

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Child and Family Services Review**  
**ALASKA**

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses State performance during a specified time period with respect to seven child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being and with respect to seven systemic factors. The assessment is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Alaska Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases from three areas of the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three counties and the State capital) with a wide range of stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, various levels of State and local DFYS personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The on site review in Alaska occurred during the week of June 24, 2002.

With regard to the assessment of outcomes, a key finding of the review of Alaska’s child welfare programs is that the State is effective in preventing children’s re-entry into foster care. The case review process found only one case in which a child re-entered foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode, and the State Data Profile indicates that the State’s rate of foster care re-entry for fiscal year (FY) 2000 (4.6 percent) meets the national standard for foster care re-entry (8.6 percent). In addition, the State was found to be effective in placing children in foster care in close proximity to their biological families and with siblings when possible and in the children’s best interest.

The CFSR also found, however, that Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with the seven safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes under assessment. For example, the State data for FY 2000 indicated that the State did not meet the national standards for repeat maltreatment, maltreatment of children in foster care, length of time to achieve reunification, length of time to achieve adoption, and stability of foster care placement. In addition, case reviews and stakeholder interviews revealed a lack of consistency on the part of DFYS with regard to protecting children, promoting their permanency, and ensuring their well-being.

A significant concern identified through the CFSR was the lack of success in many cases with regard to achieving permanency for children in foster care. For example, Permanency Outcome 1—Children have permanency and stability in their living situations—was

found to be not achieved in 78.3 percent of the foster care cases reviewed and efforts to achieve finalized adoption in a timely manner were a matter of concern in 70 percent of applicable cases. In a substantial percentage of cases, the review determined that DFYS was not effective in ensuring stability for children in their foster care placements (item 6), in establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner (item 7), or in achieving permanency goals in a timely manner (items 8, 9, and 10.)

Another area of concern related to Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 1—Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs. Case reviewers determined that this outcome was substantially achieved in 28 percent of the cases. In a large number of cases, reviewers found that children and families were not receiving needed services (item 17) and were not being involved in the case planning process (item 18). In addition, in many cases, the frequency of DFYS caseworkers’ face-to-face contact with children (item 19) and parents (item 20) was determined to be insufficient to monitor children’s safety or to promote attainment of case goals, including permanency goals.

Safety issues also were found to be a concern for the State. Maltreatment was found to recur within a 6-month period in 26 of the 50 cases reviewed. In addition, the CFSR revealed that DFYS is not consistently responding to maltreatment reports in a timely manner (item 1), and is not consistently effective in maintaining children safely in their own homes (item 3) or in managing the risk of harm to children (item 4).

With regard to the systemic factors assessed, the CFSR determined that the State is in substantial conformity with the factors related to training for child welfare staff and child caregivers, the Information System and to the agency’s responsiveness to the community. However, the CFSR found that the State did not have a case review system or quality assurance system that were sufficient to support the attainment of positive outcomes for children and families. In addition, the CFSR found that the State was not in substantial conformity with the factors of service array and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention.

The following is a summary of the CFSR findings regarding specific outcomes and systemic factors.

## KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

### I. SAFETY

*Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.*

#### **Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 62 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

The CFSR revealed that DFYS is not consistent in its efforts to ensure children's protection from abuse and neglect. With regard to timeliness of investigations, the case reviews found that in instances involving imminent risk reports (reports deemed priority 1), the agency responded within established timeframes. However, investigations of maltreatment reports not involving imminent risk (i.e., reports assigned a priority 2 or 3 level) were not always initiated within the timeframes required by State policy, and face-to face contact was not consistently established within timeframes that would ensure children's safety. Problems with responding to reports in a timely manner were attributed to high workloads (and the corresponding problem of high levels of staff turnover). Concerns also were noted regarding the lack of policy regarding timeframes for face-to-face contact with children who are the subjects of maltreatment reports. Finally, CFSR findings indicate that maltreatment recurrence is a significant challenge for DFYS. Information from case reviews and stakeholder interviews suggest that the high incidence of maltreatment recurrence may be due to the number of maltreatment reports involving alcohol abuse and/or to a lack of adequate services to ensure children's safety in their homes. A summary of findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

#### **Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment**

Item 1 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS responded to maltreatment reports in a timely manner in 70 percent of the cases. However, in 30 percent of the cases, the agency did not respond to maltreatment reports in a timely manner, particularly reports assigned a priority 2 rating. Stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern about the absence of policy guidelines regarding face-to-face contact.

#### **Item 2. Repeat maltreatment**

Item 2 was rated an Area Needing Improvement for the following reasons:

- In 26 percent of the cases reviewed, there was a substantiated /indicated maltreatment report during the period under review that occurred within 6 months of another substantiated/indicated report.

- The incidence of repeat maltreatment reported in the State Data Profile was 23.6 percent, which does not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent.

***Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.***

**Status of Safety Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 60 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

A general CFSR finding was that the agency is effective in reducing risk by removing children from their homes and providing services to families. However, the agency is not as effective in maintaining children safely in their own homes. The key concern identified by reviewers was that the services offered to families did not address underlying issues contributing to the maltreatment. Another concern identified was that although services were offered to families, there often was insufficient agency monitoring of services. A summary of the findings for specific items assessed under this outcome is presented below.

**Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal**

Item 3 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS made diligent efforts to provide services to ensure children's safety while preventing their placement in foster care in 69 percent of the applicable cases. However, in 31 percent of the applicable cases, there were concerns relating to this item. The main concerns were (1) that services were inadequate because they did not address key problems, (2) that recommended services were not provided, and (3) that post-reunification services were not provided in some cases.

**Item 4. Risk of harm to child**

Item 4 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that the agency was effective in efforts to reduce risk of harm to children in 68 percent of the applicable cases. However, in 32 percent of the cases, DFYS was not effective in its efforts to reduce risk of harm to children. The key concern identified was that DFYS was not consistent in monitoring families to ensure that family members were participating in services, that change was occurring as a result of service participation, and that children continued to be safe. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that this problem may be due in part to a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the various agency and non-agency workers involved with the family. Stakeholders also suggest that the agency is most effective in managing risk when it removes children from their homes, but less successful when the children remain in their homes.

## II. PERMANENCY

### *Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.*

#### **Status of Permanency Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following:

- 21.7 percent of the cases were rated as having substantially achieved Permanency Outcome 1, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity;
- The State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of children reunified who were reunified within 12 months of placement into foster care;
- The State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of children experiencing two or fewer placements during their first 12 months in foster care; and
- The State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of children adopted who experienced a finalized adoption within 24 months of entering foster care.

Although Alaska meets the national standard for the incidence of re-entries into foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode, the CFSR revealed that achieving permanency and stability for children in foster care continues to be a significant challenge for the agency. Concerns were noted with regard to placement stability, establishing appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner, and achieving permanency goals in a timely manner. A summary of findings for specific items assessed under this outcome is presented below.

#### **Item 5. Foster care re-entries**

Item 5 was rated a Strength for the following reasons:

- Reviewers noted that re-entry into foster care did not occur in 86 percent of the applicable cases.
- The State Data Profile indicates that the re-entry rate for Alaska is 4.6 percent, which meets the national standard of 8.6 percent.

#### **Item 6. Stability of foster care placement**

Item 6 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 61 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children had placement stability and/or that placement changes were in the child's best interest. However, reviewers determined that in 39 percent of cases the children had not experienced stability in their placement settings during the period under review. In addition, the State

Data Profile indicates that of all children in foster care for 12 months or less, 70.6 percent experienced no more than 2 placement settings, which does not meet the national standard of 86.2 percent.

Consistent with the case review findings and stakeholder comments, the Statewide Assessment noted that placement instability may be attributed to a lack of foster homes, which restricts the ability of workers to match the needs of children to the skills and training of the foster parents.

#### **Item 7. Permanency goal for child**

Item 7 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 61 percent of foster care cases, reviewers determined that DFYS had established appropriate permanency goals for children in a timely manner. However, concerns were identified regarding this issue in 39 percent of foster care cases. Key concerns related to maintaining inappropriate or unrealistic goals for long periods of time. Case reviewers and stakeholders noted that although concurrent goals are being established for children, caseworkers tend to see what happens with one goal before actively working toward the other goal.

#### **Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship or Permanent Placement with Relatives**

Item 8 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that in 31 percent of applicable cases, DFYS had made, or was making, diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification or guardianship. However, reviewers also determined that DFYS had not made diligent efforts to achieve these goals in a timely manner in 69 percent of the applicable cases. The primary concern identified was that DFYS was not providing the parents with the services necessary to bring about the changes required for reunification. Also, data from the State Data Profile indicate that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (58.3%) does not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent.

#### **Item 9. Adoption**

Item 9 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 70 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFYS had not made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. A key concern was that the cause of the delays could be attributed to case practice issues, including not making decisions in a timely manner. In addition, according to the State Data Profile, the percentage of finalized adoptions that occurred within 24 months of removal from home (21.8%) did not meet the national standard (32%).

#### **Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement**

Item 10 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because in one of the two applicable cases, it was determined that the agency had not provided the child with the services needed to support a successful transition from foster care to independent living.

*Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.*

**Status of Permanency Outcome 2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 65.2 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity. Although the State was not in substantial conformity for this outcome, the CFSR revealed that DFYS is effective in placing children in close proximity to their parents or close relatives and in ensuring that siblings are placed together, whenever appropriate. However, DFYS was found to be inconsistent with respect to facilitating and supporting visits between children and their parents and siblings, preserving children’s connections, seeking relatives as potential placement resources, and promoting or maintaining the parent-child bond. A summary of findings for specific items assessed relevant to this outcome is presented below.

**Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement**

Item 11 was rated a Strength because in 100 percent of applicable cases, children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives, or placement in another community was justified based on the child’s needs.

**Item 12. Placement with siblings**

Item 12 was rated a Strength based on the finding that in 90 percent of the cases, siblings were either placed together or the separation was deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children.

**Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care**

Item 13 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 68 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFYS had made, or was making, concerted efforts to facilitate visitation. However, reviewers identified concerns with respect to this issue in 32 percent of the cases. The key concern pertained to the significant lack of visitation in some cases between children and their parents, particularly their fathers. Some stakeholders suggested that infrequent visitation could be attributed to high caseworker caseloads.

**Item 14. Preserving connections**

Item 14 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 74 percent of foster care cases, reviewers determined that DFYS made diligent efforts to preserve children’s connections to family, community, heritage, faith, and friends while the children are in foster care. However, in 26 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFYS did not make concerted efforts to maintain children’s connections with extended family or, in the case of Native American children, with the traditions and customs of their Tribes. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, this issue is of critical importance because approximately 50 percent of the children in care are Alaska Natives. (Of the cases reviewed, approximately 70 percent were Alaska Native.)

**Item 15. Relative placement**

Item 15 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Although reviewers determined that the agency made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources in 70 percent of foster care cases, they also determined that in 30 percent of the cases, the agency had not made such efforts. One primary problem identified was that caseworkers were not fully exploring paternal relatives as placement options.

**Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents**

Item 16 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 81 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFYS made diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationship for children in foster care. However, in 19 percent of applicable cases, reviewers identified concerns regarding this issue, particularly with regard to the inconsistency of agency efforts to locate absent fathers and to promote the relationship between children and their fathers.

**III. WELL-BEING**

*Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.*

**Status of Well-Being Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved for 28.0 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

Although reviewers did identify a number of cases in which DFYS was making concerted efforts to ensure that the families had enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs, there were a substantial number of cases in which this was not the case. In these cases, the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents were neither assessed nor addressed. In addition, the agency did not consistently involve parents and children in the case planning process. A serious concern noted by reviewers and stakeholders pertained to the infrequent visitation between caseworkers and the children and parents in their caseloads. In more than 70 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visitation with both children and parents was inadequate to ensure the child's safety or well-being or to promote attainment of case goals. A summary of findings for specific items assessed relevant to this outcome is presented below.

**Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents**

Item 17 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS was effective in assessing the needs and providing appropriate services to children, parents, and/or foster parents in 52 percent of the cases. However, in 48 percent of the cases, reviewers identified concerns related to this issue. A key concern was that inadequate assessments resulted in a failure to capture and address underlying problems for both children and parents.

**Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning**

Item 18 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS appropriately involved parents and/or children in the case planning process in 48 percent of the cases. However, in 52 percent of the cases, reviewers noted that parents and children were not involved in case planning. The Statewide Assessment acknowledged this problem and attributed it to workload issues and difficulties engaging some parents.

**Item 19. Worker visits with child**

Item 19 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were not of sufficient frequency. Stakeholders attributed problems to high caseloads, worker turnover, weather, and transportation problems.

**Item 20. Worker visits with parents**

Item 20 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. In 28 percent of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that visits with parents were sufficiently frequent and of sufficient quality to promote the safety and well-being of the child or enhance attainment of case goals. However, in 72 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with parents were not of sufficiently frequency or quality. In particular, reviewers determined that worker visits were not sufficiently frequent in 23 of the 27 in-home services cases.

*Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.*

**Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 79.5 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. A summary of findings for the specific item assessed for this outcome is presented below.

**Item 21. Educational needs of the child.**

Item 21 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS was effective in meeting children’s educational needs in 79 percent of applicable cases. However, in 21 percent of the cases there were concerns relating to this issue. The key concern identified pertained to in-home services cases in which reviewers determined that DFYS was not responding to children’s education-related issues.

*Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.*

**Status Of Well-Being Outcome 3 - Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 65.2 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. Reviewers identified a number of problems with respect to health services, including a lack of health screenings at entry into foster care, lack of preventive health and dental care, and not addressing medical needs. In addition, children’s mental health needs were not adequately addressed by DFYS. A summary of findings for the specific items assessed for this outcome is presented below.

**Item 22. Physical health of the child**

Item 22 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS was effective in addressing children’s health needs in 77 percent of the applicable cases. However, in 23 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that these needs were not adequately met. A key concern was that health screenings were not consistently provided at entry into foster care and preventive health and dental care was not being provided on a routine basis.

**Item 23. Mental health of the child**

Item 23 was rated an Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that DFYS was effective in addressing children’s mental health needs in 66 percent of the applicable cases. However, in 34 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children's mental health needs were not adequately met.

## KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

### IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

#### **Status of Statewide Information System –Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is in substantial conformity with the factor of Statewide Information System.

**Item 24. The State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.**

Item 24 was rated a Strength because information on the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for each child in foster care is retrievable from the State's data system.

### V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

#### **Status of Case Review System – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System.

**Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.**

Item 25 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because of the lack of clear goal-oriented case plans and the lack of a system to consistently and actively involve parents and children in case planning.

**Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.**

Item 26 was rated a Strength because periodic reviews are held in a timely manner and the quality of these reviews is reported to be excellent. Stakeholders commented on the meaningfulness of these reviews and noted that there is a good level of participation.

**Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.**

Item 27 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because permanency hearings are not consistently held in a timely manner.

**Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.**

Item 28 was rated a Strength because the State has implemented procedures for filing for termination of parental rights and is generally filing for TPR in a timely manner.

**Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.**

Item 29 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because foster parents do not consistently receive notice of permanency hearings and are not always afforded the opportunity to be heard in these hearings.

## **VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

### **Status of Quality Assurance System- Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System.

**Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.**

Item 30 was rated a Strength because the State has developed and implemented the necessary standards to protect children in foster care.

**Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.**

Item 31 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because the State does not have a statewide quality assurance process and has no formal process for clients or stakeholders to evaluate agency performance.

## **VII. TRAINING**

### **Status of Training- Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training.

**Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.**

Item 32 was rated a Strength because the agency has an initial training program and workers complete training before being assigned a caseload.

**Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.**

Item 33 was rated a Strength because ongoing training is required and available.

**Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under Title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.**

Item 34 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because foster parents are not consistently receiving initial core training and routinely provide care for children prior to receiving training. In addition, foster parents are not consistently completing ongoing training and DFYS does not monitor whether training is being accessed.

## **VIII. SERVICE ARRAY**

### **Status of Service Array-Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the factor of service array.

**Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.**

Item 35 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because services are not available in sufficient quantity in either rural or urban communities. Shortages of services have a negative impact on prevention and reunification efforts, placement stability, and child well-being. Stakeholders noted shortages in foster placements, substance abuse services, mental health services, respite care, day care, culturally appropriate services, and home-based services.

**Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.**

Item 36 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because Alaska has a shortage of services in both rural and urban communities.

**Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.**

Item 37 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because service provision is influenced by availability rather than underlying needs of the children and families.

## **IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY**

### **Status of Agency Responsiveness To The Community- Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is in substantial conformity with the factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

**Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.**

Item 38 was rated a Strength because the State has an active Tribal-State collaboration group, some positive local collaboration efforts, and leadership that is accessible at all levels of the agency when questions or issues arise.

**Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered.**

Item 39 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because involvement in the Child and Family Services Planning Process is limited to review and comment by key stakeholders instead of active involvement in setting goals and priorities.

**Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.**

Item 40 was rated a Strength because the State has collaborative efforts to coordinate services among Federal and federally assisted programs.

## **X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION**

### **Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention-Not in Substantial Conformity**

Alaska is not in substantial conformity with the factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention.

#### **Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.**

Item 41 was rated a Strength because the State has issued and implemented comprehensive new licensing standards issued December of 2001.

#### **Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.**

Item 42 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because application of variances results in full licensing standards not being applied to all foster homes.

#### **Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.**

Item 43 was rated a Strength because criminal records checks are completed on all homes.

#### **Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.**

Item 44 was rated an Area Needing Improvement because the State does not have an effective recruitment plan and needs more recruitment strategies. Stakeholders identified several barriers to recruiting and maintaining foster homes, such as lack of day care and inadequate reimbursement.

#### **Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.**

Item 45 was rated a Strength because the State utilizes the Alaska Exchange and the Northwest Adoption Exchange to seek placements for children.

## INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Alaska. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Alaska Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases at three sites throughout the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites) with local and State-level stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 50 cases reviewed are the following:

- 26 cases were reviewed in Anchorage, 12 in Mat-Su Borough, and 12 in Nome.
- All 50 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review.
- 23 of the cases were “foster care cases” (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare agency and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 27 were “in-home services cases” (cases in which families received services from the child welfare agency while children remained in their homes).
- In 25 of the cases, all children in the family were Alaska Native/American Indian; in 12 cases, all children in the family were Caucasian; in 3 cases, all children in the family were African American; in 3 cases, all children in the family were Hispanic; and in 6 cases, the children in the family were two or more races. In one case, reviewers did not identify the race/ethnicity of the children.
- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the primary reason for the opening of a child welfare agency case was the following:
  - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 24 cases (48%)
  - Physical abuse – 11 cases (22%)
  - Substance abuse by parent – 4 cases (8%)
  - Mental/physical health of parent – 4 cases (8%)
  - Child’s behavior – 2 cases (4%)
  - Sexual abuse – 2 cases (4%)
  - Domestic violence in child’s home – 1 case (2%)
  - Other – 2 cases (4%)
- Among all reasons identified for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency, neglect (not including medical neglect) was cited in 40 cases (80%), physical abuse was cited in 25 cases (50%), substance abuse by parent was cited in 21 cases (42%), and domestic violence in the child’s home was cited in 10 cases (20%).

- For 11 (48%) of the 23 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in foster care during the entire period under review.

The first section of the report presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State's performance in achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table providing the degree of outcome achievement by site, a presentation of the State's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome, and a discussion of each item examined as part of the overall outcome assessment. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.