



Strengthening Families ***Together***

Q&A: Answering Your Panel Questions

Biannual Collaborative Convening

April 2024

Q1: What suggestions do you have for organizations to reach children during the summer months? Those child who could benefit from service but do not have transportation or means to connect outside of their neighborhoods?

A1: To reach children who might benefit from services but lack transportation or means to connect outside of their neighborhoods during the summer months, here are some suggestions to leverage community resources:

1. **Mobility Network:** Collaborate with Rainbow Fleet and utilize transportation from the mobility network.
2. **Summer Feeding Programs:** Partner with summer feeding programs offered by the Regional Food Bank and Hunger Free Oklahoma to provide meals and information about available services for children. Coordinate with local Family Resource Centers to identify areas of need.
3. **Community Centers Collaboration:** Work closely with the local YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, and Family Resource Centers to establish and expand services within neighborhoods.
4. **Value Added Benefits Outreach:** Utilize Sooner Select Value Added Benefits to incentivize participation in programs.

Q2: The complexities of the state's early childhood (EC) systems are compounded when spread over multiple state departments. Even though some of the federal funding requirements for EC programs require those funds to be placed under certain administrative domains. Over 20 states have created EC models to align/or centralize funds and management to enhance efficiency and efficacy. Would the agencies present today support an EC working group to develop recommendations to establish a cohesive and effective Oklahoma EC governance structure that has shown to support foundation learning and financial savings?

A2: In 2003, House Bill 1094 created the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR). This legislation recognized more state-level action is required to successfully support families and children from birth to five years old. OPSR helps Oklahoma families access the early care and education, family support, and health and mental health services they need to support their children during the most critical period of development from birth through age five. OPSR facilitates collaborative planning and decision making to increase coordination between programs, to maximize the use of public and private funding, and to pursue policies that improve learning opportunities and environment for Oklahoma's children.

Q3: What are some of the largest gaps in services or areas of need facing families, especially in areas outside of Oklahoma City and Tulsa?

A3: Identifying and addressing barriers in various aspects of life is crucial for improving the overall quality of life and ensuring equitable access to opportunities. Here are some fundamental barriers identified in the responses to the State Plan and Regional Meetings. The State Plan on the Prevention of Child Abuse will address potential strategies to mitigate the identified barriers.

- Families in survival mode and ineffective communication skills
- Stigma behind asking for help and resources
- Transportation
- Affordable housing and rent
- Mental health and substance use/addictions
- Accessibility to services/resources (car seats, information, etc.)
- Childcare: quality, affordability, assistance
- Access to extracurricular activities
- Employment and qualified staff
- Language barriers, literacy, translation

Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach involving community organizations, government agencies, and policy changes to create an environment where everyone can thrive.

Q4: With transition-age youth experiencing many barriers related to school, the justice system, foster care, and the community, what are your plans to ensure a strong safety net of support for them?

A4: The Oklahoma Human Services (OKDHS) Oklahoma Successful Adulthood Program (OKSA) – mission is to empower youth in and from foster care to lead safer, healthier, more independent, and more productive lives.

OKSA focuses on the teen population and seeks to:

- promote the importance of early planning for one's future;
- develop each individual's innate strengths;
- promote the concept of permanent connections.
- ensure the transition of young people ages 16–21 from state custody to self-sufficiency and successful adult living;
- support youth by encouraging a multi-disciplinary approach through training of field staff and other appropriate adults;
- develop targeted resources for teens and community partnerships.

OKSA resources include the OKSA Helpline, youth conferences, the education and training voucher program, life skills groups, transition plans, youth development funds, and other services.

A4, continued: The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) Transition Age Youth (TAY) services include convening a statewide advisory committee that brings together service providers, experienced leaders, and advocates from across the state to address systemic issues that impact youth transitioning out of state care. The committee focuses efforts on legislative policy and strategic partnerships to improve outcomes for TAY. For example, a strategic alliance was established between OCCY and Oklahoma's Credit Union (OKCU) to provide TAY access to banking services with minimal identification documentation and no parental consent. In addition, OKCU provides TAY with financial literacy education and guidance, mobile banking options, and other services. For more information, contact OKCU youth@okcu.org.

Q5: What role do you see your respective agencies playing in funding and supporting homeless (youth and families) prevention programs?

A5: OKDHS is committed, through the available safety net programs, in helping individuals successfully entering the workforce into employment that pays a reasonable salary. Some of the efforts underway in doing this is through Work Ready Oklahoma (WRO) and SNAP Employment and Training for those who qualify for SNAP benefits. The WRO initiative is aimed at enhancing self-sufficiency for low-income families and achieving family stability and fostering sustainable employment.

A5, continued: OKDHS maintains a partnership with the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) and, through this partnership, has been able to provide Housing Choice Vouchers for youth and young adults Through the Oklahoma Successful Adulthood (OKSA) program and the federal funding received during the pandemic, OKDHS is in the final stages of building 15 tiny homes specifically for youth aging out of care to prevent homelessness in partnership with Pivot.

OKDHS can utilize federal funding to help youth get started with housing by paying deposits and the first month's rent and helping to prevent young people from being evicted. A collaboration for Transitional Living Programs across the state has been initiated to help coordinate housing for youth and youth adults who are exiting or have exited care.

OCCY continues to work to convene stakeholders to identify and solve issues related to families experiencing homelessness. We are focused on efforts that include guiding and forming legislative policy to prevent homelessness.

Q6: How do you collect information from parent leaders about what they believe are the needs of parents in the community and how we might address those need?

A6: To effectively collect information from parent leaders about the needs of parents in the community and how to address those needs, you can utilize a multi-faceted approach incorporating various strategies and resources provided. Some ways to do this include:

- **Developing and Sustaining a Parent Advisory Committee Community of Practice:** Establishing a community of practice dedicated to parent advisory committees can create a platform for agency providers tasked to facilitate parent voice where they share insights, experiences, and best practices. Regular meetings, workshops, and networking events can facilitate meaningful discussions and idea exchange.
- **Parent Advisory Committees in Family Resource Centers:** Utilize existing Parent Advisory Committees in Family Resource Centers as a valuable information resource. These committees consist of parents who are actively involved in their communities and can provide firsthand insights into the needs and challenges faced by parents.
- **Continuum of Parent Voice:** Implement a continuum of parent voice, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other forms of feedback mechanisms. This approach ensures that you capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences from parents in the community.

Q7: What are the 2–3 highest unmet needs of low-income families in Oklahoma?

A7: To identify the highest unmet needs of low-income families in Oklahoma, we can draw insights from resources such as the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Casey Community Opportunity Map, and the State of the Babies Report.

Q8: How will OCCY, OKDHS, and OSDH increase resources and coordination with communities to enhance the implementation of strategies within the 2023–2028 OK State Health Improvement Plan?

A8: One avenue is through the Children’s State Advisory Workgroup (CSAW). This workgroup brings together multiple state agencies and stakeholders, not just OCCY, OKDHS, and OSDH. A primary objective is to better address the needs of local communities and reduce common barriers by providing a venue, the Oklahoma Resilient website, for regular engagement. Communities can share their needs and concerns and even request specific assistance through this forum. OCCY, OKDHS, and OSDH will also continue to collaborate and work to engage professionals in the field and those with lived experience across the state to better serve communities and address key components of SHIP. Although systems level change is the goal, community level buy-in is essential.

Q9: Would it be possible to have a collaborative website for families and/or partner agencies to include services and resources that also include other agencies, such as the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse and the Oklahoma State Department of Education? It can be with links to each agency's own website as well. The number of different agencies and what they do can be overwhelming for families.

A9: The Children's State Advisory Workgroup (CSAW) has developed a website, Resilient Oklahoma, to provide families and professionals with easy access to state and local resources, including training and events. The website launched July 1, 2024.

Q10: How is the department looking at utilizing Indian Health services in tandem with standard programs they normally use in cohorts? Also, how is the department looking at better connecting the custody of children to their extended family/siblings?

A10: A continuum of care and service array for children and families through a community-based approach to ensure connection to, and utilization of, the formal and informal community-based resources available is a priority in Oklahoma. OKDHS continues cross-system collaboration and coordination with state agencies, tribes, and community-based service provider agencies to help in preventing children from entering the child welfare system as well as providing ongoing support

A10, continued: while in foster care and at the time of reunification to prevent re-entry into care.

Oklahoma continues to build upon framework and culture for the inclusion of youth, family, and tribal voices to promote and facilitate the co-designing of a child and family well-being network that elevates an understanding of what families need and how to remove barriers that prevent them from receiving effective support and services.

OKDHS continues to provide support to the families we serve by informing child welfare staff of tribal services available through the Tribal Program Coordinators outreach efforts that have included creating a resource guide, an online toolkit for staff to access information on services and supports directly through tribes, as well as helping to support the utilization of Be A Neighbor by tribes to help inform of tribal services.

Q11: What are areas you see that organizations could better collaborate?

A11: OKDHS continues to build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, community and faith-based engagement, tribes.

A11, continued: Ongoing collaboration with projects and initiatives is maintained to ensure services and support for all children and families through a board approach to serve statewide and distribute resources where they are most needed.

OKDHS is committed to finding pathways to partner with communities to identify ways to serve and invest in a comprehensive continuum of prevention and continuum-based supports and resources for children and families, meeting the unique needs defined by the communities.

OKDHS, as a partner of the Children's State Advisory Workgroup (CSAW), is one example of how OKDHS is utilizing cross-system collaboration to ensure access to adequate support, services, and resources and engage with local communities.

The OKDHS real estate modernization, which involves Service First, a partnership with community partners across the state, is making a significant impact. By providing spaces for embedded workers and co-locating services in the same building, we are enhancing the accessibility of our services. Additionally, our mobile office/bus partnerships allow OKDHS to be onsite with local organizations, further strengthening our ties with the community.

A11, continued: Oklahoma is also participating in a multi-state, multi-agency collaborative hosted by the Casey Family Programs. This collaboration is of great importance as it allows us to look at ways to better serve children and youth with complex needs. We are proud to be part of this impactful initiative.

OKDHS continually strives to improve collaboration and coordination to serve Oklahomans and continues to look for opportunities for braided project funding and/or joint funding requests.

OCCY hopes to create additional opportunities to provide funding for time-limited events in communities. There is an untapped potential of community volunteers and advocates throughout our state.

Q12: What are the ways that you are implementing youth, bio family, and foster family voice that you are doing? How often are they invited to the table to participate in discussions to improve the work that you do?

A12: In our effort to incorporate youth, bio family, and foster family voices into our work, we have implemented several strategies aimed at fostering collaboration feedback and participation. These include a formal training, the Developing and Sustaining a Parent Advisory Committee Community of Practice. Family Resource Centers across the state implement Parent Advisory Committees focused on family needs.

A12, continued: OCCY has been tasked with facilitating the Parent Partnership Board, which includes representation from bio families, foster families, and youth. This board plays a crucial role in shaping our policies, programs, and practices by providing valuable insights and recommendations. OCCY actively seeks representation from youth, bio families, and foster families on panels, advisory boards, and decision-making bodies related to our work. This ensures that their voices are lifted up.

OCCY also participates in specialized initiatives such as OKSA Youth Advisory, CSAW, Youth Voice – Injury Prevention, and Youth Action Board OKC Tulsa. These initiatives provide platforms for youth and families to advocate for their needs, share their perspectives, and collaborate on projects that address issues relevant to them.

Overall, we prioritize regular and meaningful engagement with youth, bio families, and foster families across various forums and activities to ensure their voices are heard, valued, and incorporated into the work that we all do.

Q13: Would Oklahoma Human Services be willing to review their policy on the 'safety threshold'? This policy has the potential to keep children in unsafe homes.

A13: OKDHS develops policy in accordance with the Oklahoma Children's Code, Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes, and continually assesses policy and practice to identify areas where we can improve and ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children and families we serve. Child Welfare Services Programs and the Practice Model assist CW Specialists in ensuring a child's safety while helping to strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment, family separation, and trauma to children and their parents.

OKDHS aims to provide maximum safety for children and to enable families to remain together when possible. The majority of families that are identified through a report of abuse and/or neglect can be assisted through community-based services and voluntarily through OKDHS. However, in serious abuse and/or neglect, court intervention and removal of the children from their homes may be necessary.

The provided training, tools, and resources support CW specialists in focusing on the entire family rather than individuals and provide comprehensive services that engage the family and target the family's therapeutic, supportive, and concrete needs.

A13, continued: All Child Welfare (CW) staff receive additional training, tools, and resources as part of the statewide implementation of the Safety through Supervision framework. This initiative aims to enhance staff knowledge and skills in safety practices through improved safety and needs assessments. These enhancements are designed to guide decision-making, case planning, and service provision. The framework also builds upon the competencies that CW Supervisors gain through the Supervisors Academy.

Policy instructions to staff include enhanced guidance on assessing safety during the initial Child Protection Services safety evaluation and investigative process, as well as throughout the CW case until case closure. Tools and resources are provided to support CW staff in conducting high-quality safety evaluations with children and families, including a Safety Guidebook. The guidebook includes a compilation of resources that provide definitions, examples, and guidance on the appropriate way to assess and document comprehensive safety decisions, as well as how to assess protective capacities.

CW supervisors can utilize these resources to hold specialists accountable for best practice, as well as to provide support, coaching, and mentoring.

Q14: How can the OU Parent Partnership Advisory Committee work with the three organizations?

A14: The OU Parent Partnership Advisory Committee or any other committee/coalition can collaborate with the three organizations (OSDH, OKDHS, OCCY) in several ways:

1. **Attend Community of Practices:** The members can attend Community of Practices sessions hosted by the organizations. These sessions provide opportunities for stakeholders to share insights, experiences, and best practices related to parenting and youth engagement. Participating in these sessions allows the committee members to learn from the organizations' expertise and contribute their perspectives on parent engagement and support.

2. **Engage in Preestablished Efforts:** The committee can actively engage in preestablished efforts led by the organizations. This may include volunteering for events, participating in advocacy campaigns, or providing feedback on programs and initiatives designed to support youth and families. By collaborating on these efforts, the committee can strengthen its relationship with the organizations and amplify the impact of their collective work.

A14, continued: The OU Parent Partnership Advisory Committee and any other committee/coalition can contribute to shared goals and outcomes. This collaboration can foster greater synergy, coordination, and effectiveness in addressing Oklahomans' needs.

Q15: Can you share how communities can apply for a school-based specialist to increase concrete supports for families in need?

A15: Schools interested in having the School-Based Program are asked to complete the attached questionnaire and email it to dhs.schoolbasedservices@okdhs.org. Schools can also reach out to the same email address for any additional questions. <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:6a5002b1-5ad8-3931-90a4-da6ce2990f87>

Q16: How are your departments each working to improve access to mental health and substance abuse providers, specifically in rural areas?

A16: Oklahoma Families First Program (OFFP) is a grant to expand treatment, prevention, and recovery support services for pregnant and postpartum women up to one year, their infants, and involved families members to address the fragmentation of services and supports and improve the continuum of care.

A16, continued: Four grant providers are covering the following counties: Tulsa, Cherokee, Creek, Okmulgee, Wagoneer, Muskogee, Osage, Kay, Payne, Rogers, and Washington.

Technology Supports in Rural Areas. ODMHSAS maintains a statewide telemedicine network. Units are placed in treatment facilities and satellite locations serving rural settings. These units increase access to services and information, including medication clinics conducted by psychiatrists, therapy sessions, court commitment hearings, and administrative meetings. The ODMHSAS is utilizing the latest in software-based access (Cisco Jabber) to provide simple, cost-effective telehealth connectively to Oklahoma's "most remote" areas.

In addition to its traditional telemedicine network, thousands of iPads have been distributed to state-operated or contracted CCBHCs, law enforcement for assistance during mental health-related calls, and more than 80 city/county health departments to help rural residents immediately access behavioral healthcare.

Telehealth is a primary strategy used by the ODMHSAS to increase access to mental health and substance use disorder information and services in underserved areas. Through the Oklahoma Telehealth Network, Oklahomans who were once unable to receive services due to geographical, economic, and workforce barriers can now receive the care they desire.

A16, continued: The tablet program has strengthened ODMHSAS's relationships with others, as well, including firefighters, emergency departments, schools, courtrooms, and jails.

By putting iPads directly into the hands of consumers with more intense needs, they have immediate access to crisis de-escalation, which greatly reduces the number of calls to both 911 and 988 and results in fewer hospitalizations.

Informed by the community needs assessment, the CCBHC provides services at locations that ensure accessibility and meet the needs of the population to be served, such as settings in the community (e.g., schools, social service agencies, partner organizations, community centers) and, as appropriate and feasible, in the homes of people receiving services. In addition the CCBHC conducts outreach, engagement, and retention activities to support inclusion and access for underserved individuals and populations.

Q17: What do you imagine prevention efforts to look like across Oklahoma in 5 years?

A17: The safety and well-being of children and all family members are paramount. When safety can be ensured, strengthening and preserving families is the best way to promote children's healthy development.

Strengthened programs and services, including those that focus on economic success for families, that are designed to achieve measurable outcomes focused on family strengthening, prevention, and protection to prevent maltreatment and the removal of children from their families and placement into foster care will continue to be a focus for OKDHS.

Agency capacity will continue to be increased to serve children and families through solid, family-centered practices and services, a hope-centered, trauma-informed systems approach, and a system transformation to a child and family well-being network.

Our focus is on enhancing outcomes for children and families. We will continue to provide benefits programs like TANF and child care subsidies and enhance efforts for better outcomes. With greater service flexibility and innovation, we aim to meet the needs of children and families when they become involved with the CW system. This is possible through continued collaborations with public health and prevention system partners.

A17, continued: We would be able to lean on numerous Family Resource Centers (FRCs) located throughout the state that provide positive services that are not stigmatized – a place where families are proud to walk into a FRC in any community in the state. There will be increased informal networks of supports for families.

Q18: Being trauma informed and trauma responsive is very different. I encounter providers with an understanding of trauma but using tools that check their bias and triggers. Is this being addressed?

A18: Numerous trainings and experiential learning are offered to providers by state agencies, non-profit organizations, etc. to address trauma and healing including but not limited to the Potts Family Foundation, Oklahoma State Department of Education, Oklahoma State Department of Health, University of Oklahoma National Resource Center for Youth Services, and Oklahoma State University Center for Integrative Research on Childhood Adversity. In addition, the Oklahoma Trauma Informed Care (TIC) Workgroup also provides technical assistance to organizations and providers.