



Staff Survey  
Department of Health and Social Services  
Office of Children's Services

2010

## Office of Children’s Services Staff Survey

### Section I - Introduction

The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children’s Services conducted a survey of staff in October 2010. Each employee of the Office of Children’s Services was included in the electronic distribution of the survey. The survey was forwarded to a total of 457 staff with 343 responses received for a response rate of 75 percent. The survey was sent to all staff with three follow-up contacts to those who had not responded. The survey sought information regarding the overall operation of the agency.

Respondents were able to skip questions they wished to, thus the data for each question will not total to the total number of overall survey respondents. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. Questions which provided for a narrative response have been summarized. The following report presents the findings from the 2010 survey.

#### • Descriptive Information

Information regarding the respondents is presented in Tables 1-4. The number of responses, job titles of respondents, and years at the agency and in the current job position are presented.

**Table 1**

<b>Survey Responses by Year and Percent</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Sent</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Responses</b>
2010	457	343	75%

**Table 2**

<b>Respondents by Job Title and Percent</b>	
<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Administrative/Clerical Support Staff	16%
Children's Services Manager	1%
Community Care Licensing Specialist	5%
Eligibility Technician	4%
Independent Living Specialist	0%
Mental Health Clinician	.3%
ORCA Support Staff	1%
Psychiatric Nurse	1%
Social Service Associate	8%
Social Worker I-III/Children's Services Specialist I-III	40%
Social Worker IV/Children's Services Supervisor IV	11%
Social Worker V/Staff Manager	2%
State Office Program Staff	7%
Other	3%

N = 338

**Table 3**

<b>Period of Time Respondent Employed at Office of Children's Services By Number and Percent</b>		
<b>Number of Years</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Less Than a Year	59	17%
One to Two Years	77	23%
Three to Five Years	90	26%
Six to Ten Years	67	20%
More than Ten Years	47	14%

N = 340

**Table 4**

<b>Respondents' Years in Current Position by Number and Percent</b>		
<b>Number of Years</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Less Than a Year	99	29%
One to Two Years	95	28%
Three to Five Years	91	27%
Six to Ten Years	35	10%
More than Ten Years	19	6%

N = 339

## **Section II - State and Regional Offices' Communication with the Field**

This area of the survey asked staff to respond to questions regarding communication with the state and regional offices. Tables 5 through 17 present the questions and findings.

**Table 5**

<b>The Practice Model of the Office of Children's Services is clearly communicated to staff and is understood by staff.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	32	10%
Agree	172	55%
Undecided	69	22%
Disagree	34	11%
Strongly Disagree	7	2%

N = 314

**Table 6**

<b>Leadership which establishes clear direction for the agency is provided through my regional office.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	34	11%
Agree	151	49%
Undecided	68	22%
Disagree	48	15%
Strongly Disagree	9	3%

N = 310

**Table 7**

<b>My regional office provides information which clearly describes the model of practice.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	37	12%
Agree	161	53%
Undecided	69	23%
Disagree	34	11%
Strongly Disagree	5	2%

N = 306

**Table 8**

<b>There are established methods of communication from state office and my regional office through memorandums and meetings which keep me informed of the activities of the agency.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	27	9%
Agree	157	51%
Undecided	64	21%
Disagree	51	16%
Strongly Disagree	11	4%

N = 310

**Table 9**

<b>The Pipeline Newsletter helps to keep me informed regarding state-wide agency activities.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	26	8%
Agree	186	59%
Undecided	75	24%
Disagree	24	8%
Strongly Disagree	6	2%

N = 317

**Table 10**

<b>I regularly receive copies of Quality Assurance Reports prepared by the State Office Evaluation Unit.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	44	14%
Agree	137	44%
Undecided	70	23%
Disagree	42	14%
Strongly Disagree	15	5%

N = 308

**Table 11**

<b>When changes are made in my region in response to the findings of quality assurance activities, the changes are clearly communicated to staff.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	20	7%
Agree	120	39%
Undecided	88	29%
Disagree	63	21%
Strongly Disagree	13	4%

N = 304

**Table 12**

<b>I am able to share information and give suggestions to regional and state office management through attendance at meetings, discussions with my supervisor and other means.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	36	12%
Agree	148	48%
Undecided	47	15%
Disagree	59	19%
Strongly Disagree	20	6%

N = 310

**Table 13**

<b>There are opportunities for workers, through direct communication or committee work, to influence the organizational operation and service delivery.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	20	6%
Agree	107	34%
Undecided	73	23%
Disagree	86	28%
Strongly Disagree	26	8%

N = 312

**Table 14**

<b>Leadership which establishes clear direction for the agency is provided through the state office.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	17	5%
Agree	131	42%
Undecided	92	29%
Disagree	59	19%
Strongly Disagree	16	5%

N = 315

**Table 15**

<b>The state office provides information which clearly describes the model of practice.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	28	9%
Agree	146	46%
Undecided	104	33%
Disagree	29	9%
Strongly Disagree	7	2%

N = 314

**Table 16**

<b>The agency, through the efforts of both the state office and the regional offices, effectively communicates its mission with the larger community.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	14	5%
Agree	109	35%
Undecided	110	35%
Disagree	61	20%
Strongly Disagree	16	5%

N = 310

**Table 17**

<b>In my experience in working with community agencies, I believe the Office of Children's Services has strong working relationships with the community.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	41	13%
Agree	133	42%
Undecided	76	24%
Disagree	53	17%
Strongly Disagree	12	4%

N = 315

### Section III - Staff Training, Development and Retention

This section of the survey asked staff to respond to questions regarding their experiences in receiving training and other staff development activities. Tables 18 through 24 present the findings.

**Table 18**

<b>I receive feedback from my supervisor regarding my performance which is useful in making changes in my work.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	85	28%
Agree	152	49%
Undecided	29	9%
Disagree	33	11%
Strongly Disagree	9	3%

N = 308

**Table 19**

<b>My supervisor is available and responsive to questions I have regarding my work.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	118	38%
Agree	130	42%
Undecided	31	10%
Disagree	20	6%
Strongly Disagree	11	4%

N = 310

**Table 20**

<b>I have received training which provided information to enable me to do my job.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	49	16%
Agree	162	53%
Undecided	44	14%
Disagree	44	14%
Strongly Disagree	9	3%

N = 308

**Table 21**

<b>I have received sufficient information/training on how to document my case work in ORCA.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	40	13%
Agree	153	51%
Undecided	54	18%
Disagree	45	15%
Strongly Disagree	8	3%

N = 300

**Staff Comments: Respondents were asked to indicate in which areas they would like to receive additional training and ongoing education.**

Comments received from staff ranged from suggestions for training needed to carry out direct practice to suggestions for training to assist them in the administrative aspects of their work. The information gained from this question will be used in further development of the training program at OCS.

Several areas for increased and follow-up training were provided. Areas suggested included:

- ORCA
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence and its impact on child development
- Writing initial assessments
- Writing request for funds including the do's and don'ts
- A step by step guide for ORCA entry when custody is taken including placement
- Advanced interviewing skills
- Cultural Communications
- Mental health assessments and services for young children
- Family Engagement
- Preparation of court documents
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Time management
- Medicaid
- Confidentiality
- Impact on children of removal from home
- Case plan development
- Licensing Specialist training
- OCS Eligibility Staff training

Other suggestions included development of a standardized format for letters for different stages of the case. The need for very clear directions in all aspects of carrying out the job was identified.

**Table 22**

<b>The cross cultural training I have received has helped me in working with different populations.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	29	10%
Agree	131	44%
Undecided	85	29%
Disagree	39	13%
Strongly Disagree	11	4%

N = 295

**Staff Comments:** Respondents were asked to indicate any other cross cultural training information which they believed would be helpful in working with different populations. The narrative below summarizes the highlights of the suggestions.

Several staff noted they enjoyed and benefitted from “Knowing Who You Are” training. It was noted by several respondents that there is a need for ongoing training in cross cultural issues rather than the current schedule which provides for one course.

There were numerous comments that training needs to be offered which reaches across cultures and presents the multiple groups that OCS works with. It was noted that although the majority of families served are Alaska Native, there are also many other groups which are represented in the service recipients. There were several staff in administrative support positions who noted that they did not have access to cross cultural training and felt that it should be offered to all staff.

There were also comments that training needs to address broader issues that impact families. Mentioned were “culture of poverty” and socio-economic factors that families experience.

Retention of experienced workers is important to the Office of Children’s Services. Employees were asked to respond to a question regarding the reasons they choose to continue to work at the Office of Children’s Services. The respondents were able to select as many options as they choose, thus the number of respondents column is greater than the total number of respondents to the survey.

**Table 23**

<b>Retaining experienced staff is important to the agency. Please check the areas which reflect reasons you have continued to choose to work at the Office of Children’s Services.</b>		
<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
The job duties match my training and background	159	53%
I have decided to pursue a professional career in child welfare	88	29%
My job duties are challenging and allow me to use my skills, talents, and problem solving abilities	197	65%
The pay and benefits are commensurate with the work	84	28%
I value the opportunity for an alternate work week	58	19%
I enjoy the challenges of working to insure the well-being of children	169	56%
I enjoy the positive working relationship with my supervisor	164	54%
My co-workers contribute to and make my job satisfying	184	61%
I value the security and benefits of working for the state	194	64%
I receive support and guidance from my supervisor	148	49%
I enjoy the professional atmosphere of the agency	57	19%
I believe in the Practice Model of the agency	109	36%
I enjoy working with other state agencies or community agencies	113	37%

N = 302

**Staff Comments: Staff were invited to provide information on other areas which caused them to continue to work at the Office of Children Services.** The narrative below provides highlights of the comments.

Several staff commented on the sense of support they experience from the community for the work that they do. Others spoke of the belief in the work that they do, citing a sense of loyalty to the families they serve.

The need and importance of serving as advocates for children was given. The opportunity to assist children in becoming productive members of society was listed as important. Working with foster parents was cited as a positive aspect of the job.

Support from coworkers and a team approach were important characteristics of the work. The value of supervision and receiving guidance and support were listed as reasons for continuing to work at OCS. One respondent noted that the supervisor provides for an open discussion process, group problem solving, and individual support. The challenge of the positions was noted as well as the rewarding nature of the work.

Staff spoke of the importance and value of serving families from diverse backgrounds and the opportunity to learn from the experience.

One respondent described using the small successes with families, community partners, and staff as a source of motivation which allowed them to stay at OCS.

There were many staff that cited the security of their positions and the ability to work flexible schedules. The opportunity to advance their social work degree was also cited.

The Office of Children’s Services is interested to learn the ideas employees feel would help retain staff. Respondents were asked to respond to ways in which the Office of Children’s Services could work to retain staff. The respondents were able to select up to three options from a list provided, thus the number of respondents for this question is greater than the total number of respondents to the survey.

**Table 24**

<b>There are many reasons that staff choose to change jobs. Please check the three main areas that you believe would help the Office of Children’s Services retain staff.</b>		
<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Increased recognition for work accomplishments	128	42%
Increased pay and benefits	193	63%
Greater autonomy in work decisions	41	13%
A better work environment (i.e. office space, furniture, supplies)	57	19%
Increased opportunities to attend trainings	71	23%
Increased opportunities to influence agency procedures	81	27%
Opportunities for the alternate work week	70	23%
Improved quality of supervision	84	28%
Increased clerical support	85	28%
Increased case (SSA) support	98	32%
Alternate staff to cover vacant caseloads	91	30%
Overall reduction in workloads	168	55%

N = 305

**Staff Comments: Staff were invited to provide other suggestions for the Office of Children's Services attracting and retaining a strong workforce.** The following narrative provides a summary of the responses.

There were several concerns expressed regarding housing in rural areas for workers. Lack of housing was cited as a contributing factor in not being able to retain staff. It was noted that housing is frequently not available and is of very poor quality. It was noted that even housing which was of limited quality was very expensive. It was noted that in many areas, other departments have housing for the state workers.

The balance between direct work with families and the documentation and administrative requirements was cited as a factor in worker stress. The documentation aspect of the work was seen as continuing to increase which adversely impacts the ability to spend time with children and parents.

Several comments were made regarding the overall workload of cases assigned to workers. It was stated that the numbers of children per case directly increases the amount of time required to provide services to the case such as visits to each child and parent. These numbers were not seen as feasible to be worked and provide good services.

Availability of alternative work weeks was described as a need by several staff. There were needs expressed that with the volume of work that is required, that it is helpful if staff are able to participate in different kinds of work schedules. Several respondents noted the importance of supervisors needing to be able to also work an alternate work week.

Increased support for workers' attendance at trainings and conference in the community was cited as a means to encourage workers to stay at OCS. The need for financial support for these trainings as well as financial support for attending college classes was described.

Worker turnover was described as a problem when positions that become vacant are delayed in completing the hire. The remaining workload has to be carried by the workers who are still with the agency increasing their own workload.

**Section IV** – This area of the survey asked staff to respond to questions regarding support for program and case activities. Tables 25 through 31 present the findings.

**Table 25**

<b>In general, ORCA is a useful tool to manage case information.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	63	21%
Agree	165	55%
Undecided	41	14%
Disagree	24	8%
Strongly Disagree	6	2%

N = 299

**Table 26**

<b>When needed, there is available support in a timely manner to assist me with ORCA questions and issues.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	62	21%
Agree	190	63%
Undecided	26	9%
Disagree	21	7%
Strongly Disagree	3	1%

N = 302

**Table 27**

<b>When I have questions regarding the operation of my computer or I need direct assistance, there is timely IT response to my needs.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	46	15%
Agree	164	53%
Undecided	36	12%
Disagree	49	16%
Strongly Disagree	12	4%

N = 307

**Table 28**

<b>The policy and procedures manual and other written directions that guide my job are clear and helpful.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	20	7%
Agree	153	51%
Undecided	67	22%
Disagree	45	15%
Strongly Disagree	14	5%

N = 299

**Table 29**

<b>There are opportunities for me to make suggestions for changes and upgrades to the policy and procedure manual and they are considered.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	19	6%
Agree	96	32%
Undecided	104	35%
Disagree	58	19%
Strongly Disagree	23	8%

N = 300

**Table 30**

<b>When policy and procedures are developed, they are disseminated throughout the agency in a timely manner.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	37	12%
Agree	159	53%
Undecided	75	25%
Disagree	25	8%
Strongly Disagree	3	1%

N = 299

**Table 31**

<b>I have the necessary office supplies and office furniture to carry out my job duties.</b>		
<b>Level of Agreement</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	48	16%
Agree	178	59%
Undecided	32	11%
Disagree	34	11%
Strongly Disagree	11	4%

N = 303

### **Section V – Final Comments**

In concluding the survey, a final area was provided for staff to give comments that they felt were important and helpful to the agency. The comments were far ranging and covered aspects of service organization and delivery at OCS. The following narrative provides a summary of the comments.

The importance of workers being involved in providing information for policy development and decisions was stressed. There was concern expressed that veteran workers are not always consulted and their expertise used. It was suggested that a means for commenting on pending policy and procedure changes be offered other than by e-mail. It was felt if presentations of the policies were made, staff would have a greater opportunity to provide feedback. It was also suggested to include workers on committees which are developing policy.

The location of positions such as ICWA Specialist, Administrative Reviewer, and Social Worker V were a concern in that the positions are only located in major field offices even though their responsibility is over several field offices in the region. It was suggested that the positions could be located in the smaller field offices, thus increasing the opportunities for more staff to have opportunities to serve.

There was concern expressed that workload and workers available to meet the needs is not always evenly distributed. It was felt that there were areas of the state which had significant community populations, but that had less staffing than areas with smaller

populations to be served. Several instances of field offices where the workload is high were described.

Some field offices described the need for more vehicles and better furniture. It was suggested that when office furniture is worn out, that there should be a process to replace it. The need for supplies of tissue for waiting rooms for families and children was identified.

It was suggested that the use of technology such as SKYPE should be incorporated into the resources available to work with families.

### **Appreciation to Staff**

The time that staff took to express their thoughts and suggestions is deeply appreciated by the Office of Children's Services. The findings and comments of the survey serve to inform the Continuous Quality Improvement Process. The information will be used by management in efforts to enhance the work environment and to enable the delivery of quality services to families.