

CHILD WELFARE ACADEMY

Annual Report

July 2022 – June 2023



ACADEMY OVERVIEW

The Child Welfare Academy (CWA) provides training and technical assistance to the State of Alaska, Office of Children's Services (OCS). CWA also contracts with other organizations, as requested, to provide a variety of training and facilitation needs in the area of child welfare.

MISSION

The Child Welfare Academy trains, develops and supports Alaskans to assure children are safe, youth thrive, and families are strong. We work to develop professionals so that they may be competent and compassionate.

CORE VALUES

Respect: We respect and honor all peoples' dignity with compassion.

Trauma Informed: Our curricula and training is trauma informed.

Excellence: Through research, collaboration, adaptability and creativity.



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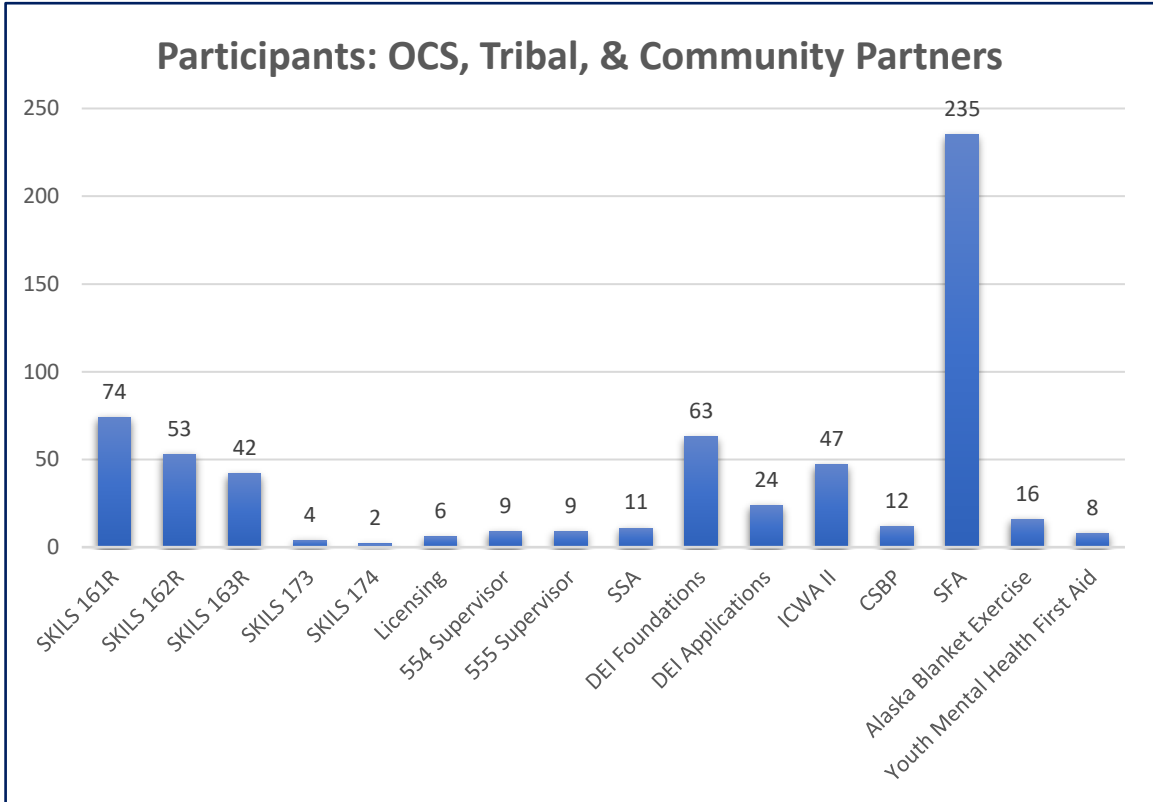


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Training Summary

Between July 2022 and June 2023, Child Welfare Academy delivered 248 training days for child welfare professionals, parents, and resource parents across Alaska. The following charts depict the participant count for each training event.

248
training days



OCS Participants, SKILS 161R	68
OCS Participants, SKILS 162R	53
OCS Participants, SKILS 163R	42
OCS Participants, SKILS 173 I&A	4
OCS Participants, SKILS 174 FS	2
OCS Participants, Other Training	202
Tribal & Community Partners, SKILS 161R	6
Tribal & Community Partners, Other Training	238
Total Completed Training Days	248
Total Course Hours	11,620

Training Calendar

NO.	EVENT	DATES
1	161R SKILS	July 11-25, 2022
2	237 ChildFirst™	July 11-15, 2022
3	140 SSA Training	July 25-29, 2022
4	161R SKILS	August 1-15, 2022
5	162R SKILS	August 15-26, 2022
6	DEI Foundations	August 18, 2022
7	229 ICWA II	August 23-25, 2022
8	161R SKILS	September 12-26, 2022
9	237 ChildFirst™	September 26-30, 2022
10	163R SKILS	September 26-30, 2022
11	Strengthening Families AK	September 29-30, 2022
12	580 CSBP #14	October 2022-February 2023
13	161R SKILS	October 3-17, 2022
14	162R SKILS	October 17-28, 2022
15	DEI Foundations	October 20, 2022
16	Strengthening Families AK	October 20-21, 2022
17	Alaska Blanket Exercise	October 25, 2022
18	Strengthening Families AK	November 10, 2022
19	161R SKILS	November 7-21, 2022
20	Strengthening Families AK	November 29-30, 2022
21	114 Licensing	December 5-9, 2022
22	Strengthening Families AK	December 13-14, 2022
23	Strengthening Families AK	January 4-5, 2023

NO.	EVENT	DATES
24	161R SKILS	January 9-23, 2023
25	163R SKILS	January 23-27, 2023
26	Strengthening Families AK	February 8-9, 2023
27	162R SKILS	February 13-24, 2023
28	DEI Foundations	February 16, 2023
29	Youth Mental Health First Aid	March 01, 2023
30	161R SKILS	March 6-20, 2023
31	554 Supervisor	March 21-23, 2023
32	Strengthening Families AK	March 22-23, 2023
33	Strengthening Families AK	March 28-29, 2023
34	161R SKILS	April 3-17, 2023
35	162R SKILS	April 17-28, 2023
36	DEI Foundations	April 20, 2023
37	237 ChildFirst™	April 24-28, 2023
38	163R SKILS	May 1-5, 2023
39	161R SKILS	May 8-22, 2023
40	DEI Applications	May 10, 2023
41	Ethics and Advocacy Training	May 16, 2023
42	Strengthening Families AK	May 23-25, 2023
43	555 Supervisor	May 23-25, 2023
44	DEI Applications	June 06, 2023
45	Strengthening Families AK	June 27-29, 2023

SKILS

SKILS (Standards, Knowledge, and Insight Leading to Success) is a mandated core training required for all Protective Services Specialist (PSS) Is/IIs upon hire with the Office of Children's Services (OCS).

SKILS consists of PreSKILS E-learning Modules, followed by 3 virtual online courses to include: 161R (2 weeks + transfer of learning), followed by Intercession A (Asynchronous), 162R (2 weeks), followed by Intercession B (Asynchronous) and 163R (1 week).

PSS staff complete PreSKILS asynchronous E-learning modules in the online Learning Management System CWASTARS followed by virtual training sessions facilitated by CWA Trainers via Zoom. PSS staff engage in independent study of materials through asynchronous modules to prepare for application to a case study.

PreSKILS is a prerequisite for SKILS 161R. PreSKILS is designed to offer participants a foundational understanding of OCS and an introductory overview of Child Welfare. The purpose is to adequately prepare participants for the subsequent in-class training. It consists of 13 E-learning modules, outlined in the OCS Staff Development Plan (SDP). These modules must be completed ahead of attending SKILS 161R. PreSKILS E-learning Module topics are outlined below:

- Welcome Message from CWA
- Introduction to the Practice
- Mandatory Reporter Training
- Cultural Humility and Historical Trauma
- Introduction to ICWA
- Substance Use/Abuse Training
- Interviewing Basics
- Introduction to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (COE)
- Child Functioning Guide
- Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA)
- Car Seat Training
- Prepare for SKILS Classroom at CWA
- Introduction to SKILS 161R Virtual Training

SKILS 161R is two weeks and one day of classroom training led by CWA Trainers, followed by four days with the OCS Mentor team to transfer learning from classroom to the field, for three weeks in total. Participants receive training materials both physically and electronically. Live classroom training is conducted via Zoom, followed by asynchronous E-learning Modules each afternoon using CWA's online learning management system (LMS). Supervisors coordinate field shadows to provide practical experience ahead of training.

SKILS 161R is targeted to an array learning outcomes to offer PSS staff an understanding of how to conduct an assessment of child safety and risk using specific decision-making tools using the Alaska Office of Children's Services' policies, procedures and practice model. PSS staff follow a mock case through each stage of Investigation and Assessment and on to Family Services and permanency planning.

Week One begins with an orientation to child protection and the OCS Practice Model. Initial Assessment and safety are the primary focus along with a specific emphasis on interviewing, information collection, safety threats and risk factors, analysis, and assessment.

PSS Staff engage in using the Maltreatment Assessment Protocol and explore the concept of future risk of abuse and neglect. PSS Staff gain and understanding of and practice using the Present Danger Guide and the Impending Danger Safety Threats Guide. These activities help participants understand unsafe behaviors and articulate how safety threats cross the threshold for impending danger. Participants learn to utilize agency tools to determine the occurrence of maltreatment and its impact on the child. The importance of recognizing safety threats during case transfer and its implications for timely and accurate decision-making by the agency is emphasized.

Week One further focuses on key topics outlined below:

- OCS Mission, Vision, and Values
- Bias Management
- Evidence-Based Child Interviewing
- Environmental Awareness and Worker Safety
- Information Gathering and Simulated Child Interview
- Analysis of the Training Case
- Protective Factors in Investigation and Assessment (I&A)

Week two focuses on Family Services practice delivery once a case is opened for ongoing services due to safety threats or high risk of abuse or neglect to a child within his/her own home, permanency goals, behaviorally based case planning, conditions for return home, and case closure.

PSS Staff engage in utilizing the Impending Danger Safety Threats Guide to continually assess behavior change, the Case Plan Flowchart Field Guide to assist with case planning, the Caseworker Visit Guide to ensure screening is thorough at each visit, the Progress Toward Goal Achievement Guide to inform the case plan evaluation, and the Safety Plan Guide to create a Trial Home Visit Safety Plan. These activities help participants understand how to utilize agency tools to determine the inform steps in the practice model. Participants learn to think critically around practice model decisions using the mock training case.

Week two further focuses on the following key areas:

- Family Services (FS) Assessment Model and Family Engagement
- Protective Factors
- Creating Case Plan Goals
- Simulated Case Planning Interview and Feedback
- Trauma-Informed Case Plans
- Caseworker Visits
- Monitoring Behavior Change Trial Home Visit

Week three of the training focuses on transfer of learning. It begins with a full day of legal training outlining Child in Need of Aid basics and court reports. The remainder of the week, PSS Staff split into two groups: I&A and FS. Generalist participants coordinate with their supervisors to join the desired group and are assigned a case accordingly.

After receiving their first case, PSS Staff walk through the protocol with the support of supervisors and mentors. Mentors connect participants' field experiences with the classroom training, solidifying learning and critical thinking. Participants also have the opportunity to learn from one another's cases and share insights on next steps.

By providing a comprehensive and practical learning experience, the training program aims to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively handle cases and contribute to the mission of the Office of Children's Services.

SKILS 161R is open to Tribal Partners, with the exception of Legal Day and Transfer of Learning with the OCS Mentor Team.

SKILS 162R is two weeks of classroom training led by CWA Trainers. Participants receive training materials both physically and electronically. Live classroom training is conducted via Zoom.

Prerequisites for SKILS 162R include the completion of SKILS 161R, "Intersession A," E-learning Modules in the LMS, and field experience as a case-carrying PSS Staff with support from supervisory coaching and mentorship.

The Intersession A modules focus on preparing participants for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) workshop, preparing for the Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification, an Opioid webinar, Prudent Parent Standards, Child Welfare Ethics and Advocacy, Tribal Identification Guide, and completing a reflection on a cultural practice reading.

SKILS 162R covers a wide range of topics outlined below:

- Advanced Safety Assessment
- Screening for All Types of Abuse
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Substance Use Disorders
- Mental Health
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) I
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Foundations
- Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification
- Permanency
- Advanced Information Collection in Investigation and Assessment
- Parent Engagement Strategies
- Worker Safety
- Resiliency
- Identification of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Testifying in Court and Report Writing
- Youth Perspectives
- Domestic Violence

The comprehensive training program of SKILS 162R aims to equip participants with the necessary knowledge, skills, and perspectives to address complex issues in the field of child welfare. By covering a diverse range of topics and incorporating real-life experiences, the training fosters a deeper understanding and enhances the participants' ability to support children, families, and communities effectively.

SKILS 163R is two weeks of classroom training led by CWA Trainers. Participants receive training materials both physically and electronically. Live classroom training is conducted via Zoom.

Prerequisites for SKILS 163R include the completion of SKILS 161R, "Intersession B," E-learning Modules in the LMS, and field experience as a case-carrying PSS Staff with support from supervisory coaching and mentorship.

SKILS 163R focuses on key topics outlined below:

- Reflections from the Field
- Resilience II
- Trauma Informed Care
- I&A Advanced Interviewing
- FS Motivational Interviewing
- Casework with Children and Youth from Vulnerable Populations
- Application
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Applications
- Advanced Legal

The objective of this course is to provide frontline staff with in-depth knowledge of various aspects of child protection as they gained work experience in the field.





Sampling of SKILS 161R participant feedback:

- *I have enjoyed the trainings so far. I really like the breakout rooms and the ability to interact with my fellow classmates. I find this very helpful for my learning gaining knowledge from others.*
- *The process helped me understand why we are involved with the family from the IA to FS and reunification.*
- *It gives me the foundation that I need to get started. I like the laminated guides and the flowcharts. Devoting a week to I&A was perfect and rounded out what I had learned shadowing case workers in the field. Following 1 case throughout the training is a great way to get the big picture and how it all fits in.*
- *The training gave me to have a bigger picture of what and how we do in daily basis. Definitely gave me a foundation and I am pretty confident I will utilize the materials for both in field and in office duties.*
- *I feel like I know enough that I could complete the full I&A process with some support of my supervisor and co-workers*

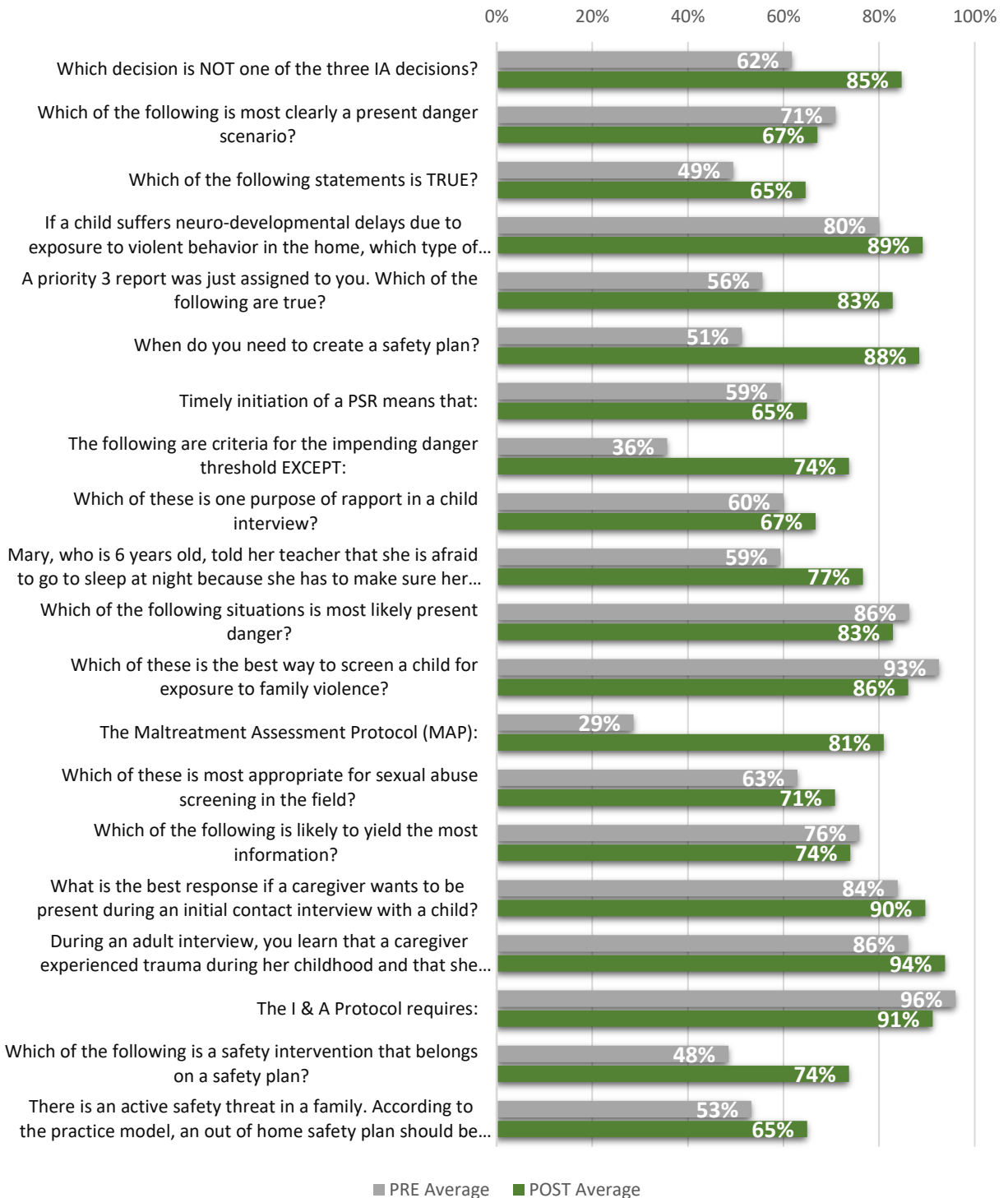
Sampling of SKILS 162R participant feedback:

- *I think the information was helpful, I learned different approaches when working with families.*
- *The maltreatment section was helpful.*
- *[It] built on concepts learned in 161 and in the field.*

Sampling of SKILS 163R participant feedback:

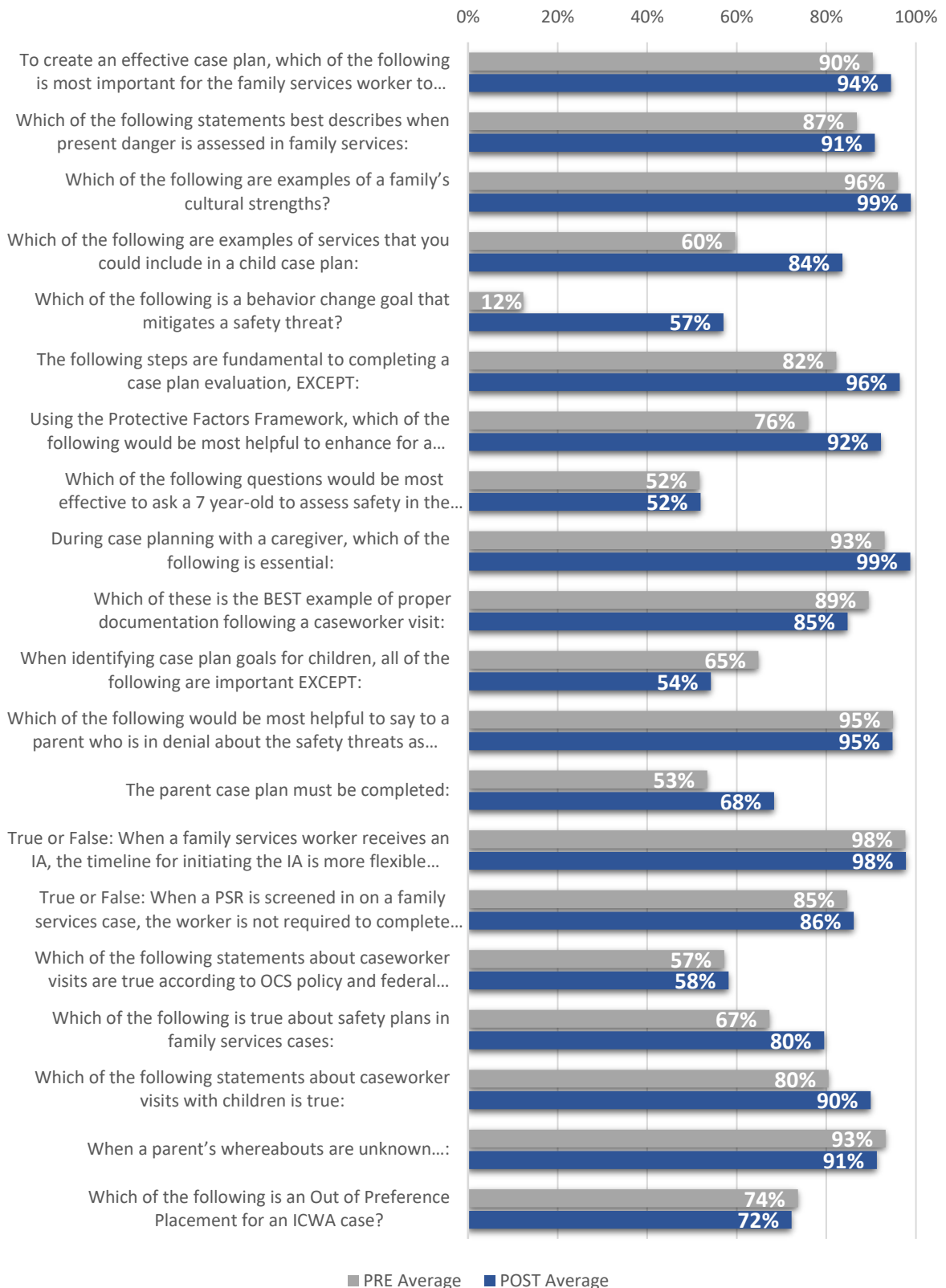
- *It gives a good foundation for the protocol. I'm not sure about social work issues and how that came across. A lot of it was review for me.*
- *All material was relevant, informative, and scenario based.*

SKILS 161R - Week 1 Pre-Post Results



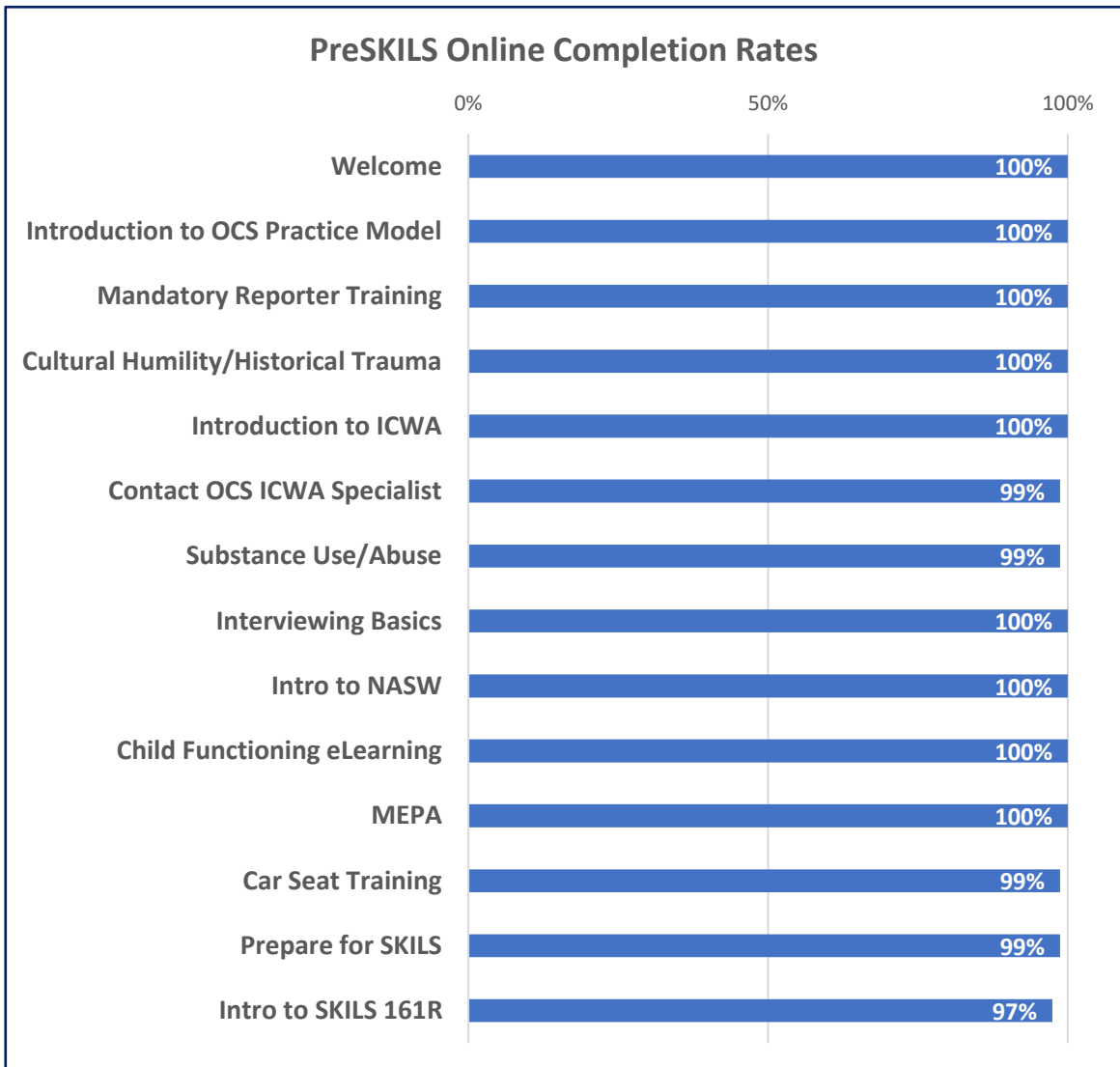
SKILS 161R - Week 2

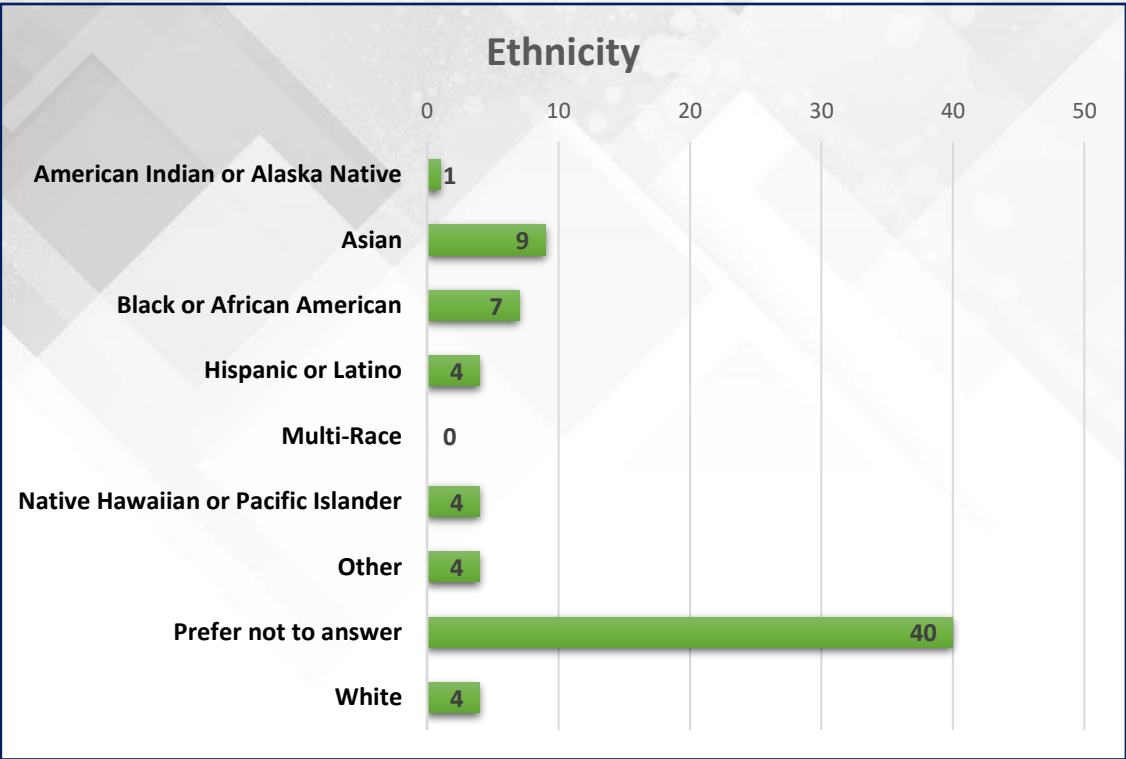
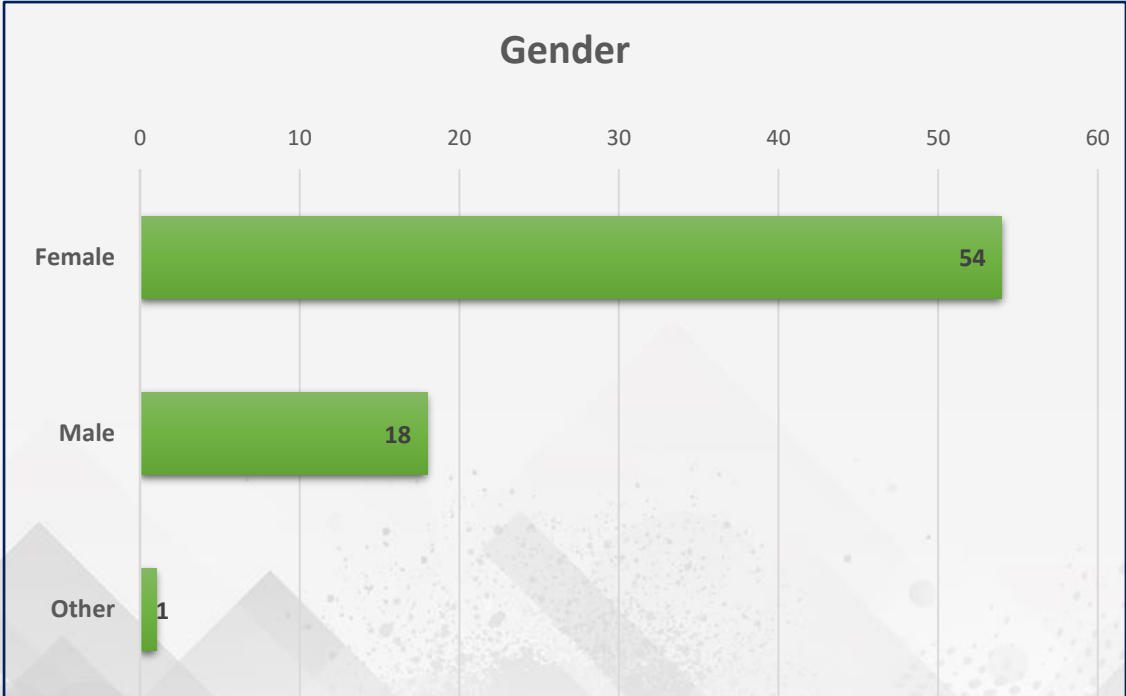
Pre-Post Results

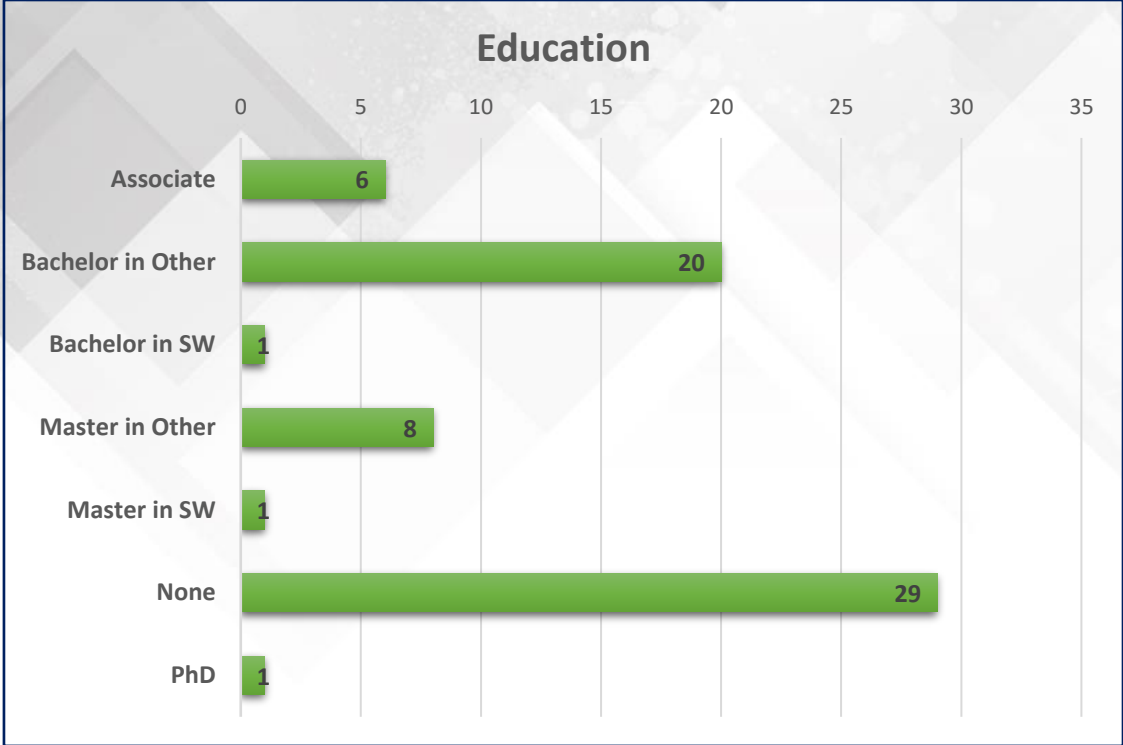
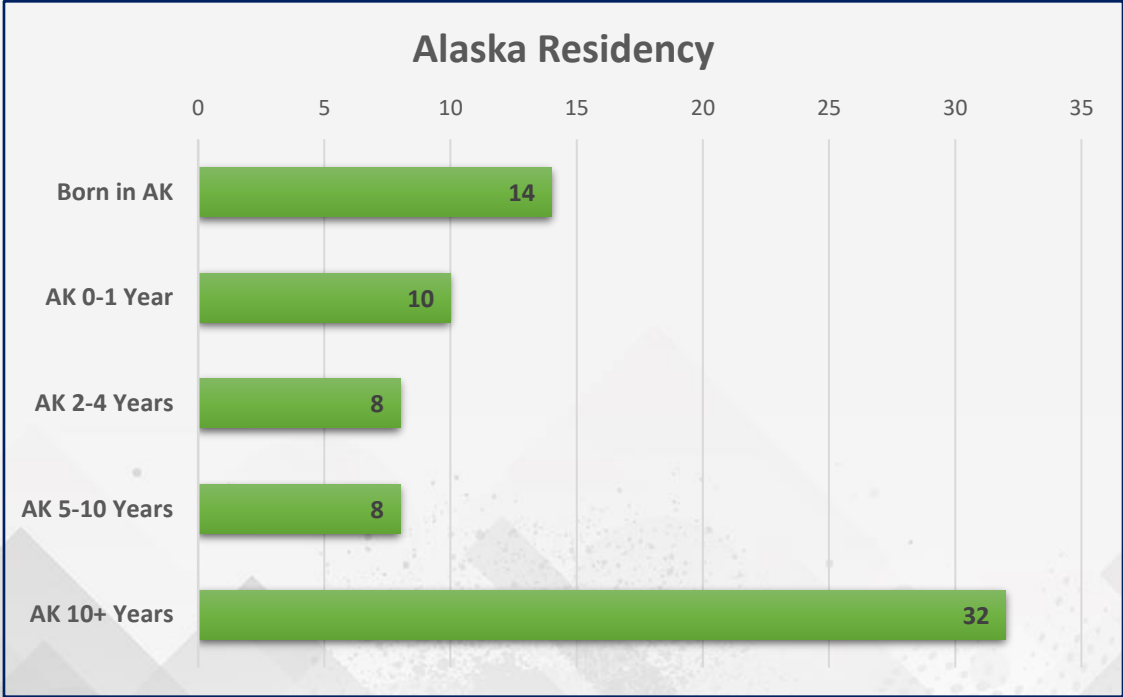


Online Module & Demographic Information

Prior to starting SKILS, new employees are required to finish online modules. The subsequent charts display the completion rates for each module, accompanied by demographic information of the workers. The demographic percentages are derived from the attendees who completed the survey.







LICENSING

CWA offers Community Care Licensing Specialist (CCLS) training to gain skills, knowledge and opportunities to practice their role and responsibilities as CCLS staff. The Licensing 114 training includes Pre CCLS-online training and one week of training in a virtual setting. The Pre CCLS-online training includes an introduction to CWA staff, explores the OCS Vision/Mission/ Values, mandatory reporting, introduction to ICWA, and a CCLS Manual excerpt review. The foundation of this training incorporates the Strengthening Families protective factors when supporting resource families and allows CCLS staff to practice simulated child and adult interviews, to learn about resource family engagement, customer service, and permanency. This was supported by the Alaska Center for Resource Families facilitating a resource family panel and collaboration with the Office of Children Services and Alaska Attorney General’s Office to facilitate training around licensing investigations and Title IV-E.

Previously, licensing training was offered over four days. During this fiscal year, CWA was able to increase licensing training to five days, which included the updated foster care regulations that went into effect July 1, 2022. The additional day of training allowed CWA to support CCLS staff in their understanding of foster care licensing background checks & Standard by Standard home inspections that fall under both previous and updated foster care regulations.

Please rate the Training in the following areas:	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
	1	2	3	4	5
The virtual classroom was sufficient for me to learn what I needed to learn to get started in the field.	0%	29%	13%	29%	29%
The instructional materials (i.e. PowerPoints, participant manuals) were helpful in building knowledge and skills on the topics covered.	0%	0%	28%	29%	43%
The activities were meaningful in facilitating my learning.	0%	14%	28%	29%	29%

Sampling of Licensing participant feedback:

- *Conducting interviews with team was a very beneficial practice.*
- *It fortified my foundation as I've been in my position for about 6 months. I've already learned the nitty gritty details, and this training provided the "this is WHY we do what we do" part.*
- *The experience was very engaging.*
- *It gave a great introduction on many different topics.*

SUPERVISOR TRAINING

Supervisor training is offered in two segments:

Part 1, SUPS 554, is focused on leadership development, emotional intelligence, performance management, understanding the influence of personal values, effective communication styles, coaching techniques, trauma-informed practices, and trauma-informed supervision.

Emphasis is placed on empowering supervisors to create individualized learning plans that cater to the unique needs and aspirations of their respective teams. This personalized approach ensures that supervisors are equipped with the necessary tools and strategies to foster growth and professional development within the workforce.

Part 2, SUPS 555, addresses professional development, equipping supervisors with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles. It focuses on honing coaching techniques to a greater extent, providing supervisors with enhanced proficiency in guiding and empowering their teams towards success. Conflict management strategies are emphasized, equipping supervisors with the ability to navigate and resolve interpersonal and organizational conflicts with tact and effectiveness.

Supervisors are equipped with techniques and best practices for delivering feedback in a manner that fosters growth, enhances performance, and maintains a positive working relationship.

Supervisors learn effective strategies for team building, fostering a positive team culture, and optimizing the collective potential of their workforce.

The training program includes change management, recognizing the importance of adaptability and guiding supervisors in navigating organizational transitions effectively. Strategic planning is emphasized to empower supervisors with the ability to align their team's objectives with the broader organizational goals and contribute to overall success.

PART I - Please rate the Training in the following areas:

	Very Low 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5
The instructional materials (i.e. PowerPoints, participant manuals) were helpful in building knowledge and skills on the topics covered.	0%	13%	0%	63%	25%
The activities were meaningful in facilitating my learning.	13%	0%	25%	50%	13%
Your initial ability to apply what you learned to your job.	0%	0%	25%	38%	38%

PART II - Please rate the Training in the following areas:

	Very Low 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5
The instructional materials (i.e. PowerPoints, participant manuals) were helpful in building knowledge and skills on the topics covered.	0%	0%	40%	60%	0%
The activities were meaningful in facilitating my learning.	0%	0%	40%	60%	0%
Your initial ability to apply what you learned to your job.	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%

Sampling of Supervisor Training participant feedback on aspects that were helpful:

- *Conflict training and the different approaches to project planning*
- *Article provided were insightful and interesting*
- *Coaching strategies*
- *Resources and the energy that the trainers brought*
- *Handouts, like for strategic planning*

SOCIAL SERVICES ASSOCIATE

The annual SSA training focuses on skills development and employs a blended learning approach with both online and zoom based interactions. Participants engage in asynchronous activities, allowing flexibility in their learning process. The training covers various topics such as Protective Factors, cultivating relationships, and establishing partnerships with birth parents and resource parents. By practicing new skills and enhancing existing ones, the training aims to equip participants with necessary tools to provide better support and care within the context of their role.

In addition to the aforementioned topics, an important area of focus is the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Participants learn about the legal and cultural considerations specific to Alaska Native and American Indian children in foster care, ensuring compliance with the ICWA guidelines. The training addresses the impacts of historical trauma on children and families involved in the child welfare system. Understanding the historical context and its effects enables participants to provide culturally sensitive and trauma informed care.

Please rate the Training in the following areas:

	Very Low ← 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High → 5
The virtual classroom was sufficient for me to learn what I needed to learn to get started in the field.	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%
The instructional materials (i.e. PowerPoints, participant manuals) were helpful in building knowledge and skills on the topics covered.	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%
Asynchronous time was conducive to my learning.	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%

Sampling of SSA Training participant feedback on aspects that were helpful:

- *The combination of lecture by the instructors, the power points, the discussion groups, the debriefs and the Asynchronous work put together greatly benefited me in learning the key concepts in the virtual classroom.*
- *The training did provide a proper foundation for me to continue working with children and families.*
- *It was good, the instructors were very open to questions and provided great explanations.*

COACHING SUPERVISORS to BEST PRACTICE

The Coaching Supervisors to Best Practice (CSBP) program was revised to a 14-week training program tailored to empower and equip supervisors and mentors of frontline staff workers. The program's core objective is to cultivate and reinforce the essential competencies and self-assurance necessary for effective leadership in this role.

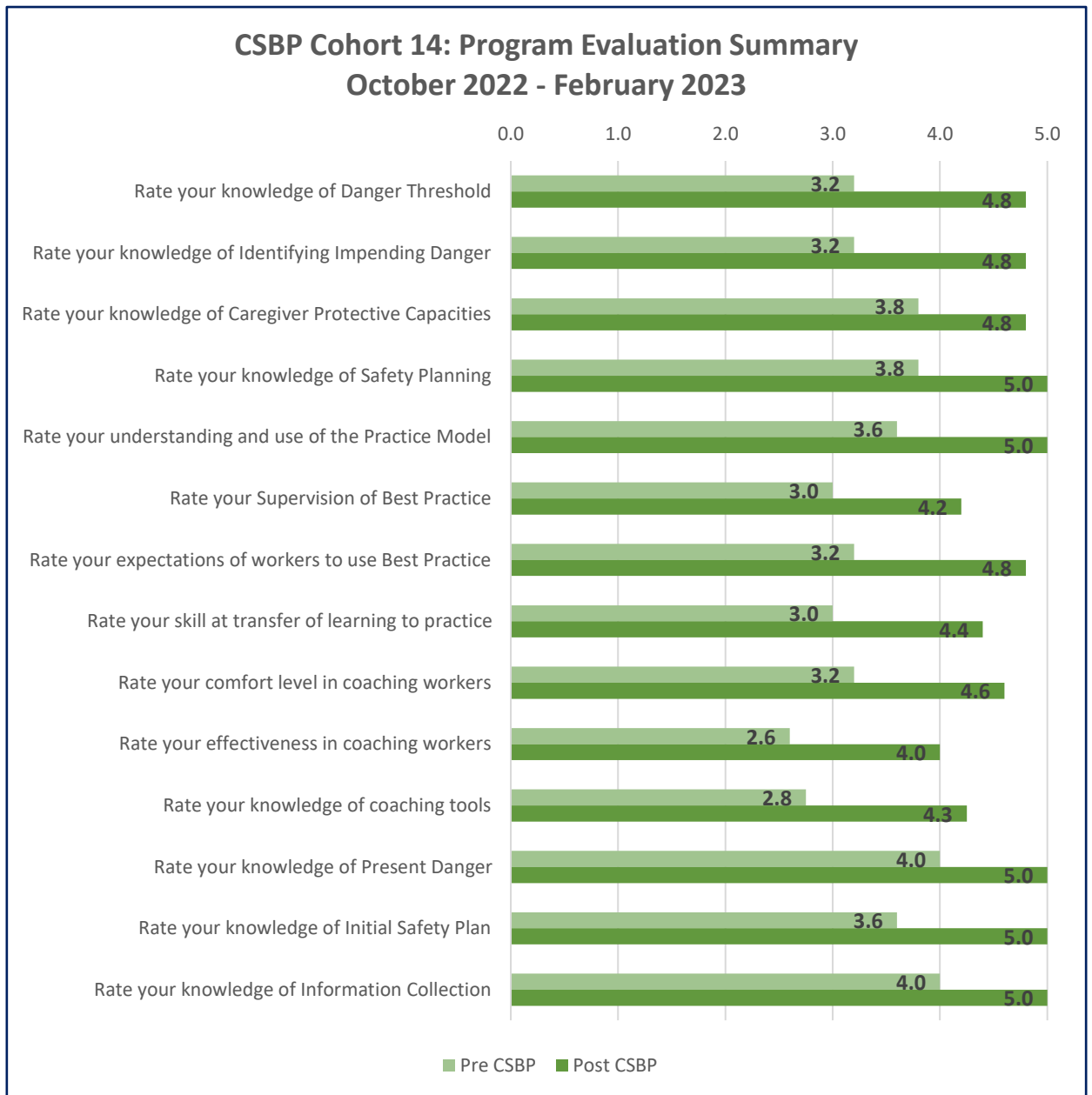
In order to align closely with the Office of Children's Services (OCS) practice model, CSBP has been revised and structured to address performance coaching specific to the OCS Practice Model.

CSBP now integrates a framework for personalized one-on-one coaching. Each supervisor is assigned a dedicated professional coach. This tailored coaching approach focuses on the specific practice model topics relevant to each supervisor's responsibilities, while also emphasizing the development of critical thinking skills.

CSBP is structured into four modules, each building upon the previous one. The final module is dedicated to fostering the transfer of acquired knowledge and skills to the supervisor's staff, to ensure the implementation of best practices within their respective units and individual workers.



Below is a summary from participants who submitted evaluations.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

DEI is a progressive training with three phases: Foundations, Applications, and Leadership & Coaching. CWA continued the momentum made the previous years with DEI training for all OCS staff. The comprehensive DEI training was offered in a virtual and online E-learning module format to explore topics on diversity, equity and inclusion. DEI Foundations is built into SKILS 162R and DEI Applications is built into SKILS 163R. CWA offered standalone trainings to accommodate existing staff and staff who do not participate in SKILS 162R or SKILS 163R training.

The E-learning modules allow participants to begin self-reflection and provides skill-based activities in a group virtual training setting. The DEI framework includes components known as the 5 C's: curiosity, connections, courage, compassion, and change. These are weaved into all parts of DEI Foundations and Applications.

DEI Foundations provides participants a common language and understanding around diversity, equity and inclusion concepts, and skills to apply to their daily work with families and co-workers. The 5 C's provides participants with a framework to begin their steps towards increasing their DEI understanding and work with others they interact with.

Prior to attending the virtual workshop, participants complete four E-Learning modules that introduce fundamental DEI concepts and lay out the relationship between DEI and the OCS Mission/Vision/Values and NASW Code of Ethics. Participants explore the importance of bias awareness, microaggressions and create an individualized action plan to continue their work in developing the 5 C's into their daily work with families.



DEI Applications is the second step in the DEI program, and this training was first introduced in September 2022. This training revisits the action plan participants created in DEI Foundations, builds on the 5 C's, explores systems of oppression and systems of advantage, and provides opportunities for participants to practice applying the 5 C's and utilizing culturally relevant interventions to families they work with. This training provides another opportunity to create an individualized action plan to continue developing their DEI skills and incorporating the 5 C's to families with work with daily.

CWA continues to strive in providing the most up to date DEI training and considered feedback provided. A workgroup was created at the end of fiscal year 23 to assess the existing DEI Foundations and DEI Applications curriculum and make modifications where beneficial. This curriculum is currently being reviewed. This same workgroup will continue the development of **DEI Leadership & Coaching** and solidify the process for continued annual training.

The next step for participants who have completed DEI Foundations and DEI Applications, will be to complete annual training for agency management and staff who work directly with families. While this component has not started yet, the vision is to continue the 5 C's framework and provide opportunity to continue staffs overall DEI understanding and skills.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ALASKA

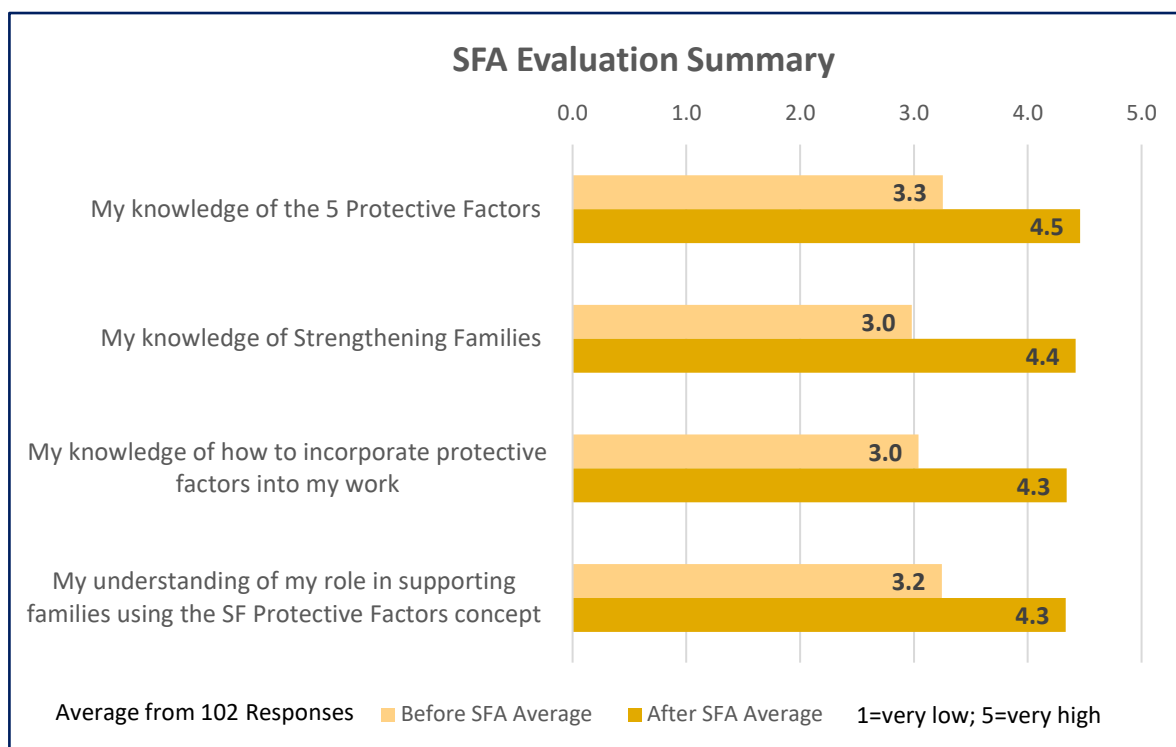
Strengthening Families Alaska (SFA) is a training designed for professionals working with families, youth, children, and foster families. This training is hosted virtually, allowing participants from across the state of Alaska to attend.

SFA focuses on the Five Protective Factors. Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Supports in Times of Need, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, and the Social and Emotional Competence of Children.

These factors are essential for promoting the well-being and health development of children and families. SFA aims to provide professionals with a comprehensive understanding of how these factors impact families. Participants learn through engagement with the facilitators and small group discussions with other professionals to learn new strategies that can strengthen and enhance each protective factor.



Here is a summary from participants who submitted evaluations.



Sampling of SFA participant feedback:

- *I always prefer in-person, but this being offered virtually actually allowed for me to attend.*
- *Love the variety in the training video, talking, break out groups, sharing as a group. I enjoyed the collaborative approach and the amount of resources.*
- *The breakout discussions were great and the chat box was utilized. Very engaging training!*
- *I thought the training was done very well. I love that there was so much time to share thoughts, brainstorm, and share resources. I honestly can't think of anything I'd change.*
- *This training strengthened my understanding of cultural familial differences.*
- *It was good for me to attend this training again. It was a good refresher and getting other new ideas. I like the idea of collaboration between different organizations. I appreciate you guys for doing this class even for the foster parents.*
- *It was easy and accessible for educators from all around, thank you!*

SERVICE ARRAY

With the support of OCS, CWA continues its work with Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) and Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) across the State to provide training and technical assistance. During the past year,

- CWA served on the Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force & Legislative Advocacy Committee. The CJA Task Force held a two-day Strategic Planning Session in Girdwood, AK. CWA provided logistical, technical and administrative support prior to and throughout the two-day event. Trainers facilitated the Strategic Planning Session and delivered the Alaska Blanket Exercise training to those in attendance. New CJA Task Force goals were developed, along with ongoing activities and workgroup assignments.
- 2022 Child Maltreatment Conference Committee. In partnership with and support of Alaska Children's Alliance, CWA participated in the planning of a hybrid virtual and in-person conference held November 2022. Major themes of the 10th Biennial Child Maltreatment Conference included human trafficking, child neglect, and cross systems collaboration. Through Service Array, CWA provided registration scholarships for 58 participants and materials distributed to each in-person registered participant.
- Sexual Assault Statutes (HB325) training, held December 15, 2022. Training was delivered virtually with all SART and CAC MDT members, medical providers, forensic interviewers, family advocates, law enforcement, OCS and DJJ staff as the target audience. CWA provided coordination and logistical support.
- 2023 Alaska Child Welfare Conference. CWA is serving on the Alaska Child Welfare Conference Development Committee. Conference is scheduled to be held in the fall of 2023.

CHILDFIRST™ ALASKA

Child Welfare Academy continues its partnership with Alaska Children's Alliance and Zero Abuse Project by co-facilitating ChildFirst forensic training for Law Enforcement, OCS, and community partners. ChildFirst training was offered three times in this fiscal year where 66 participants successfully completed and received certification.

CWA HIGHLIGHTS

New Team Members: Over the last year, we added four new trainers to our team.

Olivia Shears became a team member in August 2022. She began working in child welfare in 2006 with various roles providing direct care services to foster youth, therapeutic foster care licensing, CASA volunteer, and Investigation & Assessment with the Office of Children's Services. She worked with the Alaska Center for Resource Families as a Family Support Specialist, providing training and support to resource families across Alaska for three years. Prior to joining the CWA, Olivia worked at the Office of Children's Services as a Community Care Licensing Supervisor. She truly enjoys supporting OCS staff who do meaningful work every day, and her biggest treasures include her family and cuddling with her two orange cats named Mac and Cheese.

Lindsey Wilson also joined the training team August 2022 after ten years with the Office of Children's Services. Lindsey is a lifelong Alaskan from Soldotna. She loves all things outdoors from hiking in the Chugach Mountains, packrafting Eagle River, kayaking in Resurrection Bay, to fishing for sockeye on the Kenai River. Lindsey has a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a focus on behavior analysis, and she is currently working towards her Master's in Social Work. She loves learning and considers herself a knowledge enthusiast. Her passion is giving back to her community, building relationships, networking, training, and mentoring. Lindsey's professional goals aim to support competent practices, improve programs, and expand access to resources for Alaskans--with the ultimate aim of enhancing the quality of life and well-being for families and children.

Lea Ann Lyday joined the team in September of 2022. She was a middle school and high school teacher history and social studies teacher for eight years prior to transitioning to child welfare. Lea Ann worked with the Office of Children's Services for five years as a family services worker and in the Intake department prior to joining the CWA. Lea Ann is a native of Texas but spent part of her childhood living in Germany and Australia, and multiple states in the U.S. as an Air Force brat. While living in Australia when she was six, Lea Ann was kicked in the chest by a kangaroo and fortunately survived.

Ashly Andrews became part of the team in January 2023. Ashly is a Miami Native and made her transition to Alaska in 2019 when joining the child protection field in Bethel. Although Ashly has worked in the child protection field since 2019, she is also a certified birth/postpartum doula and a childbirth educator. One of her favorite childhood memories is learning how to fence and then winning the state championship as a first-time competitor.

Accessibility: One of CWA’s priorities this past year was making training materials ADA accessible and compliant with 508 online standards. Any new materials developed will be created in a way that users can use assistive technology, such as screen readers, to move through our materials in a way that makes sense to them. Such modifications can come in very handy when busy CPS workers need alternative ways to receive training materials and content, such as through text to speech. Led by our ADA Compliance committee, CWA continues tackling updates to existing course materials, including handouts, PowerPoint presentations, and e-learning modules.



Intern and Practicum: In January 2023, a new position was created to support practicum and intern students throughout their learning journey at OCS. The OCS Practicum Coordinator, initially a half-time position, shared with regular trainer duties, is held by long-time trainer and UAA MSW graduate, Valerie Dudley. Valerie is not only familiar with OCS but can also draw from her experience as an MSW practicum student at OCS in guiding and supporting students.

For the 2022-23 school year, OCS hosted 10 students, of which 2 were already agency employees and 1 student gained employment. The 2023-34 school year finds 12 practicum students at the agency (2 for the 2023 summer and 10 through the school year).

The Practicum Coordinator works closely with the OCS Deputy Director Travis Erickson. This year, they will implement training and support for Field Instructors and students. Several goals include hosting a variety of disciplines such as Justice and Psychology, in addition to Social Work and Human Services; increasing the number of students who chose to seek employment following their practicum placement; and standardizing the placement process without duplicating services or taking away autonomy from the 5 OCS regions.

National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC):

This past year, CWA again had the pleasure of working with Fox Valley to provide technical assistance to OVC grant recipients. As subject matters experts, through CWA, Gretchen Schmelzer, PhD and Elsie Boudreau, MSW, presented to Alaska Tribal grantees on Difficult Conversations. The first webinar was held August 16th on Healing in Action™. Healing in Action™ is a strengths-based model for providers, peer-based supports, and the communities they serve, to learn about trauma, increase their leadership capacity and engage with action. It is crucial that this is not just an awareness or information-based program but instead begins as a leadership program, beginning with acknowledging and strengthening the capacity of the providers in order to create a positive, safe environment to engage trauma informed care. On September 7th, Gretchen Schmelzer and Elsie Boudreau presented on the Community of Practice. This was continuation of the presentation from August 16th.

In February 2023, Gretchen Schmelzer, Valerie Dudley, and Marianne Mahon travelled to Fairbanks to work with a group of Elders. They facilitated a two-day gathering titled Elders' Journey of Healing and were honored to work with Elders who had so much wisdom and knowledge to pass on to future generations. Throughout the gathering, they covered topics such as the Impact of Childhood Trauma, Resilience and Community Strengths, and the Cycles of Healing.



Office of Youth Empowerment

Child Welfare Academy, in partnership with the Office of Children's Services: Independent Living Program, administers the Education & Training Voucher program (ETV), supporting current and former foster youth in pursuit of post-secondary education, career training, and professional development.

Eligible youth 16 years of age or who turn 16 during their time in state or tribal foster care will retain financial assistance across post-secondary education or career training through the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, until age 23. Program recipients are awarded up to \$5,000.00 per academic year in ETV funds, based on their cost of attendance at an approved institution of post-secondary education. Cost of attendance includes tuition, books, fees, school supplies, transportation, housing, personal miscellaneous, etc.

The historical background of children in foster care means limited familial support and financial backing when transitioning into independent and higher education. For many foster youth, access to post-secondary education and training are inhibited by the common vulnerabilities characterized by the barriers plaguing this population. Success in higher education for the youth and alumni of foster care also go far beyond academic achievement and financial stability.

The ETV program understands that success in higher education can only be met once a student achieves their utmost functioning in a stable and accommodating environment. The program ensures that both direct services and outside resources are utilized in assisting each student secure support among a variety of needs including safe and secure housing, healthcare services, food security, transportation, financial aid, academics, and life skill development. Students in the program are also met with supportive social connections helping promote identity development and emphasizing a sense of belonging.

Education & Training Voucher Program Highlights:

- The official announcement in 2023 ending COVID-19 protocols came with the effects of how moving to a virtual way of life continued to remain across many subsets of post-secondary education and career training. While many options for school remain virtual, numbers for enrollment into higher education among foster youth saw an increase after a continued decrease that arose in Fall 2020.
- 45 Education and Training Vouchers awarded in total to foster youth, with 26 of them were first year students
- 35 foster youth attended UA campuses across the state
- 14 foster youth were awarded new University of Alaska (UA) Presidential Foster Youth Tuition Waivers for the academic year 2022-2023, with 26 students total attending a UA campus on a tuition waiver
- 9 foster youth awarded OCS Tuition Scholarships
- 6 former youth graduated with degrees from a University campus, totaling 65 graduates to date
- 3 recent ETV students to graduate with a Bachelor's continued on to a graduate degree level program
- Several foster youth attended a college outside the UA system or enrolled in a vocational/career training program:
 - Alaska Pacific University
 - Alaska Christian College
 - Alaska CNA Program
 - Academy of Hair Design
 - AVTEC
 - Haskell Indian Nations College
 - Northern Industrial Training (NIT)
 - University of Arkansas: Fort Smith
 - University of Maryland Global Campus
- Hosted Annual Foster Youth Post-Secondary Education Conference, for the first time in person
- Continuing from December 2020, The Foster Youth Pandemic Act enforced temporary amendments to prior existing laws and requirements increasing the ETV award from \$5,000 to \$12,000 per academic year, or \$6,000 per semester, ending October 1, 2022.
 - Such provisions allowed the ETV program to extend greater financial support across one final academic semester - helping offer some monetary reprieve to students supporting themselves through higher education as the cost of living continues to rise.
- Presented on ETV program to foster youth for first time in person at an OCS: Independent Living (IL) class, since COVID-19 took all IL classes online

CHILD WELFARE ACADEMY

We emphasize in family-centered practice to encourage collaboration with families, tribes, communities, or any professional who share the responsibility of keeping children safe and families strong in Alaska.



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