

10/7/16 and 10/8/16 – Minutes Resource Family Advisory Board Anchorage Face-to-Face Meeting

Attending: Brian Headdings, Yurii Miller, Russell Pressley, Sabrina Owsley, Gwen Emel, Dora Wilson, Sara Childress, Danielle Holt, David Garcia, Aileen McInnis, Joanne Borges, Heather Payenna, Debbie Laflamme

Via Phone: Sabrina Owsley,

Not in Attendance: Alana Medel

Approval of Minutes: The September 12, 2016 meeting minutes were approved.

Day 1: Friday, October 7, 2016

Meeting began at 9:30am with introductions around the table and a review of the agenda.

Licensing Issues

Yurii gave a history of the information gathered from the call-in time at the March face-to-face meeting in Juneau and passed out a copy of the summary given to KariLee Pietz. He also distributed an updated OCS Licensing Department organizational chart and a current copy of the Foster Parent Survey which highlighted “awareness of the RFAB” showing 40% of foster parents had knowledge – noted as a considerable increase from last year.

Yurii shared information about OCS’s Emergency Relief Support Pilot Program currently in place in Southeast Alaska. The idea of the program is to provide unlicensed relatives, who take placement under emergency conditions, financial assistance within two days of placement and then work to license the home within 90 days. Summaries are showing this program is having positive effects.

OCS Leadership: Current Initiatives

OCS Staff Members joined via teleconference: Christy Lawton, Barbara Cosolito, KariLee Pietz, Tracy Spartz Campbell and Miraha Scalf.

1. Foster Parent Bill of Rights

The group looked over the provided list of twelve Foster Parent rights currently in place and received helpful feedback from OCS leadership. The Board was challenged to 1) prioritize the top two rights to focus on 2) consolidate full list into one page for easier review and 3) think about what the desired goal is for sharing this list of rights.

2. Foster Parent Feedback

Conversation then focused on recurring themes echoed during the Juneau meeting call-in time as well as the OCS Child and Family Services Review. Resource families wish to be “respected and feel a part of the team” and this has proven to be a constant challenge. OCS leadership reported that plans are in the works to be more effective at including Resource Families yet they are open to all ideas from the Board of ways to do this better. Many discussed the idea of mentorship for struggling families as a way to give support. A reminder was also put out to share the good that happens and not only focus on the bad.

The group discussed ways for the Board to have better communication with OCS Leadership and the following: 1) submit articles to the OCS *Frontline* monthly publication 2) add the discussion to the agenda of the upcoming Statewide OCS Managers meeting or perhaps have a RFAB member attend

3) the RFAB can work to have a more specific agenda prepared for OCS Leadership discussion at the next meeting.

3. Updates

OCS Leadership shared information about their review in the spring, changes incurred with The Education Stability Act, changes in ICWA placements after the passing of House Bill 200, and budding legislation for worker caseload caps.

4. 2016 Initiatives

Brian reviewed the Board's current initiatives with OCS Leadership. After thoughtful discussion the following was offered: 1) potentially feature Starter Kit photos in OCS publications to help grow awareness of the project 2) potentially identify mentors from the Board to support those experiencing a licensing investigation. Teleconference ended.

After a short break, the Board reconvened and worked to prioritize the Foster Parent Bill of Rights (Items #1, 2 and 9 were chosen as top priorities) which piggybacked into a helpful conversation about communication challenges between OCS and ICWA workers/tribes. Conversations led to how placements are decided upon and from there a potential future initiative was identified: How to support Resource Families feeling stuck without placement. The Board was asked to think about the three identified Foster Parent rights and more discussion will be held at the November meeting.

OCS Spending Matrix

Dee Pearson and Amra Custer from the Juneau OCS office joined via telephone to provide the Board with an overview of how their office uses the OCS Spending Matrix to determine if an item, service or support is allowable for reimbursement. They shared the history of its development and the everyday applications - highlighting items often covered/not covered, approval protocol and timelines. Travel rules and vacation guidelines were also clarified.

Foster Home Investigations

After a lunch break for the group, OCS Licensing Specialist Kim Ford joined to discuss the Foster Home Investigation process. She gave an overview of statutes and terms that come into play and discussed the process of how reports are made and screened to see if they meet the criteria for an investigation. It was clarified how CPS and Licensing work together and separately on investigations and the issues of confidentiality. Kim identified the aspects of the child protection side of allegations. Conversation ensued regarding the centralized registry and the implications of being included on it.

Yurii posed the question of whether a different name for "licensing investigations" would be beneficial. Additional training was discussed for licensing staff in the area of family relations.

Senator Bill Wielechowski stopped in per invitation by Yurii. He gave a brief economic forecast and requested to hear concerns from the Board. Members voiced the need to pass legislation to cap case loads as a top priority.

Conversation continued regarding communications with tribes during the investigation process.

In closing, Saturday's schedule was reviewed and the Board adjourned at 4:45pm for the day.

Day 2: Saturday, October 8, 2016

Attending: Brian Headdings, Yurii Miller, Russell Pressley, Sabrina Owsley, Gwen Emel, Dora Wilson, Sara Childress, Danielle Holt, David Garcia, Aileen McInnis, Joanne Borges, Heather Payenna, Debbie Laflamme

Via Phone: Sabrina Owsley,

Not in Attendance: Alana Medel

Meeting began at 9:00am with a recap of Friday's Investigation presentation. It was suggested that the Board develop a guideline of the process so foster parents know what to expect and explore changing wording from "investigation" to "assessment" to sound less ominous.

OCS Regional Recruitment Plans

Yurii shared how OCS Regional Recruitment Plans have historically been developed. He extended an invitation to Board Members to join a quarterly meeting and share ideas with OCS Leadership. He made note this is the first year plans are tasked with actually tracking the results of the efforts.

Resource Family Training Update

Aileen highlighted monthly ICWA teleconferences, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and how it affects keeping children in their school of origin and the Strengthening Families and Preventing Sex Trafficking Act and the importance of foster parents being educated as foster children are at high risk for exploitation. She recapped the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and how a recent Quarterly Managers Meeting about transportation issues led to the development of a self-study training for clarity on issues. She also reported that an Education Guide and Adoption & Disclosure Guide have recently been published. Brian suggested trainings be presented to the Board on a scheduled basis throughout the year. Board members were in support of the idea. Topics and dates to be discussed.

National Foster Parent Association Conference - Houston, TX June 21-24, 2017

David recapped his positive experience attending last year's conference in Las Vegas. Funding options were discussed to enable to entire Board to attend. Casey Families (Danielle will follow-up) The Rasmuson Foundation (Brian will follow-up) were mentioned as potential sponsors. Brian and Sabrina will collaborate on a flier and a GoFundMe page (\$25,000 goal). The idea was shared to have the Board offer to give a workshop during the conference which could potentially result in a few complimentary registration fees for attendees.

Foster Parent Call-in/Email

From 11:00am until 12:30pm the Board accepted phone calls and emails from foster parents. (See attached.) Afterwards, the group debriefed. Highlights from the discussion were: 1) for the next call-in session: a request for positive stories will be included and perhaps the wording tweaked to clearly convey the purpose 2) the notion of a foster parent being "blacklisted" if they ask for help or to move a child from their home resulting in no more placements 3) a consensus to add Board recommendations to the dialogue during future call-in/email sessions and 4) how to share information about ICWA and the role of ICWA workers throughout the life of a case. During discussions, the idea bloomed to honor OCS workers. Members can email Aileen with nominations.

Citizens Review Panel Overview

After a lunch break, Diwaker Vadapalli joined the meeting to share the structure and function of this federally mandated program tasked to evaluate the Office of Children's Services to ensure their responsibilities are being fulfilled. He detailed the ways the Panel conducts public outreach and advocates based on findings from their research throughout the State. The Board was invited to attend the CRP's upcoming 2017 conference.

Initiatives Wrap-Up Discussion

- **Foster Parent Bill of Rights**
Members were tasked to identify 2-3 rights to highlight. Numbers 1, 2 and 9 were identified as priorities with #6 to be incorporated, as well. Once the prioritized items are finalized, Yurii can send to OCS in-house printer to design brochure samples to bring back to the Board.
- **Foster Parent Feedback & Communication with OCS Management**
The Board will develop an agenda for the next meeting with OCS Management to provide more clarity of the conversation objectives.

- **Foster Home Investigations**

The following recommendations were proposed: incorporate mentoring by other foster parents, explore changing the wording from “investigations” and include tribal supports during the process. Recommendations will be compiled and forwarded to Karilee.

- **Starter Kits**

The upcoming holiday season typically proves to be a fruitful time for Starter Kit community involvement. Yurii shared that several remote locations have requested kits but the logistics of delivery still needs to be sorted out. Publicizing their availability throughout the ranks of OCS staff still proves to be a challenge. Yurii offered to share the information at “All Staff” meetings and forward information and photos for inclusion in the OCS in-house newsletter.

- **Promote Regional Support Networks**

Discussion ensued around ways to dissect the Regional Retention & Recruitment Plans from OCS. It was agreed that the Northern Region would be the focus of discussion during the RFAB November meeting. The following actions items were identified 1) develop an informal list of experience foster parents willing to mentor those struggling 2) begin to identify those who may be willing to serve on the Board as Associate Members 3) explore an increased social media presence to serve as an information resource, as well, as emotional support 4) ensuring clear online links to ICWA information was posted along with “Let’s Talk ICWA” teleconference information.

Juneau 2017 travel was discussed with the suggestion of extending the visit by half a day to allow for personal visits to legislators. Meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.

Next Meeting: Monday, November 14, 12:00-1:00pm

