development of the E-Filing system in order to be able to incorporate and integrate CIP best practices into case processing for CINA cases.

For the **training grant**, grant funds will be utilized (in addition to Basic grant funds) to support the full implementation of CINA Core Curriculum project (discussed in Priority Area #1 above). Since the beginning of the project, OCS has been a close partner in the development of the CINA Core Curriculum – this project is the cornerstone of CIP’s multi-disciplinary/cross-training efforts with OCS. With the content of all of the curriculum modules finalized, CIP intends to deliver the modules on a regional basis around the state, in an ongoing, rotating schedule.

CIP conducted a second pilot of the 3-day Legal module in February 2017 with 45 multidisciplinary participants from around the state. The next pilot rollout will occur in August 2017 for the Education Law module. Finally, beyond the curriculum program, CIP looks to provide critical, timely training to CINA stakeholders on an as-needed basis. For instance, CIP recently hosted a one-day Opioid Crisis & Child Protection Summit in Anchorage, with 53 multi-disciplinary attendees from around the state.

Update: CIP provided a three-day training, "***Forging Relationships to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes for Children and Families in Southeast Alaska.***" It was a collaboration between the Alaska Court Improvement Program and the Sitka Tribal Court Improvement Project. It took place in our 1st Judicial District in Sitka in the Fall of 2017. Three of our CINA Curriculum modules were presented: Community & Culture, Family Well-Being, and Services & Resources. We had approximately 60 participants from Southeast Alaska, including state court judges, tribal court judges, ICWA workers, tribal attorneys, Sitka Tribe administration and child protection workers, attorneys general, Child Welfare/Office of Children’s Services (OCS) social workers, guardians ad litem (GALs), and parents’ attorneys.

CIP provided a three day training on "***Child in Need of Aid Laws, Roles & Responsibilities, Practices & Procedures,***" May 30–June 1, 2018. It took place in our 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Fairbanks. We had approximately 30 participants from interior Alaska including Aniak, Fairbanks, Bethel, Barrow, Golovin, Kotzebue, and Unalakleet. Participants included judges, assistant

attorneys general, Office of Children's Services (OCS) social workers, guardians ad litem (GALs), ICWA workers, tribal attorneys, and parents' attorneys.

We plan to provide a two day training on the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and Community and Culture training modules of our CINA Curriculum in September of 2018 in our 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District. (A project description of the entire CINA Core Curriculum including all modules is attached). The two day training will be provided in collaboration with the Southcentral Regional Tribal-State group.