

# Site Visit Report: CITC Program: Collaboration Between TANF and Child Welfare to Improve Child Welfare Program Outcomes

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**Cluster:** Collaboration Between TANF and Child Welfare to Improve Child Welfare Program Outcomes

**Grantee:** Cook Inlet Tribal Council

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## SUMMARY

Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) is an Alaskan Native organization that serves the needs of Native people throughout the Cook Inlet region and beyond. The organization's mission is "to work in partnership with Our People to develop opportunities to reach Our endless potential." CITC is grounded in four core values: interdependence, resilience, accountability, and respect.

The 2006 Children's Bureau grant cluster Collaboration Between TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and Child Welfare to Improve Child Welfare Program Outcomes represented an opportunity for CITC to increase collaboration among its four major departments: Education, Child and Family Services, Recovery Services, and Employment and Training. Although all four departments were located in the same building, they operated largely as independent entities with little communication or collaboration. Clients (or "participants," as the CITC refers to them) participating in multiple programs reported providing the same information multiple times, as well as conflicting requirements and schedules that hindered their success. At the same time, CITC's Chief Executive Officer was moving toward a collaborative leadership model that moved agency decision-making to the four division directors as a collaborative group. With the release of the funding opportunity announcement, the time was ripe within the agency to emphasize collaboration as a means of providing program participants with more cohesive service delivery that would better meet their needs.

The CITC program is based on the premise that integrated services, beginning with standardized intake and coordinated through integrated case management, will allow for the provision of better coordinated services for program participants. CITC strives to improve community outcomes by increasing:

- Self-esteem and cultural identity
- Self-sufficiency
- Health and stability of families
- Equity and social justice

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Abstract

The Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) is an Alaskan Native organization that serves the needs of Native people throughout the Cook Inlet region and beyond. In 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) led to the formation of 13 Native Regional Corporations, both for profit and nonprofit, to manage investment opportunities and health and social service delivery systems for Alaska Native people. Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc., through authority from Cook Inlet Region, Inc., serves the social service and educational needs of Alaska Natives in the Cook Inlet region. Through these services, CITC works to achieve four "Community Outcomes":

1. Increased **self-esteem and cultural identity**. We want to ensure that CITC's programs and advocacy help bring about a community in which strong self-esteem and pride in Alaska Native identity and heritage is widespread.
2. Increased **self-sufficiency**. We want to ensure that CITC's programs and advocacy capitalize on the collective endless potential of Our People, and create a community in which individuals take responsibility for both themselves and each other, without depending on entitlements that undermine self-reliance.
3. Increased **health and stability of families**. We want to ensure that CITC's programs and advocacy foster a network of healthy, loving families that nurture and support Our People, especially our children. We want to help build a community of families that help and strength each other.
4. Increased **equity and social justice**. Knowing that some of the challenges that the Alaska Native Community faces are rooted in attitudes and systems that perpetuate racism and prejudice, we want to ensure that CITC's programs and advocacy actively challenge and reform attitudes and systems that hold Our People back.

With the *Collaboration Between TANF and Child Welfare to Improve Child Welfare Program Outcomes*, CITC saw an opportunity to develop collaboration across CITC's four major service divisions: Education, Child and Family Services, Recovery Services, and Employment and Training Services. Though these programs were located in a single building (having recently moved into a single building from multiple settings throughout the city), there was little collaboration among leadership and staff. At the same time, the agency's clients often participated in multiple programs across divisions. These clients ("participants") reported a range of issues, from repeating the same information multiple times to conflicting program timelines and goals. CITC consists of four major departments:

- **Child and Family Services** – Provides multiple prevention, family strengthening, and reunification services, including emergency financial assistance, parenting education, fatherhood support, and services and supports for family reunification.
- **Employment and Training Services** – Provides job training and certification programs for young people and adults and a career center that works with participants to develop a resume, search for jobs, and prepare for interviews. This department also provides support for participants interested in starting their own small businesses by supporting development of business and customer services skills. Employment and Training Services also manages the agency's administration of several assistance programs including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition for Women, and the Infants and Children (WIC) program.
- **Education Services** – Provides educational programs to assist youth in completing high school and pursuing higher education, educational programs for adults, and after-school and summer programs for children and adolescents. This department fields teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools in the Anchorage School District.
- **Recovery Services** – Provides recovery support, based in Alaska Native values and principles, for participants struggling with dependency on alcohol or other drugs to

achieve and maintain sobriety. The department offers both residential and outpatient treatment.

At the time of their grant award, CITC's Chief Executive Officer, Gloria O'Neill, was leading the agency toward a collaborative leadership model. With a stated goal of moving responsibility for 80 percent of agency decision-making from herself to a group of division leaders working collaboratively, program leadership began meeting on a regular basis and brainstorming ways to increase efficiencies and provide more integrated services to clients. An early change was to create the Standardized Intake.

While CITC does not yet have a single, integrated Management Information System, the agency has improved its ability to access data across systems and ensure that staff in different CITC programs have the participant information they need to provide and manage services. The agency also has worked to address confidentiality concerns and ensure that client privacy and confidentiality are protected by developing a standardized release of information form that allows staff in different CITC programs to share participant information to provide more cohesive and collaborative services.

CITC's program also includes an evaluation component. Families involved in Child and Family Services (CFS) programs complete the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale (NCFAS) at the start and conclusion of services, with follow-ups at 6 months and 12 months after service to provide evaluation data. To date, the program evaluation has included 167 participants and has shown that families receiving services jointly from CFS and TANF demonstrate better outcomes in multiple domains compared with families receiving either CFS or TANF services alone. Measured outcome domains include:

- Environment
- Parental capability
- Family interactions
- Family safety
- Child well-being
- Caregiver/child ambivalence
- Readiness for reunification

At the time of the site visit, CITC was concentrating on improving data management and information sharing across divisions and continuing the program evaluation to document results and refine its approach to collaboration.

### **Need for This Service**

CITC provides services in the Cook Inlet region. Authorized to do so by the largest of 13 Native Regional Corporations formed by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Cook Inlet includes the city of Anchorage. Nine percent of Anchorage residents are Alaska Natives.

Participants come to CITC programs from a variety of referral sources. Since its founding in 1983, CITC has continued strong outreach to the community and is a well-known provider of programs and services that are steeped in Alaska Native culture. Word-of-mouth outreach within the community is actively cultivated and is an important reason that participants feel comfortable seeking services from CITC programs. Often, participants report that they learn of CITC programs from family members who have had a positive experience participating in CITC services. CITC also has formal means—a website, newsletters, regular press releases—of communicating its services and activities to the community.

State child welfare workers, courts, and schools also are key referral sources. Some CITC workers are stationed in the State child welfare office, and some State child welfare staff are

stationed at the CITC office. This arrangement promotes collaboration between the State and CITC in serving child welfare participants. Courts include CITC programs on the list of treatment programs available to those mandated to complete substance abuse treatment. Several elementary, middle, and high schools have CITC-employed teachers who tailor their approach to Native learners. These teachers make students and their families aware of CITC supports and services available to the whole family. The local Veteran's Affairs office has referred clients, often for housing services, and local hospitals refer patients to CITC for follow-up support.

In applying for the Children's Bureau grant, CITC conducted a review of its intake and assessment processes and identified 37 separate intake processes across its different programs. This corroborated an issue long identified through client satisfaction surveys—that clients had to repeatedly provide the same information to different staff across CITC programs. Clients also expressed frustration at the multiple and often competing demands of different programs. For example, CFS may enroll a participant in parenting classes with a goal of reunifying a child who had been removed from the home; however, the classes posed scheduling conflicts with employment readiness programs. Program staff were protective of client confidentiality, often resulting in a wariness to share information across programs, which further hindered service provision. Recognizing that the "silo" nature of the different divisions hindered participant progress, CITC applied for a Children's Bureau grant in 2006 to improve collaboration across the agency, including standardizing intake, improving information sharing and communication across programs, and emphasizing the development of a single, cohesive case plan for CITC participants.

Through this grant, the agency developed a Standardized Intake (through an arduous process of reviewing and analyzing over 30 disparate, overlapping, and overly complex program intake forms), consisting of a streamlined form and process, and a Welcome Center that provides intake services to all agency participants. Through this process, staff educate participants about programs and resources available to them and facilitate entry into CITC's programs and services.

## **SITE VISIT HIGHLIGHTS**

The site visit took place April 21, 2011, at Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) offices, located in Anchorage, AK. The site visit included:

- A tour of the facility, including the Welcome Center, daycare facility, and various program offices
- Interviews with the CITC Chief Executive Officer, program directors, program evaluator, and grant coordinator
- A visit to a local café managed through a CITC program that provides employment experience to adults returning to the community after a period of incarceration

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Unique and Innovative Features**

#### ***Standardized Intake***

One of the strongest features of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) program is its Standardized Intake form and process, which replaced 37 separate forms and processes previously used. A collaborative group formed, which included representatives from each of CITC's different programs. This group created a single intake instrument with supplemental forms for each major program. This new process reduced the number of times that CITC program participants had to provide identical information and helped ensure that staff in different programs received consistent participant information. The process also allowed participants to be better served by a better-informed staff.

This process also involved building a Welcome Center that provides a comfortable, inviting, and warm environment for prospective participants. An onsite child care center provides up to 3 hours of child care for participants, enabling parents of young children to complete intake processes without having to obtain child care, addressing an issue that was a hardship for many participants in the past.

Finally, at the time of the site visit, CITC was experimenting with staffing the Welcome Center for short shifts with existing staff across different programs, rather than hiring dedicated staff. This would allow staff from different programs to experience interacting with participants at the point of intake, to learn directly about the challenges that participants face at intake, and to reinforce the need for collaboration and provision of multiple services in a cohesive manner.

### ***Collaborative Leadership Model***

At the time that CITC applied for the Children's Bureau grant, CITC's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was moving toward a commitment to collaborative leadership. With a stated goal of "moving 80 percent of major decisions out of the Office of the CEO to a collaborative group of program leaders," program directors began meeting twice monthly and brainstorming ways to enhance collaboration and improve outcomes for mutual clients. This top-down support for collaboration set the stage for successful collaboration at the service-provision level and was critical to the success of the grant program.

### **Challenges**

Some of the challenges the program has encountered include:

- **Information Sharing.** Each of CITC's programs clearly understood the sensitive nature of the information participants provided to them and were dedicated to maintaining client confidentiality. In implementing a new collaborative model, agency leadership worked closely with staff to help them understand appropriate information sharing. For example, on one occasion, a Child and Family Services (CFS) worker discovered an adult living in a home that was not reported to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which would have compromised the family's eligibility for TANF benefits. The agency continues to work on developing protocols and implementing staff training to address these and similar issues.
- **Lack of a common data system.** At the time of this visit, CITC did not have a single management information system that could facilitate information sharing across programs. CITC's information technology staff had created additional reports, however, that streamlined the process for staff and leaders to pull necessary information out of their two data systems. Development and implementation of a single, integrated data system remains a priority for this agency.
- **Resistance to change.** CITC was established in 1983. Many of the agency's programs had long-established policies and procedures. CITC leaders noted that there was a certain amount of resistance to change, particularly from long-time staff persons who were accustomed to their way of doing things. Staff training was critical in addressing this issue and was particularly effective when evaluation findings could demonstrate that collaboration resulted in improved outcomes for participants and higher client satisfaction ratings.

### **Successful Strategies and Keys to Success**

Program staff and leadership have learned a great deal about implementing and operating a collaborative program that best meets the needs of their clients. These lessons include:

- **"Top-down" commitment to collaboration.** CITC's commitment to collaboration and service integration started at the CEO level. From the highest levels of agency

leadership, a consistent message about the importance of collaboration as a key to improved participant outcomes was communicated to staff. This was critical to the initiative's success, as staff at all levels understood this to be a permanent change in the way that the agency as a whole served clients, and not a temporary program or "quick fix."

- **Early and ongoing staff communication and training.** Because CITC programs were largely isolated from each other prior to the grant, staff persons were accustomed to working with participants through the relatively narrow lens of their own programs and interventions. The decision to meet twice monthly, share food, and discuss policy and procedural issues in an open, honest setting, was an essential component of the effort to transform "many agencies" into one. Staff training was important to educate those who had direct client contact about the importance of collaboration. A key message in training was that increased collaboration resulted in improved outcomes for clients. Staff training also helped to overcome resistance to collaboration, particularly in the area of information sharing across programs.
- **Service co-location.** Just prior to the implementation of the grant program, CITC's four divisions were moved to the same building. This removed logistical challenges for staff and program participants alike, as they no longer had to travel to different buildings to receive services. It also allowed program staff to work together in decision-making bodies, and to work short shifts in CITC's Welcome Center, which exposed them to a broader perspective than they had when they only worked within their own program. Finally, agency leaders noted that service co-location allowed their staff to accompany participants to programs as soon as a need was identified. For example, a CFS worker could literally walk a client to Recovery Services when an assessment pointed to a previously unidentified need. This allowed staff to capitalize on participant motivation and willingness to accept services in a way that they could not when services were in multiple locations.

## OUTCOMES

### Evaluation

The Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) is participating in the Children's Bureau's evaluation of this grantee cluster, which is being conducted by James Bell Associates. CITC has contracted with an external evaluator, Gary Leonardson, Ph.D., who has evaluated CITC programs for 7 years. Dr. Leonardson developed a Theory of Change for the program:

Overall atmosphere established by agency leadership allows for:

Integrated services, which results in:

Integrated case management/standardized intake, which leads to:

Better coordinated services, which results in:

Services that "treat" conditions concurrently, which provides for:

Better outcomes in the areas of:

Environment  
Parental capability  
Family interactions  
Family safety  
Child well-being  
Caregiver/child ambivalence  
Readiness for reunification

The evaluation incorporates several levels of assessment:

- 1) Pre/post single group design
- 2) Change over time
- 3) Group comparisons (including statistically matched control groups)

The evaluation uses the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale to measure multiple domains of family functioning. Child and Family Services (CFS) participants complete the scale upon entry into the program and then again at program completion. Scores on this scale were compared across three groups:

- Participants in CFS programs alone
- Participants in CFS and Recovery Services but not Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Participants in CFS and TANF programs

Preliminary evaluation results showed improvements in all 36 individual items from pre- to posttest, with improvements in 32 of the items being statistically significant. Further analysis indicated that participants in CFS and TANF programs experienced much better outcomes than participants in CFS programs alone (without TANF).