

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Technical Assistance Site Report



Prepared for Alaska Office of Children's Services
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Dates of onsite technical assistance summarized in this report:

June 13 and 14, 2006;
July 24 and 25, 2006
August 15, 16 and 17, 2006

Situation and Technical Assistance Request

Technical assistance (TA) was approved by the Federal Regional Office for the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services (NRCCPS) to assist The Alaska Office of Children's Services (OCS) with the following objectives:

- Assist with the development and maintenance of an executive team to support the Deputy Commissioner and fully participate in the necessary decision making and monitoring tasks related to the state's initiative to implement a more comprehensive approach to child safety decision making
- Assist with the development of a strategic plan to support the implementation effort
- Assure that efforts for implementation and planning processes include necessary partnerships with Tribal representatives and that plans meet the unique needs of Alaska.

A 3 day TA site visit in March of 2006 was summarized in detail in an earlier report. Briefly, that site visit provided an opportunity for some beginning steps toward establishing a managerial team whose job was defined as overseeing various supports to Alaska's implementation of standards of practice for child safety decision making.

This report summarizes the technical assistance provided in 3 subsequent site visits. The objective of these visits remained constant: helping Alaska gain capacity in its managerial team to support the change in child safety practice standards.

As mentioned in the March site report, the first site visit helped identify a critical next step for the management team, in order to assure the success of its implementation plan. The need for a genuine, authentic partnership with the state's tribes became evident. Therefore, several months elapsed before the next on-site TA visit. This time allowed for OCS management to take necessary steps to engage tribal partners in this effort and to secure their commitment to fully participating in any future TA.

Site Visit of June 13 and 14, 2006

Terry Roe Lund from NRCCPS provided TA during this site visit to the management team of OCS, including its Deputy Commissioner. Tribal partners were represented and as new participants to the TA process, some overview of the implementation plans and previously made decisions was necessary.

A review of the state of the art in child safety decision making was provided to the group, along with a comparison of the state of the art to Alaska's new model for safety decision making. This allowed for rich discussion among all group

members, and served as a method for bringing new participants “up to speed,” and minimizing myths, rumors and misunderstandings regarding what the initiative truly is about.

Specific review was given to decisions made prior to the inclusion of tribal partners. These decisions and their implications were discussed:

Decision: Clearly and Practically define and distinguish risk of maltreatment and safety

Implications of this decision:

Allows for the potential to decide who OCS will serve; who can best be served by community and/or tribal services

Clarifies difference between a risk assessment and a safety assessment

If/when necessary, precision about these concepts can help with any case backlog, allowing for decisions about which cases may close (risk) and which cases must be served (safety).

Has positive effect on permanency: reunification can happen earlier if we look at when the child can be safe rather than waiting for all risk issues to be treated.

Helps decide what must be managed/controlled on a case versus treated.

Decision: Clarify Criteria for when a Risk Factor Reaches the Threshold for a Safety Threat

Implications of this decision:

Continues to model precision, rigor in analyzing

Gives clearer guidance to staff out in the field

Helps assure fair treatment of families by standardizing criteria

Decision: Formally state and expect Information Collection Standards: Minimally What Must be Known to Decide about Safety

Implications of this decision:

Reinforces critical thinking; conclusions must be backed by data.

Moves away from erroneous thinking that staff will naturally infer what information is necessary because they have to complete a tool or form.

Wider scope of what information is minimally expected helps move away from incident focused thinking and decision making.

Decision: *Define Protective Capacities: What is Really Associated with Protectiveness*

Implications of this decision:

Helps focus staff on what to look for during information gathering and analyzing if adults in the home can protect.

Helps decide safety: children are safe if no threats exist OR sufficient protective capacities exist.

For the future plans of OCS regarding standards of practice in ongoing services, these clearly defined protective capacities will become the central focus of the case planning process.

Decision: *Threats to Safety will be Defined and Staff Guided/Expected to Address Threats as They Really Play Out and are Learned About*

Implications of this decision:

Tied specifically to information collection standards.

Helps assure safety immediately but recognizes that threats may still exist and must be addressed after full information collection.

Positive effect on permanency by revisiting any protective action that had been taken early on in the case after full information is learned.

Alaska has been demonstrating considerable leadership in its extensive efforts to confront the issues surrounding racism and disproportionality. As these decisions outlined above were discussed in detail, considerable time was taken to get group consensus regarding any cultural implications or bias. For example, each of the 15 safety threats and their standardized definitions was examined and discussed by the group, using a cultural context for the review. The group particularly looked to its tribal partners for guidance regarding this issue. There was consensus that the definitions and the decisions were culturally appropriate. However, there was also consensus that the *application or implementation* of any of the concepts would be vulnerable to culturally incompetent or biased practice.

This agreement and importantly this caution served as a way to solidify the importance of the group's charge: to assure successful implementation of the new standards of practice for safety decision making.

The strategic plan of providing system supports for implementation was reviewed for all participants. Tribal partners agreed to:

- commit to participate in the management team workgroups of Policy/Procedure; Supervision; Program Leadership; Staff Development and Continuous Quality Improvement.
- weave in the issues of racism, bias and disproportionality into each group's charge, rather than creating a sixth group on these issues.
- use the Tribal Caucus as the mechanism to communicate the outcome of this meeting and secure more participants in the management team workgroups.

The "next steps" agreed upon for further TA: to provide each workgroup comprising the implementation team an opportunity for focused attention to develop their group's focus and make further plans.

Therefore, 5 days of TA were scheduled in order to provide TA to each of the 5 workgroups: July 24 for the Continuous Quality Improvement group; July 25 for the Program Leadership group; August 15 for Policy and Procedures; August 16 for Staff Development; and August 17 for Supervision.

Site Visit of July 24 and 25, 2006

Terry Roe Lund from NRCCPS provided TA to the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and Program Leadership workgroups during this 2 day site visit.

July 24 TA with CQI

Some time was spent in discussion around the group's purpose and how that purpose would fit within the implementation management team framework. Given that CQI in Alaska has been doing very different types of case reviews, this narrower focus on judging qualitative data was important to establish.

CQI findings from case record reviews will serve to inform and drive further decision making by all the other workgroups. TA helped identify the initial benchmarks for record reviews and the protocol the CQI workgroup will follow.

Initially, consistent with the fact that safety decisions are compromised if insufficient information is collected, the CQI workgroup will review case records only for sufficiency of collected information. Until there is consistency of good collection of information, the workgroup's resources would be wasted in reviewing assessments and plans.

A draft instrument for case reviews was developed during the TA visit, with plans for the workgroup to continue refining it. The instrument follows:

Safety Assessment Review Six Questions FACE SHEET	
A. Name of Reviewer	
B. Date of Review	
C. Case Name	
D. Family ORCA Number	
E. Region	
F. Field Office	
G. Worker Name	
H. Supervisor Name	
I. PSR Date	
J. Supervisory Closure Date	
K. Case Type: (please check one)	
Investigation that is closed with no further service	
Investigation that is opened for in-home service	
Investigation that is opened for permanency	

SECTION I: SAFETY RELATED INFORMATION COLLECTION INTERVIEWING PROTOCOL			
	YES	NO	NA
L. Alleged child victim(s) interviewed/observed			
M. Other children in the home interviewed/observed <i>(includes siblings, step siblings, non-related children in home)</i>			
N. Maltreating caregiver(s) interviewed <i>(includes bio-parent, paramour, grandmother acting as parent, etc)</i>			
O. Non-maltreating caregiver interviewed <i>(includes bio- parent, paramour, grandmother acting as parent, etc)</i>			
P. Other household members interviewed <i>(includes boyfriend, relatives in home, roommates, boarders, etc)</i>			
Q. Relatives (not in household) interviewed <i>(includes when relevant, grandparents, adult siblings, adult children, etc)</i>			
R. Collaterals interviewed <i>(includes when relevant, doctors, school, neighbors, etc)</i>			

SECTION II. SIX QUESTIONS

	YES	NO
1. Sufficient information regarding extent of maltreatment? (What is the extent of the maltreatment?)		
<i>Sufficient refers to identification of type(s) of maltreatment; details about symptoms; details about severity; identification of maltreater</i>		
	YES	NO
2. Sufficient information regarding nature of maltreatment? (What surrounding circumstances accompany the maltreatment?)		
<i>Sufficient refers to circumstances and events associated with maltreatment; includes duration; progress or patterns; response of non maltreating caregiver; explanation for maltreatment; attitudes of caregivers respective of maltreatment. Even when no maltreatment exists, caregiver explanation should be included</i>		
	YES	NO
3. Sufficient information regarding child functioning? (How does the child function on a daily basis? Include pervasive behaviors, feelings, intellect, physical capacity and temperament)		
<i>Sufficient refers to physical, emotional and social development; predominant behavior; peer and school behavior; mood and temperament; speech and communication; vulnerability; general behavior; daily routines and habits; ability to self-protect. Child functioning refers to information regarding all children in the home.</i>		
	YES	NO
4. Sufficient information re: parenting disciplinary practices? (What are the disciplinary approaches used by the parent, including the typical context?)		
<i>Sufficient refers to intent, attitudes and expectations about discipline; purposes for discipline; creativity and versatility; age appropriateness; varied methods.</i>		
	YES	NO
5. Sufficient information regarding general parenting? (What are the overall, typical, pervasive parenting practices used by the parent? (do not include discipline)		
<i>Sufficient refers to parenting style and approach; knowledge of child development and parenting; parenting skill; parenting satisfaction; sensitivity to child's limits; realistic expectations.</i>		
	YES	NO
6. Sufficient information regarding adult functioning? (How does the adult function in respect to daily life management and general adaptation?)		
<i>Sufficient refers to general behavior; daily routine and habits; communication; emotional control and presentation; social relationships; problem solving; stress management; mental health; substance use.</i>		

SECTION III: OTHER MEASURES			
	YES	NO	
A. Evidence of reasonable worker diligence and effort to collect information in all areas?			
<i>Reasonable diligence and effort refers to behavior that demonstrates thoroughness, conscientiousness, specific care to seeking detail, repetitive attempts and exertion to get information and to include relevant people in the information gathering process. Think of it as going the extra step; clearing up confusion; filling in the gaps; reconciling differences; qualifying facts and data. Reasonable is a subjective standard but can be qualified by what seems sensible and logical; the level headed thing to do; influenced by what is known; what is not known; what is important to know; what good practice and decision making depends on..</i>			
	YES	NO	
B. Reviewer judgment: the information collected reflects good quality and adequacy?			
<i>Quality and adequacy refer to enough depth and breadth in all information collection a) to provide a reasonable understanding of family members and their functioning and b) to support and justify decision making. Information is specific, behaviorally stated, precise, relevant and comprehensive.</i>			
	YES	NO	
C. Some information (regardless of sufficiency) is entered for <u>each</u> of the six questions. Each question has some information as an answer, no matter how cursory?			
	YES	NO	Can't Determine
D. Family members interviewed face to face, separately, and privately?			
E. General Impressions:			
<i>Reviewers can include comments here that might be helpful to staff and managers – patterns, trends, quality issues - positive and negative.</i>			

The proposed protocol for how the findings would be communicated and acted upon:

- CQI will review case records each month from each region, with a proportionally larger selection of cases drawn from the Anchorage region.
- CQI will prepare its findings and share with OCS Deputy Commissioner
- Deputy Commissioner will share findings with Program Leadership workgroup
- Conference call of all workgroups to analyze the meaning of the findings and further inform implementation tasks of each workgroup

After tentative plans were made, the Deputy Commissioner joined the meeting for an update. Approval was given to proceed with the plans.

An offsite TA consult was planned (teleconference call) for August with the CQI review team. Five case records would be shared with Terry Roe Lund and copies made for each of the team reviewers. The purpose of the teleconference call will be to help prepare the review team for their task of judging for information sufficiency, and assure the utility of the case review instrument.

July 25 TA with Program Leadership

Considerable time was taken during TA to ensure this workgroup's members fully understood their charge: to "own," lead, and oversee the success of the implementation of this initiative and to ensure that it remains a *partnership* that is genuine.

Many decisions were reached, including:

- There will be tribal participation in case reviews of tribal families. OCS managers will pair up with tribal partners. Minimally, once per month (beginning by September 30) the pair will meet and review cases together. A calendar of scheduled monthly meetings will be submitted to the Deputy Commissioner. CQI will assist by identifying the cases for review and any other prep necessary. The first September meeting will be for preparation; the first actual record review will be in October.
- Each workgroup's lead will be an OCS representative, in recognition that tribal partners have responsibilities outside of this initiative. It was agreed that genuine partnerships can exist nonetheless.
- The role of the lead person of each workgroup is to assure adequate communication, coordination takes place. In addition, the lead will hold the workgroup accountable to its task.

The implementation plan was modified and is included here:

Safety Assessment Implementation Team Plan

Revised - July 2006

(O - OCS T- Tribal)

System Supports	Tasks to be addressed	Workgroup Assignment
<p>Safety Policy and Procedures Team</p> <p>Meets with NRCCPS on 8-15</p>	<p>Review current p/p for bias How will case information be shared and in what format Clear definitions Requirements Procedural instructions How do I guide Screening criteria</p>	<p>O - Joanne Gibbens - Lead O - Sara Alden O - Greg Van Kirk T- Racquel Martinez T - Penny Westing O - Sandi Broderson</p>
<p>Safety Supervision Team</p> <p>Meets with NRCCPS on 8-17</p>	<p>Minimum requirements Minimum expectations for meetings between tribal and OCS supervisors Communication Individual conferences Unit meetings Manual tracking Field shadowing Briefing managers</p>	<p>O- Dara Lively - Lead O- Christy Lawton O - Vicki Koehler T- Marilyn Doyle O- Natalie Powers T- Jennifer Showalter</p>
<p>Information Systems/Documentation</p>	<p>Formats needed, developed & distributed Modify training forms</p>	<p>Merged with Policy and Procedures Group</p>
<p>Safety Staff Development Team</p> <p>Meets with NRCCPS on 8-16</p>	<p>Target supervisors expertise Target manager, CSM & CO expertise Identify immediate needs Methods for how awareness & cultural competency is increased Continued review of safety threats definitions for misapplication/bias issues</p>	<p>O - Claudia Shanley - Lead O - James Steele O - Sara Childress T - Malinda Beiler T - Le Florendo O - Phil Kaufman</p>
<p>Safety Program Management/ Leadership Team</p> <p>Met with NRCCPS on 7-25</p>	<p>Communication strategy Oversight - implementation, tasks, timeframes Needs assessment & analysis Tribal partnership to support implementation Grants/contracts support of safety</p>	<p>O - Tammy Sandoval - Lead O- Ritchie Sonner T- James LaBelle T - Francine Eddy Jones O - Vacant</p>

	services Community education and development Answer the question - "Who does OCS serve?"	Administrator
Safety Continuous Quality Improvement (QA) Team Met with NRCCPS on 7-24	Case reviews - OCS/Tribal pairing teams Application/misapplication of safety threat criteria Baseline measurement Minimum # of case reviews to represent overall outcomes Protocol for sharing information from reviews	O - Bernita Hamilton - Lead O - Susan Arts O - Travis Erickson T - Esperanza Redelfs T - Stacy Bai

Considerable time was spent discussing the importance of communication. Various ideas were brainstormed. The group decided that the Deputy Commissioner would secure the assistance of the Public Information Officer in order to look at plans for email and other ways to coordinate communication.

In the subsequent weeks, much work was done to form the beginnings of an "embedded" way of doing the business of these workgroups and ensuring that people remember to talk to each other. Email groups were established for each workgroup and for the entire implementation management team. Additionally, a webpage has been established for each of the workgroups to access to see what other groups are working on and as a way to post information. The webpage is public and may be accessed at the following URL:

<https://dbh-ssweb.state.ak.us/sites/DBH/ocsSafetyAssessment/default.aspx>

Site Visit of August 15, 16, and 17, 2006

Terry Roe Lund continued with the process of providing TA to each of the implementation management team workgroups. During this site visit, TA was provided to the Policy/Procedures, Supervision and Staff Development workgroups.

Each of the 3 days, time was initially spent providing a review of the safety decision making process (aimed at helping build the expertise of each workgroup) and an overview of the framework of the implementation management team, with each workgroup's charge and how all the workgroups relate to each other.

After this initial review with each workgroup, the remaining TA was focused on the particular workgroup's charge. Lastly, the Deputy Commissioner joined each workgroup meeting to receive an update, give any direction, and finally approve proposed plans.

August 15 TA with Policy/Procedures (P&P)

TA focused on helping the workgroup identify the many short-term and longer-range tasks it has to support successful implementation of the safety practice standards.

In addition, discussion regarding the need for the workgroups to reflect a genuine partnership with tribal representatives led to the identification of another task owned by this workgroup. The P&P workgroup will establish procedures for sharing information, for the CQI record reading by the OCS and tribal partner, and for each workgroup to self-assess if they are truly working in partnership.

The following tasks were identified and are presented in the general order of urgency:

- Ensure that (even if it has already been communicated) all staff know they are expected to complete and document the answers to the six questions on all investigations.
- Policy and procedure must be developed that clearly lays out the *process* if safety decision making through the investigation. The workgroup should think about multiple methods to reinforce and support this: narrative, visuals, prompt-like tools, etc.)
- Develop a step by step guide to documentation: what gets documented first, then second, etc. to reinforce that the sequence of documentation matches the sequence of the process.
- Develop policy and procedures reinforcing information standards, interviewing protocol, criteria for sufficient information and where it must be documented. Attach sample forms completed correctly, sufficiently.
- Identify and develop policy and procedures (keeping in mind multiple methods to convey and reinforce ideas) that support implementation milestones. For instance, if the first step for mastery is information collection, then procedural guidance would help related to a)what staff need to know; b)what supervisors need to know; and c)what managers need to know related to their separate but inter-related responsibilities regarding mastery of this competency.
- The workgroup will have longer range tasks of reviewing policy and procedures for bias, which will be evaluated in partnership with tribal partners.
- Once the OCS organizational review is complete, with feedback given on policy, the workgroup's tasks of reviewing current policy for inconsistencies with the new practice standards will begin.

- The workgroup will develop methods and processes for how (new) policy will be communicated within the implementation management team and will propose how policy should be communicated to OCS staff (e.g., accompanying explanations, context, etc) and by whom.
- A “how to” guide will be developed: in the short run, the objective is to provide help to staff, sups and managers on information collection; in the long run, the objective is to have a guide that is for the entire decision making process.
- The workgroup will communicate together 1 time per week for the first six weeks: the lead of the workgroup will draft a work plan with tasks, assignments, and responsibilities.

August 16 TA with Staff Development

The TA helped clarify this workgroup’s role: it is NOT to train others. Rather, it is to consider and understand what people must know and learn in order to carry out their responsibilities regarding safety decision making. In addition, it includes understanding how people learn and then developing, proposing, advocating, coordinating and securing the methods and processes necessary to ensure that staff, supervisors and managers have the opportunity to learn what they need to know.

The following issues were identified:

Longer- range responsibilities

- Identify and secure membership of a group to become OCS and tribal experts in the full scope of safety practice standards
- Develop and implement a continual process for examining trends (positive and negative) to measure the effectiveness of methods used to increase competencies. (practice trends will be learned from CQI; other methods to understand supervisory and managerial trends? What process will be used to ensure this workgroup looks at their role in understanding the meaning of practice that is not sufficiently improving?)
- Implement plans for developing cultural competence that directly relates to the practice standards
- Implement plans for influencing beliefs, skills and knowledge that are necessary to have authentic partnerships (this is not just about the workgroups, but about all staff in all roles and their relationships with tribal partners)
- What are the staff development needs of the other workgroups within the implementation management team? Develop methods to meet those needs.

Immediate Responsibilities

- Target supervisors and their managers regarding information collection (CQI, the case record reading pairings between OCS and tribal partners, and the implementation management team)
- Examine own workgroup's expertise around information collection and develop it
- In brainstorming ideas, keep thinking and asking questions: for example
 - Analyze what influences information collection, such as
 - The protocol for interviewing
 - Knowing the importance of information; how it relates and why
 - Having the necessary skill, knowledge and beliefs to carry out the competency
 - Naivete regarding cooperation, willingness

As a result of analyzing the above, what does it suggest for this workgroup's responsibility for helping people learn what is necessary to meet the practice standards?

To help the workgroup recognize the importance of thinking beyond classroom training in shaping their plans, time was spent discussing how people learn. It was agreed that multiple methods and repetition of information are crucial. Methods besides traditional classroom training that could be considered in planning for staff, supervisors and managers (and the team) include:

- Modeling
- Practice with feedback
- Reading and discussion
- Homework, and feedback
- Side by side coaching
- Creating and reinforcing a culture that this is a required competency

An example of the analysis needed by the group, and the need to differentiate needs of staff from those of supervisors, from those of managers:

What do supervisors need regarding the first competency of information collection?

1. what are the six questions?
2. where are they documented?
3. which cases?
4. an understanding or belief in the importance of the questions and how they relate to decision making
5. knowledge of key areas (mental health, substances, child development, etc.)
6. criteria for sufficient answers to the questions

7. who should be interviewed?
8. supervisory methods—tracking, questioning, use of unit meetings, use of conferences

Finally, the workgroup identified the following responsibilities they will carry out immediately:

- development of a work plan with tasks, assignments, timeframes
- development of a meeting schedule and communication strategy

Longer range and/or continual responsibilities:

- assuring the partnership of OCS and tribal staff of the workgroup stays authentic
- keep other workgroups apprised of work process and products
- ask other workgroups about their work
- consider always how things inter-relate and what that means for learning needs

August 17 TA with Supervision

TA with this workgroup helped establish that their focus would have at least as many implications for the managers of supervisors as it will for supervisors.

This workgroup will develop a draft work plan and communicate with members missing from the meeting to provide an update. A next meeting was scheduled where a longer term meeting schedule will be developed. Other workgroups will be apprised via email about this group's progress and any products.

The following captures the brainstorming of ideas in order to help this workgroup establish a focus and consider their approach.

There are supervisory behaviors that can be observed that helps evaluate how they help reinforce safety practice standards. Every action (or inaction) conveys the priority the supervisor places on this initiative. The following behaviors were identified:

- communicating, informing staff about news, expectations, etc. regarding standards
- use of case consultation to focus on the competency (e.g., info collection)
- use of unit meetings for learning, reinforcing: safety standards a standing item on unit meeting agenda
- going out in the field with staff for the purpose of observing the competency and giving specific feedback on what is observed
- bringing casework to manager for consultation on the competency
- approach to staff regarding new expectations is calm but firm

- develops tracking and other methods to stay on top of progress of competency
- gives status reports routinely regarding progress with the competency
- attempts to analyze why progress lags, and attempts to problem solve
- takes a case to try: writes up answers to six questions; gives to manager for review for sufficiency

Time was spent identifying the various options for ensuring that what and how the supervisor is doing is known. The following were considered:

- a defined communication schedule between supervisor and boss is established during which communication the boss directs the focus on the competency expected
- it is expected that supervisor and boss will together review cases routinely, and the schedule is defined.
- any written information (email, memo) to staff by supervisor regarding any aspect of the safety practice standards will be cc'd to the manager.
- workers can be asked if they are getting the supervision they need to carry out the competency
- supervisors can be asked if they are getting what they need to supervise the competency

Next Steps

The above summary details all the technical assistance available to Alaska's Office of Children's Services during the 2006 fiscal year. OCS will be making a request for TA to continue to help with the implementation team's strategies and to increase their expertise in the standards they seek to reinforce.