

# Resource Family Advisory Board

## Face to Face Meeting

March 29-30, 2017. Juneau, Alaska

*Present: Brian Headdings, Danielle Holt, David Garcia, Yurii Miller, Dora Wilson, Russell Pressley Heather Payenna, Alana Medel, Sabrina Owsley, Jo Ann Borges, Heather Payenna, Aileen McInnis*

*MISSING: Gwen Emel, Sara Childress, Debbie LaFlamme*

### March 29 Day One

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Review of the Agenda

Approval of the Minutes:

- Added in Heather Payenna to the Investigations Committee
- Jo Ann Added Red Cross will smoke detectors and co2 detectors and will install all over state

#### GENERAL UPDATES:

**CPS Updates: Sara Childress was unavailable to do OCS CPS Updates**

#### **Licensing Updates: Yurii Miller**

*ERS Emergency Relief Support Project and Pilot.* Currently in SERO WRO and now NRO. Very successful! Led to reduction of placement moves, reduction of emergency licenses issued, and longer term stays for child. Strong relationship with Tlingit-Haida and their program helped with success in Southeast. Yurii shared different experiences in different region including the different roles of tribal organizations in different regions. Exploring roll out in Southcentral and Anchorage.

*Foster Wear* Yurii handed out list of current Foster Wear vendors and asked board for assistance in reaching out to new vendors. Rep. Les Gara's office is reaching out to Fred Meyer's as a possible vendor. Suggestion that each board members take two businesses and write a personal note to each expressing thank you. Brian suggested that we also issue plaques of appreciation to these businesses to express out appreciation.

- ❖ **ACTION ITEM: Each Board member took two names to write a thank you note for support the Foster Wear program. Aileen will send out a template that Board Members can use.**

*Postcards* Time for an update of the postcard and mailing out letting folks know about the Resource Family Advisory Board. Sabrina volunteered to help with that. Aileen will check budget to see if we can do it in this fiscal year.

❖ ***ACTION ITEM: Sabrina will work on a design for a postcard to send out if we have money in our budget to do that at the end of the year.***

*Medically Fragile Children's Homes Recruitment* Yurii shared the new advertising material for these groups and talked about various ways to get the materials out and asked for ideas from the board. Discussion about what the training needed for families for families caring for complex medical needs. Discussion about how to market the recruitment and outreach to hospitals or medical conferences such as combining it with cultural training for the Alaska Native medical organizations. Heather also talked about training for medical providers on working with children in foster care having special medical needs. Jo Ann also suggested recruiting through the school district.

❖ ***ACTION ITEM: Yurii will send out the brochure to all RFAB members to share with families that might be interested.***

#### **ACRF Updates- Aileen McInnis**

Aileen said the Resource Family Advisory Board was going to be funded for another year through the Resource Family Training Grant. She shared info about use of "micro-trainings" as another venue for families getting training hours in. ACRF would like to use more mentors in the upcoming year and she also asked for input about post adoption supports.

## REVIEW OF INITIATIVES

### **INITIATIVE: Resource Family Bill of Rights**

Done! What is next step? How do we get the word out? Suggestions included: Put on RFAB website, OCS website, Frontline article, information link on the postcard, put on the Facebook pages and distribute by email, Yurii will share it with OCS managers, and send out to ACRF mailing list, Child Welfare Academy. Present at Tribal/State Collaboration Group. Ask Christy to send out managers to emphasize that we are doing this now. Discussion about doing a big initial roll out then ongoing communication and awareness so the awareness that there is a Bill of Rights doesn't die. Suggestions to put into a course format to explain what each mean.

Discussion about getting Senior Management to take on responsibility for getting it out the staff and maybe checking in with them in three months. Should we provide "talking points" for Senior Management and examples to help communicate it? Do we need an education committee to develop a strategy for getting this done? Heather talked about differences in communication in rural areas and the ways we communicate with each other. Need to understand how front line workers are communicating with parents and help them communicate on the same level

JoAnn suggested to add in the RFAB mission statement to the Bill of Rights. Discussion around keeping its simple and that the time had passed for changes.

Lots of discussion of what is the purpose of Bill of Rights—what about the concern that this has no teeth or can't be enforced? Sabrina suggested a poster version and getting it into everyday use and getting it out through various methods such as foster care applications, or the Red Placement Packet. Discussion about RFAB getting it out to families or ask OCS to mail it out for May Foster Care Month. Dora suggested looking into printing at King Career Center to save money.

- ❖ **ACTION ITEM: Consider using end of the year RFAB funds to send out a copy of the Bill of Rights to all Alaska foster parents.**
- ❖ **ACTION ITEM: When presenting the Bill of Rights to Director Lawton, ask what Senior Management can do to promote this Bill of Rights amongst OCS staff**
- ❖ **ACTION ITEM: Develop an educational and awareness strategy to make sure that all foster parents know about the Bill of Rights and to raise awareness of what each of the rights mean**
- ❖ **ACTION ITEM: Sabrina will design a poster that can hang in the OCS offices**

#### INITIATIVE: Investigations of Foster Homes

David presented the suggested points of action from the sub-committee which included six options for the committee to consider. (SEE ATTACHMENT A: *Recommendations from the RFAB Subcommittee on Investigations*)

DISCUSSION: Alana and Yurii shared information about licensing and cps investigations and unannounced visits. Yurii talked about licensing workers calling families before the findings are sent out and suggest to call the licensing worker if there are any concerns. Has cut down on appeals because it offers a chance to get questions answered. Yurii went through the list of enforcement actions and discussed the central registry.

JoAnn asked about apology – does OCS apologize for unsubstantiated reports? No. For legal reasons that may not be able to happen, Sabrina suggested instead can there be somewhere a chance to say, “Sorry for the hardship. We know this is hard.”

Members liked development of a brochure to leave with families who are undergoing an investigation and a chance to debrief with a supervisor or OCS after the investigations. Mentors were also a good idea: Yurii wondered about confidentiality when using mentors? Suggestions of a different licensing or CPS brochure for families who are undergoing an investigation to help them understand. Russ suggested that we emphasize that it is not about the foster family, it is about the safety of children

Heather brought up concerns about foster parents making a report of harm and then not hearing from OCS about whether the report was screened in or screened out. Yurii talked about the process and acknowledged that there is not a feedback loop. Yurii suggested that maybe if the foster parent self reports that there might be a feedback to the foster parent. Maybe contacted by the licensing worker? Could the board make this a recommendation? Maybe

looking at the homes like therapeutic homes in other regions who are licensed through OCS in Anchorage and notifications.

Suggestions of going back to CPS and find out what their agency does for CPS investigations of foster homes

Follow Up Discussion of Investigations by board:

- Consider the discretion piece of interviewing bio children at school
  - What about follow up and process piece for foster families? Families just get a letter after a sometime dramatic investigations and families feel that it should be more personal response from OCS. The difficulty of fighting unsubstantiated or false allegations for families that can include hotel bills or court costs
  - Look at possibility of different CPS related investigations of foster families as opposed to a general CPS investigation.
  - Questions about training of the licensing workers – currently mostly on the job and some written guidelines—can there be more formal, uniform training along with the social or softer skills of working with foster families with the hope of retaining them?
  - Questions generated monthly from ORCA to solicit both positive and concerning questions about OCS, family contact, visit
  - Can we recognize social workers who are doing a good job?
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- ❖ ***ACTION ITEM: Send out investigation current brochure to board for review and suggestions for response through #4.***
  - ❖ ***ACTION ITEM: Put together some recommendations regarding #2 on debriefing and notifying foster parents about self reports of harm, present to Yurii Miller to meet and get feedback from licensing sups monthly meeting***

## **DAY TWO March 30.**

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### **INITIATIVE: Starter Kits**

Discussion about the status of starter kits and how are they getting distributed. Juneau has a lot of them and has offered to send some to Ketchikan. Russ suggested more stuff for teens and that teens really like good backpacks including blankets. Could that work in other areas? Lions did a backpack drive in Juneau and really got a lot. Discussion about organizations who donate quilts or fleece blankets

Discussion about helping families with starter kits -- such as smoke detector, fire extinguisher, first aid kits, disaster kits, beds. Heather discussed more rural areas and could we look into partnering with agencies to get supplies out to the rural areas. Can we expand? Maybe focused on first aid kits and disaster kits? Discussion about liability and the difficulty of sending haz mat materials to bush areas.

JoAnn said Red Cross has smoke detectors and co2 detector. Heather suggested using hub communities and fire dept. for holding of the fire extinguishers. JoAnn was going to see about sending fire extinguishers to Nome through Red Cross. Discussion about using a registry like Amazon so people can contribute directly.

- ❖ ***ACTION ITEM Check out prices of first aid kits and emergency kits through Jon Hunt and see if we can promote this for rural foster parents***
- ❖ ***ACTION ITEM Explore a wish registry for folks for folks to send directly to Amazon wish list to set up where people can donate explore Sabrina knows the about the military folks who set up starter kits used the Amazon listing***

#### INITIATIVE: Regional Networks

Sabrina talked about her networks and the use of the Facebook. Can we set up a rural teleconference to talk about networks? think about quarterly outreach around networks outreach through our rural teleconference or live Facebook event. Work with Sabrina to set this up and set up written materials to help support this. Rules around using Facebook make for a good experience.

- ❖ ***ACTION ITEM: Aileen will invite current Facebook support group leaders to be part of the rural teleconference training series this summer.***

## OTHER TOPICS AND AGENDA ITEMS DURING THE TWO DAY MEETING

### **BOARD MEMBERSHIP BUSINESS:**

Most of the board's terms expire in April 2017. Everyone agreed to re-up for another two year term and there were no objections. Two board applications were reviewed. Based on regional representation, Elizabeth Dillon of Kwethluk was approved to represent the Western Region as a full member of the board and Raeshawnora Jett from Northern Region/Nome will be offered an Associate member position

### **TEAM DECISION MAKING MEETING TRAINING** Presented by Judy Ringstad and Wendy Nethken from the Northern Region Office

Judy and Wendy gave an overview of the TDM process and the role of foster parents in the process. Resulting discussion included the role of foster parents and whether foster parents should contact TDM prior to the meeting. There were mixed feeling about having children/youth attend the meeting because of the high emotions from the adults. Yurii said it is an opportune

time for giving input for TDM improvements since Casey Family Programs are looking at Alaska right now.

❑ **UPDATE ON CHILD FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW Presented by Karilee Pietz**

KariLee joined us via teleconference to update us on the CFSR issues. Every 5-8 years a large onsite review by the Children's Bureau. Last one was in 2008. Will be the week of May 22. Two phased approach to look at how Alaska is doing in providing child welfare

First Phase was the Statewide Assessment- on the website, looking at seven outcomes and seven systemic factors (*put link here to the Assessment*) Feds, based on the information provided determines was agreement with strengths and defined areas of needs. There will be stakeholders interviews to follow up on areas that the Feds need more information to get more information. RFAB might be a group of stakeholders (May 11 and 1 ) that could be interviewed. Looking for several folks for about four of the items (about an and a half each) On site review is the week of May 22 ( 25 in-home and 40 foster care) Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Anchorage looking at case files and talk with the folks involved in the case. KariLee offered to be part of our may meeting to get input into five-year plan. Annual Progress and Services report (APSR). Said she was proud of RFAB for the Bill of Rights and the work we've done . She announced that Noelle Kennedy Perez will be her replacement

❖ **ACTION ITEM: LIST OF FOLKS INTERESTED IN BEING PART OF THE INTERVIEWS included David Garcia, Russell Pressley, Brian Headdings, and Dora Wilson**

❑ **FOSTER PARENT NATIONAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE JUNE 21-24 HOUSTON**

A poll showed that only a few people might be interested and available to go to the National Conference. Looks like it would be about \$1500 per person.

❑ **OCS MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ( Christy Lawton, Barbara Cosolito, Tracy Spartz-Campbell, Pam Halloran)**

- Director Lawton gave information about the State of OCS Challenges—downturn in economy, heroin/opoid challenges so foster care and child welfare involvement increased dramatic but slowing down, more families being screened in because of changes from the original practice model, Good news—rates of repeat maltreatment is starting to go down. Lots of good work with Tribal partners. In April sitting down and talking about how to share child welfare responsibilities
- Tracy added some information about the CFSR. There are some bright spots in Alaska's work including permanency outcomes and foster parents are helping with meeting the goals of the well-being markers. Foster parents may be involved as stakeholders for upcoming interview by the Feds.
- Discussion about caseloads and turnovers. Caseloads vary but 30 in Anchorage and up to 40 in Mat Su.) OCS is addressing it through training supervisors in the coaching

model, relationship with supervisor is important, helping with transfer of learning through mentors and support and better recruitment of the right person for the job. Discussion in each of the offices about customer service and the values they want to promote in each office.

- Budgets-- Les Gara amendment would give 26 new workers and mentors to bring down caseworkers/House supported but Senate had more cuts. HB 151 (Gara) limits cases per worker and increases skills training.
- How are we doing with bringing on foster families? Cited the ERS project. Yurii talked about recruitment fo medically fragile child, needed for specialty needs, Yurii talked about regional recruitment teams. Christy said she was looking toward fall to get more tribal involvement and that should help with ICWA recruitment
- Rep. Tammy Wilson-- the grand jury referred the case to the Ombudsman and CRP. OCS is to expecting a report from the Ombudsman and getting recommendations. CRP is probably going to look at it in some fashion but she was not sure what CRP was going to do. HB 10 introduced by Wilson to apply ICWA to all children.
- BIA Final Rule- Impact on Foster Children. Final Rule solidifies what has always been in ICWA and Christy didn't think it would change much for foster parents. HB 200 allows relatives to use a proxy to indicate they want immediate placement and to also help preserve their choice for future decisions. Christy emphasized the permanency piece that relatives need to be willing to be a forever choice.

#### **RFAB REPORT TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT (Given by Brian Headdings)**

Brian gave updates on Starter Kits, Regional Networks, Bill of Rights. For the Bill of Rights, it was agreed that Christy to send out to foster parents this May and also send a memo to OCS staff with communication from Christy. The letter to foster parents should include a paragraph outlining what to do if they feel their rights are not being respected.

- ❖ ***ACTION ITEM:*** Yurii will write a draft letter for Director Lawton to send out for May.

**Next face to face in October around the 8th and 9<sup>th</sup>.**

## **Recommendations from the RFAB Subcommittee on Investigations**

**Members:** Dave Garcia, Chair; Gwen Emel, Danielle Holt, Heather Payenna, Russ Pressley, Aileen McInnis,  
From Subcommittee Meeting February 27, 2017. Noon to 1 p.m.

1. **Change the wording used from investigation to report of concern or safety assessment to reflect the same changes made in the practice model to Initial Assessment (previously Investigations.)** Language is powerful and this change would reflect less of a law enforcement aspect. It also probably fits better into the language that licensing is using while they are assessing the situation. Another area of concern is the use of “enforcement actions” which also has a break-the-law connotation. Can this phrase be called something else when it is different than the more punitive actions of revoking a license? (Examples: *assessment recommendations, administrative action, etc.*)
2. **Establish a procedure of debriefing opportunities for families who have experienced an investigation.** When closing out an investigation, make it a standard procedure that families are offered an opportunity to talk to a supervisor about the process. This could be to offer either concerns or feedback about a job well done or to make sure that foster parent is accurate in their understanding of the process and the result. This also offers a chance for the supervisor to be aware of any ongoing issues with individuals conducting the investigations. Timing needs to be sensitive to the situation (give a little time to recover but not too long that people forget.) Needs to document or sign something that they requested or declined a post interview with a supervisor so that it is documented that foster parents were given this option.
3. **Review and strengthening the training in conducting investigations of community Care Licensing Workers.** Foster parents are an important resource for the care of children and youth and investigations need to recognize that safety is paramount but foster home are also an important resource and need to be respected, protected and retained even as they are investigated. This training should not only include the procedural information but also the training of workers to use their people skills and to know how to offer support and resources. Investigations should be done with respect for individuals of the foster home and consideration of their length of service and reputation. Included in this training should be an emphasis on applying trauma informed principles with special considerations of cultural considerations and perceived discrimination based on historical mistrust and institutional racism in people of color.
4. **Provide standard information through a introduction letter or a brochure that gives information about the process, what foster parents can expect, expected timelines, and resources.** This letter or brochure should also clearly outline that the process of investigation is to be applied consistently without regard to race or culture, religion, sex, sexual orientation etc.

5. **Explore ways to provide mentors throughout the region and support persons who can be made available to family going through an investigation to contact.** These can be volunteer resource families who are willing to talk to families about the process, how to survive the investigations and how to best work with the system. Families should be given this information by OCS or referred to RFAB or ACRF to find out who these folks are. It is recommended that these families receive basic education about the investigations process in addition to their own experiences.
  
6. As a proactive move, **we encourage families to join regional peer support networks such as support group or social media networks** such as the Northern Foster and Adoptive Families Network.

**POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS:**

Present our recommendations at the statewide Licensing Supervisors Meeting

ATTACHMENT B: *Report of Calls from Resource Families During the RFAB Call In*

COMMENTS REGARDING INVESTIGATIONS

*Foster Family in Fairbanks:* Licensed for foster care for 7 years. Report was filed that foster child said he had a scratch on his neck and told to the parent during a visit. Injury was later revealed it was a scratch from a tree. Findings were unconfirmed. Issue with the investigation was conducting the interview at school with his biological kids—quoted policies that you can interview the suspected child victim at school at the discretion at OCS but why the bio kids? Also expressed frustration that didn't get communication back from OCS about his concerns.

*Foster family from Kenai* expressed concerns of lack of support for foster families in the midst of an investigations. There is support for kids but not for parents. We need to better support foster parents during an investigation. Especially for Alaska Native foster parents, may be difficult to confront and are more likely to leave foster care because of an investigation.

OTHER TOPICS:

*Grandmother in Fairbanks* in process of trying to adopt grandchild after 2 ½ years. First supported reunification efforts with OCS. Concern with how OCS is working in this case. Requested that OCS place her grandson place with an ICWA family but child is not placed with ICWA family or active efforts not followed. Expressed that OCS has hidden behind a “fire wall” of confidentiality and CINA. Expressed concerns about level of training of workers and ability to use sound judgement.

*Ketchikan Foster Parent* expressing concerns about being involved with the birth parents of the child. Two children in care. Felt caseworker would push decisions on them including pick up and drop off which made her feel uncomfortable because of dad's big size and mental health history. Expectations of the visit weren't clear around family contact, including if the possibility of drug use is involved. Need training on what foster family expectations are for visitations.