



Pipeline

By and for the
Office
of Children's Services

... the flow of OCS

Sean Parnell, Governor • Bill Streur, Acting Commissioner



From ...
Christy's Desk

Happy New Year!

HB 126 went into effect Jan. 1, 2011. HB 126 allows foster care to extend to age 21, and will now allow voluntary re-entry into foster care for those youth and young adults who find they are struggling to make it on their own, are homeless, or are in need of assistance.

These young adults would not be coming into care due to current abuse or neglect; they would be entering through their own request and approval of the court. This is in essence what many young people have to their advantage when they venture out on their own, find it's harder than they thought, and then go back to mom and dad for a while. HB 126 allows our young folks to return to their nest as well if they don't have a supportive or suitable one available.

We recognize that the system too often doesn't adequately prepare them to exit due to resources, workload, or other limitations, but this is a second chance for them. We will develop a very different relationship with a young adult who voluntarily enters and who can leave at any time than we will form with our current children and families.

Continued on page 2

Background check transition

By Kathy Ensor

It's coming! In the near future, conducting background checks will transition to the Background Check Program (BCP) in the Division of Public Health.

Foster care applicants, unlicensed relative caregivers, household members age 16 and older, and adoptive/guardianship families will all have their background checks processed through the BCP.

This transition *does not* affect emergency placements. Workers will continue requesting and reviewing APSIN and other necessary background checks when making a placement under emergency conditions. In addition, workers will continue requesting information on individuals from the child abuse and neglect registry in each state of residence during the past five-year period.

How will this process work? — Licensing workers will submit the BCP On-Line Application and other required forms at the time fingerprints are submitted. **Important!!!** CPS workers submitting the electronic or ink prints

Continued on page 5

Indian Child Welfare (ICW) Corner

Hello everyone:

This article is the first in what we hope will become a regular fixture in the Pipeline. OCS often has many partnerships, collaborations, or projects going on with our tribal partners, but because of how busy everyone is, we tend to not celebrate our success as often as we should. This section will focus on bringing out all the successes and strengths that our partnerships create to help serve Alaska families.

The story this month that we would like to share comes out of our Ketchikan field office. The OCS



Ketchikan Field Office and Ketchikan Indian Community have been working in collaboration to protect the children in the community for many years. One reason has been the excellent communication between the two agencies.

Ketchikan Indian Community ICWA worker Wendy Weston comes to the Ketchikan Field Office every other week in order that the communication between both agencies continues to be a top priority. Ketchikan Indian Community and the Ketchikan OCS field office have built a strong

Continued on page 4

CHRISTY'S DESK continued from page 1

There are going to be many questions and issues that will arise due to the fact we've never done this before and, while we've anticipated and planned for many of them, there will likely be more with the unique needs that arise.

All staff need to be cognizant of HB 126 so that you can be prepared to direct calls accordingly or answer basic questions should you be asked.

Criteria for re-entry are:

- Is 18 years of age or older, but less than 21.
- Was placed in out-of-home care under a court order immediately before being released from custody.
- Is in need of out-of-home care.
- Meets with their RIL to sign a re-entry agreement that outlines specific objectives in their transition plan.
- Will actively participate in services designed to promote self-sufficiency identified by them in partnership with OCS.
- Is no longer in state custody, including those who were emancipated prior to age 18.

If a former foster youth calls or presents himself or herself at your office, you should attempt to include from the start the IL specialist for your region as well as conferencing in Dee Pearson, the Social Service Program Coordinator in Juneau. Previous

legal parties such as the GAL and youth's attorney (if they had one) should also be contacted as the youth will need to provide a written statement to the Court about his or her desire to return to foster care.

All youth currently in care should be strongly encouraged to consider remaining in care for as long as possible unless they are achieving permanency through traditional means: reunification, adoption or guardianship. Youth exiting with plans to be independent or youth being dismissed from care because of refusals to stay in placement should be repeatedly counseled on the options and opportunities that can be afforded to them, should they stay. It's a rough world out there and we need to be their parent in the most responsible, respectful manner we can.

Most importantly, youth need to be constantly counseled about the importance of permanent connections that can support and assist them through adulthood. While OCS may not formalize a permanent home for the youth through the courts, all youth deserve a place to call home with a relative, friend, or other lifelong supports.

OCS Policy 3.1.4 outlines the use of APPLA as a permanency goal for youth in care. APPLA is not a goal that any young person in our care should be given unless all other efforts to create a permanent home for the youth have been completely exhausted. Permanent connections do not require a legal document such as an adoption decree, but

rather, youth need emotional permanency with someone who they know will be there to support them throughout their young adulthood. A total of 53 (43 percent) IL youth, age 16 and 17 currently have APPLA or independent living as their permanency goal. This represents approximately 43 percent of the total IL Youth population age 16-17.

APPLA is a vague, undefined goal that leads to poor planning and youth exiting care without adequate supports or ideas of how they will live. Contrary to some widespread perceptions internal and external to OCS, older youth are adoptable! Guardianship and adoption provide the kind of foundation, relationships and support that all young people need, and we should make every effort (and continued efforts) to see that made possible!

In the coming month there will be policies and procedures being issued that will give specific clarity to how HB 126 will be operationalized. Although we aren't anticipating a rush of young adults coming to our doors, it is likely that there will be a few and possibly some media coverage highlighting this significant change in the foster care program. Please help get these young people connected with the IL Specialists in your area or with Dee Pearson in Juneau by shepherding and welcoming them into the agency.

Christy

**Christy Lawton is Acting Director of the
Office of Children's Services.**

