



Resource Family Advisory Board Minutes

Juneau March 9-10, 2016

Goldstein Building, 4th Floor 130 Seward Street, Juneau Alaska 99811

PRESENT: Brian Headdings, Russell Pressley, Sabrina Owsley, David Garcia, Dora Wilson, Gwen Emel, Danielle Holt, Aileen McInnis **On Video or Teleconference:** Yurii Miller, JoAnn Borges, and Sara Childress.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes from February Meeting were reviewed and approved.

DAY ONE: Wednesday, March 9

The RFAB gathered at the conference room on the fourth floor of the Goldstein Building which also houses the Office of Children's Services State Office Staff. This was our first time meeting in Juneau as a board. All board members were able to participate on some level whether in person, on the phone, or by video conferencing. Agenda was reviewed and approved with two additional items: the idea that OCS should develop an app to assist with communication and the item that OCS should be encouraged to allow grieving time for children after termination of parental rights before plunging into an adoption agenda.

Resource Families Needed (A System in Crisis) – Sara Childress

Sara spoke about OCS being in a time of crisis and said she applied to be on the RFAB because she thought this was a group that could help with the situation. There are 1300 kids in foster care in Anchorage and the number of foster homes, especially ICWA homes, is not keeping up. Retention efforts are also needed because foster families are burning out and we all know that foster families are the best recruiters. The board discussed reasons why there are so many kids coming into care and the reasons are multi-fold, including an increase in heroin addiction across the state and different screen in criteria including a better response to multiple reports involving very young children.

The board also discussed why it might be hard to retain foster families who are already licensed, trained and caring for children and these reasons included feeling isolated, the difficulty of foster home investigations, out of region placements, not getting call backs from caseworker and others. That first week of placement also is critical for support and information, especially for new foster homes. Dave brought up discussion about lack of resources in the rural community such as emergency placement and mental health services and Sara pointed out that those issues happen in large communities like Anchorage as well.

IDEAS FOR RETENTION: When discussion came up about what RFAB could do about this area, many of the ideas focused on retention (keeping the families who are already licensed and caring for the children.) As part of the morning's discussion, the following ideas came up for consideration:

- Develop an App to Assist with Communication
- Have focus groups around the state to develop ideas and Input
- Facebook Support Groups
- Help Foster Parent develop own Respite/Support System (Informal systems, ACRF, Facebook, finding Mentors)

- Share ideas of who else to call to get needs met
- Recruit home to provide permanency for Teens
- Training on how to deal with Blowouts and Emergencies
- Develop more mentorship opportunities
- Support and Assistance with investigations including legal assistance
- Foster Parent Liaison at OCS to be a contact

These were added to the list as the day went on

- Facilitate information and communication about ICWA/Tribal Connections
- Beef up the retention efforts in the Regional Recruitment and Retention Plans
- Promote Positive Stories about Successes in Foster Care and Adoption
- Add more on ACRF website about available supports and support group and Facebook opportunity
- Survey exiting foster parents to determine reasons for leaving or suggestions for improvement

11:00 – 12:00 PM Resource Family Call In/Email Opportunity

See suggestions in Attachment A

About six resource parents called in with a variety of ideas and questions and **xxxxx emails were** received. The ideas and suggestions are listed in Attachment A and were referred to and considered as the meeting continued through the next day. Brian will respond to all the email to thank the participants for bringing the concerns to the Board.

We had lunch sponsored by the generosity and good will of JoAnn Borges who was unable to be with us in person, but was certainly there in spirit. Thanks, JoAnn!

OCS Licensing Update – Yurii Miller

Yurii Miller gave an update on several related matters and his update was spread over both days due to the schedule and telephonic forum for resource parents. His comments and updates are listed here.

- The updated Alaska Resource Family Handbook is ready for printing and will be distributed through licensing. A copy is available on the OCS website under Publications as well on the ACRF website. Updates include a section on the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, information on safe sleeping practices, update on language such as changing Medicaid coupons to cards, phone numbers and website addresses have been updated and a section added on social media.
- Each OCS region has developed a Regional Recruitment and Retention Plan and Yurii suggested that it might be good for the RFAB to review those plans and give input. Each region identify their goals and needs for their part of the state and Yurii gave the example of Bethel recruiting emergency foster homes and using the local theater as a place to run a foster parent recruitment PSA.
- Gwen asked about licensing timelines and Yurii shared the timelines, such as a worker must make contact with 10 days after an application is submitted and the decision to license must be made with 90 days. Alana also shared information on obtaining fingerprinting and references which are two things that can slow down an application.
- Yurii also share information and a handout about the ERS (Emergency Relief Support) Pilot Project in Southeast that helps out with upfront costs for unlicensed and specific child foster homes while those homes either pursue licensing or Public Assistance. This project will last from

March 1 through June 30th in Southeast and then reviewed for possible roll out in the rest of the state.

- Brian suggested beefing up the retention part of the Regional Recruitment and Retention Plans.
- Yurii said that there is a quarterly meeting of the Community Care Licensing Specialists and asked if RFAB wanted to be a part of one of those meetings to give an update on our initiative. It was suggested that either June or July would be good.
- Russ asked about how licensing workers feel about investigations. Yurii basically said “Yucky.” It is difficult to maintain good relationships with families if you are both there to help them and simultaneously asked to investigate complaints.
- Yurii shared the Foster Wear Vendor Application and guidelines and asked the board to make suggestions and share the applications with local businesses that might be interested. There was discussion about sending thank you letters to the stores to express thanks for participating and encouraging them to continue.

OCS Update--- Christy Lawton and Tracy Spartz-Campbell

We were very pleased to have Christy Lawton, Director of OCS, and Tracy Spartz-Campbell, Assistant Commissioner of DHSS attend our meeting and share information about the numbers of children in the foster care system, the proposed budget before the Legislature, the agreement with Tlingit/Haida, and HB200/SB112 which addresses adoption and tribal members. Both Director Lawton and Asst. Commissioner Spartz-Campbell offered to participate in some of our regular RFAB meetings to answer questions and hear the RFAB’s concerns.

DAY TWO: Thursday, March 10

Burl Sheldon Review-- Burl Sheldon, Director Big Brothers Big Sisters (Haines)

Burl is the community programs for the Big Brothers Big Sister Program in Haines and has a passion for the recruitment of foster families. He noted that he has not seen many recruitment efforts in Haines and he had some ideas of how to get the word out using the power of marketing. He urged developing partnerships with business using a product placement model and used Coca Cola as an example. He said branding of the campaign is important and there needs to be a continuous media drumbeat letting the public know about the need for foster parents. He said that in many smaller communities there is a competition for volunteers and involved community members and somehow the recruitment of foster care needs to distinguish itself in that need. He asked if it is in the RFAB budget to do something like this. Yurii encourage him to be part of the SERO Recruitment and Retention committee and share the ideas there.

After Burl hung up, the Board discussed their role in recruitment. Sara expressed the concern that it is not one person’s job at OCS to do foster parent recruitment. Yurii pointed out that each region develops a recruitment and retention plan though Sara said she has not seen the one for the Anchorage region. Alana mentioned there is a foster care recruiter position at Tlingit/Haida and also suggested that we focus on retention because recruitment is not effective if foster parents are soon leaving. Satisfied foster parents are the best recruiters and if they leave unhappy, they may actually be discouraging people from becoming foster families. Russ suggested that former foster youth who are now adults might be a good pool to recruit from. Discussion also revolved around the possibility of exit interviews or a survey from the RFAB to find out why people leave foster care and if we can address those issues directly. If the survey came from and back to the RFAB, maybe people would be more honest in their answers. Sabrina suggested we take the comments we heard on the telephonic forum and share them with OCS management along with some recommendations. Sara suggested that this board could act as a steering committee, developing suggestions and presenting them to OCS management.

This also led into a discussion about what the role of the board is—is it an *advisory* board or a *doing* board.

Tribal IV-E Maintenance Agreement between Central Council Tlingit/Haida; Guest Presenter: Kristie Swanson

Kristie presented information about the work that has been done in the state to promote more tribal control over tribal licensing of foster care homes and tribal jurisdiction in child protection cases. In the past year there has been a historic agreement with Tanana Chiefs Conference in the Interior Region to receive Pass Through Federal Funds to help fund and maintain tribally licensed foster homes and in the weeks before RFAB met in Juneau, a similar agreement was signed with Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes. Kristie supplied several handouts that showed the number of ICWA and Non-ICWA homes in Alaska which showed a large disproportionality across the state and also shared a handout that outlined the indicators the state will use in the upcoming year to track progress in this area.

OTHER BUSINESS:

- RFAB members went line by line through our draft by-laws and cleaned them up. They should be ready for final approval at our next telephonic meeting.
- Discussion was held again regarding the upcoming National Foster Care Association meeting in Las Vegas June 22-25. Aileen will check for leftover money in the RFAB travel budget but there probably won't be enough to send everyone on a full scholarship. Brian thought it would be important to send at least two people to represent the board.
- There was lots of good discussion about Sabrina's idea of an app to assist with communication between OCS and foster parents. Sabrina thought an app that could have a calendar for upcoming events and appointments, some of the child's information, emails of all the folks working on the case, and an easy way to contact the players involved could help case management and communication immensely. There was discussion around costs, feasibility, interface with ORCA (OCS's data management system) and confidentiality. Brian googled foster care apps and Focus on Foster Care by the Nathanson Center came up.
- RFAB got to meet several state office staff and match names to faces. Met Dee Pearson from Provider Payments, Naomi Davidson of Independent living Services; Karilee Pietz, State Program Office and founder of the RFAB, and Yvonne Hill, Program officer of Grants of Contracts and former manager of adoption programs all stopped by to say hello and introduce themselves to the board members.

2016 INITIATIVES

The Board reviewed the ideas generated from the previous discussions and reviewed the ideas generated about retention over the two days and developed five initiatives to work on for 2016.

1. Establish a Bill of Rights of Resource Parents in Alaska

RFAB has already compiled a list of rights already in place and will seek OCS review for accuracy and then distribute this to Alaska Foster Parents. RFAB will review the Bill of Rights from other states to determine what might be missing or needed.

2. Seek Foster Parent Feedback and share with OCS Management

The call in was successful and RFAB will plan for more ways to get foster parent ideas and input and share with OCS. RFAB will pursue the offer of Christy Lawton and Tracy Spartz Campbell to participate in upcoming RFAB meetings as a vehicle to share foster parent concerns with managements.

3. Make Recommendations Regarding Foster Home Investigations

Yurii Miller and Alana Ballum-Schwan will provide training on the complaint investigations process and based on that information and the experiences of the board, RFAB will develop a set of recommendations to help improve the process for foster parents.

4. Continue Starter Kit Project

RFAB will continue with the Starter Kit Project

5. Promote Regional Support Networks amongst Foster Parents

RFAB will pursue ways to encourage support networks amongst foster parents including promoting Facebook pages, perhaps looking at possible focus groups or meet 'n greets with RFAB members, promoting more ideas on the ACRF webpage for support and helping educate foster parents about alternatives to the caseworker to get need met

ATTACHMENT A: Concerns brought up by families on call and in email

- Karen of Big Lake-- Brought up concerns about the taxes and auditing issues—perhaps notice can be sent out to foster parents of who is going to claim the dependency
- Respite issues for different ages
- Pet—Family Visits with Pets for kids who left pets behind
- Assistance with finding out about medications and what medications were for along with the diagnosis
- School issues—have to go to school before it can be determines that a child has special needs even if child is way behind and has been to school
- Questions about Medication and teens and who monitors those prescriptions, the role of the psych nurse—Sara gave psych nurse information in Southcentral
- Josh Smith-- Tax issues and suggested RFAB Advocate for better process to get BIA/CIB Card
- No information or instruction about how to get a hold of the ICWA worker with child who is placed out of regions need to get placement information to the ICWA worker and need to get ICWA information to the foster parents
- Seems like the Red Packets may not be going out in some regions
- Another parent wanted to know if OCS would pay for private school for a child who would benefit from staying in a smaller consistent school
- Other email: Don't cut out foster parents out of process, foster parents know the children better than anyone and have valuable information