Aileen McInnis Named New Director of ACRF

In May 2011, Aileen McInnis was named the new Director of the Alaska Center for Resource Families. She fills the position formerly held by Deborah Hayes who served as the Director of ACRF for ten years. Aileen is a familiar name and face to many foster parents in Alaska. She has been the Training Coordinator in the Anchorage Regional Office for 17 years, teaching Core, developing curriculum, and authoring many of the web based courses that ACRF offers. She also traveled regularly to the Kenai Peninsula as well to teach Core Training for Resource Families and coordinate the Kenai Peninsula Out-of-Home Care Conference. Aileen will remain in the Anchorage office as Director and looks forward to continuing to work with staff and resource families to increase the quality and availability of resource family support, training, and outreach.

Tammy Keech leaving ACRF

After many years of working as a Family Support Specialist in the Anchorage office, Tammy Keech is leaving Alaska. She and her family are moving to a small town in Arkansas to be closer to family and live a more rural lifestyle. We will miss Tammy’s incredible knowledge and her many skills, as well as her passion and devotion to foster families and the children and youth in the foster care system. Many families have been touched by Tammy’s wisdom and support and she will be greatly missed. We wish her and her family the very best of luck and thank her for the many gifts she has given us all!

Resource Family Advisory Board

Written by: Jera Goins, licensed foster parent

As a member of the Resource Family Advisory Board for OCS, I wanted to provide you with information about the board. We are a group of current Resource Families across the different regions in Alaska. The Board is made up of Resource Families which includes families that are licensed foster care homes, unlicensed relative placement homes, and adoptive or guardianship parents. Our goal is to bridge the gap between Resource Families and OCS. We see our role as providing support to the children in care, and providing support to the families who provide for their needs through emergency or ongoing placement, or anywhere in between. We are all passionate about giving the children in custody the best families and support possible.

Our vision is to strengthen and improve support for Resource Families and OCS as we partner to care for Alaska’s children. We are focused on providing guidance to resource families and OCS for the benefit of all, through open and continuing communication with the intention to create a better environment for all children.

We are currently expanding the board and working to identify the specific actions and tasks we can do to assist in improving the current foster care and placement system.

If you have questions or comments for the Resource Family Advisory Board, here is a list of the current members:

Barry Levit, Alaska Resource Family – 907-299-4076, polarbar_2000@yahoo.com
Jason and Jera Goins, Alaska Resource Family – 907-945-3101, jeragoins@yahoo.com
Vickie Romano, Alaska Resource Family – 907-863-2144, romanomamma@yahoo.com
Samantha Moore, Alaska Resource Family – 907-776-8392, samanthamoore@acsalaska.net
Susan Moore, Alaska Resource Family – 616-780-8215, smoore2010@live.com
Susan Frisby, OCS Representative – 907-352-8910, susan.frisby@alaska.gov
KariLee Pietz, OCS Representative – 907-465-2145, karilee.pietz@alaska.gov
OCS Licensing Requirement for Resource Families...
Licensed foster homes are required to have 15 hours of training per licensing year for a two-parent home and 10 hours for a single parent home. Report all your training to ACRF. To find out how many hours you've completed or to find out ways to complete your training hours, contact your local ACRF office or call toll-free 1-800-478-7307.

Fairbanks Training:
Unless otherwise noted, the trainings in Fairbanks are held at ACRF: 815 Second Ave, STE 101 Pre-registration is REQUIRED, call 479-7307 to register.

✦ AUGUST:
Adoptive Parent Orientation
Tuesday, August 2nd from 11:30am – 1:00pm

Fairbanks Support Groups:
✦ Grands Raising Great Children Support Group. Participation is FREE. Limited supervised children’s activities are available during the group – please pre-register if you are bringing your children. Group meets the second Monday of every month from 6:30pm–8pm, at RCPC, 726 26th AVE, Suite 2 in Fairbanks. Call 456-2866 for more information.

Juneau Training:
Unless otherwise noted the trainings in Juneau will be held at ACRF: 9109 Mendenhall Mall RD, Suite 6A. Pre-registration is REQUIRED, call John at 790-4246 to register

✦ JULY:
1st Thursday Summer Movie Night: “Catfish in Black Bean Sauce” Earn 3 hours plus enjoy free popcorn and softdrinks
See this humorous look at the ups and downs of a transracially adopted brother and sister and their reunion with their birthmother. The movie will be followed by a discussing the issues it presents.
Thursday, July 7th from 6:00pm–9:00pm

✦ AUGUST:
1st Thursday Summer Movie Night: “The Martian Child” Earn 3 hours plus enjoy free popcorn and softdrinks
See this endearing tale of a widowed man and his attempts to adopt a child who sees himself as from another planet. The movie will be followed by discussing the issues it presents.
Thursday, August 4th from 6:00pm–9:00pm

✦ SEPTEMBER:
1st Thursday Summer Movie Night: “Secrets and Lies” Earn 3 hours plus enjoy free popcorn and softdrinks
See this acclaimed drama dealing with adoption, transracial issues, search & reunion, infertility, and the power of family. The movie will be followed by discussing the issues it presents.
Thursday, September 1st from 6:00pm–9:00pm

Advocating for Your Child in School
Is your child struggling in school? Get a basic introduction to special education law and learn strategies to get the most out of the services you are entitled to.
Thursday, September 8th from 6:30pm–8:30pm

Core Training for Relative Placement
If you are raising the child of a relative, fulfill your requirement for Core Training with this version tailored to the unique needs of kinship families.
Saturday, September 17th from 9:00am–5:00pm (lunch provided)

Juneau Support Groups:
✦ Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group meets on the last Tuesday of each month at T.J. Arnold’s house, 9343 Parkview CT in Juneau. Call T.J. at 209-0516.

✦ The Stone Soup Group (children with special needs) meets every Thursday from 6-8pm at Catholic Community Services Bldg., 419 6th ST in Juneau. Call Lori King at 321-8311.
Mat-Su Training:

Unless otherwise noted, the trainings in Wasilla will be held at ACRF: 5050 Dunbar ST, STE A2 (off the Palmer/Wasilla HWY, Brentwood Plaza). Pre-Registration is required for the following events by contacting Betsy at 376-4678 or bwoodin@nwresource.org.

✦ JULY:

Video Day: International Adoption
Refreshments will be served, but no childcare available. You do not have to stay the entire time.
Thursday, July 7th from 9:00am-2:00pm

Adopting Through OCS
Friday, July 8th from 9:00am-Noon
Or
Tuesday, July 12th from 6:00-9:00pm

Core Training for Relative Placement
Monday, July 11th and Friday, July 15th from 9:00am-1:00pm. Must attend both days for credit.

✦ AUGUST:

Video Day: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Refreshments will be served, but no childcare available. You do not have to stay the entire time.
Thursday, August 4th from 9:00am-2:00pm

Core Training for New Resource Families
6 weeks. Aug 30th, Sept 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th and Oct 4th. from 6:00-9:00pm. Must attend all 6 classes for credit.

✦ SEPTEMBER:

Core Training for Seasoned Foster Parents
Monday, September 12th and 19th from 9:00am-1:00pm. Must attend both days for credit.

Video Day: Culture and Identity
Refreshments will be served, but no childcare available. You do not have to stay the entire time.
Thursday, September 15th from 9:00am-2:00pm

Core Training for Relative Placement
Tuesday, September 20th and Thursday, September 22nd from 9:00am-1:00pm. Must attend both days for credit.

Rural Teleconference Training

Families may participate by dialing 1-888-626-7441 and when asked enter the code: 9939775# For more information email Betsy at bwoodin@nwresource.org or call 1-800-478-7307.

Tuesday, July 12th, Noon-1pm
• Attachment, Betsy Woodin.

Wednesday, July 13th, 7-8pm
• Child Abuse and Neglect, Betsy Woodin

Tuesday, August 9th, Noon-1pm
• Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Betsy Woodin

Wednesday, August 10th, 7-8pm
• Sensory Integration, Betsy Woodin

Tuesday, September 13th, Noon-1pm
• Special Education Law, John Bennett

Wednesday, September 14th, 7-8pm
• Kincare, Betsy Woodin

Tuesday, October 11th, Noon-1pm
• Childhood Trauma 1, Betsy Woodin

Wednesday, October 12th, 7-8pm
• Childhood Trauma 2, Betsy Woodin

CHECK IT OUT...
ACRF has posted past Rural Teleconferences and more audio courses on our website
http://www.acrf.org/Audio.php
Listen to the teleconference, take the quiz and earn 1.0 hour training!

Parent Sharing Call-in Group
for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger Syndrome

First Tuesday of each month from Noon-1pm. Dial 1-800-315-6338, enter code 2272#

The Importance of Confidentiality

Resource Families sometimes need to be reminded of the importance of confidentiality. While you may be very excited and proud to introduce others to the newest additions to your family, please do NOT introduce them as “your foster children.” This becomes especially important today due to the popularity of social networking sites like Facebook.

In the Core Training for Resource Families self-study training, this is covered on page 24 and it is based on the State of Alaska foster care licensing regulations (7 AAC 50.130. Records):

“Resource families also need to respect confidentiality and avoid giving out information about the child and his or her family. This means not sharing information about the child or family with neighbors, extended family or co-workers. You should share information only on a “need to know” basis, such as sharing medical information with a provider or care giving instructions with a childcare worker or respite worker”.


Keeping in Touch: Effective Communication with Your Caseworker

By: Aileen McInnis, Director, Alaska Center for Resource Families

To be an effective advocate, you need to effectively communicate. That means knowing how to reach your caseworker, leaving an effective message and knowing what to do if you need help. A group of OCS caseworkers and resource parents in Anchorage put these ideas together to help resource families improve the communication flow.

First, Know Who To Call

- Know the correct name and phone number of the OCS caseworker for each child in your care. Better yet, get the caseworkers business card and keep names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses in an easy to find place. You can also call the OCS main number in your community and ask to be connected or check the State Employee directory at www.state.ak.us for phone numbers and email addresses.

- Most caseworkers belong to some kind of OCS unit led by a supervisor and at the least, every caseworker has a supervisor. Know the worker’s supervisor in case of emergency. In larger communities, the Social Services Associate (SSA) in the unit can also be helpful. In some offices, a Unit Coordinator is on call to handle emergencies.

- Know the name and phone number of your licensing worker. Often she can help when you can’t reach someone.

If You Are Calling On The Phone

- Call early (between 7:30 to 9 a.m.) before social workers are caught up in court and visits.

- If a caseworker is not available, you will reach voice mail. Listen carefully to the message. It may tell you the caseworker is on vacation or in training.

- Leave a good voice mail message and be specific. Say why you are calling and how urgent the message is. Indicate if you need to be called back and what time is a good time to call and indicate any deadline to receive the information needed. The more specific you are the better.

- Caseworkers may not be able to call back the same day. Be patient! Caseworkers often have dozens of phone calls to return upon returning to the office. Do not leave multiple messages on the same day.

- Once you get your caseworker on the phone, you may not have time to chat over a long period of time. Be direct and precise in what you need so problems and concerns can be solved quickly.

- Give the caseworker a reasonable amount of time to return calls. Utilize the Unit Coordinator if it is an emergency and the caseworker has not returned your call in a reasonable amount of time.

- Voice mail is your friend! Leave an update on the child just for information sharing so the caseworker knows more about day-to-day issues. State your questions clearly so a caseworker can call back if necessary. Speak clearly and leave your phone number so the caseworker doesn’t have to look it up.

If You Use E-mail

- E-mail is another option for contacting social workers with information. Caseworkers can often answer an email faster than return a phone call. If you have access to email, use it whenever possible.

- All social workers have an e-mail address. But talk to your workers about what they prefer. Some social workers don’t use email as much as others. All OCS employees have the email address of firstname.lastname@alaska.gov.

- Just as in a phone call, be precise and clear about what you are asking for. Be brief. Don’t bury your request toward the bottom of the email. The caseworker may never see it! Put it near the top and specify you need a response. Long involved emails may be skimmed and a question or request can be lost.

- Emails can be printed and included in the child’s file. So use it as a way to update the caseworker on a child’s progress. Indicate in your message that you are keeping the caseworker up-to-date and that you don’t need a reply. But remember to always be professional. More people than your caseworker, including the birth parent or the tribe may see your communication so choose your words with care.

- When working with the team, consider copying the email to the caseworker and the guardian ad litem and the therapist so everyone has the same information.

- If a home visit is coming up, develop a list of things you need to discuss with the caseworker and send it in an email several days before the visit. This way, the caseworker can come prepared.
Keeping in Touch: Effective Communication with Your Caseworker continued...

Climbing The Ladder of Communication

1. Contact the caseworker first. Leave a clear message and a way to contact you. Allow a reasonable amount of time before calling again. The instruction of OCS to their workers is to try to return phone calls from foster parents within 48 hours.

2. If you don’t get a return call after leaving several messages, or if it is an emergency and you cannot wait for an answer, call the main number and ask for the Unit Coordinator for your social worker’s unit.

3. If you still can’t get what you need, contact the Unit Supervisor. (In some areas, the Unit Coordinator is the caseworker on call for that day.)

4. If you still can’t get what you need, contact the Staff Manager or call the reception desk and ask to talk to someone in person.

Keeping in Touch: Effective Communication with Your Caseworker

1.0 Hour Self-Study Questionnaire

If you read the above entitled article and want foster parent training credit applied to your training requirement, fill out the following questionnaire and FAX it to 1-907-479-9666, mail to ACRF, 815 Second AVE STE 101, Fairbanks, AK 99701 or email to acrf@nwresource.org.

Name: _______________________________________ Email: _________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________ Provider#: ___________________

1. All OCS employees have the email address of __________________________.______________________@alaska.gov. (Fill in the blanks)

2. More people than your caseworker, including the birth parent or the tribe, may see your e-mail communication.
   
   _____ True
   _____ False

3. Describe what makes a good voicemail message.

4. If you are calling, call __________________ before the caseworker gets caught up in appointment such as court and visits. (Fill in the blank)

5. The instruction of OCS to their workers is to try to return phone calls from foster parents within ________ hours. (Fill in the blank)

6. Name one other person you can call if you can’t get reach your caseworker.
ABOUT FOSTER WEAR

Participants in the Foster Wear Program offer discounts to licensed foster families when they present their foster parent identification card.

Anchorage:
- REI
- Army/Navy Surplus Store
- JCPenney
- Sixth Avenue Outfitters

Bethel:
- Swanson’s

Dillingham:
- N&N Market

Fairbanks:
- Prospector Outfitters

Homer:
- Homer’s Jeans
- Redden Marine
- Ulmer’s Drug & Hardware

Juneau:
- Nugget Outfitters

Valdez:
- Prospector Outfitters

Statewide:
- AC Stores (32 stores)

To learn more about the FosterWear Program, go to:
www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/fosterwear/

or contact Marcia Coonce at 907-465-2218 marcia.coonce@alaska.gov
On the advice of some resource families in Fairbanks, we’ve started “Foster Talk” as a regular feature in Training Tracks on wisdom gained in the experience of being a foster parent. What tricks and skills have you picked up in your days/weeks/or years of being a foster or adoptive parent? We will post a couple ideas in each of our Training Tracks.

NEXT QUARTER: Send your ideas about working with schools and teachers to Aileen at amcinnis@nwresource.org with Ideas from Seasoned Foster Parents in the subject line.

From Valerie Gilligan –

**If you ever need your social worker or Guardian Ad Litem's email or phone number, use this link to search for it. State of Alaska Employee Directory: [http://www.alaska.gov/whitepages/](http://www.alaska.gov/whitepages/). Remember that the GAL is there to advocate for your foster child. Keeping them well informed will help them be successful.

**There may come a time that you are requested or even subpoenaed to be at a court hearing. Once you have the court date, the night before check the online court calendar to make sure it is still going to happen at the set date and time. Do not rely on your social worker to inform you of a date or time change! If you don’t see it, call your social worker or Guardian Ad Litem and find out when it was rescheduled for. Alaska courts calendars: [http://www.courts.alaska.gov/trialcts.htm#cal](http://www.courts.alaska.gov/trialcts.htm#cal)

**As foster parents you will need to interact with your foster child’s birth parents at some point in time. This is a relationship that will need time to form. You are responsible for keeping yourself and your family safe. Having an idea of your child’s birth parents life style will help you decide what is safe and at what rate you want this relationship to grow. To find out what kinds of criminal offenses the birth parent(s) have previously been charged with use this site. Court view: [http://www.courtreCORDS.alaska.gov/pa/pa.urd/pamw6500.display](http://www.courtreCORDS.alaska.gov/pa/pa.urd/pamw6500.display)

From Tammy Keech –

**If you make a lifebook for your child, make a colored copy of it in case the pages get lost or torn or destroyed by the child in anger. Or make an effort to keep copies of especially valuable photos that can’t easily be replaced.

**Give a child or the supervisor of a visit a disposable camera to take pictures of the child with his parents or family members at a visit so a child will have photos to keep in his room or in his lifebook.

From Katie Sawyer –

**Core training should come with a lifetime subscription and training course on Outlook Calendar usage. Calendar alerts on my computer and phone keep me and my family on top of all the appointments and visits.
New Library Items Available from ACRF

Selected Book: The Dance of Defiance: A Mother and Son Journey with Oppositional Defiant Disorder
Selected Book: The Child with Autism Goes to Town: 250 Tips for Community Outings
Self-Study DVD: Fostering Familiarity and Cultivating Cultural Connections (1.0 Hour)

Available at the Fairbanks ACRF Library!
Call 479-7307 or 1-800-478-7307 to check it out
Check-out period for Books and DVDs is two weeks

Two New ACRF Rural Teleconference Series are up on our website at http://www.acrf.org/Audio.php

Rural Teleconference Training: Caseworker Visits with Resource Families (1.0 Hour)
Rural Teleconference Training: Culture, Race and Ethnicity (1.0 Hour)