



# ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS



**ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL  
FY 2022–2023**

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# ***ROUND TABLE REPORT: Executive Summary***

## PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) identified child welfare workforce retention as their priority focus for FY 2021-2022 after the Office of Children's Services (OCS) reported a near 60% turnover among frontline staff. They started with a literature review on the past 15 years of child welfare retention related research in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why child welfare workers leave a position or the field. Next, the themes identified in that research guided the development of questions to be used in discussions with OCS staff. Then, the CRP hosted five round table discussions, one in each region of Alaska, with frontline workers. Finally, the findings from those discussions were used to inform the recommendations developed for the 2021-2022 CRP Annual Report.

The relationship between worker wellbeing and supportive leadership was one of the main findings from the FY 2021-2022 round table discussions with frontline staff. With that in mind, the Panel decided to build on their work by meeting with Supervisors and Managers this year. Additionally, the Panel reconnected with past round table participants in an effort to identify any perceived changes in organizational culture and worker wellness since they last met.

## METHODOLOGY

The CRP hosted six roundtable discussions around organizational culture and wellness in 2022-2023. To encourage authentic engagement, the decision was made to host individual discussions with each level of staff. One discussion was held with each of the following groups: PSS I/II (past participants), Regional Managers, Staff Managers, Urban Supervisors and Rural Supervisors. For the purpose of these discussions, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Wasilla, and Juneau were considered urban offices and the remaining offices were considered rural offices.

Each two-hour discussion was hosted via Zoom. A member of the CRP facilitated each discussion. One or two other Panel members and two staff members from the CRP Coordinator's office provided support for each discussion. Panel members and support staff in attendance took notes and participated in a debrief afterward where the group arrived at a consensus on broad themes for each area. Individual summary reports were developed for each round table discussion and those reports were used to create this Executive Summary.

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Alaska OCS is divided into five regions: Anchorage, Southeast, Southcentral, Western, Northern. **PSS I/II, December 7, 2022:** All 27 past participants were invited to a follow up discussion this year. There were 8 participants in this discussion, with representation from all regions of Alaska. **Regional Managers, January 25, 2023:** Five Regional Managers participated in this discussion. **Staff Managers, January 26, 2023:** Five Staff Managers participated in this round table discussion.

**Urban Supervisor, January 31, 2023:** Thirteen Supervisors from urban offices participated in this round table discussion.

**Rural Supervisor, February 2, 2023:** Seven Supervisors from rural offices participated in this round table discussion.

## **FINDINGS**

It's important to note this is a high-level overview of findings and experiences vary by staff level and region. More detailed findings can be found in the individual round table reports on [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org).

Frontline workers:

- Workers continue to report not feeling valued
- Wellness time is not given, or is worker driven and often worker funded
- Vacancies force workers to work outside their scope and training
- Great need for access to mental health services due to the nature of the work
- Reported discrepancies around how critical incident debriefing is handled
- Perceived lack of follow through on promised changes such as PSS III position, bonuses, a mental health clinician, and changes to on-call

Managers and Supervisors:

- Lack of staff was reported as their biggest challenge
- HR delays prevent them from hiring qualified applicants
- Managers and Supervisors need to be considered when thinking about worker wellness and retention
- Unreliable technology and a lack of resources add to their already heavy workload
- Participants feel like decisions are made without input from the people they impact

Opportunities for improvement:

- Improve HR at the state level to prevent OCS from losing qualified applicants
- Improve technology at OCS
- Prioritize safety in rural Alaska
- Address travel barriers in rural Alaska in order to achieve federally mandated timelines for essential services
- Prioritize and protect worker wellness

## **CONCLUSION**

This Executive Summary provides a high-level overview of the project and findings. It is highly recommended to read the individual reports and the FY 2021-2022 round table summary to gain a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by each level of staff. Individual round table summary reports, along with the Executive Summary, will be posted publicly on the CRP website, [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org). The 2022-2023 CRP Round Table Executive Summary will be shared with all participants and the Office of Children's Services. The CRP will encourage OCS to share the Executive Summary, and their response on how they will utilize the report, with all OCS staff. Findings from the 2022-2023 CRP round table discussions will inform the recommendations that are developed as part of the CRP Annual Report. The Annual Report will be sent to OCS for response and will be made available to the public, community stakeholders and Alaska's policymakers.

***ROUND TABLE REPORT:***  
***Urban Supervisors***

## **Background**

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) identified child welfare workforce retention as their priority focus for FY 2021-2022 after the Office of Children's Services (OCS) reported a near 60% turnover among frontline staff. They started with a literature review on the past 15 years of child welfare retention related research in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why child welfare workers leave a position or the field. Next, the themes identified in that research guided the development of questions to be used in discussions with OCS staff. Then, the CRP hosted five round table discussions, one in each region of Alaska, with frontline workers. Finally, the findings from those discussions were used to inform the recommendations developed for the CRP's Annual Report.

## **Project Overview**

The relationship between worker wellbeing and access to supportive leadership was one of the main findings from the FY 2021-2022 round table discussions with frontline staff. With that in mind, the Panel decided to build on their work by meeting with Supervisors and Managers this year. The CRP hosted a roundtable discussion with each of the following groups: Regional Managers, Staff Managers, Urban Supervisors and Rural Supervisors. Additionally, they reconnected with FY 2021-2022 round table participants through one stand-alone meeting.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT**

Open-ended questions in seven focus areas were developed using the broad findings from the 2021-2022 round table discussions as well as themes identified in the literature review such as the role of organizational culture in retention and the importance of looking at worker wellness from an individualized and multidimensional perspective. Additionally, the Panel created questions that would help them better understand the roles and responsibilities of Supervisors and Managers.

## **PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

To encourage engagement, the decision was made to host individual discussions with each level of staff. Additionally, the Panel understands that workers' experiences will vary by area, so the Supervisor level was divided into urban and rural areas. Urban Supervisors were identified as the target participants for the 2 hour January 31, 2023 round table discussion. As the first step in the recruitment phase, OCS leadership forwarded an email from the CRP Chair to all Supervisors and Managers. The email introduced the round tables, informed the workers that the project was independent of OCS and shared the project details. Next, the CRP reached out directly to Supervisors to invite them to the discussion.

## **VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE METHODOLOGY**

Throughout all steps of the process, participants were reminded that the CRP operates independent of OCS, and while OCS would know who was invited, they would not have access



to a list of participants. The meetings were held via Zoom. Participants were held in a waiting room and then screened for admittance using the confirmed participant list and an organizational chart provided by OCS. Participants were notified that a recording was being made of the discussion, but it would only be used for internal review purposes in the notetaking and report-writing process. Recordings were not shared and were deleted upon completion of the reports for each round table discussion. Participants were informed that complete anonymity may not be possible. However, names will not be used in any round table reports and region names that were associated with responses were removed from the following summary in an effort to protect participants as much as possible.

## **Round Table Design**

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- **Facilitator:** The CRP Chair, Cameron Adams, was the facilitator for this discussion. She explained the expectations of the meeting, procedures around confidentiality and facilitated the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief.
- **Ambassador:** Panel member, Colin Underwood, acted as ambassador for this discussion. He was responsible for the opening and closing remarks, and he took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Observer:** Panel member Sharon Sparks observed the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Coordinator:** The CRP Coordinator, Tricia Minnick, handled the technology for the Zoom meeting, took notes and facilitated a debrief after the discussion. A UAF social work practicum student also attended the meeting, they took notes and participated in the debrief.

### **FACILITATION METHODS:**

Facilitation methods varied depending on the level of participation and engagement for each question and included the following:

1. Zoom hand-raising function followed by participants being called on by facilitator
2. A “round-robin” approach of calling on all participants by name for a focus area/question
3. Encouraging participants to simply unmute and begin speaking
4. Use of the Zoom chat function was encouraged if someone was uncomfortable sharing verbally, or if there was not enough time for everyone to share verbally.

### **QUESTION FORMAT:**



A slide was shared on screen for each focus area (Appendix A). On the slide were open-ended questions related to that focus area. The facilitator explained the focus area, read off all of the questions and then encouraged participants to respond to the one that stood out to them the most. Participants contributed to a focus area, but not necessarily to each specific question.

## **FOCUS AREAS & QUESTIONS:**

### **Intro: Paint a Picture**

We'd like to know about a typical day as a Supervisor. Can you paint a picture for us?

- a. What do you feel like your role is—how do you see your role?
- b. What are some of the challenges and what are some of the successes?

### **Organizational Culture and Wellness**

What does organizational culture and wellness mean to you?

- a. How are you able to achieve your vision of that?
- b. What barriers do you face to reaching that?
- c. What words come to mind when you think about describing the organizational culture at OCS as a whole?

### **Connection and Support**

How do you support your team?

- a. How much autonomy do you have to make decisions around supporting your team?
- b. What kinds of successes have you experienced in supporting your team?
- c. What are the biggest barriers or challenges to supporting your team?

What's it like managing a team remotely from a different region?

- a. What are the challenges?
- b. What are the benefits to managing remotely?

### **Training**

What training did you receive to become a Supervisor and what does on-going training look like?

- a. What tools and support did you receive to prepare you for your position?
- b. What additional tools do you wish you had to be more successful as a Supervisor?

Many of you likely started at a lower position in OCS before being a Supervisor. How has the system changed since you moved up through the ranks?

### **Policies and Procedures**

When new policies are put in place, what does implementation look like?

- a. What kind of support/guidance do you get from leadership when a new policy needs to be implemented?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided to implement new policies in a way that works for your team, region, office, etc.?

What gets in the way of being able to follow your own procedures?

- a. How could leadership help you follow your policies and procedures better?

- b. What kind of support do you need in order to follow current policies and procedures designed to support your staff?

### **Communication**

What is the flow of communication? (How is information shared with you and how do you share information with your staff?)

- a. How are you presenting information? How do you ensure it's being communicated as intended?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided when having to communicate information with your teams, region or office?
- c. What kind of support do you receive from your leadership when having to communicate about changes or having to present potentially difficult information to your teams?

What are the challenges in communication in your role?

What have been successful communication strategies?

What kind of communication tools do you presently use?

What other suggestions do you have for OCS to be able to communicate more effectively across its vast and diverse organization?

### **Findings from the CRP Round Table Discussions with PSS I/I**

Did you read our 2021-2022 Annual Report and the OCS response?

- a. We've shared on the screen the main findings from last year's discussions with case-carrying workers; please take a moment to read through them and then share your main takeaways.

### **PARTICIPANTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS:**

Alaska OCS has five regions: Anchorage, Southeast, Southcentral, Western, Northern. For the purpose of these discussions, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Wasilla, and Juneau were considered urban offices and the remaining offices were considered rural offices. Thirteen Supervisors from urban offices participated in this discussion.

### **DATA COLLECTION METHODS:**

1. The Facilitator, Ambassador, Observer and Coordinator staff all took notes during the round table discussion.
2. Transcripts from the Zoom chat function were reviewed.
3. The discussion was recorded for immediate internal review only. Once the report writing was completed for that round table, recordings were deleted to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

Note taking: A note taking template was provided in advance of the meetings which was broken down into focus areas. The note taking template was used to note any concepts or ideas that stood out to the notetaker in that specific area. While everyone tasked with taking notes was provided with this template, some chose to take notes in a format of their choosing.

Debrief: After the round table discussion, everyone who took notes met together to debrief. Each question was discussed, and the group arrived at a consensus on broad takeaways for each focus area as well as notable quotes which correlated with the themes.

Preliminary Findings: A broad summary of initial findings was shared with OCS Director Guay and the Senate and House Social Services Committees during a February 14, 2023 presentation.

Summary Report: Notes from the debrief and a final review of the discussion recording was used to create this summary report. A standalone executive summary will be created once all round table discussions are completed for the year.

## Findings

This section provides a summary of the January 31, 2023 round table with Urban Supervisors. **Any suggestions or recommendations in this section are on behalf of participants, not the CRP.** These findings will be used to guide the recommendations the Panel develops for their Annual Report.

### INTRO: PAINT A PICTURE

**Their job is a constant balancing act between case work and supervisory duties.**

- “We’re taking on caseloads as well as trying to support staff and make sure we are meeting safety needs.”
- “There are a lot of different pieces and sometimes I feel stretched thin.”
- “Trying to make sure that safety and that all of the children are seen and that case plans are done, it’s a lot with so many cases.”
- “I have a lot of hats and a lot of different duties which can be challenging and confusing at times but then also there is a lot of achievement through those things.”

**The strain from vacancies is one of the biggest challenges they deal with.**

- “Challenges are recruitment and workers leaving and having to move cases all the time and having different case workers for different cases and having new caseworkers to get to know those cases which is really hard for families to have so many caseworkers.”
- “One of the challenges I face in my role is a constant level of vacancies and trying to manage the workload around those vacancies.”

**On-call is one of their biggest frustrations and one that may ultimately lead to turnover among the supervisory team.**

- “We have so many openings for supervisors that we are on call every two weeks. That’s really challenging to do our day to day job and then be on call and constantly answering calls.”
- “On-call is an issue. All of that on-call stuff is horrible.”

- “I would echo the concern with on-call. In addition to supervisors having to take on casework, the use of supervisors having to take on on-call is going up.”
- “On-call is unacceptable. The amount we are on-call really impacts our job.”
- “I have a feeling there’s some people, and I might be one of them, that might not be at this meeting next year if the on-call continues the way it is.”
- “If you get sick while you’re on-call, there is no backup plan. I’ve been sick while on-call twice and I had to work because there was no back up.”
- “On-call is a sore issue for supervisors, it affects the way we carry out our job. If we’re thinking about leaving, this would be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.”
- “On-call is a big thing, there’s just no compensation for the supervisory staff to have that part of our job duties assigned to us. There’s just none.”
- “It’s like the whole State of Alaska and the Department itself is winning because all of the supervisors are doing all of this work without any compensation.”
- “Every two to three weeks is above a manageable level. It’s taking a toll on my ability to have self-care and have a life outside of work.
- “The outlook on this issue is bleak right now.”

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & WELLNESS**

**The culture at OCS is one that does not allow time for wellness.**

- “OCS tries hard to create a good culture and working environment, but sometimes those things are just one more thing that we have to stop our day and not get our work done.”
- “Workers talk about ‘I’d like to go to meditation and spend an hour to do that but that’s one hour I’m not going to be able to do a home-visit or I can’t get my work done or I have to work late’, sometimes it just doesn’t balance out.”
- “I want them to be able to do some training and bonding and spend time together, but I have management saying ‘you still have to handle emergencies and gotta handle yours calls and these things’, so we can’t even take a day to disconnect because they still have to worry about their cases.”
- “It’s about the workload and not being able to manage it and workers being so burnt out that they can’t even focus on these wellness things.”
- “There is a lot of verbal messaging that indicates support for taking care of ourselves and taking care of the caseworkers, but I don’t feel like our organization has that systemic support or culture in place to be able to achieve those things.”
- “It’s a nice sentiment, but everyone is on their own for their own wellness and their self-care.”
- “Unless there is some sort of big overhaul, I don’t see how this agency is going to be able to wrap itself around a culture of self-awareness and self-wellness.”
- “We try to model positive behavior and organizational culture by supporting each other as supervisors and allowing workers to see that, but it’s a big struggle when you’re dealing with everything trickling down.”

- “There is a constant pull with the organizational culture and wellness. On one hand, upper management and the State goes ‘Take care of yourself’ but on the other hand they look at the numbers and say ‘Why do you only have X percentage of...?’ They’re very much essential services focused and not so much on wellness.”
- “They preach self-care, but it feels like it’s only on the surface.”
- “It’s like you get penalized for any self-care or taking any time off.”

## **CONNECTION AND SUPPORT**

**The amount of autonomy they are allowed in supporting their staff varies across regions.**

- “I have pretty good autonomy to make decisions.”
- “I have autonomy in some areas, but we definitely run into issues where we run up against other people seeing things differently and then it causes some hubbub and drama that we have to work out.”
- “Sometimes I approve leave and then there are lots of questions about why they aren’t there.”
- “We have a lot of autonomy, but we also preach that nobody is expected to do their job alone.”
- “We have a lot of autonomy to make decisions and support our team.”
- “Sometimes decisions are taken away from us and it gets really convoluted and I feel ruled out of control with my decision.”

**Their biggest challenges in supporting their staff are a lack of staff and time.**

- “A lot of the administrative stuff takes away from us as field supervisors and our availability to be there for our people.”
- “We’re not available to support our team like we would like to.”
- “There are lots of barriers to supporting our team, having the availability and being able to be there with them. I wish I had more time.”
- “Oftentimes I’m working on my own cases and not able to really have that time for my worker.”

## **TRAINING**

**Training at the supervisory level is often provided too late.**

- “I didn’t have training for my first two to three years and there’s been no follow up sense then.”
- “I have been a supervisor for two years and I’m only just getting Coaching Supervisors to Best Practice.”
- “I think there is a lack of impactful training sups get, especially when you first start.”
- “We get Coaching to the Practice Model and they revamped it this year. It’s great, but we receive it so late into being a supervisor that it feels like more work and just something to check off than an actual learning opportunity.”
- “I don’t think I got my first supervisor training until about a year into the job.”

**They are not given protected time to complete trainings.**

- “I attempted the Supervisor Academy and had to withdraw. It’s not possible to do the Academy and your own work without working overtime.”
- “The training that is offered is spread over years. A lot of the training is good, but it takes a long time to get tagged for it and there isn’t a system in place to support you going to training. There isn’t anyone to do your work when you’re in training.”

**Training does not prepare them for the day to day tasks of a Supervisor.**

- “I’ve asked if there is any sort of checklist of day to day things that you’re supposed to do as a supervisor and there’s not.”
- “They’re training, there are new supervisor monthly hour long sessions with different topics but it feels like just another thing we have to attend and they are not always beneficial.”
- “Nothing prepares you to be a supervisor except experience in the field and on the job training.”
- “I agree with the statement made that there just isn’t anything that prepares you to be a supervisor.”
- “The initial Supervisor Academy I went to was good for general information but didn’t help with the day to day work.”
- “I agree, it would be nice if there was a checklist. I recently asked for a checklist and there was a bit of animosity for that. Is a checklist of how to do other additional duties such a bad idea? I didn’t need to be shamed for that.”

## **POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

**Policy decisions are made without the input of those they impact.**

- “Often they don’t think about things that are already in place that can help us do some of the things they’re putting in the policy because they either didn’t know or didn’t connect it.”
- “Sometimes they just make decisions and roll it out. Once they determine there is an issue then they solicit feedback and at that point it’s kinda too late.”
- “It’s not effective. We’re given this mandate and then the expectation is to follow it, but the mandate and what’s given doesn’t necessarily relate to how we do the work, so there is a disconnect there.”
- “It feels like management are making decisions impacting workers and bypassing the supervisory team in some of the decision making. That’s caused some peer to peer challenges between the supervisors.”

**Communication and training around policies and procedures could be improved.**

- “If it is that the messaging is coming out by email, and say it’s an email that’s 150 deep in your inbox, maybe you didn’t get the update and it wasn’t messaged out in any other format. It’s not for lack of caring, but the message didn’t get to you timely.”

- “The quarterly policy meeting happens, but if you’re not available when it happens, there’s no messaging after the fact. Whatever is discussed in the space of that meeting kinda stays there. Maybe they could hold those meetings and then email the information out after the fact.”
- “We get updates from management, but I don’t recall ever going over policies in those meetings. It might be helpful if new policies come out to be able to review them with us, that would be incredibly helpful.”
- “As soon as one becomes a supervisor, there should be some training on policy and procedures. There is a gap in regard to training and policies. Integrating into the initial training of a supervisor could help a lot.”

**They struggle with not being able to follow some policies due to things outside of their control.**

- “There are things in our policy that are outside of our control as workers and supervisors. There are things in our policies that refer to what other people, other agencies or Tribes will do, and we don’t have control over that. That can interfere or impact our ability to get something done because we can’t influence people outside of our agency.”
- “Our policies are written to achieve best practice standards, not what we are capable of doing. So, sometimes it’s just difficult to meet the target; we can’t get there until we have more resources that are out of our control.”
- “Our caseloads and our abilities don’t match up with our policies and procedures.”
- “The sheer amount of responsibilities that we have, there’s not enough time in the day to manage things effectively or efficiently. Things do get missed.”

## **COMMUNICATION**

**OCS leadership needs to be more careful with what or how they communicate.**

- “The most difficult information to give to our workers is we’ve been waiting a long time on retention bonuses and for workers to flex up to a III level. It’s been like six months and my workers keep asking ‘what’s happening’, we don’t have a lot of information to tell them and they’re getting really frustrated and we’re getting frustrated.”
- “As far as the flex and the bonuses, it’s great that our leadership team has done all this work to make these things happen, but I think sharing it as soon as they did when they didn’t have everything worked out has been a huge problem. It’s caused a lot of frustration with supervisors and staff and it has led to talk about people not wanting to stay.”
- “I know they meant well, but how it was communicated and followed through on has been difficult.”
- “Information was shared that was too early to share. All that stuff with the flex positions and bonuses and stuff has been a nightmare.”
- “It was supposed to boost morale but I think it actually had a negative impact on worker morale. There were lots of unknown and there are still things that were not answered.”



**In-person meetings would improve connection and communication.**

- “There is that lack of relationship building with management because everything is done virtually which dampens our flow of communication.”
- “In person when possible would be great. It would be nice to see upper management here. Anytime that we can have more in person contact would be really helpful.”
- “Face to face contact is ideal.”

**Experiences around communication vary by region/office.**

- “We have a lot of autonomy. I’m in constant communication with my unit.”
- “We do have some autonomy to communicate it out, but it has to be done in certain ways.”
- “Depending on what office you’re in or what part of the state you’re in, the culture around communication looks different-with the stereotype that goes ‘The further away from Anchorage you get, the less you know’.”
- “It feels like things are held tight and it’s very strategic on who gets what information, when they get that information and who is responsible for sharing that information.”
- “If the supervisor staff was in the know, we could help message things or explain it to staff better if we were in the know.”
- “We could be a valuable population within this agency to keep things smooth and calm and flowing if we were just in the know with some of these things.”

**FINDINGS FROM THE 2021-2022 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS****They share the worker's concerns around wellness and unreasonable expectations.**

- “A lot of these are valid. We feel this way as supervisors too, we’re burnt out, we feel it.”
- “All these things are big deals, each and every one of these bullet points.”
- “It’s living within that realm of unreal expectations.”
- “I see the majority of these bullet points as still being issues, not a lot has changed.”
- “We are living in a world of unreal expectations which is really disheartening. I feel so, so bad for everybody that’s living within that realm; it’s horrible.”
- “The employee assistance program, that’s the only resource we have available to refer our workers to for support outside of the agency and it’s not even working well. I’ve heard so many complaints from workers about not getting calls back. That’s the only tool we have for wellness outside of the agency and it’s not even functioning.”

**They agree with workers that lack of reliable technology is a huge issue.**

- “Licensing has been asking for our workers to get laptops for years, only 3 workers have them, waiting on 7 more still.”
- “The lack of reliable technology is huge. Getting your computer fixed or replaced is an act of Congress and it’s how we do our job.”
- “Two of my buttons don’t work on my keyboard and I have to count how many letters are in my password to make sure I don’t get kicked out.”

- “I had a cell phone that was due for a reboot over a year ago, I had to ask multiple times over three months for a reboot. I was going into the field with a battery that wouldn’t last half a day. That’s a safety issue.”
- “We have batteries that smoke. I’ve heard of people at OCS who are afraid their computer will start a fire, so they leave their keyboards in their garage overnight so it doesn’t burn their house down.”
- “I ended up buying my own keyboard and my own mouse, but not everybody can do that and none of us should have to do that, but we do.”

**Difficulty accessing office supplies leads to worker frustrations and inefficiencies.**

- “I buy my own pens because it is not worth the hassle.”
- “We can’t keep toner here for our printer and we are out of printing. It’s enough sometimes when you’re so stressed out that it throws the workers over the edge.”
- “Even asking for pens or office supplies is ridiculous. My workers get frustrated and just buy it themselves and it’s one more thing that puts OCS in a negative way. It seems silly but those basic things can make or break your day.”
- “Yeah, we just had a situation in my unit where all those things were happening, and the worker ended up going out and buying basic office supplies necessary to do their job. All of us have bought office supplies necessary to do our job.”
- “These little itty-bitty things send people over the edge.”
- “The supplies are genuinely locked down and if you are not in the good graces of the people who have it locked down, you have even less access.”

**Unreliable transportation is a safety concern.**

- “Speaking of things we need to do our jobs and do it safely, we’ve had a ton of issues with vehicles. We’ve had numerous vehicles break down while we are transporting children, we’ve had workers stranded on the side of the road, we’ve had vehicles that didn’t have studded tires through half of the winter season. These are really important.”
- “These are people’s children that we are transporting, we shouldn’t have to worry that we are not going to have reliable, dependable vehicles and I really find that a concern.”
- “We are often in unsafe situations and when we go in those situations we take state vehicles so that our personal vehicles aren’t marked and we are not identified in our personal lives. If we can’t exit a scene when we need to, that’s concerning.”

**Complicated mileage cards and timesheets frustrate workers and add to their workload.**

- “A lot of what I hear is how frustrating and time consuming it is to do the mileage forms. A lot of our workers are not getting reimbursed because they don’t have the damn time to fill it out.”
- “There are a lot of inefficiencies with the timecard and mileage form. I’ve seen the mileage card morph to be a tool you don’t want to use, it’s discouraged to use because they made it so darn complicated.”

- “We’re doing it so often, there's gotta be a way with timesheets and mileage to make it more user-friendly.”
- “We’re still doing our timesheets on Excel, it’s archaic.”
- “Every Monday, time cards are kicked back to us for something stupid and petty that could’ve been taken care of if we had electronic time cards. It wastes everybody's time.”

**Workers are either too overwhelmed or don’t have the time to take advantage of the support that is offered to them.**

- “Some workers don’t want supervision or feel like they’re even too busy for supervision so they skip it. Some workers may feel so overwhelmed in their jobs to even be available for supervision.”
- “We have wellness opportunities, it’s just finding the time to do it. A lot of workers don’t have time to do it. They feel so overwhelmed with getting all their work done that they can’t stop.”
- “They work, work, work, work and don’t take breaks and just burn themselves out, and we try to navigate to help them with that, but the reality is we need to have kids seen.”
- “There isn’t a single worker that doesn’t prioritize child safety so a lot of the other things get pushed aside.”
- “I think OCS is trying to be responsive as an agency with things like the meditation group, but sometimes when they come up with an idea of how to make changes, it’s great but it’s right in the middle of a work day. Workers can’t access that, it’s just not reality.”
- “It’s hard for me to envision how workers could feel like they could pull out of work mid-day to do something, even though it’s so important for self-care.”
- “Sometimes the implementation and what it would really look like gets lost. On paper that looks great, but how do we really get to the point where workers can utilize it and it can really impact them? I don’t know.”

**They perceive the culture at OCS differently than PSS I/II participants.**

- “I don’t know that we are unsupportive or toxic as a culture, I do think there is some disconnection, some disorganization and we encourage everybody to overwork.”
- “I do think there have been times where it has been unsupportive and there are still times where it is unsupportive, but I don't think that overall it’s an unsupportive environment.”
- “It’s definitely disconnected and disorganized; I don’t think it’s toxic, but I could see how it could relate to someone as being toxic.”
- “There are parts of it that are toxic, but as a general whole, I don’t think that’s true.”
- “I don’t think it’s toxic but maybe combustible. If you’re not careful enough it’s going to go up in flames really quick without warning.”

## **Next Steps**

Individual round table summary reports, along with the executive summary, will be posted publicly on the CRP website, [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org). The 2022-2023 CRP Round Table Executive Summary will be shared with all participants and the Office of Children's Services. The CRP will encourage OCS to share the Executive Summary, and their response on how they will utilize the report, with all OCS staff. Findings from the 2022-2023 CRP round table discussions will inform the recommendations that are developed as part of the CRP Annual Report. The Annual Report will be sent to OCS for response and will be made available to the public, community stakeholders and Alaska's policymakers.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CRP=Citizen Review Panel

FY=Fiscal Year

OCS= Office of Children's Services

PSS=Protective Services Specialist

PSM=Protective Services Manager

UAF= University of Alaska, Fairbanks

***ROUND TABLE REPORT:***  
***Rural Supervisors***

## **Background**

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) identified child welfare workforce retention as their priority focus for FY 2021-2022 after the Office of Children's Services (OCS) reported a near 60% turnover among frontline staff. They started with a literature review on the past 15 years of child welfare retention related research in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why child welfare workers leave a position or the field. Next, the themes identified in that research guided the development of questions to be used in discussions with OCS staff. Then, the CRP hosted five round table discussions, one in each region of Alaska, with frontline workers. Finally, the findings from those discussions were used to inform the recommendations developed for the CRP's Annual Report.

## **Project Overview**

The relationship between worker wellbeing and access to supportive leadership was one of the main findings from the FY 2021-2022 round table discussions with frontline staff. With that in mind, the Panel decided to build on their work by meeting with Supervisors and Managers this year. The CRP hosted a roundtable discussion with each of the following groups: Regional Managers, Staff Managers, Urban Supervisors and Rural Supervisors. Additionally, they reconnected with FY 2021-2022 round table participants through one stand-alone meeting.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT**

Open-ended questions in seven focus areas (Appendix A) were developed using the broad findings from the 2021-2022 round table discussions as well as themes identified in the literature review such as the role of organizational culture in retention and the importance of looking at worker wellness from an individualized and multidimensional perspective. Additionally, the Panel created questions that would help them better understand the roles and responsibilities of Supervisors and Managers.

## **PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

To encourage engagement, the decision was made to host individual discussions with each level of staff. Additionally, the Panel understands that workers' experiences will vary by area, so the Supervisor level was divided into urban and rural areas. Rural Supervisors were identified as the target participants for the 2 hour February 2, 2023 round table discussion. As the first step in the recruitment phase, OCS leadership forwarded an email from the CRP Chair to all Supervisors and Managers. The email introduced the round tables, informed the workers that the project was independent of OCS and shared the project details. Next, the CRP reached out directly to Supervisors to invite them to the discussion.

## **VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE METHODOLOGY**

Throughout all steps of the process, participants were reminded that the CRP operates independent of OCS, and while OCS would know who was invited, they would not have access



to a list of participants. The meetings were held via Zoom. Participants were held in a waiting room and then screened for admittance using the confirmed participant list and an organizational chart provided by OCS. Participants were notified that a recording was being made of the discussion, but it would only be used for internal review purposes in the notetaking and report-writing process. Recordings were not shared and were deleted upon completion of the reports for each round table discussion. Participants were informed that complete anonymity may not be possible. However, names will not be used in any round table reports and region names that were associated with responses were removed from the following summary in an effort to protect participants as much as possible.

## **Round Table Design**

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

- **Facilitator:** The CRP Chair, Cameron Adams, was the facilitator for this discussion. She explained the expectations of the meeting, procedures around confidentiality and facilitated the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief.
- **Ambassador:** Panel member, Colin Underwood, acted as ambassador for this discussion. He was responsible for the opening and closing remarks, and he took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Observer:** Panel member Sharon Sparks observed the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Coordinator:** The CRP Coordinator handled the technology for the Zoom meeting, took notes and facilitated a debrief after the discussion. A UAF social work practicum student also attended the meeting, they took notes and participated in the debrief.

### **FACILITATION METHODS**

Facilitation methods varied depending on the level of participation and engagement for each question and included the following:

1. Zoom hand-raising function followed by participants being called on by facilitator
2. A “round-robin” approach of calling on all participants by name for a focus area/question
3. Encouraging participants to simply unmute and begin speaking
4. Use of the Zoom chat function was encouraged if someone was uncomfortable sharing verbally, or if there was not enough time for everyone to share verbally.

### **QUESTION FORMAT**

A slide was shared on screen for each focus area (Appendix A). On the slide were open-ended questions related to that focus area. The facilitator explained the focus area, read off all of the questions and then encouraged participants to respond to the one that stood out to them the most. Participants contributed to a focus area, but not necessarily to each specific question.

## **FOCUS AREAS & QUESTIONS**

### **Intro: Paint a Picture**

We'd like to know about a typical day as a Supervisor. Can you paint a picture for us?

- a. What do you feel like your role is—how do you see your role?
- b. What are some of the challenges and what are some of the successes?

### **Organizational Culture and Wellness**

What does organizational culture and wellness mean to you?

- a. How are you able to achieve your vision of that?
- b. What barriers do you face to reaching that?
- c. What words come to mind when you think about describing the organizational culture at OCS as a whole?

### **Connection and Support**

How do you support your team?

- a. How much autonomy do you have to make decisions around supporting your team?
- b. What kinds of successes have you experienced in supporting your team?
- c. What are the biggest barriers or challenges to supporting your team?

What's it like managing a team remotely from a different region?

- a. What are the challenges?
- b. What are the benefits to managing remotely?

### **Training**

What training did you receive to become a Supervisor and what does on-going training look like?

- a. What tools and support did you receive to prepare you for your position?
- b. What additional tools do you wish you had to be more successful as a Supervisor?

Many of you likely started at a lower position in OCS before being a Supervisor. How has the system changed since you moved up through the ranks?

### **Policies and Procedures**

When new policies are put in place, what does implementation look like?

- a. What kind of support/guidance do you get from leadership when a new policy needs to be implemented?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided to implement new policies in a way that works for your team, region, office, etc.?

What gets in the way of being able to follow your own procedures?

- a. How could leadership help you follow your policies and procedures better?

- b. What kind of support do you need in order to follow current policies and procedures designed to support your staff?

### **Communication**

What is the flow of communication? (How is information shared with you and how do you share information with your staff?)

- a. How are you presenting information? How do you ensure it's being communicated as intended?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided when having to communicate information with your teams, region or office?
- c. What kind of support do you receive from your leadership when having to communicate about changes or having to present potentially difficult information to your teams?

What are the challenges in communication in your role?

What have been successful communication strategies?

What kind of communication tools do you presently use?

What other suggestions do you have for OCS to be able to communicate more effectively across its vast and diverse organization?

### **Findings from the CRP Round Table Discussions with PSS I/I**

Did you read our 2021-2022 Annual Report and the OCS response?

- a. We've shared on the screen the main findings from last year's discussions with case-carrying workers; please take a moment to read through them and then share your main takeaways.

### **PARTICIPANTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS:**

Alaska OCS has five regions: Anchorage, Southeast, Southcentral, Western, Northern. For the purpose of these discussions, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Wasilla, and Juneau were considered urban offices and the remaining offices were considered rural offices. Seven supervisors from rural offices participated in this discussion.

### **DATA COLLECTION METHODS:**

1. The Facilitator, Ambassador, Observer and Coordinator staff all took notes during the round table discussion.
2. Transcripts from the Zoom chat function were reviewed.
3. The discussion was recorded for immediate internal review only. Once the report writing was completed for that round table, recordings were deleted to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

Note taking: A note taking template was provided in advance of the meetings which was broken down into focus areas. The note taking template was used to note any concepts or ideas that

stood out to the notetaker in that specific area. While everyone tasked with taking notes was provided with this template, some chose to take notes in a format of their choosing.

Debrief: After the round table discussion, everyone who took notes met together to debrief. Each question was discussed, and the group arrived at a consensus on broad takeaways for each focus area as well as notable quotes which correlated with the themes.

Preliminary Findings: A broad summary of initial findings was shared with OCS Director Guay and the Senate and House Social Services Committees during a February 14, 2023 presentation.

Summary Report: Notes from the debrief and a final review of the discussion recording was used to create this summary report. A standalone executive summary will be created once all round table discussions are completed for the year.

## Findings

This section provides a summary of the February 2, 2023 round table with Rural Supervisors. **Any suggestions or recommendations in this section are on behalf of participants, not the CRP.** These findings will be used to guide the recommendations the Panel develops for their Annual Report.

### INTRO:PAINT A PICTURE

**Vacancies prevent them from being able to support their staff as much as they would like to.**

- “What I would like my role to be is much different from what my role actually is. My role right now is to essentially put out fires, that’s the level we are at with the staffing the way it is.”
- “The biggest challenge I have is staffing issues.”
- “I don’t feel like I have time to help my staff develop.”
- “I would like to be more in a coaching and helping staff develop role, but it’s just not possible at this time.”
- “It’s been three or four months since I’ve had time to sit down and breathe and check in with my workers. I’m a really hands-on supervisor and I don’t like this.”
- “I have not had the time to have those really meaningful conversations with my workers, which I know really makes a difference with retention.”
- “My role has now almost become completely about putting out fires. I used to be able to do much for strategic supervision with my workers and spend a lot more time developing them.”
- “The biggest barriers are with short staff, we all know that.”

**They are challenged by transportation barriers in rural/remote areas.**

- “The whole transportation system during COVID went through a massive regression and now we have only 20% of the flights that we had to our villages. It’s almost impossible for us to hit our timelines without having a dedicated air service completely to us. Everyone is aware of this but nobody has made that change or procured that option but yet we’re expected to do a better job than we ever have before with 20% of the resources.”
- “It’s distressing because we can’t get to where we need to go. Travel to villages is the single biggest challenge I deal with every day.”
- “Traveling and then retraveling is about 45% of my day.”
- “These things affect essential services but they are largely out of our control. That makes it very difficult for rural supervisors.”

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & WELLNESS**

### **The culture at OCS does not support worker wellness.**

- “I believe OCS sends a message that they want people to focus on self-care, however, when it comes time to implement those efforts, I don’t always see that happen.”
- “OCS as a whole wants to be better, wants to support workers, but when it comes down to the nitty gritty it’s ‘Hey, the job’s gotta be done. You can’t do that today’.”
- “If we’re going to really focus on this, we’re going to have to actually specify time for it that cannot be diverted.”
- “If we really want our workers to recover and stay with us, it’s gotta be not just protected time but it has to be ‘you can’t touch time’.”

### **Rural/remote areas are not included in wellness and support activities.**

- “I get frustrated because so many of the programs are Anchorage and Fairbanks and Wasilla focused.”
- “It seems like a lot of the focus is on things that work for the larger offices and the rural offices are just meant to figure it out.”
- “The issue we come across for rural is that we’re completely separated so we are pretty much dismissed as ‘out of sight, out of mind’.”
- “It can be a really lonely feeling in remote work. Sometimes it feels like nobody really hears you.”
- “I think they are incentivizing some full-time positions for some rural workers, but there is a lack of inclusivity with these LOA positions. The work they do is extreme, if we’re going to incentivize areas based off of the hard work they do, it needs to include LOAs.”

### **They are frustrated by the lack of rural/remote perspective.**

- “At the upper levels, there is very little understanding of what we are dealing with on a daily basis and not a lot of conversation with us directly asking what we think would solve problems.”
- “There is a disconnect from upper management.”

- “My frustration is we have these people creating something who do not work out in the remote areas.”
- “How about you get on a small plane, go out into the villages, go into homes and see what workers have to deal with. We have to ride on the back of a four wheeler, back of a snow machine, down in a sled or walking to get where we are going. You come up with ideas, but it’s not realistic.”
- “We only have one airline and if they’re not flying for two to three days we have people from Anchorage and the whole chain of the government on the email asking when I’m going to get people out there. How are we getting out there if the plane is not flying?!”
- “There are things that we just cannot do in the area, not because we don’t want to, but we can’t do them unless the agency buys a plane or helicopter to use in these areas to get us out there to do what we need to do.”
- “We hire people who have no experience whatsoever with unrealistic expectations of working in this remote area. Then they’re trained by people who don’t work in the remote area.”
- “If you hear nothing else, the opportunity to have this rural voice that we’ve been arguing for for so long, we really appreciate this.”

## **CONNECTION AND SUPPORT**

### **Rural challenges are not taken into consideration when creating expectations.**

- “The biggest barriers are the workplace obstacles and the pressures to overcome the obstacles that aren’t in our control.”
- “90% of the time we have an automatic failure on an initiation because we don’t have a plane to go to that village.”
- “We need to readjust expectations because workers really want to succeed.”
- “The challenge is that most of the workers who come here are not from the community. So, their idea of wellness or taking a day off is taking a trip to Anchorage. Being able to say ‘take that time off if you need it’ is not something I’m able to do.”

### **They lack adequate resources to support their staff.**

- “I have the autonomy, but not the resources to make these things a reality.”
- “I have people hanging on by a string and I need to help them.”
- “There isn’t a mechanism in place to help my staff participate in things like the potlucks or appreciation weeks. When I go out to visit my staff each month, I take them to lunch and that comes out of my own pocket.”

### **HR delays cause them to lose qualified applicants.**

- “When we get people that apply, they’ve applied to a bunch of other jobs. We get interviews scheduled the next day after getting applications and it will take 2 weeks for HR to do the hire approval. By the time we call them back to offer them the job, they’ve already taken another job. It’s super frustrating.”

- “This is not an employer's job market; this is very much a worker's job market. It's wasted time trying to get new people in.”

## **TRAINING**

### **Training at the Supervisory level is too little or often provided too late.**

- “It took 8 months for them to get me into Coaching Supervisors to Best Practice training. Why did we not get this information sooner?”
- “There was very little training that I received.”
- “I feel bad for supervisors who come on who don't have any previous experience.”
- “There is no on the job training for sups.”

### **Training does not prepare them for the day to day tasks of a supervisor.**

- “What people need is training to learn how to actually do the job.”
- “I've learned my role is by doing things and apologizing for it later.”
- “I have been through the supervisor training and the coaching training. I don't think it really prepared you for what you are encountering or the everyday activities that you need to do. It doesn't give you information on the daily tasks.”
- “Training is a bigger picture view and when they get to the office they have no idea what their daily tasks look like. They don't even know how to manage time, they don't know what to do first.”
- “What people need is training to learn how to actually do the job.”

## **POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

### **Unique challenges in remote/rural areas make it difficult for them to follow policies and procedures.**

- “Something that's unique to rural offices, there are times where there is no way for me to meet a timeline. It is literally impossible. Even if I got the notification while in the airport, I still wouldn't be able to make it there on time.”
- “If I had only had one staff, but all of my cases were cases that I could drive in a car to go do, we could get everything initiated on time. But that's not the reality.”
- “One of the challenges I have is that I have workers all over the place that don't have connectivity. There is a lot of need to communicate to workers who need to set up safety plans, assess placements and don't have connectivity to call me. They're doing their best, but they're making an unsupervised safety assessment without any information.”
- “The lack of cell phone coverage is also a worker safety issue. Sat phones would be helpful.”
- “The communication between a worker and supervisor to support their work out in the village, to have communication if safety needs arise is a big barrier.”
- “It's challenging meeting policies and procedures for case initiations due to weather, staff and flight availability.”



## **COMMUNICATION**

**There are opportunities for improvement with messaging and communication.**

- “The communication from the top could be better as far as making sure they are providing the same message.”
- “Something I took note of are the differences in opinions in how a case is handled. So, I think there needs to be more clarity in that process so that there is consistency across the state.”
- “One person’s interpretation of what is safe could be different from another persons, so having a more clear description of that could be beneficial because it impacts case decision-making.”
- “Presenting information and ensuring it's being communicated as intended is a big one, so much is done on email and text message and it can be really hard sometimes. I talk to my staff about picking up the phone and talking on the phone if there are any questions.”

## **FINDINGS FROM THE 2021-2022 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS**

**They share workers' concerns around wellness and organizational culture.**

- “I would 100% agree with the part that says ‘The culture at OCS is one that encourages people to overwork themselves’ that is spot on.”
- “I don’t think people leave OCS because of money, they leave OCS because they are overworked and underappreciated.”
- “I agree with these statements.”
- “A lot of these statements are true and if we could start investing into the supervisors, it would eliminate a lot of these issues because we would have the time to check in with workers and change the culture of our office.”
- “Without us getting the resources to make some changes, I don’t see how this is going to change.”
- “I’ve heard a lot of my workers express that they didn't feel valued or the agency was supporting them.”
- “I’ve been in offices where they posted essential services worker names with percentages next to their names. That’s just an example of essentially embarrassing people.”
- “There are very few people that I know that have left OCS because they said they don’t make enough money. People take pay cuts to leave OCS.”
- “The workers are getting incentives, but what about the supervisors? Give us something that shows you really appreciate us.”

## **Next Steps**

Individual round table summary reports, along with the executive summary, will be posted publicly on the CRP website, [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org). The 2022-2023 CRP Round Table Executive Summary will be shared with all participants and the Office of Children’s Services. The CRP will encourage OCS to share the Executive Summary, and their response on how they will utilize

the report, with all OCS staff. Findings from the 2022-2023 CRP round table discussions will inform the recommendations that are developed as part of the CRP Annual Report. The Annual Report will be sent to OCS for response and will be made available to the public, community stakeholders and Alaska's policymakers.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CRP=Citizen Review Panel

FY= Fiscal Year

LOA=Letter of Agreement

OCS= Office of Children's Services

PSS=Protective Services Specialist

SUPS=Supervisors

UAF= University of Alaska, Fairbanks

***ROUND TABLE REPORT:***  
***Staff Managers***

## **Background**

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) identified child welfare workforce retention as their priority focus for FY 2021-2022 after the Office of Children's Services (OCS) reported a near 60% turnover among frontline staff. They started with a literature review on the past 15 years of child welfare retention related research in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why child welfare workers leave a position or the field. Next, the themes identified in that research guided the development of questions to be used in discussions with OCS staff. Then, the CRP hosted five round table discussions, one in each region of Alaska, with frontline workers. Finally, the findings from those discussions were used to inform the recommendations developed for the CRP's Annual Report.

## **Project Overview**

The relationship between worker wellbeing and access to supportive leadership was one of the main findings from the FY 2021-2022 round table discussions with frontline staff. With that in mind, the Panel decided to build on their work by meeting with Supervisors and Managers this year. The CRP hosted a roundtable discussion with each of the following groups: Regional Managers, Staff Managers, Urban Supervisors and Rural Supervisors. Additionally, they reconnected with FY 2021-2022 round table participants through one stand-alone meeting. The 2 hour discussion with Staff Managers was held via Zoom on January 26, 2023.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT**

Open-ended questions in seven focus areas (Appendix A) were developed using the broad findings from the 2021-2022 round table discussions as well as themes identified in the literature review such as the role of organizational culture in retention and the importance of looking at worker wellness from an individualized and multidimensional perspective. Additionally, the Panel created questions that would help them better understand the roles and responsibilities of Supervisors and Managers.

## **PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

To encourage authentic engagement, the decision was made to host individual discussions with each level of staff. Staff Managers were identified as the target participants for the January 26, 2023 round table discussion. As the first step in the recruitment phase, OCS leadership forwarded an email from the CRP Chair to all Supervisors and Managers. The email introduced the round tables, informed the workers that the project was independent of OCS and shared the project details. Next, the CRP reached out directly to Staff Managers to invite them to the discussion.

## **VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE METHODOLOGY**

Throughout all steps of the process, participants were reminded that the CRP operates independent of OCS, and while OCS would know who was invited, they would not have access

to a list of participants. The meetings were held via Zoom. Participants were held in a waiting room and then screened for admittance using the confirmed participant list. Participants were notified that a recording was being made of the discussion, but it would only be used for internal review purposes in the notetaking and report-writing process. Recordings were not shared and were deleted upon completion of the reports for each round table discussion. Participants were informed that due to the fact this was a small discussion for Staff Managers only, complete anonymity may not be possible. However, names will not be used in any round table reports and region names that were associated with responses were removed from the following summary in an effort to protect participants as much as possible.

### **Round Table Design**

#### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**Facilitator:** Panel member Retchenda George-Bettisworth was the facilitator for this discussion. She explained the expectations of the meeting, procedures around confidentiality and facilitated the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief.

**Ambassador:** The CRP Chair, Cameron Adams, acted as ambassador for this discussion. She was responsible for the opening and closing remarks, and she took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.

**Observer:** Panel member Trevor Storrs observed the discussion.

**Coordinator:** The CRP Coordinator, Tricia Minnick, handled the technology for the Zoom meeting, took notes and facilitated a debrief after the discussion. An associate from the Coordinator's office also attended the meeting, they took notes and participated in the debrief.

#### **FACILITATION METHODS:**

Facilitation methods varied depending on the level of participation and engagement for each question and included the following:

1. Zoom hand-raising function followed by participants being called on by facilitator
2. A "round-robin" approach of calling on all participants by name for a focus area/question
3. Encouraging participants to simply unmute and begin speaking
4. Use of the Zoom chat function was encouraged if someone was uncomfortable sharing verbally, or if there was not enough time for everyone to share verbally.

#### **QUESTION FORMAT:**

A slide was shared on screen for each focus area (Appendix A). On the slide were open-ended questions related to that focus area. The facilitator explained the focus area, read off all of the

questions and then encouraged participants to respond to the one that stood out to them the most. Participants contributed to a focus area, but not necessarily to each specific question.

## **FOCUS AREAS & QUESTIONS:**

### **Intro: Paint a Picture**

We'd like to know about a typical day as a Staff Manager. Can you paint a picture for us?

- a. What do you feel like your role is—how do you see your role?
- b. What are some of the challenges and what are some of the successes?

### **Organizational Culture and Wellness**

What does organizational culture and wellness mean to you?

- a. How are you able to achieve your vision of that?
- b. What barriers do you face to reaching that?
- c. What words come to mind when you think about describing the organizational culture at OCS as a whole?

### **Connection and Support**

How do you support your team?

- a. How much autonomy do you have to make decisions around supporting your team?
- b. What kinds of successes have you experienced in supporting your team?
- c. What are the biggest barriers or challenges to supporting your team?

What's it like managing a team remotely from a different region?

- a. What are the challenges?
- b. What are the benefits to managing remotely?

### **Training**

What training did you receive to become a regional manager and what does on-going training look like?

- a. What tools and support did you receive to prepare you for your position?
- b. What additional tools do you wish you had to be more successful as a regional
- c. manager?

Many of you likely started at a lower position in OCS before being a Staff Manager. How has the system changed since you moved up through the ranks?

### **Policies and Procedures**

When new policies are put in place, what does implementation look like?

- a. What kind of support/guidance do you get from leadership when a new policy needs to be implemented?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided to implement new policies in a way that works for your team, region, office, etc.?

What gets in the way of being able to follow your own procedures?

- a. How could leadership help you follow your policies and procedures better?
- b. What kind of support do you need in order to follow current policies and procedures designed to support your staff?



## **Communication**

What is the flow of communication? (How is information shared with you and how do you share information with your staff?)

- a. How are supervisors presenting information? How do you ensure it's being communicated as intended?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided when having to communicate information with your teams, region or office?
- c. What kind of support do you receive from your leadership when having to communicate about changes or having to present potentially difficult information to your teams?

What are the challenges in communication in your role?

What have been successful communication strategies?

What kind of communication tools do you presently use?

What other suggestions do you have for OCS to be able to communicate more effectively across its vast and diverse organization?

## **Findings from the CRP Round Table Discussions with PSS I/I**

Did you read our 2021-2022 Annual Report and the OCS response?

- a. We've shared on the screen the main findings from last year's discussions with case-carrying workers; please take a moment to read through them and then share your main takeaways.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS:**

Alaska OCS has five regions: Anchorage, Southeast, Southcentral, Western, Northern. Five Staff Managers participated in this round table discussion, representing four regions.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODS:**

1. The Facilitator, Ambassador and Coordinator staff all took notes during the round table discussion.
2. Transcripts from the Zoom chat function were reviewed.
3. The discussion was recorded for immediate internal review only. Once the report writing was completed for that round table, recordings were deleted to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

## **Data Analysis Approach**

Note taking: A note taking template was provided in advance of the meetings which was broken down into focus areas. The note taking template was used to note any concepts or ideas that stood out to the notetaker in that specific area. While everyone tasked with taking notes was provided with this template, some chose to take notes in a format of their choosing.

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Preliminary Findings: A broad summary of initial findings was shared with OCS Director Guay and the Senate and House Social Services Committees during a February 14, 2023 presentation.

Summary Report: Notes from the debrief and a final review of the discussion recording was used to create this summary report. A standalone executive summary will be created once all round table discussions are completed for the year.

## Findings

This section provides a summary of the January 26, 2023 round table with Staff Managers. **Any suggestions or recommendations in this section are on behalf of participants, not the CRP.** These findings will be used to guide the recommendations the Panel develops for their Annual Report.

## INTRO: PAINT A PICTURE

**There is no typical day for a Staff Manager; this is mostly seen as a positive as it keeps things exciting.**

- “There is no typical day, it’s a multitude of different tasks. Having that variation of what you are doing with the job has led to a continued exciting work experience.”
- “Every day is different, depending on what the needs are.”
- “Makes things challenging, makes things interesting and never ever boring.”

**The current leadership team is stable and works well together.**

- “As a leadership team we come together and figure it out and even if it's not what we want to do or happy about doing it we figure out how to make the best out of a bad situation, and I really appreciate that cause it's quite frankly one of the only reasons I am still here.”
- “Leadership team has been pretty stable which is a big win for us.”

**This Staff Manager team is good at being flexible and shifting resources.**

- “Trying to pivot and come up with alternatives and create something different to make it work. We have done a lot with Facetime, a lot with Zoom video chats, things like that to at least be able to lay eyes on kids that we haven’t been able to get too.”
- “With the pandemic, we were able to figure out what worked best for us and how we could work with our staff to alter their schedules. That was a big success for us.”
- “My area has been really creative with utilizing the resources that we do have available to us and shifting as needed. We’ve learned we have to do that in order to not completely drown.”

**Taking a team-mentality approach as a region is seen as a success that improves morale.**

- “There really is more of a team view of these families and children we serve in this entire region, we have a shared responsibility for them. So, that’s been a success both in functionally covering the work that needs to be done but also the morale and the comradery of our staff. They are wanting to go and do these things we are asking them to do.”
- “There is a much more collaborative approach to the work in the region.”
- “A team mentality-one of my roles is moving the chess pieces around and pulling resources from this office to that office.”

**Lack of resources is one of the biggest challenges they face.**

- “Staffing, there is not enough of it.”
- “Getting sucked into really minuscule line tasks needs because we don’t have placements is challenging.”
- “I also carry, I think, 13-15 families. It’s not ideal, but it’s also not ideal to burn staff out.”
- “The lack of resources and systemic barriers.”
- “Our airlines are really difficult. Even when we have booked seats, it’s about a 50/50 chance whether they will bump us off of them. This really has an impact on the flow of cases but also on the relationship with the families.”

**They struggle with having to work outside of their roles which leaves them without as much time as they would like to support their staff.**

- “We are dragged into a thousand different things that have absolutely nothing to do with case management.”
- “You want to be able to devote time to the case management aspect. You want to take time with coaching and working with your supervisor, to be able to build up their level and then transfer them to their own staff but you are constantly being pulled in a lot of different directions that are outside of the scope you would normally think this job would do.”
- “I do tend to carry cases. It’s not ideal to, but it’s also not ideal to burn staff out by inundating them with new cases. It’s a struggle.”
- “Apparently we are also realtors now.”

**Delays in HR processing result in losing qualified job applicants and Staff Managers report not feeling prepared for the HR part of their role.**

- “Now we have been turned into running every aspect of recruitment because recruitment is understaffed, so if we don’t have everything in a perfect tiny little bow when we send it in, they kick it back to us and it goes at the bottom of the pile and we have to wait a week. Guess what, when you have to wait a month to offer them a job they accept another job.”
- “HR has been a challenge for a while.”
- “I have never ever had any formal training on HR.”
- “We are just told to figure it out.”
- “HR is an area that’s draining and exhausting.”

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & WELLNESS**

### **The overall culture at OCS does not support wellness.**

- “We want to see people healthy and take care of themselves and enjoy working here, but unfortunately we have limited resources to support that.”
- “It’s difficult to keep people healthy and in a good place when in reality we still have a job we have to do. We don’t have a wait list. The expectation is you do the work.”
- “It goes from being a marathon to a sprint everyday and how long can you maintain that?”
- “The secondary trauma is huge among our workforce.”
- “It’s hard because I only have so much to give other people as well, we all do. Sometimes I find myself pretty burned out trying to meet the individual needs of the people I supervise.”
- “What we discuss is one thing, but it’s incongruent with the work.”
- “We are run by an administration that doesn’t understand us. We’re funded by a legislature that doesn’t understand us. That creates a level of culture that we are constantly fighting. In general most people within our administration and community do not like us and do not think we do a good job. That’s always an umbrella that’s hanging over us.”
- “We try to process the chaos and lack of support from all those above us and try not to pass that on to our staff, but there is only so much in our control.”
- “There is that dichotomy between ‘we care about you and we need you to do an insurmountable amount of work’. That pressure is always there.”
- “It feels like lip-service when they say they want you to be well, because I don’t think there is a lot in the structure at OCS that supports that person.”

### **Decisions are made without the input of those they impact.**

- “I feel like a lot of the levels above us are out of tune with what is really going on.”
- “Decisions are made in vacuums without consultation with how it would affect the staff and that dovetails directly in with wellness.”
- “Our Director and Director’s team decided to announce to all staff that they were getting these large bonuses without having anything finalized yet. It’s now been nine months and staff have now gotten to the point like ‘Yeah, they were lying to us.’ They allowed a seed of mistrust to continue to bloom and it created more resentment between the field staff and state office staff.”

### **The current pay structure, benefits and lack of support does not incentivize them to stay or others to promote.**

- “I cannot tell you how disappointed I am with the lack of wellness they are trying to supply to us as managers. Any retention structure or anything they are doing for staff cuts off at us.”

- “You’re asked to be an expert in fifteen different fields and be pulled into a thousand different things and then to not realize we are important too at this level is extremely disheartening.”
- “I am glad that certain things have been made available to our frontline staff, these PSS IIIs, they’re working on someday these bonuses coming out, but we’ve set up a structure where we are going to fail to create a leadership team and people who want to promote. Our PSS IIIs with overtime will make more money than PSM IIs.”
- “They haven’t put incentives in place to go into leadership and I’m really concerned that in the next three years no one is going to want to promote. Period.”
- “I have a quarter of my staff who make more than I do.”
- “Don’t even get me started with all of the promised on-call changes that have been talked about that are nowhere being brought to fruition.”
- “The State is not setting people up to want to stay long-term. Because why? Why would we stay ten years?”
- “We have the right people, but we don’t have the right incentives to help them move forward.”
- “The professional development within our leadership team is laughable.”
- “My biggest concern is the lack of ongoing professional development. There is none at all.”

## **CONNECTION AND SUPPORT**

**The amount of autonomy they are allowed in supporting their staff varies across regions.**

- “I feel a great deal of autonomy, that’s one of the things I love about this job.”
- “Other than large-scale things that pop up where legislators, the Governor’s office or the State office get involved, it is almost entirely up to my discretion in how I handle a situation.”
- “I think the autonomy varies depending on your PSM II. I don’t feel like I have the same amount of autonomy, I do in words, but when it comes down to it....”
- “We are told we have autonomy, but when we go to do it, you have to go through twelve layers of conversation for approval.”
- “I would say I have a lot of autonomy.”

**The biggest challenge they face with support is not having enough staff.**

- “To me that’s the biggest barrier is the on-going ridiculously high vacancy rate that we have.”
- “My biggest one is I need the people and I don’t have the people.”
- “You’re playing multiple roles because you don’t have the bodies there in those positions.”

**There is a lack of understanding around their roles and what is in their control and what isn’t.**

- “The never ending expectation is that we don’t get to say no to anybody; no matter how hard we try to shield anybody from the onslaught that we get, we are limited in what we can do.”
- “A lot of the decisions on a day-to-day basis, I can do, but overarching decisions come from my manager.”
- “A big challenge is getting everybody on the same page as far as expectations go.”

## TRAINING

### **There is no formal training for Staff Managers.**

- “There is no training. It’s called ‘figure it out’.”
- “There is no formal training for us from a regional level or a state level.”
- “There is zero training.”
- “Figure it out, see what you can find. It’s non-existent for a manager in any formal sense.”

### **Supervisors receive some training, but there is a lot of room for improvement.**

- “We do a better job of supporting the shift from a PSS to a Supervisor, but even then the training isn’t great.”
- “When I was promoted to a supervisor, I wasn’t sent to training until much later down the road. I had to beg my management team to be able to attend any type of training to learn anything.”
- “There was good training when I became a supervisor, I felt like it covered what I needed it to cover. Some of it didn’t apply to our job, it felt like general coaching and not actually applicable to the position we were in.”
- “Both my new supervisors didn’t get supervisor training until they had been on for a year, therefore, not helpful.”

## POLICIES & PROCEDURES

### **Lack of time and staff create inconsistencies in following their policies and procedures.**

- “I don’t know that we do enough quality assurance work as an agency.”
- “Time and staff get in the way of us following policies. You have to prioritize what you can do in the amount of time you have.”
- “We can’t meet timelines because we can’t get to locations, or we don’t have staff to do the work we need to do.”
- “Our workloads constantly get in the way, from our line workers trying to follow it to us overseeing it.”

## COMMUNICATION

### **They feel the flow of communication is a strength within the management team.**

- “We have a pretty good flow of communication.”
- “Anyone on our management team can send a region-wide email to all staff, we all have that autonomy.”

- “We communicate regularly with the other regions.”
- “Our communication between us as a management team is pretty good.”
- “There is constant communication going on all the time.”

**OCS leadership needs to be more careful with what or how they communicate.**

- “We’ve taken a pretty hard stance that any grandiose thing sent down from State Office, State Office has gotta present it to staff, because we’ve been burned too many times. We were sick of being the fall guys every time State Office decided to take a 90 degree turn into a different direction halfway through implementation of some previous communication that they sent down.”
- “Stuff gets communicated too early.”
- “We should not have promised staff that massive changes are coming to on-call 9 months ago and we are nowhere in sight of any changes being implemented.”
- “The bonuses should not have been communicated at the time they were. The PSS IIIs should not have been communicated at the time they were.”
- “We need them to be more cohesive in how they communicate big things about retention efforts because it’s having the opposite effect.”
- “Leadership constantly tells us ‘You gotta slow down’, but when it comes to communication of those items it’s very rushed and that causes problems.”

## **FINDINGS FROM THE 2021-2022 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS**

**There is a disconnect between what staff are experiencing and the support they are offering at a managerial level.**

- “It would make sense if you’re feeling a certain way, someone has to be responsible for contributing to those feelings. The lack of communication and clarity is leaving people frustrated and feeling like they’re not getting what they need, without knowing the other side, which is the reality of what we are doing.”
- “I don’t know that they’re always aware of the support that we provide, because it’s not always obvious. We’ll do work to keep it off of them. If I know something is going to go really poorly, I’ll call in so they don’t have to deal with it.”
- “We present some of these things to them and they just can’t see them amidst all the muck.”
- “A lot of our staff can’t see the communication and the supports and the things we do for them. That’s not their fault, that’s part of the job, but for some of them there is a piece of that.”

**They agree with workers that technology is a huge issue.**

- “The information-technology for the State sucks!”
- “The equipment they give us is the cheapest possible piece of crap. Our laptop batteries are exploding, people are getting shocked. It’s utterly ridiculous.”
- “I’m not asking for the Taj Mahal, I’m just acting that it doesn’t take an act of God to get our staff a new \$200 laptop.”

- “My computer is shocking me when I touch it in certain places. I feel like I’m wearing a dog collar.”
- “I do not understand why the State of Alaska fails to prioritize technology, it’s baffling.”
- “My laptop battery was expanding, the top was cracking.”
- “All of our phones are ancient and half the time they don’t work.”
- “We have lots of staff who have field duties who still don’t even have laptops.”

## **Next Steps**

Individual round table summary reports, along with the executive summary, will be posted publicly on the CRP website, [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org). The 2022-2023 CRP Round Table Executive Summary will be shared with all participants and the Office of Children’s Services. The CRP will encourage OCS to share the Executive Summary, and their response on how they will utilize the report, with all OCS staff. Findings from the 2022-2023 CRP round table discussions will inform the recommendations that are developed as part of the CRP Annual Report. The Annual Report will be sent to OCS for response and will be made available to the public, community stakeholders and Alaska’s policymakers.



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CRP= Citizen Review Panel

FY= Fiscal Year

OCS= Office of Children's Services

PSS=Protective Services Specialist

PSM=Protective Services Manager

***ROUND TABLE REPORT:***  
***Regional Managers***

## **Background**

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) identified child welfare workforce retention as their priority focus for FY 2021-2022 after the Office of Children's Services (OCS) reported a near 60% turnover among frontline staff. They started with a literature review on the past 15 years of child welfare retention related research in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why child welfare workers leave a position or the field. Next, the themes identified in that research guided the development of questions to be used in discussions with OCS staff. Then, the CRP hosted five round table discussions, one in each region of Alaska, with frontline workers. Finally, the findings from those discussions were used to inform the recommendations developed for the CRP's Annual Report.

## **Project Overview**

The relationship between worker wellbeing and access to supportive leadership was one of the main findings from the FY 2021-2022 round table discussions with frontline staff. With that in mind, the Panel decided to build on their work by meeting with Supervisors and Managers this year. The CRP hosted a roundtable discussion with each of the following groups: Regional Managers, Staff Managers, Urban Supervisors and Rural Supervisors. Additionally, they reconnected with FY 2021-2022 round table participants through one stand-alone. The 2 hour discussion with Regional Managers was held via Zoom on January, 25, 2023.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT**

Open-ended questions in seven focus areas (Appendix A) were developed using the broad findings from the 2021-2022 round table discussions as well as themes identified in the literature review such as the role of organizational culture in retention and the importance of looking at worker wellness from an individualized and multidimensional perspective. Additionally, the Panel created questions that would help them better understand the roles and responsibilities of Supervisors and Managers.

## **PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

To encourage authentic engagement, the decision was made to host individual discussions with each level of staff. Regional Managers were identified as the target participants for the January 25, 2023 round table discussion. As the first step in the recruitment phase, OCS leadership forwarded an email from the CRP Chair to all Supervisors and Managers. The email introduced the round tables, informed the workers that the project was independent of OCS and shared the project details. Next, the CRP reached out directly to Regional Managers to invite them to the discussion.

## **VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE METHODOLOGY**

Throughout all steps of the process, participants were reminded that the CRP operates independent of OCS, and while OCS would know who was invited, they would not have access to a list of participants. The meeting was held via Zoom. Participants were held in a waiting

room and then screened for admittance using the confirmed participant list. Participants were notified that a recording was being made of the discussion, but it would only be used for internal review purposes in the notetaking and report-writing process. Recordings were not shared and were deleted upon completion of the reports for each round table discussion. Participants were informed that due to the fact this discussion was for Regional Managers only, and there are only five Regional Managers in Alaska, anonymity would not be possible. However, names will not be used in any round table reports and region names that were associated with responses were removed from the following summary in an effort to protect participants as much as possible.

## **Round Table Design**

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- **Facilitator:** Panel member Retchenda George-Bettisworth was the facilitator for this discussion. She explained the expectations of the meeting, procedures around confidentiality and facilitated the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief.
- **Ambassador:** The CRP Chair, Cameron Adams, acted as ambassador for this discussion. She was responsible for the opening and closing remarks, and she took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Coordinator:** The CRP Coordinator, Tricia Minnick, handled the technology for the Zoom meeting, took notes and facilitated a debrief after the discussion. An associate from the Coordinator's office also attended the meeting, they took notes and participated in the debrief.

### **FACILITATION METHODS:**

Facilitation methods varied depending on the level of participation and engagement for each question and included the following:

1. Zoom hand-raising function followed by participants being called on by facilitator
2. A "round-robin" approach of calling on all participants by name for a focus area/question
3. Encouraging participants to simply unmute and begin speaking
4. Use of the Zoom chat function was encouraged if someone was uncomfortable sharing verbally, or if there was not enough time for everyone to share verbally.

### **QUESTION FORMAT:**

A slide was shared on screen for each focus area (Appendix A). On the slide were open-ended questions related to that focus area. The facilitator explained the focus area, read off all of the questions and then encouraged participants to respond to the one that stood out to them the most. Participants contributed to a focus area, but not necessarily to each specific question.

## **FOCUS AREAS & QUESTIONS:**

### **Intro: Paint a Picture**

We'd like to know about a typical day as a Regional Manager. Can you paint a picture for us?

- a. What do you feel like your role is—how do you see your role?
- b. What are some of the challenges and what are some of the successes?

### **Organizational Culture and Wellness**

What does organizational culture and wellness mean to you?

- a. How are you able to achieve your vision of that?
- b. What barriers do you face to reaching that?
- c. What words come to mind when you think about describing the organizational culture at OCS as a whole?

### **Connection and Support**

How do you support your team?

- a. How much autonomy do you have to make decisions around supporting your team?
- b. What kinds of successes have you experienced in supporting your team?
- c. What are the biggest barriers or challenges to supporting your team?

What's it like managing a team remotely from a different region?

- a. What are the challenges?
- b. What are the benefits to managing remotely?

### **Training**

What training did you receive to become a regional manager and what does on-going training look like?

- a. What tools and support did you receive to prepare you for your position?
- b. What additional tools do you wish you had to be more successful as a regional
- c. manager?

Many of you likely started at a lower position in OCS before being a Regional Manager. How has the system changed since you moved up through the ranks?

### **Policies and Procedures**

When new policies are put in place, what does implementation look like?

- a. What kind of support/guidance do you get from leadership when a new policy needs to be implemented?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided to implement new policies in a way that works for your team, region, office, etc.?

What gets in the way of being able to follow your own procedures?

- a. How could leadership help you follow your policies and procedures better?
- b. What kind of support do you need in order to follow current policies and procedures designed to support your staff?

### **Communication**

What is the flow of communication? (How is information shared with you and how do you share information with your staff?)

- a. How are supervisors presenting information? How do you ensure it's being communicated as intended?
- b. What kind of autonomy are you provided when having to communicate information with your teams, region or office?
- c. What kind of support do you receive from your leadership when having to communicate about changes or having to present potentially difficult information to your teams?

What are the challenges in communication in your role?

What have been successful communication strategies?

What kind of communication tools do you presently use?

What other suggestions do you have for OCS to be able to communicate more effectively across its vast and diverse organization?

### **Findings from the CRP Round Table Discussions with PSS I/I**

Did you read our 2021-2022 Annual Report and the OCS response?

- a. We've shared on the screen the main findings from last year's discussions with case-carrying workers; please take a moment to read through them and then share your main takeaways.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS:**

Alaska OCS has five regions: Anchorage, Southeast, Southcentral, Western, Northern. Five Regional Managers participated in this round table discussion.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODS:**

1. The Ambassador, Facilitator and Coordinator staff all took notes during the round table discussion.
2. Transcripts from the Zoom chat function were reviewed.
3. The discussion was recorded for immediate internal review only. Once the notetaking and report-writing were completed for that round table, recordings were deleted to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

## **Data Analysis Approach**

Note taking: A note taking template was provided in advance of the meetings which was broken down into focus areas. The note taking template was used to note any concepts or ideas that stood out to the notetaker in that specific area. While everyone tasked with taking notes was provided with this template, some chose to take notes in a format of their choosing.

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## Findings

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### INTRO: PAINT A PICTURE

**Regional Managers see their role as advocates for staff; they struggle with not having enough resources.**

- “A big part of my role is setting the tone for the region and really working on that culture piece and the staff wellness piece, but the challenge is that we lack resources to impact that.”
- “I advocate for the needs of the region and staff to make sure they have what they need to do their job.”
- “We don’t have any sort of way to financially support staff, there’s no budget for that, so that can be challenging.”
- “You have to figure out how to pull resources to support one while the other one is struggling just as much.”
- “Making sure we have the bodies to get the work done is one of the struggles.”

**They are challenged as the middle person between the field workers and upper management and by staff not understanding the limitations of their role.**

- “It feels like you’re in a sandwich and you can’t make anyone happy sometimes.”
- “You have things that upper management is telling you to do and you have feelings that people below you have, and it’s really hard to navigate that. So, sometimes it feels really heavy.”
- “There is an expectation that we work on accountability and performance, but then there is also this expectation that we support and manage the field in a way that’s supportive and that can be a challenge because those two things don’t really match.”
- “There are significant limitations on what we can and cannot do. Specifically, the Family Services team, their caseloads are out of control and there isn’t much I can do to impact that. The challenge is the staff expect me to be able to impact that and I can’t.”
- “The management team takes the hit, we are a really easy target to blame for people’s lack of satisfaction about their caseloads and the nature of the work they are doing. They

don't realize that there aren't a lot of options for our team or the statewide executive team to impact that or change that."

- "There is this expectation that we have all the answers because we're Regional Management, but we typically don't."

**The high level of camaraderie among the Regional Managers has a positive impact on their job.**

- "We have a strong team as far as the management team goes. I'm grateful I have them, and they make my job a lot easier."
- "For the first time in a very long time we have very few personnel issues going on, so that has been great and has a lot to do for morale."
- "We work well together, we communicate, and we share resources."
- "This team works really well together, and it's been very helpful for our own individual wellbeing to have people we can rely on that we have that shared experience with."
- "My previous experience was that management was very punitive and there was a lack of respect even in day to day dialogue, but I don't see that anymore."

**One of their biggest challenges is delays in the hiring process.**

- "The recruitment process is a mess."
- "It's a nightmare. The changes DOA made to the hiring and recruitment process has been a nightmare."
- "We are losing a lot of people that are applying because we can't even respond with an offer until well over a month and people have moved on."
- "What was promoted as being an improvement to the hiring process has backfired, it has not been helpful at all. We don't have a lot of support from DOA. Trying to get things resolved from them is like talking to a brick wall."
- "The state works against itself; our divisions do not work well together. It's bizarre that we can't figure out how to work better together as a collective across divisions."

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & WELLNESS**

**There has been an increased focus at OCS on improving the organizational culture and wellness, but there is a lot of work to be done.**

- "We're paying attention to it, we're talking about it and we're trying new things"
- "We're in the exploration phase; we are thinking about it and looking internally. We're at the infancy phase where we are dipping our toes in that water, and that's good, but we have a ways to go."
- "We've really focused on shifting the culture into a more supportive and listening for input type."
- "It has felt like an organization that was pushing aside the dead bodies to bring in the next people to do the work. It was sorta like out with you, in with the next. This organization did not support the impact of this work in years past, but we have turned a corner and are embracing wellness."



- “I’ve been here for a long time and I’ve seen the organizational culture and wellness and it hasn’t always been good. I’ve tried leaving multiple times in my time here because it was a terrible place to work.”

**OCS struggles to foster an environment that supports worker wellness.**

- “Wellness does require resources and we don’t have them.”
- “This work chews people up and spits them out.”
- “Barriers to wellness is all of the work put upon us as managers and everyone below us. It’s hard to check in with yourself when you’re delegating work; figuring out a way to do this in a kind way.”
- “Having humans in the positions would massively help with the wellness and mental health of our staff.”

**Regional Managers reflect on how they can positively impact organizational culture.**

- “I think about what does it feel like to work here and how we exist with one another within a shared organization.”
- “It starts with us being authentic leaders, exercising transparency and being respectful with our staff.”
- “People are watching our moves every day, every word we say matters.”
- “One of the things I like about this team is that every single regional manager came from the field, we have field experience so we are relatable.”
- “We’ve really focused on shifting the culture into a more supportive and listening for input type.”
- “People who left our agency on fire, as fire-balls, have come back and have come back as leaders and are doing a great job. I’m hearing people are returning because things have changed here.”
- “People are looking to me when things are really bad. I try to be very consistent and even keel.”

**Wellness is individualized and is paid for out of their own pockets.**

- “We have to pay out of pocket to support staff. I spend probably \$1,000 a year on staff wellness activities as do my other managers.”
- “This job makes you very reactive, makes you feel like you have to solve all the problems. So, I achieve wellness by being reflective, taking breaks, being transparent and showing my human qualities.”
- “The wellness part is very individualized; everyone will have a different way to stay sane with this work.”
- “I’ve invested in myself to be ok to do this work, which means I probably pay \$1000 out of pocket each month, for my own wellbeing. That’s counseling out of pocket, for a gym membership, out of my own pocket to be ok to do this work. Knowing that the secondary trauma of this work is so real, that should be part of an employment packet to work here. It’s hard not to carry a little resentment that I have to use leave and pay out of pocket to be ok to work here.”

## CONNECTION AND SUPPORT

**There are pros and cons to managing their team remotely.**

- “It’s challenging, it’s hard to have a pulse of what’s going on day to day when you don’t have the accessibility to your staff.”
- “It keeps me out of the noise. We all telework, and it allows us to concentrate and focus on bigger projects or issues.”
- “It’s a challenge to not be there as boots on the ground with your staff as frequently as they would like.”
- “The travel does impact your personal life.”
- “We’re able to be better connected with team meetings.”

**They lack sufficient resources to support their team.**

- “Some ways that I like to support my team are to buy them donuts or buy them pizza, and that all comes out of my pocket which kinda sucks.”
- “Yes, the investment in the staff appreciation gifts and supplies we pay for out of pocket.”
- “My biggest challenge is not being close to my team and not having a ton of resources to support my team in different ways.”

**The biggest positive impact on supporting their staff would be filling vacant positions; sometimes HR delays prevent that from happening.**

- “Workers are going three or four times over the national average on caseload standards and not seeing those bodies come in.”
- “The biggest barrier for supporting our team is getting human bodies into the positions to fill them.
- “Having humans in the positions would massively help with the wellness and mental health of our staff.”
- “If we had qualified human beings applying for these jobs, that would be the biggest way to support our staff because the work would be spread a bit.”
- “I’m trying to sound the alarm and say, ‘I have really good people I want to hire, why the hell is it taking this long to get the approvals back?’ and then you get them back and people have moved on to other jobs. It feels so defeating.”

## TRAINING

**Regional Managers do not receive formal training which leaves them feeling unprepared and/or undervalued.**

- “There is no Regional Manager training, it is trial by fire.”
- “One thing that I feel like we fail at is building up our leadership team through intentional trainings.”
- “We have to be willing to spend the money to continue investing in our leadership staff. You don’t just wake up and become a good leader; it requires education, training, support

and opportunity to slow down and really think about how you want to show up. That just does not exist within our agency.”

- “I’ve had to beg to go to trainings; I’ve often been told no because it costs money.”
- “We as an agency don’t do a good job of training our supervisors, then training our PSM I’s, etc., that entire line.”
- “I have to pay for training opportunities for myself and I find that ridiculous because I know that's not the same in other divisions.”

**There is a perceived lack of succession planning for leadership at OCS.**

- “A lot of people look at this team like the next deputy director or director will come out of the team and I’m like “Absolutely freaking not” I won’t even entertain that idea because I don’t feel like I’ve been given enough tools or have that level of experience to take on something like that.”
- “I feel like there needs to be a more intentional focus on succession planning and training and education for leadership across all regions at the supervisory and up level.”
- “We’re not going to be PSM I’s our entire lives, so what succession planning is OCS providing us to provide those below us one or two levels to then take our place when we decide to move on? That is something that I think we have not done a very good job with.”
- “We’re staying because we care, but at some point it’s not going to be enough, and you will have turnover at this level and the problem will be you don’t have people ready to step into these positions and things will crumble.”

**The current pay structure, benefits, and lack of training opportunities leave them feeling undervalued or unsupported.**

- “If I’m going to be able to stay in this job, I need to feel like I’m learning and growing.”
- “These positions are so freaking stressful that if we aren’t given the tools to figure out how to manage that, or to feel like we’re having an impact or to feel inspired to keep showing up then you’re going to see attrition happen with the leadership team.”
- “Every additional education opportunity I’ve done while at OCS, I’ve had to pay out of pocket for it. The agency doesn’t see these types of professional growth opportunities as valuable.”
- “If there was a way to invest in people’s individual plan of growth, it would be super helpful and it would help with retention of leaders.”
- “If we’re getting stagnant in our role, it’s easy to think I’m going to go get this certificate and go get this different job because they’re going to support me.”
- “That is one area where I carry resentment; because you hear everyone on here talking about ‘I want to grow myself, I want to make myself better for this organization and better for our people’ which translates to better for families that we’re serving, but I’m doing it at my own cost.”
- “I’m not getting bonuses, I’m not getting a raise, I don’t get overtime; it’s all this expected personal investment to be a leader.”

- As we continue to invest in the frontline staff, it's becoming more attractive for people to demote into those positions because there are bigger benefits."
- "There is a lack of value around longevity at the State level. We're desensitized by the system we work for."
- "The model for supporting longevity is broken."
- "Our pay is disparate compared to other positions at the managerial level at the State office. Our responsibilities are so freaking huge and so broad compared to some other positions that are receiving the same pay rate as us."
- "The ways in which I'm investing my care and appreciation for people that are staying, I do it because I care, but we get lost in the sauce of all of that. It's a missing piece."

## **POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

**Policies are changed or created without the field or rural perspective.**

- "There are a lot of people on the policy team that have no idea what's going on in the field or what the impact of making a policy change would be."
- "Sometimes policies get changed without a lot of thought or the right people at the table to raise questions."
- "Not only do we not get the field perspective, we also haven't gotten the rural perspective. This policy may work in Anchorage, Wasilla, or Fairbanks, but it's not going to work in Ketchikan, Bethel, or Kodiak."
- "I worry that the wrong people are at the table."

**There are a lot of opportunities for improvement with implementation.**

- "Implementation is not our strong suit."
- "As far as ability to implement stuff, there isn't a lot of time or support to do that."
- "We don't have the time or resources to do that."
- "We're really good at talking and planning and evaluating and assessing, but we're really bad at implementing."

## **COMMUNICATION**

**The flow of communication can be confusing; ineffective communication can have negative consequences.**

- "Sometimes there is confusion around who should communicate big things. Sometimes that creates confusion, because you have five Regional Managers sending out five different messages when it really should've come from higher up."
- "One of the things that is challenging about OCS is that there are so many different layers. So when I communicate through an email, half the people don't read it."
- "Things get lost in translation."
- "Most recently the bonuses really caused a lot of harm to our staff, because there hasn't been good communication about that."

- “Those situations just cause more animosity, questions and confusion when the communication is watered down due to the layers it flows through.”
- “I feel like sometimes our leaders don’t want to give the field too much information because they might get confused, but I don’t think that gives us enough credit. I think full transparency would help.”

**They have autonomy with communication but would appreciate more support.**

- “It’s full autonomy. The expectation is that we are the people communicating out whatever it is that needs to go out to our teams, regions, offices.”
- “I feel like our SET team could provide some of the heavy communication and we could support their message.”
- “I feel uncomfortable communicating out policies that I don’t really understand.”
- “We should have more statewide virtual staff meetings where information could be communicated out, that would really help with consistency in messaging.”

## **FINDINGS FROM THE 2021-2022 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS**

**In general, they agree with the findings from the 2021-2022 Round Table Discussions.**

- “Looking through this list, I agree we can do so much better.”
- “We have so much work to do and this is all so true.”
- “Agreed. Lack of reliable technology is absolutely infuriating.”
- “There’s so much more we could do in the hiring process to give applicants a clear picture of the job.”

**They feel there may be a lack of awareness around roles and responsibilities at the various levels of leadership.**

- “Do staff really know what we have control over and what we don’t have control over?”
- “Are we doing a good enough job as an agency saying, “This is the role of a PSM II, this is the role of a PSM I, this is what you can expect from a Supervisor, etc.?”
- “It’s easy to shoot the messenger, and that often happens a lot.”

**There is a lot of room for improvement around worker wellness.**

- “We have a lot of work to do with wellness, and hopefully we’re turning a curve there.”
- “Not one person gets to walk into this agency and not be impacted by the crisis, and we just do not have enough resources around wellness.”
- “That wellness piece, it’s treating us as individuals and humans and caring for each other better than we are doing right now.”

## **Next Steps**

Individual round table summary reports, along with the executive summary, will be posted publicly on the CRP website, [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org). The 2022-2023 CRP Round Table Executive Summary will be shared with all participants and the Office of Children’s Services. The CRP will encourage OCS to share the Executive Summary, and their response on how they will utilize the report, with all OCS staff. Findings from the 2022-2023 CRP round table discussions will

inform the recommendations that are developed as part of the CRP Annual Report. The Annual Report will be sent to OCS for response and will be made available to the public, community stakeholders and Alaska's policymakers.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CRP= Citizen Review Panel

DOA=Department of Administration

FY=Fiscal Year

OCS= Office of Children's Services

PSS=Protective Services Specialist

PSM=Protective Services Manager

SET= Statewide Executive Team

***ROUND TABLE REPORT:***  
***PSS I/II***



## Background

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) identified child welfare workforce retention as their priority focus for FY 2021-2022 after the Office of Children's Services (OCS) reported a near 60% turnover among frontline staff. They started with a literature review on the past 15 years of child welfare retention related research in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why child welfare workers leave a position or the field. Next, the themes identified in that research guided the development of questions to be used in discussions with OCS staff. Then, the CRP hosted five round table discussions, one in each region of Alaska, with frontline workers. Finally, the findings from those discussions were used to inform the recommendations developed for the CRP's Annual Report.

## Project Overview

The Panel decided to build on their work by reconnecting with past round table participants and meeting with Supervisors and Managers this year. It was important for the CRP to reconnect with past participants as they had previously expressed that groups come in, gather information from them and then they may never hear from the group again or they never see any results. The CRP shared the FY 2021-2022 round table report and annual report with them and met with them again this year in an effort to identify any perceived changes in organizational culture and worker wellness since they last met. The 2 hour follow up discussion with past round table participants was held on December 7, 2022 via Zoom.

## Round Table Design

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- **Facilitator:** Panel member Retchenda George-Bettisworth was the facilitator for this discussion. She explained the expectations of the meeting, procedures around confidentiality and facilitated the discussion. She took notes and participated in a debrief.
- **Ambassador:** The CRP Chair, Cameron Adams, acted as ambassador for this discussion. She was responsible for the opening and closing remarks and she took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Observers:** Panel members Trevor Storrs and Sharon Sparks observed the discussion. Sharon took notes and participated in a debrief afterward.
- **Coordinator:** The CRP Coordinator, Tricia Minnick, handled the technology for the round tables, took notes and facilitated a debrief after the discussion. A University of Alaska, Fairbanks social work practicum student attended the meeting as well; they took notes and participated in the debrief.

## **FACILITATION METHODS:**

Facilitation methods varied depending on the level of participation and engagement for each question and included the following:

1. The Zoom polling function was used for scaling questions throughout the discussion. Poll responses were anonymous.
2. Zoom hand-raising function followed by participants being called on by facilitator
3. A “round-robin” approach of calling on all participants by name for a focus area/question
4. Encouraging participants to simply unmute and begin speaking
5. Use of the Zoom chat function was encouraged if someone was uncomfortable sharing verbally, or if there was not enough time for everyone to share verbally.

## **QUESTION FORMAT:**

A slide was shared on screen for each focus area (Appendix A). On the slide was a scaling question related to any perceived changes in the areas of wellness, organizational culture, compensation and benefits, workload process and the decision to leave or stay at OCS. The facilitator explained the focus area, reminded the participants about the findings from the FY 2021-2022 discussions, read the question and then encouraged participants to respond to the anonymous Zoom poll. Once the responses were received, the facilitator asked open-ended questions that encouraged participants to describe why they answered the poll the way they did.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS:**

There were 27 participants across all five regions for the 2021-2022 round table discussions. All past participants were invited back for a follow up discussion this year. There were 8 participants in this discussion, with representation from all regions of Alaska.

## **Data Analysis Approach**

Note taking: A note taking template was provided in advance of the meetings which was broken down into focus areas. The note taking template was used to note any concepts or ideas that stood out to the notetaker in that specific area. While everyone tasked with taking notes was provided with this template, some chose to take notes in a format of their choosing.

Debrief: After the round table discussion, everyone who took notes met together to debrief. Each question was discussed, and the group arrived at a consensus on broad takeaways for each focus area as well as notable quotes which correlated with the themes.

Preliminary Findings: A broad summary of initial findings was shared with OCS leadership during the January 2023 CRP-OCS monthly meeting.

Summary Report: Notes from the debrief and a final review of the discussion recording were used to create this summary report. A standalone executive summary will be created once all round table discussions are completed for the year.

## Findings

This section provides a summary level recap of the December 7th follow-up round table with past participants. **Any suggestions or recommendations in this section are on behalf of participants, not the CRP.** These findings will be used to guide the recommendations the Panel develops for their Annual Report.

### FOCUS AREA ONE: RECRUITMENT & HIRING PRACTICES

The FY 2021-2022 round tables revealed there was little to no reported awareness of formal recruitment efforts on behalf of OCS. Focus area one followed up with workers to see if there were any perceived changes.

#### **Workers continue to report a general lack of awareness of recruitment efforts.**

- “The only recruitment effort that I can think of is one where the workers or anyone at OCS is asked to recruit someone that we know and if you do so, you get some kind of compensation-an item worth a certain amount of money depending on how long a person stays.”
- “That’s the only thing I’m also aware of.”
- “Our office has some office-specific recruitment, but it’s not even posted half of the time.”

#### **Participants report a reluctance to take advantage of referral bonuses.**

- “I honestly would never refer anyone that I know or that I care about.”
- “I don’t know that I would willingly subject anybody to this. I don’t know that we would remain talking afterward with the way some of the workers are treated.”
- “It’s like they say, if you can do anything else but this job, you should do anything else.”
- “I feel like it’s unfair to put that on the workers, who are already experiencing so much strain from caseload or the general working environment, to also then go out and recruit people.”
- “It doesn’t make sense to put recruitment efforts on the workers.”
- “Your only reward is the hope that management treats them well enough so that you get that jacket in a year, but with the way people are treated, or the burnout rate due to the way things are ran, I don’t think anyone would get that jacket unless that person is equally stuck in the job.”

## **FOCUS AREA TWO: WELLNESS**

Focus area two followed up on a main takeaway from the FY 2021-2022 discussions where workers shared they felt that there were not enough resources available that support worker wellness.

**Poll: Would you say worker wellness at OCS has improved, stayed the same or declined since we met this past Spring?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>% of Votes</b>
<b>Greatly improved</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Slightly improved</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Slightly declined</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Greatly declined</b>	<b>29%</b>

**Participants feel like OCS does not foster an environment that supports worker wellness.**

- “To get people to participate in wellness, it means that they have to have time to, and right now our worker retention is such crap that we can’t.”
- “You go to take your break and they question you. You go to take your lunch and they tell you you don’t have time for lunch that day. It’s hard to be told to take care of yourself, but management doesn’t embrace that or facilitate that.”
- “It’s infuriating to be told by management that you need to take care of yourself but not have any of the resources or means to do it.”
- “I’ve seen many of my co-workers take leave but then they have to come in and work on their approved leave.”
- “It can get really irritating to get told self-care is important or take care of yourself, but then be questioned for taking breaks or not being allowed to have your time off be time off.”

**Wellness initiatives are worker-driven, and the initiatives feel small when compared to how big a problem it is.**

- “We have a wellness committee, and we have been trying really, really hard to improve the feel around our office. It’s been an uphill battle.”
- “Most of what we do in wellness comes from our pocket, our personal money and time and effort.”

- “It’s like throwing a snowball at a bonfire trying to put it out.”
- “It really feels like we’re just doing our best to slap a Band-Aid on a gaping wound.”

**Workers face challenges with mental health and access to services.**

- “It would be nice to know that when we’re mentally burnt out and speaking to HR that they know what EAP is. They tell you to figure it out yourself and it is so complicated to get set up with services.”
- “From my experience, the people with the EAP are not great providers. So I had to find my own mental health provider through our insurance and insurance wouldn’t cover it until I had been diagnosed with something. I was losing money just so I could keep working.”
- “It’s kind of impossible to talk to someone who doesn’t understand social work or what we do. It would be a lot easier if we could be paired with licensed clinicians that understand the type of work we do, that could actually give us the tools we need to process when we face a death.”
- “There has to be a better way to address mental health issues than EAP. I don’t understand why they keep referring us to them; it hasn’t been helpful. There should be someone we can talk to that is based in Alaska, that has a social work background, that can give us realistic coping skills.”
- “They don’t provide effective resources for mental health inside or outside of the office.”

**Multiple workers shared stories of worker wellness policies and procedures around critical incident debriefing not being followed.**

- “I could pretty easily summarize the support I get from managers from one instance. I had a baby on one of my FS cases die. I reached out to a manager to say I was struggling, and I didn’t get any response-not from the manager, not from the PSM I or the PSM II and I know they’re very aware of what happened. So that just kind of summarizes the level of support that I get here.”
- “I’ve had two kids die on my caseloads, both while I carried the case. You’re supposed to debrief with the Supervisor the next business day and they’re supposed to provide some type of mental health professional within 30 days. I was not provided it at all. I had to learn to cope on my own and I was a complete wreck.”
- “I’ve only ever seen management do their duty on a child death once in eight years.”
- “One of the teenagers on my caseload committed suicide and the only debriefing I got was just them telling me about it.”

**Workers feel like OCS talks about changes to improve worker wellbeing, but they don’t see the changes implemented.**

- “It continues to be a lot of big talk, but nothing is happening.”
- “Nothing has happened with the on-call that was supposed to be changed. They said it would be a big change and improve things for workers, but nothing has happened with it.”

- “We were promised, at least a year and a half ago, to have some secondary trauma support put in place for workers, but I haven’t heard another word of that.”
- “I’m glad the PSS III thing has been implemented for rural workers, but it still has not been implemented for non-rural workers.”
- “They talked about that bonus six or seven months ago and has anyone heard anything about that since? No.”
- “You wanna help so much, but there’s only so much you can do. For me, nothing has gotten better.”
- “We haven’t had a lot of follow-through on things, so there are a lot of people who don’t believe it will happen.”

### **FOCUS AREA THREE: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

The organizational culture at OCS was described as toxic, disorganized, disconnected and one that encourages people to overwork themselves in the FY 2021-2022 round table discussions.

**Poll: Would you say the organizational culture at OCS has improved, stayed the same or declined?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>% of Votes</b>
<b>Greatly improved</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Slightly improved</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Slightly declined</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Greatly declined</b>	<b>29%</b>

**Participants report intense oversight, lack of support or harassment from Supervisors and/or Managers.**

- “It’s a continual, slow decline and there are a lot of strained feelings about upper management right now.”
- “It would help if people felt more comfortable going to managers to talk to them about issues.”
- “It’s hit or miss with anyone above upper management, it feels like they don’t support what you’re trying to do or they go out of their way to make your life more difficult. It’s incredibly stressful to the point where there is certain management where I will duck into bathrooms or into hallways to avoid confrontation with them.”

- “My direct Supervisors are amazing and are anything I could ask for, but anyone above them is a complete disaster when it comes to any kind of supervision, in my opinion.”
- “I used to boast that I had the best Supervisor in the world. I felt supported beyond belief. Having him as my supervisor was what kept me here, his support and how he was, how he taught me and coached me to be the best caseworker I could have possibly been. Then I promoted and got a new Supervisor, and this last year has been the absolute worst year of my career. I’ve been treated worse than I’ve ever been treated at a job.”
- “I’ve been questioned when I left to take a break. I have been micromanaged to the point where I was constantly on edge and anxious.”
- “I started going to counseling for the first time because of the effect my supervisor was having on me. It was creating so much anxiety that I was having physical reactions, panic attacks, and depression. I’ve never had it be that bad. I’ve never felt that way before. This has been the worst year at OCS ever for me.”
- “There’s no consistency in checking in on workers on the frontline to make sure they’re ok.”
- “I’ve shared with management that even a personal email or phone call to check in just to see how you’re doing would help workers feel appreciated and like they matter.”

**Workers feel information regarding changes or new policies seem to be intentionally dispersed in a way so that workers won’t have the chance to respond. In particular, they talked about a change in dress code policy that left them feeling like management did not understand or care about their concerns.**

- “They like to implement things like that on Fridays at 4:30 or 5. I think the idea is to give people time to cool down or forget about it.”
- “There’s been some things in our office that have been kind of slowly but surely declining, as far as the feeling in the workplace, and I think for a lot of people that was the straw that broke the camel’s back. I had people saying that they wanted to organize kind of like a walkout. It was pretty intense.”
- “It was done late on a Friday right after a holiday and it felt cowardly, like management was out to get us with the way it was implemented.”

**Vacancies are adding to workload, forcing them to work outside of the scope of their position and putting people in positions they aren’t trained for.**

- “We’ve had an insane amount of turnover, so many new people coming in and out within days or a month. There have been so many case transfers. People are reaching breaking points.”
- “We are putting people at points of failure without any form of support.”
- “I was burnt out, I had between 60-65 cases. I had to take time off, there was just no way I could keep doing it.”
- “There are plenty of workers who are being asked, or told actually, to be doing things they should not be doing.”

- “Workers are forced to cover areas that aren’t in their jurisdiction or that they don’t have any familiarity with and management’s response is that ‘it’s something you gotta do’. It leads to unfortunate circumstances for families.”
- “The biggest toxicity we have going on with management right now is their habit of placing people in positions to fail and then when they fail going ‘I don’t why that happened’? And we say, ‘we told you that would happen’.”

#### **FOCUS AREA FOUR: COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS**

Participants previously shared ways they could feel more valued at work including having a lower caseload, increasing pay, having more access to support staff, prioritization of worker safety, opportunities for team building, monetary bonuses and more.

**Poll: Since we last met, how would you describe your perception around being valued at work?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>% of Votes</b>
<b>Greatly improved</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Slightly improved</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Slightly declined</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Greatly declined</b>	<b>14%</b>

#### **Workers continue to report not feeling valued at work.**

- “I have felt more valued by people outside of this office than I have by people in this office.”
- “I’ve always felt very valued and appreciated until this year.”
- “I felt extremely unvalued this year and it’s made it so that I don’t think I can work here much longer. I expected to stay here for the next 15 years, but I think they’ve made it impossible for me.”
- “I felt I didn’t have anyone to train me at all, I had to learn everything myself. Up to this day I have not been evaluated. I take that as I’m not valued at all. It’s almost been three years and I have not been evaluated.”



## **FOCUS AREA FIVE: WORKLOAD AND PROCESS IMPROVEMENT**

When looking at workload and process improvement, participants previously shared that leveraging technology, having a centralized system and increasing support staff would decrease their workload.

**Poll: How would you describe your workload since we last met?**

Answer	% of Votes
Greatly improved	17%
Slightly improved	17%
Stayed the same	50%
Slightly declined	17%
Greatly declined	0%

**Participants feel there is a lot of opportunity for process improvement.**

- “I’ve been staffing my cases with management. There is a tool that helps you stay on track as far as what it looks like for the case and things that need to be completed. That has helped a lot.”
- “Workload has gotten worse for our office because of the turnover, and we still don’t have the support staff.”
- “There was some discussion on a centralized system and that hasn’t changed. All the changes with Zoom haven’t been addressed. We’re asked to do Zoom meetings, but we can’t because the accounts are being changed and it hasn’t been done.”

## **FOCUS AREA SIX: DECIDING TO LEAVE OR STAY AT OCS**

Frequent responses from the FY 2021-2022 discussions around why workers leave OCS had to do with a lack of support or mistreatment from management.

**Poll: Since we last met, how would you describe the level of support you receive from supervisors and managers?**

Answer	% of Votes
Greatly improved	0%

<b>Slightly improved</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Slightly declined</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Greatly declined</b>	<b>33%</b>

**Participants continue to report that the level and type of support received from Supervisors and Managers is a main reason workers either stay or leave.**

- “Workers who are leaving are not sharing their frustrations on why they’re leaving the job because they don’t feel like things will improve because it’s just the culture of how it is now.”
- “Why I stay? I have no idea at this point.”
- “If you don’t have the right support as far as the management around you, you’re not going to make it.”
- “I put ‘stayed the same’ because while my direct Supervisors have been amazing, anyone above them has gone down.”
- “We are putting people in positions to fail, by putting them in positions with no oversight or anyone there to help and then expecting them to succeed. That’s a disheartening position to be put in as a worker. It’s a large reason why we are losing workers; we are putting them in positions of failure and then management just goes ‘whoopsie daisy’.”

**Safety concerns, especially in rural areas, was identified as a reason people leave or are thinking about leaving.**

- “I’m looking at finding a different job because of a threat we’ve had on the office.”
- “Everyone asks how you feel about the safety measures in the office and it’s not great.”
- “I get targeted all the time. I feel like I can’t even go out to the grocery store as a citizen.”

**Mental health challenges and a lack of wellness was shared as a reason workers leave and some participants are currently thinking about leaving.**

- “I love this job, but not at the expense of my mental health.”
- “I have applied for different jobs that are less stressful.”
- “Everyone has either PTSD, depression, anxiety, burnout, or compassion fatigue at some point in time since they’ve been with the department. Some people, I commend them for leaving because they don’t want to continue to feel that way.”

## **PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED**

Participants were asked their thoughts about the following programs that have been, or will be, implemented by OCS to address worker wellness and improve the organizational culture:

bonuses, PSS III position, mental health clinician, safety officer, child welfare certificate, and the mentorship program.

- “The [child welfare] certificate could be good for SSA’s or PSS I’s who are wanting to promote, because we are getting a lot of people who have zero experience with anything related to child welfare. I’m sure that has lent itself to our incredible turnover this past year.”
- “I’m sure a lot of people don’t believe any of these things will actually be implemented.”
- “I’ve talked to people about the bonuses, and the problem is that we haven’t had a ton of follow-through, so there are a lot of people who don’t believe it will happen.”
- “I had a very hard time understanding the bonus, about who was getting it or when or how. Nobody understood. It was so hard to follow, and that makes it seem less real.”
- “The mental health clinician, we were told two years ago that that was going to happen. They actually had someone walk through the building and introduce themselves as that person, and then we never saw that person again or anyone else.”

## **Next Steps**

Individual round table summary reports, along with an executive summary, will be posted publicly on the CRP website, [crpalaska.org](http://crpalaska.org). The 2022-2023 CRP Round Table Executive Summary will be shared with all participants and the Office of Children’s Services. The CRP will encourage OCS to share the Executive Summary, and their response on how they will utilize the report, with all OCS staff. Findings from the 2022-2023 CRP round table discussions will inform the recommendations that are developed as part of the CRP Annual Report. The Annual Report will be sent to OCS for response and will be made available to the public, community stakeholders and Alaska’s policymakers.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CRP= Citizen Review Panel

FS= Family Services

FY=Fiscal Year

EAP=Employee Assistance Program

OCS= Office of Children's Services

PSS=Protective Services Specialist

PSM=Protective Services Manager