



Pipeline

By and for the
Office
of Children's Services

... the flow of OCS

Sarah Palin, Governor • Bill Hogan, Commissioner



From ...
Tammy's Desk

Happy August.

I hope you've all had a healthy and happy summer so far. I am so proud of all of you and of your efforts that made us successful in our Federal IV-E Audit. What a huge accomplishment for OCS!

Please take a minute to read the story in this issue of the Pipeline about the Celebrating Families event that took place in July. It's the first of its kind and I love it because it celebrates families that succeed in our system!

I hope there will more events such as these in the future, and even more families that will be successfully reunited.

Tammy

Tammy Sandoval is Director of the
Office of Children's Services.



Successful first-time event celebrates successful families

By Gail Stadig

"Celebrating Families," a brand-new OCS event, was held in Anchorage's Valley of the Moon Park one beautiful evening in July. Invited families came to a picnic to celebrate the fact that their children were back home after having been in foster care. Safety issues that had prevented the children from remaining in their homes were remedied, and each family's court case had been dismissed over the past year.

The sunny weather was perfect for the great turnout for this first-time event. The families and some of the team members who had worked with them over time were in attendance. The goal of Celebrating Families was to acknowledge each family's accomplishments in making the changes that led to safety for their children.



Guess who is in costume? Find out on page 2.

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Alaska Adoption Exchange works hard to place children

By KariLee Pietz

The Alaska Adoption Exchange (AAE) was established in the early 1990s, and is managed by the Adoption Unit at State Office. OCS also contracts with the Northwest Adoption Exchange and Adopt US Kids. Chrisanna Lesmann oversees the exchanges, working with the primary worker to gather the needed information. Chrisanna said that high-quality, close-up photos, and updated and accurate

biographical information are needed to list the child on the exchange.

Successful placements have been made through the use of the AAE. Gail Stadig has seen the AAE be successful, including in an ARO case where a child who had been in the system for 15 years was finally adopted by listing her on the AAE.

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Permanency through reunification will be celebrated at this event for years to come.

More than a dozen families attended the Anchorage gathering. Judge Sharon Gleason addressed the crowd, congratulating the families and others who worked towards reunification with the families. She spoke with sincere praise for the parents who chose to make such a positive impact on their children's lives.

A therapeutic foster dad, Doug White, volunteered to DJ and set the musical tone for a fun party. Our community's participation helped bring this event to fruition. Stone Soup Group gave each family a large "goodie bag," and other groups and organizations helped plan the event or donated time, food and funding.

Family to Family benefitted by having some of the families attending sign up to support other families who are still working through the system. The kids who attended loved the face painting, the balloon animal creations and the



OCS's Rose Sandhofer, left, in costume, and state Rep. Chris Tuck enjoy the sunny celebration.

Treasure Chest, where they picked out something to take home with them. Kimberly Nunley read a poem that she wrote, then a framed copy was given to each family. Our roving photographer, Wanda Henry, volunteered her time to take candid shots of all and prints will be sent to the parents.

It was impossible not to have tears in our eyes when one mom attending with her beautiful toddler talked about her

success, and shared that her older four children had been adopted by wonderful families. She'd obviously had a long hard road over the years, but had come through for her little girl.

The community's and OCS's support for this event was gratifying and was an outpouring in honor of the successful families. Special thanks go to the planning team: Kimberly Nunley, Jayne Shepard, Marcia Honea, Rose Sandhofer, Laura Rust, Lee-Ann French, Jessica Ullrich, Teresa Bell, Casey Groat, Beverly Oshkolkoff, Renee Leyland, Cheri Scott, April Stahl, Melissa Charmley, Brenda Ursel, Tammy Keech, Paul Cornils, Aretha Tyus, Melody Dix, Sara Childress, Tarrin Reed, Susan Morgan, Sylvia Berg, June Haisten, and Tammy Howard.

Plans are already underway for next year's "Celebrating Families" event, so if you'd like to get involved, let me know! It was a whirlwind! And so worth it!

Ed.'s note: Special thanks to Gail Stadig!

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In SCRO, Dawn Adams stated their team has successfully placed three of the four children that were listed on the AAE. Dawn said that one of the benefits of the AAE is that it "facilitates teamwork and positive relationship building as the various players collaborate to find children a home."

Dawn added that listing them on the exchange gives children hope that the agency is doing its best to find a family for the child. And Sharon Lilja said she has experienced success

finding ICWA preference placements using the exchanges.

When reunification is not an option, and an adoptive family has not been identified, please remember that the exchanges are another option for the children on your caseload. If you have questions or if you would like more information about the Alaska Adoption Exchange, please contact Chrisanna Lesmann or your Regional Adoption Specialist: 465-2779; chrisanna.lesmann@alaska.gov.

FosterWear Program expands in Alaska

The FosterWear Program continues to spread farther and farther across Alaska. AC Stores (Alaska Commercial Company), a major provider in the rural areas, and JC Penney have both joined the FosterWear Program.



Postcards were recently mailed to 1,500 families across the state to notify them of this program and participants, thanks in part to donations from David Krigbaum of PIP Printing and Barbara Hood of Great Harvest Bread Factory.

Additional information on the program and participants can be found on the OCS web site, or by contacting Izabel Bowers at izabel.bowers@alaska.gov or 907-465-2218.

Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan Update

By Kristie Swanson

The third draft PIP was submitted on July 31. The draft has taken on a new look based on a two-day meeting with representatives from ACF Washington, D.C., ACF Region 10 and Action for Child Protection. The PIP is now organized into the following “themes:”

- Practice Model
- Accountability and Supervision
- Strengthening Systems

Although the PIP has been redesigned, the content has basically remained the same as when we first started. Many of the strategies will be implemented statewide. However, based on experience with systems change, the PIP team decided to focus some of the strategies in Anchorage and Fairbanks based on factors such as population and success with Family to Family. Focusing on increasing outcomes for some strategies in two locations versus 26 statewide will increase our ability to be successful in the next two years.

We have already started to work on some of the strategies in the PIP. For example, the dramatic increase in caseworker visits!!

We will continue to keep you updated as the PIP progresses.

Tribal Cultural Events August 2009

Ongoing Anchorage Area:

Eklutna Tribe located at Eklutna Village, Tribal Community Hall. Main Office: (907) 688-6020.

- Elder’s Lunch every Wednesday at noon. If more than two people plan to attend, it would be helpful to call the main office so the cook can prepare enough for everyone.
- Eklutna Women’s Group meets most Tuesdays at 11 a.m. to work on art, sewing, beading, and other culturally-related projects. Calling main office beforehand is helpful, but not mandatory.

Advisory group to assess new SKILs training

By Dr. Eileen Lally

FYSTA Director

Coming this fall, Director Sandoval has asked OCS and Family and Youth Services Training Academy (FYSTA) to create a SKILs (Standards, Knowledge and Insight leading to Success) Advisory Group to assess the new (January 2009) SKILs training to determine how SKILs is meeting OCS workers' needs.

This group — representative of OCS managers, supervisors, tribal partners, trainees who have gone through SKILs — and trainers will meet to determine how the revised four-week training is working. The workgroup will focus on how SKILs is helping new workers understand the OCS practice model, what areas are missing or need

enhancement, and what are ways to meet these “missing” elements while striving to ensure that Transfer of Learning to the field occurs.

Through these efforts we hope to keep the link between training and the workplace strong. FYSTA will have completed four complete SKILs trainings by September.

Family to Family

The 2nd Annual Family to Family Statewide Convening will occur Sept. 29–30 in Anchorage. The theme of this year's convening will be “Valuing Family Engagement.” In partnership with our technical assistance team from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, FFCA, and others, there will be a diverse array of workshop offerings. Topics will include increasing partnerships between parents, youth, and tribes as well as beginning and advanced sessions featuring the four core strategies of Family to Family.

Alaska has been partnering with the Annie E. Casey Foundation since 2004, when the initiative began in Anchorage. Since that time, we have seen with growing success the power of TDMs, Self-Evaluation, Community Partnerships, and Support, Development, and Recruitment aid our efforts with resource families.

You, TOO, can employ the principles of Family to Family in your everyday work. For more information, contact your local F2F Coordinator or CSM.

Meet OCS at the Fair!



For the first time, OCS will have a recruitment booth at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer, Aug. 27–Sept. 7.

Seventy-two staff and community partners have signed up for shifts to staff a booth at the fair, and will be giving out brochures and information on fostering and adoption, as well as tangibles with ACRF's phone number on them.

Visit the OCS booth and say hello to your colleagues when at the fair this year!