

## **OCCY'S STATE PLAN FOR SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROMPTS VISIT TO CUSTER COUNTY COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (August 18, 2021) Leaders and staff from the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) and the Oklahoma Institute of Child Advocacy (OICA) traveled to Custer County, Oklahoma to visit with community leaders and to tour partnership facilities.

The trip began at the Community Coffee hosted by the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma. Annette Wisk Jacobi, OCCY Executive Director and Joe Dorman, OICA Chief Executive Officer, presented about the State Plan for Services to Children and Youth and provided overviews of their respective agencies. At the conclusion of the Community Coffee, OCCY staff members passed out flyers to the audience that described how to take the state plan's research survey.

"It was an honor to welcome OCCY and OICA to Custer County," said Dr. Kalie Kerth, OCCY Commissioner. "To showcase the challenges and successes our resource providers face each day is a great opportunity to learn and grow as a state and as a community."

Next up was a stop at the Weatherford Food and Resource Center. There, OCCY and OICA as well as community partners from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS), the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH), Community Cares Partners, and the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (OKDRS), were on site to sign up visitors for applicable services provided by each agency. Highlights of services available at the stop included COVID-19 vaccinations administered by OSDH, rent and utilities assistance from Community Cares Partners, and numerous visitors signed up for (or learned more about) services provided by OKDHS and OKDRS.

During the food and resource center visit, Kelly Burnett, Family Court Coordinator from the Custer Washita Family Treatment Court met with OCCY staff to discuss the obstacles and challenges their participants faced. She explained that affordable housing, employment, transportation, and education are just a few of the areas that are difficult to obtain for those who participated in the program. She stated that their clients' situations and/or criminal background often keep many from being successful and they need assistance in overcoming barriers.

OCCY/OICA leaders and staff continued their visit at the Food and Resource Center with a tour of the facility led by Lori Flansburg – the center's executive director. As they walked around the facility, leaders and staff learned about the various services and resources provided on location. The tour showcased areas such as the 'grocery shopping' styled food bank, a state-of-the-art warehouse, as well as recently remodeled meeting spaces for various community programs.

"All of the good work that the service providers of Custer County does for their community is extremely important," said Annette Wisk Jacobi, OCCY Executive Director. "At every stop we have learned so much about what works and what needs exist. What we've experienced today is vital to shaping our State Plan for Services to Children and Youth."

That afternoon, OCCY/OICA leaders and staff visited Stepping Stone, a childcare and family resource center in Weatherford. The group met with the teachers and staff and learned about how each classroom offered a teacher with lesson plans tailored to the age group who attend the day care. The group also learned about the challenges parents faced in regards to finding childcare. One of the most difficult was the fact that childcare facilities in the area were full or were unable to provide services to parents who qualified for subsidized care.

"This trip clearly showed the needs faced in rural Oklahoma and the tremendous work done by the non-profit sector to help those individuals and families," said Joe Dorman, OICA Chief Executive Officer.

Following the visit to the day care, the group visited a local battered women's shelter where they learned about the supports provided to the shelter's clients as well as the unique and valuable relationships formed between the shelter and local law enforcement. The staff expressed the largest obstacle most clients faced while staying at the shelter is access to reliable transportation – whether it be a personal vehicle or public transportation.

The group then traveled to downtown Clinton, Oklahoma where they visited the Mission House homeless shelter. Famous for the culinary offerings from the shelter's soup kitchen, the group learned about the history of the shelter, and that during the height of the pandemic, it served meals to crowds as large as 200 people a day. A faith-based non-profit, the Mission House relies on the monetary donations from local churches, sales from a thrift store, and food donations from grocery stores, the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and citizens.

The final stop for the group was at the Agape Medical Clinic in Weatherford. The group learned that the medical clinic is open twice a month providing medical services and available medications to persons in need. Clinic staff explained that some clients traveled as far as 90 miles each way to utilize the clinic's services. Due to restrictions caused by the pandemic, clients waited in their cars until their appointment. As they waited, they took advantage of the free water, coffee mugs, and t-shirts being given away by OCCY and OICA. Also on site during the visit was the OSDH, which provided COVID-19 vaccinations.

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**ABOUT THE STATE PLAN:** The State Plan for Services to Children and Youth identifies priorities for services provided to Oklahoma's children. The state plan includes information concerning the availability and accessibility of various human services, health, mental health, and education programs that serve children and their families at the community level. It also includes information or recommendations necessary and appropriate for the improvement and coordinated development of Oklahoma's children, youth, and family service systems.

**ABOUT OCCY:** Since 1982, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth has helped create quality systems for children, youth, and families by bringing accountability and independent oversight into Oklahoma's child and youth service system. Its mission is to improve services to Oklahoma's children by planning, coordinating, and communicating with communities as well as between public and private agencies. Programs within OCCY include the Oklahoma Child Death Review Boards, the Post Adjudication Review Boards, Freestanding Multidisciplinary Teams, the Office of Planning and Coordination, and the Office of Juvenile System Oversight.

**ABOUT OICA:** The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy was established in 1983 by a group of citizens seeking to create a strong advocacy network that would provide a voice for the needs of children and youth in Oklahoma, particularly those in the state's care and those growing up amid poverty, violence, abuse and neglect, disparities, or other situations that put their lives and future at risk. Our mission statement: "Creating awareness, taking action and changing policy to improve the health, safety, and well-being of Oklahoma's children."