often, in this field we set expectations for ourselves that are too high and often feel the pressure from others to be superheroes. While the expectations should be high, since the stakes in child welfare most certainly are, the reality that we are not superheroes bears remembering. Regardless of who is the harshest critic, all we can do is our best efforts every day to meet our families’ needs and recognize that many times, it will not all get done. Often, in an effort to be super human, to meet the needs of our families and the expectations of the “system,” the first thing we compromise is care of ourselves.

As individuals in the system, you absolutely have to be your own best advocate, to ensure your well-being needs are met and that you have what you need to thrive. The system will always ask us to do more, so you must build personal self-care.

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Faces FFCA

By Gary Lose

I am currently attending UAA and pursuing a degree in Natural Science, Nursing, and Psychology. This is my first semester of my sophomore year of college and I already have 90+ credits. I really enjoy campus life and being able to live on my own.

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Voices from the field

Who we are ... the ETs

By Gretchen Keim
South Central Regional Office

You have probably walked past our desks, seen our names pop up in an email. We are your Eligibility Technicians, or ETs, of OCS. We are your partners is achieving safe,

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strategies accordingly. I, you, all of us have to be able to recognize the need and apply our own oxygen first; otherwise we will be of little value to those we serve. I know that all of you are doing the very best you can every day to meet the needs of your families. That is all I can ask of and expect of you, to keep coming to work every day and doing your very best to help serve the families who need us. This month I challenge you to spend time thinking about yourself. Think about what makes you happy and brings you joy. What makes you feel strong, both physically and spiritually? The end of one year and the start of the new affords the opportunity to reflect and make a plan you can execute in earnest in 2014. A new year always presents a great sense of renewal, so what better timing, right?

As always, I am supremely grateful for all of you who make up the OCS family and for the incredible work you do every day. The work we do at OCS, but don’t often stop to fully appreciate, keeps thousands of children safe, creates brighter futures, helps families safely reunify or remain intact from the start and ultimately leaves a family better off as a result of the intervention.

Happy Holidays to you and yours! May your holiday season be filled with joy and peace.

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Relative searches, placement requests and denial notices: The importance of the first 30 days

By Natalie Powers, Social Services Program Administrator

In January, 2013, ORCA was enhanced to enable documentation of Placement Requests and to automatically issue a denial notice if the Request was denied. With this new technology, OCS has made great strides toward achieving compliance with issuing timely Denial notices. The remaining problem, though, is that too few Placement Requests are being documented.

In September and October, 258 children were removed in 158 cases. Only 42 of these cases had a Request for Placement documented (27%). That number should be much higher. Feedback from the field identified the following problem areas:

- Relative searches; when to document relatives; and what constitutes a Request for Placement.

Nov. 15, 2013 marked the implementation date for a new policy related to relative searches, including a new requirement for supervisors to monitor the diligent search efforts to find relatives on all cases (CPS Manual Policy 2.5.3).

The case transfer meeting will now include the requirement to conduct relative searches, enter the relatives into ORCA, document all Placement Requests, and address any Requests still pending at the time of transfer. In addition, all case staffing (including monthly supervisory case staffing) must include a conversation about relative searches and the status of following up with all identified relatives to determine whether they are interested in requesting placement.

Acting quickly after removal to identify relatives and notify them of their right to request placement is not just to satisfy Federal law and litigation requirements; it is one of our best tools to promote child safety, permanency, and well-being.

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Christy
Christy Lawton, Director
Office of Children’s Services
Recipe of the Month

What’s your favorite recipe for a quick dinner?
Send recipes and photos to susan.morgan@alaska.gov.

Self-Care Corner

How do you take care of yourself? We’d like to hear your tips. Please send your submissions and suggestions to susan.morgan@alaska.gov. Keep them under 100 words, please, and include your name and job title.

Ingenuity is our middle name!

Tisha Simmons, NRO Rural Supervisor for OCS, was found scraping off her car with a boat paddle in the middle of a recent ice storm.

Question of the Month

Submit your answer for January’s Question: “What’s your resolution for the New Year?” Please keep your responses to 100 words or less, include your name and job title, and send to susan.morgan@alaska.gov.

Send us your stories!

Do you have a coworker or staff member you’d like to suggest for our Voices from the Field column? That’s a story by an OCS worker, or written about an OCS coworker, accompanied by a photo of them at work or play. Please don’t forget to include the writer’s name on the article, and keep it to 250 words or less. Photos should be the highest resolution you have. Send your suggestions or stories to: susan.morgan@alaska.gov.

Here’s looking at you?

Do you have an interesting photo of you or a coworker at work in Alaska that you would like to be considered for a masthead photo? If so, please send a high resolution JPEG attachment of the photo to susan.morgan@alaska.gov.
Voices from the Field

Who we are as ETs continued from page 1

healthy, and productive futures for children in OCS custody.

We wear many hats in our position. Our main focus is to help secure Title IV-E Funding, which provides programs, supplies, services, positions and other much needed items for the agency’s mission. We often ask PSS and SSA staff questions regarding legal, financial, and placement information of children when we are unable to find it through our other sources. We do our absolute best to help OCS provide the best we can for our children.

We also enroll and maintain children in physical custody or adoptive homes with Medicaid benefits to help them stay healthy. We communicate with the Division of Public Assistance and Denali KidCare to help ensure that Medicaid coverage between the agencies is seamless for our children. We are here when a Medicaid coupon is needed in an emergency, to update addresses so foster parents get benefits for their foster kids, and to assist the best we can with Medicaid questions.

We are all in this together, so I urge you get to know your region’s ET staff. See what they can do for you!

Culture = Activity + Belief and Value

By Linda Fiechtl, Northern Regional ICWA Specialist

Congress declared, in the Indian Child Welfare Act, that it was our nation’s policy to “promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families” by establishing standards for child protection agencies’ activities that would “reflect the unique values of Indian culture.” The act was necessary because “well-meaning individuals” who were either unable or unwilling to embrace the unique values of Indian culture had the power to cause the estrangement of Indian children from their families and culture. I believe we continue to cause this estrangement as “well-meaning” caseworkers. It is not out of malice but more so out of lack of awareness and perhaps our own disconnectedness to who we are ourselves and what our own culture is.

Ray DeWilde, a local Athabascan leader and speaker at a recent Tanana Chiefs Conference, shared the importance of maintaining cultural continuity for Alaska Native children in foster care. His personal experience and observations as both a youth in foster care and now a foster parent made this concept come alive more than ever when he stated:

“Culture is more than activities; it is the activity plus the values and belief systems that are imparted during those activities. Culture has a powerful healing effect; it is a ‘way of being’ that nourishes the essence of who we are as individuals.”

By getting to know ourselves and our own culture we develop an organizational culture that is committed to honoring not only the cultures of the families we serve, but our own cultures as well.
OCS Performance Measures as a part of the DHSS Results-Based Accountability and Budget plans

By Tracy Spartz Campbell, OCS Deputy Director

For the past two years, the Department of Health and Social Services has been moving in the direction of Results-Based Accountability and Budgeting for purposes of the Departmental legislative presentations that are held in February each year. As a part of this effort, each division of the DHSS has been required to align specific performance measures to the broad DHSS performance outcomes. Each division has further refined their respective performance measures as a part of the Department’s outcomes.

For the past year, OCS Senior Leadership has been working diligently on defining the areas of focus for the DHSS performance outcomes. As a result the following outcomes have been selected from OCS:

1) Health and Wellness Across the Lifespan
   a. Percent of screened in reports of child abuse/neglect that are screened within one day
   b. Percent of child abuse/neglect assessments (investigations) that are initiated within required timeframes
   c. Percent of assessments (investigations) completed timely
   d. Percent of children in out of home care who receive a required monthly caseworker visit.

2) Health Care Access Delivery and Value
   a. Cost to provide health care services per client

3) Safe and Responsible Individuals, Families and Communities
   a. Percent of Alaska children with substantiated reports of abuse and neglect
   b. Cost per completed investigation
   c. Percent of children discharged from out of home care who are reunified with their parents
   d. Percent of children who re-enter out of home care within 12 months
   e. Cost of time that enforcement action is issued within required timeframe
   f. Percentage change in the number of fully licensed foster care homes
   g. Rate of child abuse/neglect in out of home care
   h. Cost of implementing domestic/interpersonal violence assessment and safety card methodology
This is the season of giving

By Yurii Miller, Foster Care Manager

During this time of year, as the holidays quickly approach, we are often drawn to fond memories of family traditions such as: baking delicious foods; decorating our homes; gift giving; and celebrating with those who are dear to us. Many of us also take this time of year to give back to our community and reach out to those who are in need of extra support by volunteering our time, donating needed gifts and providing holiday treats.

Listed below are some ways you and your family can provide assistance to the children in care throughout Alaska during this holiday season.

Volunteer to assist with one of the Regional Resource Family Holiday events in your area. Items that are often needed for the holiday events include: wrapped gifts for children in care; food items; decorations; crafts; and assistance with the planning/preparation of activities. For more information on the Resource Family Holiday event in your community, please contact the Office of Children’s Services and ask to speak with the Regional Licensing Supervisor or contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families at 1-800-478-7307 or by email at www.acrf.org.

If you are a local business vendor and would like to provide support to children in care, you may want to consider joining the FosterWear Program. This program was developed in 2009 by Representative Les Gara and Amanda Metivier, Facing Foster Care in Alaska, to provide seasonal clothing at a discounted rate for those children in the custody of the State of Alaska. Foster parents can choose from a variety of FosterWear vendors throughout the state to shop for foster youth clothing at a reduced rate. For more information about the FosterWear program please contact, Yurii Miller at 451-5075 or KariLee Pietz at 476-2145 or email yurii.miller@alaska.gov or karilee.pietz@alaska.gov.

Happy holidays!

A DSM reminder

By KariLee Pietz, Social Service Program Officer

Do you know what DSM is?
DSM stands for Direct Secure Messaging

Do you know how to log into DSM?
Each OCS employee has a unique log-in that allows you to send and receive messages through the HIPAA-compliant, encrypted email system.

Why would you use DSM?
DHSS uses DSM to send electronic private or confidential information both internally and externally.

Have you used DSM today?
Using any email system other than DSM to send electronic Protected Health Information (ePHI) or confidential information is a violation of HIPAA.

If you have questions about DSM or its use, please feel free to talk with your supervisor.
Ready, set, implement!

By Kim Guay, Child Welfare Administrator

After many months, and for some folks, years, we are finally implementing our new Family Services Assessment (FSA) model statewide. We have spent many of the past months training OCS staff on the new framework for case planning and evaluation of behavioral change. We are hopeful this new framework, and the addition of Motivational Interviewing skills, will bring positive outcomes for the families we work with.

You may be wondering, now that OCS staff are trained, what’s next? Great question! We have learned from our past and recognize that simply attending trainings does not necessarily lead to successful implementation. Our Regional Management staff will be continually training and disseminating information to our stakeholders and partners about this new model and what they can expect from us.

Our Juneau Field Office has already started training their community partners and stakeholders. We are hearing many positive comments from our tribal partners, Tlingit and Haida, about the new model as well as the collaboration and proactive thinking in both transparency and sharing of information. Great job Juneau!

There will be many upcoming webinars everyone is invited to attend and well as Captivate trainings on how the new case plan will work in ORCA. Local supervisors and management will also be providing some additional training as times goes by.

Our new policies and forms in ORCA all “go live” Dec. 17, 2013. Here are some quick highlights of changes:

• Case will transfer from Initial Assessment to Family Services much quicker
• Trauma screening for both parents and children prior to case plan development
• Use of time to develop buy-in from parents in helping write their own case plan
• Use of primary and alternate permanency goals from the beginning
• Evaluation tool used to guide process of looking for behavioral change rather than case plan compliance.

Facing FFCA continued from page 1

When I am not doing school work or undergraduate research, I am working at the Loussac Library as a Fundraising Coordinator and at UAA as a tutor for pre-nursing students. I volunteer my time with two non-profits which are Facing Foster Care in Alaska as an Active Member (monthly speaking and training events), and Volunteers Around the World as Vice President of Operations.

During the summer I was able to help provide a medical clinic in San Pedro La Laguna, Guatemala and surrounding areas helping over 500 people. This summer I plan to do another medical clinic in the Dominican Republic. I am currently in the process of fundraising the $3,000 needed to do this incredible clinic, where it is projected that over 1,000 underserved people will attend. I am very interested in the medical field and try to utilize any other “free time” with volunteer EMT work.

My current projects include starting up my own business as a scholarship consultant. Helping with an innovative program (the first in the nation) targeting children who have incarcerated parents. My current goals include: become a Marshall Scholar, obtain my Doctorate in Nursing by 30, become an international travel nurse, then obtain a job with the State of Alaska monitoring the medication prescribed to foster youth.