

# ALASKA'S CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT TASK FORCE

**Who we are:** 21 professionals & advocates with knowledge and experience relating to the criminal justice system, issues of child physical abuse, child neglect, child sexual abuse and exploitation, and child maltreatment-related fatalities.

**What we do:** advise DHSS and other State agencies on the case handling, investigation and prosecution of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation.

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/childrensjustice/default.aspx>

*One of the CJA Task Force Projects:*

MANDATORY REPORTING OF CHILD  
ABUSE – online training &  
information

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/childrensjustice/mandatoryreporting.aspx>

# PURPOSE & GOALS FOR TODAY

- Report on information shared & themes at last year's Listening Session exploring concerns about the civil & criminal child abuse response systems in Alaska
- Inform Tribal child advocates about the Task Force role in addressing these concerns
- Encourage Tribal leaders and child advocates to pursue solutions and strategies to address these issues

# December 1, 2016 “Listening Session” at BIA Providers: SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What are the greatest threats to the safety and well-being of children, adolescents & teens in your village/town?
2. Does anyone respond to the worries and safety concerns about children? Who are the responders? Is it helpful? What happens when they try to help?
3. If you knew a baby, child or youth was hurt or mistreated, or in a situation where they could be hurt in your community or family, who would you tell? What would you expect that person to do? Who would a child go to for help in your community?

# December 1, 2016 “Listening Session” at BIA Providers

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS (continued)

4. What do you know about the way state agencies like Troopers, OCS or Juvenile Justice intervene with families? Have these agencies been helpful?
  
5. We know that some children who have experienced chronic trauma, abuse and stress are sometimes labeled as “problem kids” because of the ways they handle these toxic experiences. What happens for these youth in your village/town? Is it helpful?
  
6. What is happening in your communities that is helping kids to be safe, make good choices, to talk about their concerns? Who are the people & agencies who support & help kids/youth?

# GROUP BREAKOUTS

- Groups were facilitated by staff of ANTHC Wellness or ICWA Workers
- Each group had a scribe who took notes on the comments (more later)
- Members of the CJATF were observers in most of the groups

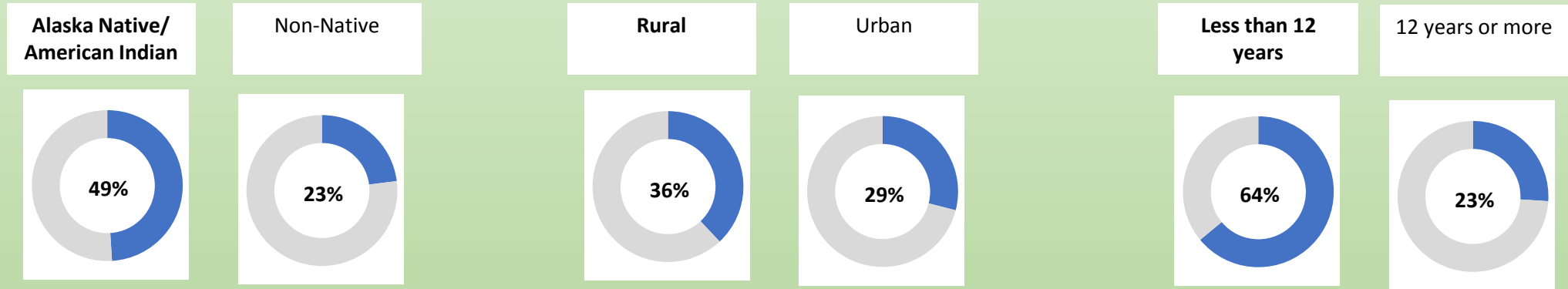
***PARTICIPANTS SELECTED THE GROUP THEY FELT MOST REPRESENTED THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH CHILD ABUSE RESPONSE ISSUES***

- Rural Women (6 groups)
- Rural Men (2 groups)
- Women Serving Rural/Hub (2 groups)
- Men Serving Rural/Hub (1 group)

# Rural context is vital



**31%**  
OF CHILDREN born in Alaska during 2009:2011  
REPORTED to OCS FOR ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE OR  
NEGLECT before age 7 years



# 1. What are the greatest threats to the safety and well-being of children, adolescents & teens in your village/town?

- Older men enticing girls with alcohol/drugs & sexually assaulting the girls, sometimes girls get pregnant
- **Teenagers with babies & lack of parenting skills**
- Nothing to do after school – too much idle time
- **Lack of mental health services, limited access to behavioral health supports** (reported by all groups)
- **Not enough support for parents, lack of parenting skills & coaching**
- Overcrowded homes
- Service providers not being supported
- **Western agencies forcing their ideas & values on village**
- **Lack of trust with OCS & police/Troopers**



## **All groups reported similar concerns related to Drugs & alcohol:**

- **Drugs – heroin, meth, prescription drug abuse & alcoholism – all contributors to neglect & abuse** (multiple comments relating to these issues)
- **Parents neglect & abuse children while using alcohol & drugs;** Children become “parents” of addicted caregivers
- Family spends money on alcohol, drugs & gambling instead of child needs
- Bootleggers & drug dealers get away with it because of lack of law enforcement
- **Community members don't report parents abusing alcohol or using drugs**
- **Community members & leaders don't know the signs of drug use, or what to do, how dangerous the drugs can be, etc. - need education about drugs**

## Comments related to youth use of alcohol/drugs

- **Kids learn to use alcohol & drugs at home**
- Alcohol easy to get (where there is liquor store adults buy for kids underage)
- **Young kids get started with tobacco, then alcohol, then drugs – alcohol use is getting younger & younger**
- No help available for youth experimenting with alcohol and/or drugs – to re-direct them before they get hooked
- **Teens have too much free time with no supervision, parents too busy**
- **Kids make bad choices due to limited supervision**
- Parents unable to protect youth/children from predators who are preying on them

Several groups had comments related to loss of respect leading to loss of culture :

- **The “culture of violence” is accepted as the new reality for Native women**
- **Sexual abuse & child pornography increasing**
- **Bullying in school** – older kids picking on younger ones & cyberbullying – kids are seeing adults hurt each other & be disrespectful & are bullying each other
- **Trauma & stress experienced by children & youth being ignored by education system, service providers, leaders**
- **Youth not learning positive roles – getting into negative, unsafe relationships**

## 2. Does anyone respond to the worries and safety concerns about children? Who are the responders?

- **ICWA workers - try to respond but sometimes are not supported by local leaders; when ICWA worker is new or not comfortable with responding Tribal leaders or Tribal administrator help**
- VPSO/VPO – if they are in village; Troopers (Troopers are often **very slow** because of understaffing)
- clinic/health aides, **some only respond if** there are allegations of medical problems, injury or illness, neglect;
- **Some villages have Child Protection Team who talks to parents to let them know the concerns & offer help**
- **Grandparents (end up with the kids – try to talk to parents too)**
- Teachers, school staff
- Behavioral health aides if village has them
- **Sober relatives, elders, community members who are concerned try to help**
- Church leaders
- Village council/tribal leaders meet and try to address the problem

3. If you knew a baby, child or youth was hurt or mistreated, or in a situation where they could be hurt in your community who would you tell? What would you expect that person to do? Who would a child most likely go to for help?

### RESPONSES FROM URBAN GROUPS:

- OCS, Child Advocacy Center, police to investigate & take action. (urban women)
- Elders, family members intervene & provide safety for the child & give parents guidance/correction (urban men)

# RESPONSES FROM RURAL GROUPS

- Family members & friends of the child/child's parents
- ICWA worker and/or VPSO
- Council members
- Troopers
  
- **These community based people are expected to help child find safety & talk to the parents about what they are doing that harms the child.**
- If there is a suspected crime, law enforcement is called

4. What do you know about the way state agencies like Troopers, OCS or Juvenile Justice intervene with families? Have these agencies been helpful?

- **All groups – both urban & rural – knew generally about the role these agencies have with families**
- **All groups commented about agency turnover**
  - some groups provided detailed descriptions about 1) lack of cultural competence of these agencies, 2) failure to recognize Tribal sovereignty and 3) oppression/imposition of western standards.
- Widely varied answers on whether interventions have been helpful or not.... More on next slide

# Is the way that DJJ – OCS – Troopers Intervene with Families Helpful or not?

- **It is Helpful When.....**

- OCS, AST, DJJ staff are **willing to develop relationships** with the village & leaders.
- OCS, AST, DJJ **doesn't have frequent turnover** in staff assigned to the village.
- OCS **responds quickly to concerns** instead of waiting for an emergency & removing children
- OCS **works with ICWA** worker to find alternatives to removing children
- Agency staff **work with Tribal court** to find solutions



# Is the way that DJJ – OCS – Troopers Intervene with Families Helpful or not?

- **It is NOT helpful when law enforcement .....**
  - Have a **delayed or no response** to reports of concern about safety of children
  - **fails to take action** on reports of child & adult sexual predators, with excuses like “its he said/she said” or “he denied it so there’s nothing we can do”

## **Specific concerns regarding AST:**

- (1) Trooper **bullying** community members (one comment: bullying was reported to the Sgt. and nothing was done)
- (2) Trooper **inappropriate in way talked** to elders,
- (3) Troopers **act scared** of community members & **won’t interact** so they can become trusted.

# Is the way that DJJ – OCS – Troopers Intervene with Families Helpful or not?

**It is NOT helpful when OCS.....**

- Makes **rushed removals** & doesn't give consideration to **village-based options** such as relatives and alternatives to "western system services"
- OCS **failure to consult with or seek input** from ICWA/Tribe when investigating & making case plans, usually waiting until after the Tribe intervened
- Worker is **hard to reach**
- **Doesn't work with the Tribe** on solutions
- **Waits until** it is a life-death **emergency** to respond to reports from community

5. We know that some children who have experienced chronic trauma, abuse and stress are sometimes labeled as “problem kids” because of the ways they handle these toxic experiences. What happens for these youth in your village/town? Is it helpful?

- **They fall through the cracks** – we find out about their trauma story when they attempt or succeed at suicide
- **They are set up for failure** – take them away & put in institutions, reinforce they are not accepted, institutionalized behavior so they can't function in the village
- **They drop out of school or get kicked out**
- **They quit trying to learn;** school puts them in detention instead of trying to understand what is happening that they are acting out

# More on children/youth with chronic abuse, trauma, stress.....

- They get ostracized by others for their behavior & feel worthless
- **They get into trouble because they are asking for help! They are living with substance abuse & some with DV too**
- **They get bullied or they start bullying**
- They are treated differently & no one takes the time to work with them
- **They turn to alcohol or drugs because that is what they see their parents & others in their family do when they are stressed or uncomfortable**
- School calls OCS instead of contacting ICWA or Tribal leaders for help with them
- **The cultural clash is not helping our children – OCS & DJJ want to “re-program them” into Anglo kids, not strengthen their cultural ties & pride in themselves**

# What is helping these children/youth?

- **Elders are going to the school to help talk with children, be mentors, share stories & teach cultural values**
- **Teachers** try to do things to help – some are helping
- **In our way the elders say to teach them**, help them find positives – one elder took a young man out to the tundra to help him undo the trauma he experienced
- **Spirit camps help – teach youth hunting, fishing, berrypicking as a way to feel safe, peace**
- **We are learning how to recognize the way kids' plea for help & how to help them**
- Sometimes they get a **BH counselor** – but not very often

6. What is happening in your communities that is helping kids to be safe, make good choices, to talk about their concerns? Who are the people & agencies who support & help kids/youth?

HAPPENING NOW:

- **Parents & grandparents teaching children**
- School encourages traditional clothing & has language throughout curriculum; immersion schools work!
- **Tribal leaders being involved & mentoring, encouraging healthy choices**
- **Tribe hosting family gatherings & events where whole family can be together doing things that are fun, healthy & developing good relationships & memories for children**
- **Teaching them to be proud of who they are & who they are connected to, family, community**

# WHO ARE THE PEOPLE & AGENCIES THAT SUPPORT & HELP OUR CHILDREN?

- Grandmas!
- Elders, parents, relatives who are sober & safe
- ICWA & social services being involved with prevention & school activity so kids feel like reaching out to them
- Teachers
- Health aides
- Church
- Village Corporation
- Covenant House in Anchorage

# WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE THIS INFORMATION?

Regional gatherings & discussions?

Child Protection Team or Community dialog?

*The CJATF Rural Issues Subcommittee is interested in hearing the concerns of your community members. We want to know what is happening with the child abuse response systems and support for children throughout Alaska.*



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