

**Tribal  
Survey Report  
2009**

**Department of Health and Social Services**

**Office of Children's Services**

## **Introduction**

The provision of Child Protective Services to families in Alaska is through the Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services. When the family is Alaska Native, the Office of Children's Services works with the tribe to ensure comprehensive services which meet the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act and that services are culturally sensitive.

The Office of Children's Services strives to ensure that children are able to remain in their own homes and coordinates all services efforts with the Tribe. When children must reside in an out-of-home placement, the Office of Children's Services, as part of its statutory child protection mandate, has authority to assume legal and physical custody of children. The agency will initiate and coordinate out-of-home placement with the Tribe. Relatives are the first consideration to provide care for children. The use of relative caregivers follows Indian Child Welfare Act guidelines in maintaining cultural continuity and family connections for children.

When children are placed in out-of-home care, the agency makes active efforts to reunite children with their families. The Office of Children's Services works collaboratively with families, Tribal groups, Guardians ad Litem, and foster parents to implement plans for services that meet the needs of children and parents.

Families throughout the state receive support and assistance from Tribal groups. This assistance and support helps to monitor the needs and progress of children and families. Tribal groups are encouraged to advocate and work collaboratively with the Office of Children's Services in providing services that are supportive of Alaska Native families.

In order to learn about the quality and effectiveness of the Office of Children's Services' efforts to work with Tribal groups, the Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a survey of Tribal groups. The survey made inquiries into active efforts by the Office of Children's Services, concurrent planning, and decision making for children and parents throughout the case. This information will be used to assist management in reviewing and improving programs within the Child Protective Services system.

### Survey Methods

The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children’s Services conducted a survey that was sent to members of Tribal groups throughout the state to solicit information and comments regarding service delivery of the Office of Children’s Services. An initial mailing and two follow-up mailings to non-respondents were conducted using a combination of the U.S. Postal Service and an internet-based survey service. The Tribal groups were assured that their responses would be combined with other respondents so that no individuals responding to the survey could be identified.

### Survey Respondents

There were 110 completed surveys received from the mailing of 225 surveys for a response rate of 49%. Responses were received from each region of the state. The number of surveys sent and the number of responses by each region are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

<b>Survey Responses by Region, Number, and Percent</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Sent</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Response</b>
Northern	80	35	44%
Southcentral	121	62	51%
Anchorage	6	3	50%
Southeast	18	10	56%
Total	225	110	49%

## Findings

Information gained from the survey has been tabulated and organized for presentation. The report presents each item of inquiry from the survey with a table of the results. At the end of the report a summary of comments received from the survey participants is presented.

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

Tribal groups were asked to identify which aspects of implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act they were involved in. Several of the Tribal groups indicated more than one area of ICWA involvement, thus the number of areas chosen and presented exceeds the number of survey participants who chose to answer this question. There were 110 survey respondents who answered this question. Survey participants were also provided an area to describe any other role they have in the implementation of ICWA. Other roles identified included working with Tribal courts, village administrator, ICWA Coordinator, and coordinating with the Office of Children's Services. Table 2 presents the responses.

**Table 2**

<b>Involvement of Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation by Number and Percent</b>		
<b>Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Formal Intervention by Tribe	90	82%
Court Appearances	47	43%
Provide Direct Services	42	38%
Other Roles Indicated	21	19%

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

Several of the respondents indicated they held more than one position within their agency. As a result, the number of positions reported exceeds the total number of those who responded to this survey question. There were 110 survey respondents who answered this question. The respondents were given an area to write in other positions they held. The positions described included Tribal Family Youth Specialist, Tribal Service Specialist, Council Member, and Tribal Children’s Services Worker.

**Table 3**

<b>Respondents’ Title of Position in Tribal Agency by Number and Percent</b>		
<b>Title of Position</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Social Services Director	13	12%
ICWA Worker	63	57%
Caseworker	5	5%
Administrative	12	11%
Other	23	21%
Not Employed in an Agency	16	15%

- **Collaboration between Tribal workers and the Office of Children’s Services in the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act has strengthened the quality of services for Alaska Native children.**

The Office of Children’s Services works with Tribal groups to ensure the provision of quality services to Alaska Native children. Tribes have resources and services that are available to Alaska Native families. Survey participants were asked their level of agreement with the statement that service collaboration has improved the quality of services to families. Table 4 presents the responses.

**Table 4**

<b>Service Collaboration Has Improved the Quality of Services by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	14%	69%	8%	6%	3%
Southcentral	62	10%	58%	22%	3%	7%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	20%	50%	0%	20%	10%
Total	110	12%	60%	17%	6%	6%

- **When it is necessary for Alaska Native children to come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children’s Services involves the Tribes in relative searches.**

When children come into the state’s custody, Tribal groups are a resource to the Office of Children’s Services and to families. By helping to locate extended family members, they enable the Office of Children’s Services to identify relatives to provide care for children who are in need of temporary out-of-home placement. Table 5 presents the responses.

**Table 5**

<b>Tribes are Involved in Relative Searches by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	20%	68%	6%	6%	0%
Southcentral	62	18%	58%	11%	11%	2%
Anchorage	3	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
Southeast	10	20%	50%	10%	10%	10%
Total	110	18%	61%	9%	10%	2%

- **When children come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children’s Services involves the Tribes in decisions regarding placement of Alaska Native children.**

Tribal groups often are aware of family networks and extended families within their own communities. When Alaska Native children come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children’s Services contacts the children’s Tribes to involve them in placement decisions. Table 6 presents the responses.

**Table 6**

<b>Tribes are Involved in Placement Decisions for Alaska Native Children by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	11%	60%	23%	3%	3%
Southcentral	61	12%	53%	16%	16%	3%
Anchorage	3	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
Southeast	10	20%	30%	20%	20%	10%
Total	109	12%	53%	18%	13%	4%

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

The Office of Children’s Services and the children’s Tribes work together to locate homes that meet ICWA requirements. This supports children’s cultural continuity and allows children to remain connected to their families’ traditions. Table 7 presents the responses.

**Table 7**

<b>Efforts are Made to Place Children in ICWA Preference Settings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	14%	63%	14%	6%	3%
Southcentral	61	15%	56%	18%	6%	5%
Anchorage	3	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
Southeast	10	30%	20%	30%	10%	10%
Total	109	16%	55%	17%	7%	5%

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

When children come into the state’s custody, the agency makes efforts to ensure siblings are placed together in foster care. The agency involves the Tribe in identifying homes where siblings are able to stay together. Table 8 presents the responses.

**Table 8**

<b>Siblings are Placed Together When Possible by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	23%	60%	17%	0%	0%
Southcentral	61	13%	59%	21%	7%	0%
Anchorage	3	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	50%	30%	10%	10%
Total	109	15%	59%	21%	4%	1%

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

The Office of Children’s Services seeks to involve Tribes in the ongoing management of cases and in the regular review of cases. To support Tribal involvement, the Tribal groups must receive timely notices of scheduled meetings and reviews. Table 9 presents the responses.

**Table 9**

<b>Tribes Received Timely Notice of Reviews and Meetings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	17%	54%	20%	9%	0%
Southcentral	61	5%	51%	18%	21%	5%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	0%	0%	67%
Southeast	10	0%	60%	20%	10%	10%
Total	109	8%	52%	18%	16%	6%

- **The administrative review process is helpful to parents to understand the changes and activities that need to occur and identify resources to assist them in the process.**

The Office of Children’s Services works with Tribes and families to ensure that services are identified for the family. The agency reviews cases every six months to monitor the ongoing need for services and participation by the family. Tribal workers are invited to attend the six-month administrative review. Table 10 presents responses.

**Table 10**

<b>The Administrative Review Process is Helpful to Parents by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	14%	66%	14%	3%	3%
Southcentral	61	8%	41%	35%	13%	3%
Anchorage	3	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	60%	30%	0%	10%
Total	109	9%	51%	27%	9%	4%

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

The Office of Children’s Services and Tribal representatives work with families to develop initial case plans. The Tribes also help to support and monitor the families’ progress throughout their involvement with OCS. Table 11 presents the responses.

**Table 11**

<b>Tribal Groups Participated in Initial Case Decisions by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	20%	57%	17%	6%	0%
Southcentral	61	10%	46%	24%	13%	7%
Anchorage	3	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	60%	0%	20%	20%
Total	109	12%	51%	19%	12%	6%

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

As families participate in services, there are decisions which need to be made regarding the ongoing case activities. Tribal groups are asked to participate in this process. Table 12 presents the responses.

**Table 12**

<b>Tribal Groups Participate in Ongoing Case Decisions by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	17%	66%	17%	0%	0%
Southcentral	60	14%	48%	20%	13%	5%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	60%	20%	0%	20%
Total	108	13%	55%	20%	7%	5%

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

When children are not able to be returned to their homes in a timely manner, an alternative goal is established to ensure the children achieve permanency in their lives. The alternate goal works in conjunction with the primary goal of reunification. Table 13 presents the responses.

**Table 13**

<b>Concurrent Planning is Used Effectively for Permanency by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	34	12%	47%	32%	6%	3%
Southcentral	60	4%	43%	40%	8%	5%
Anchorage	3	0%	34%	33%	33%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	30%	50%	10%	10%
Total	107	6%	43%	38%	8%	5%

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

The Office of Children’s Services conducts assessments to determine whether children can remain in their homes or must be removed while their parents address safety concerns. The agency will make active efforts to keep children in their own homes through the provision of services that are matched to meet the specific needs of the families. The Tribal worker is involved in identifying services that will aid the families. Table 14 presents the responses.

**Table 14**

<b>Active Efforts are Used to Reduce Risk of Harm to Children by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	14%	57%	20%	6%	3%
Southcentral	60	3%	52%	25%	15%	5%
Anchorage	3	34%	0%	0%	33%	33%
Southeast	10	10%	40%	30%	10%	10%
Total	108	8%	51%	23%	12%	6%

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

The agency works collaboratively with Tribal workers in seeking appropriate services for Alaska Native families. A family’s culture and values are recognized and respected through the agency’s efforts to engage the family in needed services. Table 15 presents the responses.

**Table 15**

<b>Work with Alaska Native Families Reflects Understanding of Cultural Values by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	35	9%	48%	26%	11%	6%
Southcentral	59	8%	34%	29%	24%	5%
Anchorage	3	33%	0%	0%	67%	0%
Southeast	10	0%	50%	20%	20%	10%
Total	107	8%	39%	26%	21%	6%

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

When families are referred to agencies to receive support and services, information about the areas the families will need to address should be forwarded to the Tribal agencies. This information should be sent in a timely manner to facilitate families receiving quality services. Table 16 presents the responses.

**Table 16**

<b>Referral Information is Sent in a Timely Manner by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	30	3%	60%	27%	7%	3%
Southcentral	56	4%	50%	21%	21%	4%
Anchorage	3	0%	34%	0%	33%	33%
Southeast	8	13%	25%	25%	25%	12%
Total	97	4%	51%	23%	17%	5%

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

The Office of Children’s Services shares information about the families’ circumstances with Tribal agencies through the referral process. The information provided to the agencies is specific to the families’ service needs to support the agencies’ assessments and case planning. Table 17 presents the responses.

**Table 17**

<b>Referral Information Supports Case Planning by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	30	7%	60%	27%	3%	3%
Southcentral	54	5%	48%	28%	15%	4%
Anchorage	3	0%	0%	67%	33%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	13%	12%	50%	12%
Total	95	6%	48%	27%	15%	4%

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

The workers at the Office of Children’s Services maintain contact with service providers to receive progress reports on families. It is vital that there is collaboration with Tribal providers to ensure families are making progress on their case plans. Table 18 presents the responses.

**Table 18**

<b>Regular Contact is Maintained with Tribal Providers by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	31	10%	64%	10%	13%	3%
Southcentral	56	6%	48%	18%	21%	7%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	0%	67%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	25%	37%	0%	25%
Total	98	7%	51%	16%	19%	7%

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

To provide services that are relevant to families, workers need to be knowledgeable about the families and the areas the families are working on. When workers are knowledgeable about their families, case planning with the families becomes more focused and enables the workers to accurately match services to families’ issues. Table 19 presents the responses.

**Table 19**

<b>Workers are Prepared and Knowledgeable about Their Cases by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	34	12%	68%	17%	3%	0%
Southcentral	62	3%	58%	19%	13%	7%
Anchorage	3	0%	33%	0%	67%	0%
Southeast	9	0%	45%	33%	11%	11%
Total	108	6%	59%	19%	11%	5%

- **Overall, the Office of Children’s Services and your agency or group have a strong working relationship that is supportive of children and families in the community in which you work.**

For agencies to be effective in the provision of support and services to families, the agencies must work collaboratively to meet the needs of families. This support enables families to progress through the behavioral changes that are needed. Table 20 presents the responses.

**Table 20**

<b>The Working Relationships between the Agencies are Stronger by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Northern	34	9%	71%	17%	0%	3%
Southcentral	62	7%	50%	27%	10%	6%
Anchorage	3	0%	0%	67%	33%	0%
Southeast	9	11%	34%	33%	11%	11%
Total	108	7%	54%	26%	7%	6%

## Respondent Comments

An area was provided for respondents to provide a written response to the following statement.

**It is of continuing concern to the Office of Children's Services and to Tribal groups that Alaska Native children and their families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare population. Would you please comment and share suggestions for ways or alternatives to placing children in the foster care system?**

There were responses by 60 survey participants. The following is a summary of the responses.

One respondent suggested that a system of foster care boarding houses in eight different parts of the state would allow children to be near their homes and also create jobs. Another respondent suggested alternative care in the villages or in regional areas. It was felt that small group homes might also work in the villages. It was also suggested that Alaska Native cultural foster homes be built in villages. It was felt that these homes could provide Native foods and activities for children. It was felt that children placed in these homes would learn survival skills such as camping, how to pick berries, and how to dry meat and fish.

There were concerns expressed that thorough background checks need to be conducted on families who wish to become foster parents. It was cautioned that just because a lengthy period of time has passed does not mean that an individual has changed their behavior and may still not be a safe place for children to be placed.

The increased use of in-home care was cited by many respondents as an important element in keeping children in their own homes. The use of wrap-around services to meet the complex needs of families was cited. Also, noted was the need for use of a home safety plan and to train ICWA workers in how to develop safety plans.

Preventing crises in homes was noted as an important means to avoid placing children in out-of-home care. Increasing the number of providers to deliver appropriate services such as parenting classes and domestic violence intervention services was identified as a means to support families.

Several responses identified the need for keeping siblings together when children must be placed in out-of-home care. The importance of placing children in Alaska Native homes where subsistence is practiced and that homes reflect the children's religion was stressed. Also identified for children in out-of-home care was the need to provide good services. Funding for counseling, clothing, and mental health services was cited as important.

The need for and importance of an active recruitment program for Alaska Native foster homes was stressed repeatedly by respondents. The respondents suggested providing incentives to foster parents such as drift nets for use during the summer. The Office of Children's Services was encouraged to use the support of Tribes through ICWA workers in assisting in cases. It was noted there needed to be increased information distributed to the villages about the foster care program.

Extensive relative searches were identified as a need. It was noted that it is important that workers not have preconceived beliefs about families and really look at the skills parents have to provide care for children. It was noted that ICWA workers could be partners in helping to identify relatives.

There were several concerns expressed regarding the workers' case loads at the Office of Children's Services. It was believed that the case loads are too high and do not allow workers to spend the needed time with families. It was believed this also contributes to poor communication between the Tribes and the Office of Children's Services.

It was noted that placing children out-of-home might be prevented by more careful evaluation of both parents' abilities to provide care for the children. When parents do not live together, careful evaluation may reveal that the children can safely stay with the other parent.

### **Additional Respondent Comments**

An area was provided at the end of the survey for respondents to comment on any other areas they felt would be helpful for the Office of Children's Services to know in their work with families.

Comments were received from 50 respondents. The following is a summary of the comments.

The importance of Tribes and the Office of Children's Services working together was stressed by many respondents. It was noted that communications need to be timely. The importance of workers returning the ICWA workers' calls was noted as well as the need for ongoing telephone communication with villages.

When workers travel to villages, it was noted that they should contact the Tribe or ICWA worker to let them know they are coming. When visiting in villages, it was noted that workers need to take their time to meet and talk with people and that sometimes they appear rushed.

The need to notify ICWA workers that a case staffing or court hearing is being held was noted as a concern. ICWA workers do not always know about staffings that are being held. A respondent reported that notices to the Tribe are routinely received approximately a week after the hearing.

Several comments were received noting the importance of notifying ICWA workers when investigations are being conducted. Workers need to know about the investigations so they can participate and the need to know the findings was also stressed. Comments were received regarding the importance of keeping the ICWA worker informed on the location of children who are in out-of-home care. There were concerns that children are moved and the ICWA worker does not know.

The importance of fully searching for relatives to ensure children are placed into Alaska Native homes was noted. The importance of locating relatives for adoptive placement was noted.

A concern was expressed that parents need to have information that allows them to fully understand the processes and procedures of the Office of Children's Services. It was noted that case plans need to be fully explained to parents. Case goals need to be realistic and parents need to understand what they need to do in order to have their children returned to them. Assistance to help families pay for services was identified as a need.

There were several suggestions that Tribes would like to be included in trainings that are held by the Office of Children's Services. Respondents indicated they would like to be included when information is distributed on the trainings.

### **Appreciation to Respondents**

The response and thoughtful comments to this survey by our Tribal partners are deeply appreciated by the Office of Children's Services and will be incorporated by management and staff in our work to continue to improve our ability to assist families and children.