

# THE OKLAHOMA PINNACLE PLAN



AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

## STATE OF OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) settled a class action, civil rights lawsuit against its foster care system by agreeing to make targeted improvements in 15 performance areas of the state's Child Welfare system. As part of this settlement agreement, OKDHS is developing an improvement plan with the assistance of three outside child welfare experts (referred to as co-neutrals), agency employees, commissioners, and key internal and external stakeholders. This plan will guide the agency in the years ahead as it works to make improvements in the way it cares for children in foster care. The agency's child welfare staff chose to name the plan, *The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan*--as the term reflects their goals to reach the highest point possible in the state's child welfare program.

The confidence and trust of both internal and external constituencies is critical to the development and implementation of *The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan*. Everyone involved with the development of the plan agreed this process should be as transparent as possible to engender trust and to ensure effective two-way communications. While it was recognized that different groups of stakeholders will have varied interest levels for information, it was decided that communications surrounding *The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan* will be detailed and the same information made publicly available to all.

The purpose of a Strategic Communications Plan is to connect people to the work of the organization – its vision, mission, values and goals. For this reason, a Strategic Communications Plan was developed for *The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan* to identify methods of eliciting feedback and informing the public and key stakeholders of its progress. This plan is purposefully aligned with the OKDHS agency-wide Strategic Communications Plan.

The following pages outline a living document that will continue to grow as initiatives are developed. The living nature of this plan demonstrates that communications is a two-way street. As we hear and learn from our stakeholders throughout this process, we will continue to develop objectives to communicate Oklahoma's story of Child Welfare improvements and successes.

## **OKDHS VALUES AND COMMITMENTS TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES**

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### ***We are committed to:***

- Equity, where all children, youth and families have access to and receive unbiased treatment and services.
- Keeping children safe with their families through prevention services, kinship placements and timely reunification whenever possible.
- Ensuring children are safe while in out-of-home care by quickly matching them with a family who will provide for their safety, permanency and well-being.
- Recruiting, retaining, and supporting the child welfare workforce and ensuring they have manageable caseloads.
- Engaging local communities in improving child welfare outcomes.

### **We cannot do it alone.**

## **COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES**

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Like many public Child Welfare agencies around the country, one of the biggest problems for OKDHS is combating a negative public perception. The nature and confidentiality of the work in Child Welfare can easily lead people to focus only on a few negative stories and events. Many forget the thousands of children who are protected and reunited successfully with their families or adopted each year because their stories cannot always be told without violating their privacy. The agency's commitment to transparency is ultimately its foundation for positive public perception, at the same time it can contribute to perception issues when the stories are not always positive.

## **SUSTAINING INITIATIVES**

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Communications is a critical component of strategies targeted at improving employee morale, reducing costly staff turnover, strengthening the recruitment and hiring processes and building strong collaborations and partnerships with key stakeholders. The strategies outlined in this communications plan will reduce organizational stress by keeping Child Welfare staff informed, allowing them to focus on improvements and the important work they do each day with children and families. This plan will support the agency's initiatives developed in The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan while keeping key constituencies informed.

## **EXPANDING COMMUNICATIONS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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As part of the OKDHS agency-wide Strategic Communications Plan, employees at all levels within the agency have been trained to be spokespersons within their communities and with the media. This Communications Plan will focus on ensuring more staff members working in the agency's Child Welfare system are trained so they may effectively share the stories and successes as the agency makes improvements. The agency will also continue to leverage existing relationships with community partners, providers and advocates which will broaden the base of people carrying the OKDHS message to a larger community.

# Strategic Communications Objectives

## **OBJECTIVE 1: Identification of Internal and External Key Stakeholders**

Key stakeholders in The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan were identified and divided into categories based upon their level of interest and need for information:

### **INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS**

- Chief Officers of OKDHS
- Children and Youth in Foster Care (in the custody of OKDHS in out-of-home care)
- Commission members
- Employees in Human Services Centers (HSC) (includes Children and Family Services Division, Field Operations Division and Family Support Services Division)
- Employees in the remaining divisions within OKDHS

### **EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS (List of stakeholders, Appendix A):**

- Advocacy groups
- Advisory groups
- Alumni youth of foster care
- Business, community and opinion leaders
- Caregivers (includes resource families and kinship caregivers—current and prospective), caregiver associations, foster parent association
- Court system (District Attorneys, Judiciary, Children’s Attorneys, etc.)
- Governor, Legislature and staff
- Media and General Public
- Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY)
- Oklahoma Public Employees Association (OPEA)
- Parents (custodial and non-custodial) and family members
- Providers and provider associations
- Tribes

## **OBJECTIVE 2: Elicit recommendations from internal and external stakeholders during the development of The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan on initiatives for improvement in the 15 identified areas.**

- Hold six Child Welfare summits with OKDHS Child Welfare staff between the dates of January 31-February 9, 2012 at each of the six OKDHS Field Operations Area Offices to elicit feedback and recommendations on the development of the plan.
- Establish the Oklahoma Child Welfare Settlement Agreement Plan Workgroup consisting of representatives from: Office of the Governor; Senate; House of Representatives; OKDHS Commission and OKDHS Child Welfare; OKDHS Chief Officer and Intergovernmental Relations; Foster Care Task Force and OCCY; Indian Child Welfare; and Department of Health. This group will be involved in the development of the plan.
- Communication strategies will support recommendations made by the previously established House of Representatives Legislative Work Group.
- Establish a highly-visible portion of the OKDHS website, [www.okdhs.org](http://www.okdhs.org), for updates on The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan and to solicit feedback. Create a devoted email address where people can send ideas and recommendations for the development of the plan.
- Establish focus groups with youth currently in OKDHS foster care and with alumni youth to elicit feedback and recommendations.
- Deborah Smith, Director, OKDHS Children and Family Services Division, will attend meetings of key external stakeholders (Appendix A) to elicit recommendations during the development of the plan.

## **OBJECTIVE 3: Provide regular and timely communications during the development and implementation of The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan:**

- Through the use of OKDHS email, the OKDHS Intranet (Infonet) and Internet, provide detailed written and video updates to internal and external stakeholders.
- The OKDHS Office of Communications will create and support a highly visible portion of the agency's website home page where updates of the plan will be made available. This page will host written updates, provide readers with a platform for two-way

communication, and provide links to child welfare data and resources, information about becoming a resource parent, volunteer opportunities, and more.

- Social Media will be used as another platform for effective, two-way communications. Social Media will be used to elicit feedback, provide updates, and drive those interested to the OKDHS website for more detailed information.
- Live meetings with OKDHS staff and external stakeholders around the state will be used to keep stakeholders apprised of the plan's progress. Written "takeaways" will be provided with key points of information.
- Office of Communications will issue statewide news releases to the media after major events and milestones are achieved in the plan.
- Office of Communications will continue to proactively pitch story ideas to the media.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: Expand Communications Roles and Responsibilities of Key OKDHS Child Welfare staff.**

The Office of Communications will:

- Provide specialized training to identified Child Welfare staff to prepare them to interact with the media and participate in the OKDHS Speakers Bureau.
- Coordinate local staff with local media around the state on story ideas.

#### **OBJECTIVE 5: Develop targeted communications strategies to support recruitment initiatives outlined in The Oklahoman Pinnacle Plan.**

- Communications will support the agency's efforts to build the child welfare workforce and to recruit foster families.

## **APPENDIX A: OKDHS CHILD WELFARE EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS**

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- Child Welfare Professional Enhancement Program members
- Court Improvement Program
- Foster Care System Improvement Task Force
- Foster Parent Association (includes adoptive parents)
- Oklahoma CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)
- Oklahoma Commission for Children and Youth
- Office of Juvenile System Oversight
- Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
- Oklahoma Legislature
- Oklahoma Public Employees Association
- Oklahoma State Post-Adjudication Advisory Review Board
- Oklahoma Supreme Court Juvenile Oversight Committee
- Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Association (Tribes)
- Youth Alumni Group (youth formerly in foster care)



## APPENDIX B: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN GRID

The purpose of the Strategic Communications Plan is to **connect people to the work of OKDHS** through effective and efficient communication focused around the Agency's core messages of safety, health, independence, productivity, accountability, and learning and growth.

Increased **effectiveness** in Child Welfare Services can be achieved by advancing the Agency's vision, mission, values and goals.

Increased **efficiency** in Child Welfare Services can be achieved by fully integrating communications into the work of the Agency

<b>SAFETY</b> We protect and serve vulnerable adults and children and reduce the risk of harm to individuals and families.	<b>HEALTH</b> Eligible children and adults are able to access health care and nutrition services.	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b> We help individuals and families in need help themselves.	<b>PRODUCTIVITY</b> Individuals move into the workforce and maintain employment.	<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b> We provide a good return on the taxpayer investment.	<b>LEARNING AND GROWTH</b> We have the capacity to effectively fulfill our mission.
<b>OBJECTIVE 1: Identification of Internal and External Key Stakeholders</b>		<b>OBJECTIVE 2: Elicit recommendations from internal and external stakeholders during the development of The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan on initiatives for improvement in the 15 identified areas.</b>		<b>OBJECTIVE 3: Provide regular and timely communications during the development and implementation of The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan:</b>	
Key stakeholders in The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan were identified and divided into categories based upon their level of interest and need for information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal stakeholders:</li> <li>• Chief Officers of OKDHS</li> <li>• Children and Youth in Foster Care (in the custody of OKDHS in out-of-home care)</li> <li>• Commission members</li> <li>• Employees in Human Services Centers (HSC) (includes Children and Family Services Division, Field Operations Division and Family Support Services Division)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold six Child Welfare summits with OKDHS Child Welfare staff between the dates of January 31-February 9, 2012 at each of the six OKDHS Field Operations Area Offices to elicit feedback and recommendations on the development of the plan.</li> <li>• Establish the Oklahoma Child Welfare Settlement Agreement Plan Workgroup consisting of representatives from: Office of the Governor; Senate; House of Representatives; OKDHS Commission and OKDHS Child Welfare; OKDHS Chief Officer and Intergovernmental Relations; Foster Care Task Force and OCCY; Indian Child Welfare; and Department of Health. This group will be involved in the development of the plan.</li> <li>• Communication strategies will support</li> </ul>		While it was recognized that different groups of stakeholders will have varied interest levels for information, it was decided that communications surrounding The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan will be detailed and the same information made publicly available to all. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the use of OKDHS email, the OKDHS Intranet (Infonet) and Internet, provide detailed written and video updates to internal and external stakeholders.</li> <li>• The OKDHS Office of Communications will create and support a highly visible portion of the agency's website home page (<a href="http://www.okdhs.org">www.okdhs.org</a>) where updates of the plan will be made available. This page will host written updates, provide readers with a platform for two-way communication, and</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees in the remaining divisions within OKDHS</li> <li>External stakeholders (See list of stakeholders, Appendix A)</li> </ul>	<p>recommendations made by the previously established House of Representatives Legislative Work Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a highly-visible portion of the agency website for The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan and updates. Create a devoted email address where people can send ideas and recommendations for the development of the plan.</li> <li>• Establish focus groups with youth currently in OKDHS foster care and with alumni youth to elicit feedback and recommendations.</li> <li>• Deborah Smith, Director, OKDHS Children and Family Services Division, will attend meetings of key external stakeholders (Appendix A) to elicit recommendations during the development of the plan.</li> </ul>	<p>provide links to child welfare data, information about becoming a resource parent, and volunteer opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social Media will be used as another platform for effective, two-way communications. Social Media will be used to elicit feedback, provide updates, and drive those interested to the OKDHS website for more detailed information.</b></li> <li>• Live meetings with OKDHS staff and external stakeholders around the state will be used to keep stakeholders apprised of the plan’s progress. Written “takeaways” will be provided with key points of information.</li> <li>• Office of Communications will issue statewide news releases to the media after major events and milestones are achieved in the plan.</li> <li>• Office of Communications will continue to proactively pitch story ideas to the media.</li> </ul>
<p><b>OBJECTIVE 4: Expand Communications Roles and Responsibilities of Key OKDHS Child Welfare staff.</b></p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVE 5: Develop targeted communications strategies to support recruitment initiatives outlined in The Oklahoma Pinnacle Plan.</b></p>	
<p>The Office of Communications will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide specialized training to identified Child Welfare staff to prepare them to interact with the media and participate in the OKDHS Speakers Bureau.</li> <li>• Coordinate local staff with local media around the state on story ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications will support the agency’s efforts to build the child welfare workforce and to recruit foster families.</li> </ul>	

## APPENDIX C: AUDIENCES, VEHICLES AND MESSENGERS GRID

### OKDHS CORE MESSAGES:

- **SAFETY** – We protect and serve vulnerable adults and children and reduce the risk of harm to individuals and families.
- **HEALTH** – Eligible children and adults are able to access health care and nutrition services.
- **INDEPENDENCE** – We help individuals and families in need help themselves.
- **PRODUCTIVITY** – Individuals move into the workforce and maintain employment.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** – We provide a good return on the taxpayer investment.
- **LEARNING AND GROWTH** – We have the capacity to effectively fulfill our mission.

	SAFETY	HEALTH	INDEPENDENCE	PRODUCTIVITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	LEARNING AND GROWTH
<b>AUDIENCES</b>						
Advocacy groups	X	X	X			
Business & community leaders	X	X	X	X		
Opinion leaders	X	X	X	X	X	
Court system (DAs, Judiciary, child’s attny)	X	X	X			
Legislature & staff	X	X	X	X	X	
Custodial parents	X	X	X	X		
Non-custodial parents	X	X	X	X		
Caregivers	X	X	X	X		
Kinship caregivers	X	X	X	X		
Families	X	X	X	X		
Resource families (current & prospective)	X	X	X	X		
Children & Youth in Foster Care - Alumni	X	X	X	X		
Providers	X	X	X	X	X	
Employees	X	X	X	X	X	X
General public	X	X	X		X	
Tribes	X	X	X	X	X	

	SAFETY	HEALTH	INDEPENDENCE	PRODUCTIVITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	LEARNING AND GROWTH
Churches	X	X				
Schools	X	X	X			
Hospitals	X	X	X			
Media	X	X	X	X	X	
Regulators					X	X
OCCY					X	X
<b>VEHICLES</b>						
<b>Tools</b>						
OKDHS Website	X	X	X	X	X	
Social Media	X	X	X	X	X	
Videos	X	X	X	X	X	
Newsletters	X	X	X	X	X	
Print (fast facts; leave behinds)	X	X	X	X	X	
Email	X	X	X	X	X	X
InfoNet	X	X	X	X	X	X
Portal for resource families	X	X	X	X	X	X
Employee meetings					X	X
Training for employees						X
<b>Stakeholder Groups</b>						
Child Welfare Professional Enhancement Program members	X	X		X	X	X
Court Improvement Program	X			X	X	X
Foster Care System Improvement Task Force	X	X				X
Foster Parent Association (includes adoptive parents)	X	X	X	X		X
CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)	X	X	X		X	
Oklahoma Commission for Children and Youth					X	X
Office of Juvenile System Oversight					X	X
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy	X	X	X	X		X
Oklahoma Legislature				X	X	
Oklahoma Public Employees Association				X	X	

	SAFETY	HEALTH	INDEPENDENCE	PRODUCTIVITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	LEARNING AND GROWTH
Oklahoma State Post-Adjudication Advisory Review Board					X	X
Oklahoma Supreme Court Juvenile Oversight Committee					X	X
Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Association (Tribes)	X	X	X	X		X
Youth Alumni Group (youth formerly in foster care)		X	X	X	X	
<b>MESSENGERS</b>						
OKDHS frontline employees	X	X	X	X	X	X
Supervisors					X	X
Area Directors					X	X
County Directors					X	X
Executive Team members					X	X
Commissioners					X	X
Caregivers	X	X	X	X		
Family members	X	X	X			
Resource parents	X	X	X			
Child Advocates	X	X	X	X	X	
Court system	X	X			X	
CASA employees	X	X	X		X	
Volunteers	X	X	X			
Providers	X	X	X			
Doctors	X	X				
Nurses	X	X				
Police	X	X				
Teachers	X	X				
School counselors	X	X	X	X		
School-based social workers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tribes	X	X	X	X		
Legislators				X	X	