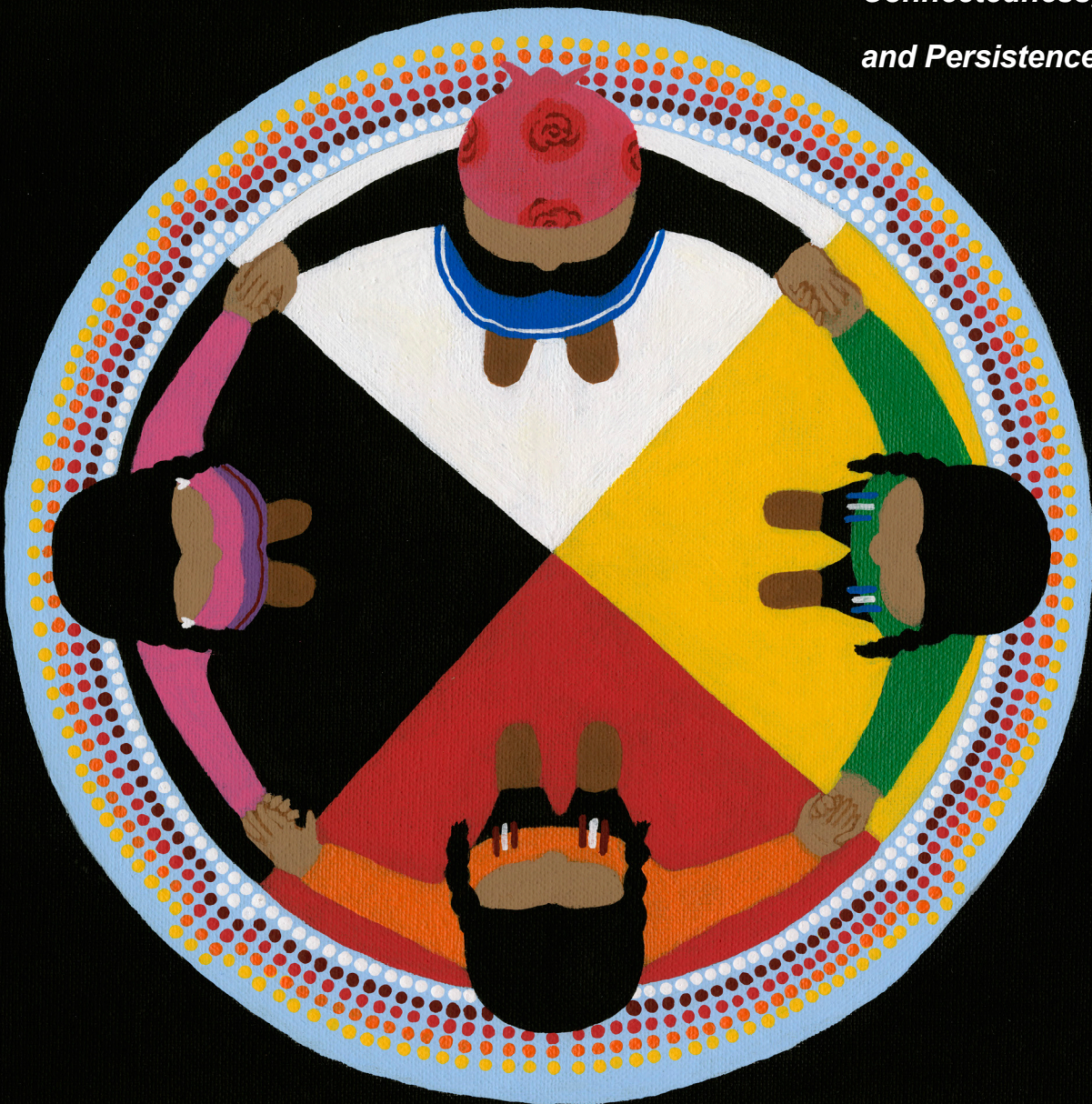


NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Spring 2021

The **LATEST**
INSIDE

*Connectedness, Resilience,
and Persistence*



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JESSIRAY



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The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) is a private, nonprofit, membership-based organization dedicated to the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families. Headquartered in Portland, Oregon, NICWA serves tribes, individuals, and private organizations throughout the United States and Canada by serving as the most comprehensive source of information on American Indian child welfare and acting as the only national Native organization focused on building tribal capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Our Mission

The National Indian Child Welfare Association is dedicated to the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

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Membership

NICWA News is the quarterly newsletter for members and donors of the National Indian Child Welfare Association. Membership is available in multiple levels starting at \$35. For reprint requests, additional copies, or other information, contact us at info@nicwa.org

Message from the Executive Director

Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,

Welcome to the spring edition of *NICWA News*. This quarter, our publication draws on the inspiration from the 39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference and our theme of “Connectedness, Resilience, and Persistence.”

Just by being who we are, Indigenous peoples know how to survive. Our creation stories, teachings, and traditional practices connect us. They tell us who we are and how we relate to other people and to the natural environment around us. This birthright of worldviews and values encoded in our languages and ways of life instructs us in our connectedness, how to adapt when our environment and context changes, and how to collectively get through situations together and move forward.

From time immemorial we have faced difficult situations—most often not of our own making—and we have endured. Our extended families play an important role in our resilience and ability to persist through shaping our identity, relaying the strength and wisdom of our ancestors, and motivating our determination to stay together and take care of each other through tough times. In our connectedness, there is strength.

Our cultures inoculate us with resilience. They equip us to grieve, heal, and find balance. They prepare us to be of service and care for the most vulnerable among us. They inspire us to adapt and innovate to meet our communities’ needs. They motivate us to observe and reflect, to care for the well-being of the whole, to seek justice and fairness, and to continue to grow and learn, to be the best we can be for our people.

In the last year, in the face of multiple and layered health, economic, and social crises, we, as Indigenous peoples and communities, have stayed connected, been resilient, and persisted. With hope, and prepared by the ones who came before us, we act to bring ourselves, our communities, and our world back into balance. We don’t know when that will be, nor how rough the road will be as we pass through difficult times, but we do know that we will be stronger together, whether in person or virtually. At NICWA we look forward to a brighter time, and until then and always, we will remain connected, resilient, and persistent.

May we continue to be bound together and find strength in our connection.

Sarah J. Kastelic

Sarah Kastelic, PhD
(Alutiiq)



Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Issues En Banc Decision in Brackeen ICWA Case

On April 6, 2021, the en banc panel of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued their long-awaited decision in the *Brackeen v. Haaland* Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) case (formerly known as *Brackeen v. Bernhardt*). In an en banc review, complex cases are reviewed before all sitting judges within the court.

The decision, which took nearly 14 months to be issued, is 325 pages long and unusually complex compared to typical en banc decisions. The full decision is comprised of multiple individual decisions on different issues, some which attracted a majority of the court and others that were evenly split with eight judges on each side. One important question before the court was whether ICWA was constitutionally based. A majority of the court found that ICWA was constitutionally based, citing Congress's plenary power to enact legislation like ICWA for the benefit of Indian people. However, the court also found some specific requirements of ICWA, such as active efforts and qualified expert witness, in violation of the commandeering doctrine of the U.S. Constitution that prohibits the federal government from commandeering, or obligating resources of state governments, in this case state child welfare agencies.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of ICWA requirements remain intact after the decision.

The issue of where this decision applies is also complex, but the decision is not applicable outside the states within the jurisdiction of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi). In addition, the decision is only binding upon federal courts, which typically don't hear ICWA cases, and is not binding upon state courts. This will allow state courts within the Fifth Circuit to consider how they will incorporate the decision.

For now, it seems this decision should not change ICWA's current application in states outside the Fifth Circuit.

We will begin discussing the practical aspects of state child welfare agency ICWA practice and what tribes can do to continue to advocate for Native children and families.

To receive registration information for NICWA's upcoming webinar discussing the practice implications following the Fifth Circuit's en banc decision in *Brackeen v. Haaland*, email us at info@nicwa.org and we will make sure you are on the invitee list. Presenters on the webinar will share what they are hearing in the child welfare field and what tribal leaders and child welfare workers can do to promote proper implementation of ICWA.

Want to keep in touch with our policy efforts?

Visit www.nicwa.org/policy-update for the latest on child and family policy-related news.

Contact NICWA's Government Affairs and Advocacy Director, David Simmons
Email: desimmons@nicwa.org

Welcome NICWA's New Staff!



Joni Williams
Child Welfare Director

Joni Williams joined the NICWA team as child welfare director in February 2021. She is a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Joni has a BA in sociology from Washington State University. Before joining NICWA, Joni worked as the child welfare director for the Nez Perce Tribe. Joni has eight years of experience working in tribal child welfare and is a humble leader who is passionate about empowering tribal people and communities. She is grateful for her new role here at NICWA and is looking forward to building capacity in tribal communities.



Jocelyn Orr
Individual Giving Manager

Jocelyn Orr is thrilled to bring over a decade of fundraising experience to NICWA, previously working with environmental advocacy and public broadcasting nonprofits. She loves that fundraising provides plenty of opportunities to meet passionate people, tell stories, and analyze data. She grew up in Boise, Idaho, and has lived throughout the Northwest. She earned a bachelor of science in environmental science and a minor in journalism from Humboldt State University in Northern California. Portland has been home since 2009. After hours, Jocelyn soaks up her family time by playing in the garden and exploring the Northwest. Jocelyn is a descendant of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.



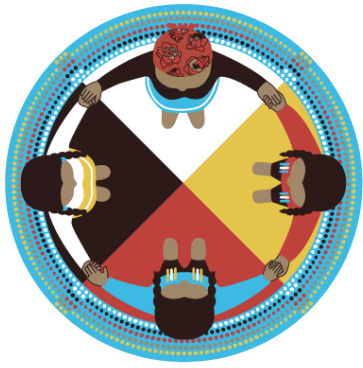
Jacob Ortiz
Strategic Communications Intern

Jacob Ortiz is originally from Los Angeles but moved to Portland to study communications and Spanish at the University of Portland. He chose to intern at NICWA because, as a person of Indigenous heritage, he immensely values NICWA's mission of being dedicated to the well-being of Native children. In the future, Jacob hopes to continue working in communications for nonprofit organizations or to become a college professor with an emphasis on social justice. Jacob is very passionate about social justice issues and socioeconomic disparities in the United States. "Culturally specific programs are resources I will always push for, and I am extremely fortunate and honored to know that I am a little piece of a big picture working for those causes, here at NICWA. I have loved every second of my internship at NICWA and truly appreciate the organization and the learning experiences I have had here."



Savannah Boyd
Practicum Student

Savannah Boyd is a first year MSW student attending Washington University in St. Louis as a Buder Scholar with a concentration in American Indian and Alaska Native studies. She is a member of the Navajo Nation and currently resides in Southern Arizona. She began her practicum with NICWA in February 2021 and is learning more about NICWA and how the organization serves tribes and urban Indian communities. Her interests include working with American Indian youth who are at-risk in the juvenile justice system or child welfare services. Aside from school and practicum, she currently works for the Gila River Indian Community Tribal Social Services with Child Protective Services. In pre-COVID times, she enjoyed traveling to many different places to spend time with friends and family.



39TH
ANNUAL



PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

Connectedness, Resilience, and Persistence

Our 39th Annual Protecting Our Children conference was a success with over 1,210 participants and 9,520 sessions watched! We were able to come together in this virtual environment with new and exciting offerings such as talking circles, a Wellbriety meeting, powwow yoga, and a membership mingle. We had about 65 virtual sessions, virtual exhibitors, and sweepstakes for a trip for two to Hawai'i, and were supported by over 30 wonderful sponsors. A huge thanks to our host sponsors, Seminole Tribe of Florida and Cowlitz Statewide Tribal Foundation Board, for making all this possible. Participant evaluations reflect gratitude for this meaningful event and lots of new information and connections that they can apply in their own communities.

We held four plenary sessions over three days where we discussed topics such as COVID-19, the *Brackeen v. Haaland* decision, and the opportunity for child welfare

redesign, and heard from a variety of youth and tribal leader perspectives. Our closing plenary session keynote, entitled "Working Together for Meaningful Change," included Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. Lieutenant Governor Flanagan is a mom, an advocate, a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, and Minnesota's 50th lieutenant governor. She highlighted her own experience growing up with government assistance and the work she is doing to move Native children and families forward in a good way. She said, "As lieutenant governor, I have consistently faced a kind of 'Minnesota nice' and worked hard to help our state confront the things that we do not do well, while fighting to make them better and trying to center children and families, because we are not going to 'Minnesota nice' our way out of this data. It takes hard and challenging conversations. It takes work to educate ourselves about the true experiences of communities and then look within ourselves and the organizations that we represent and acknowledge how we are contributing to the problem. Because we can make an intentional decision to disrupt the status quo in policymaking to invest in solutions to better serve our communities."

Another stand out moment was Roxanne Finney's acceptance of our 2021 Champion for Native Children Award. Roxanne is an enrolled member of the Assiniboine Tribe, Fort Belknap Reservation of Northern Montana, and a descendant of the Little Shell Tribe, who has spent her career of more than four decades in Indian child welfare. Roxanne shared, "NICWA has done so much to promote Indian child welfare and advocate for Indian children. There are many individuals that have done extraordinary work in this field and dedicated themselves to champion on behalf of Native children and families, and many of you here today are champions. I raise my hands to you and thank you for all you do." Thank you, Roxanne, for a lifetime of service to Native children and families!

Thank you to everyone who made our annual conference possible this year. We look forward to next year when we plan to meet both online and in person in Orlando, Florida, on April 3–6, 2021.

2021 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE BY THE NUMBERS:

- 1,213 attendees
- 50 workshops
- 142 speakers
- 814 members
- 34 sponsors
- \$143,500 sponsor dollars
- 47 states and provinces
- 272 tribes represented
- 133 participants per workshop
- 687 viewers per general session
- 9,520 sessions watched



“As lieutenant governor, I have consistently faced a kind of ‘Minnesota nice’ and worked hard to help our state confront the things that we do not do well, while fighting to make them better and trying to center children and families, because we are not going to ‘Minnesota nice’ our way out of this data. It takes hard and challenging conversations. It takes work to educate ourselves about the true experiences of communities and then look within ourselves and the organizations that we represent and acknowledge how we are contributing to the problem. Because we can make an intentional decision to disrupt the status quo in policymaking to invest in solutions to better serve our communities.”

— Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan

“...There are many individuals that have done extraordinary work in this field and dedicated themselves to champion on behalf of Native children and families, and many of you here today are champions. I raise my hands to you and thank you for all you do.”

— Roxanne Finney



Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan
(White Earth Band of Ojibwe)
Keynote Speaker



Roxanne Finney (Assinaboine)
NICWA's 2021 Champion for Native Children

Protecting Our Children

Host Sponsor



"Helping People is My Passion"

By Anthony Terry

The first thing you notice when you meet Anthony Terry is his smile, which immediately puts one at ease. A tribal family and child advocate for the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Anthony started his career working in the juvenile justice system and has worked in the child welfare field for 15 years. As he describes, he has "done it all...case management, adoption services, licensing foster homes, etc."

Originally from Pontiac, Michigan, he moved to Florida for college, met his wife, and never left. They have a young son, and like many working parents, COVID-19 has given him new insights into work/life balance. He decompresses from work by riding his bike in the warm Florida sunshine.

He had no knowledge of the Seminole Tribe of Florida when he took the job but knew it would be a new and exciting journey and one relevant to his own personal experience.



Anthony's mantra is, "We are a service. The customer is always right." By treating clients the way he would like to be treated, he is able to instill trust and confidence in the tribe and its family services department. He takes the time to explain every detail to make sure citizens understand their rights. Acting as a liaison between the citizen and the Seminole Tribe, he is there from the beginning of a case. He works with the tribal member to ensure that the member has the necessary tools so they can work together to keep their children. The pandemic has made it harder to connect with his clients; "It is a challenge to positively impact families through a screen," he remarked. Yet, his personality and sincerity have earned him his clients' trust. They have shown their appreciation of his hard work on their behalf by inviting him to ceremonial and life events such as birthday parties.

One of his favorite success stories was a client who had been in and out of care for much of her life. When she turned 17 ½, he worked with multiple agencies to help her transition out of foster care by securing outside services, including obtaining her GED, bank account, driver's license, and other supports so many of us take for granted. He acted as a liaison between her and the tribe to obtain housing and access to other tribal services. He assisted her to get on the right track, but his personal reward was watching her take ownership of her life.

When asked what he would like you, the reader, to know as the "big takeaway" from this profile, he wanted everyone to know that "it is OK if you want help. No one is thinking down on you." He works hard to normalize counseling services, so people view this as a friendly support and not something to avoid. "This is more than a job," he said. "I care about people, and I want to help make people's lives better."

NICWA welcomes back the Seminole Tribe of Florida as a Host Sponsor of the 39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference. Their generosity to NICWA over the past decade has enabled thousands of Native children and their families to stay together and thrive. Thank you, Seminole Tribe of Florida!

Protecting Our Children

Host Sponsor



"We're Steering the Canoe Now"

By Debbie Hasler

Debbie Hassler is a "doer." Her passion to assist people began in earnest when she founded the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's "Pathways to Healing" victim services program, focusing on those who have been hurt or harmed by violence and victimization, 16 years ago. She has spent 12 ½ years in tribal government, most recently as vice chair of the tribal council. Because of her passion for children, she was tapped, or "volun-told," she said laughingly, to help create a committee to review the tribe's child welfare services in hopes of creating something stronger. Today, she chairs a five-member committee dedicated to strengthening the Cowlitz Tribe's Indian child welfare-related services. Her goal is to educate the community about the tribe's child welfare program. "We are here as a preventive program and something not to be afraid of," she said. The committee is working to instill a culture of helpfulness in its citizens and incorporated seemingly simple steps such as changing "child welfare" to "family services" to better exemplify the program's core values. Working with NICWA staff, the committee set a foundation of values and beliefs, and has taken NICWA training courses like the popular "Positive Indian Parenting."

Debbie feels her government background is of benefit to the team as she brings a policy and governance lens to the issues at hand. The committee has a set of resolutions ready to be brought before council and now are tackling larger issues such as creating tribal code and governance policies. She is excited about the growth of the program. Prior to 2017, the tribe had one social worker.

When the tribe began to have economic resources, they made children one of their main priorities and hired more dedicated social workers to provide comprehensive services to their citizens.

"Before now," Debbie said, "The State of Washington was the 'driver' in our cases, however, today, the state is in the canoe, but the tribe is the skipper."

Moving forward, Debbie is thrilled that the tribe is also working to reclaim their culture and language as she believes that culture strengthens the bonds of family. She said, "[It] makes my heart happy to see tribes work together," and she was very excited to participate in this year's virtual Annual Protecting Our Children Conference. All five committee members attended as well as six other tribal council and community members.

The Cowlitz Tribal Foundation Statewide Fund, established in 2019, is an arm of the tribe that exists to provide grants for the benefit of the people and communities of Washington state and to demonstrate the commitment of the Cowlitz Tribe and Ilani, the tribe's casino, to community involvement and improvement. The Cowlitz Tribe is a long-standing supporter of NICWA, and we thank them for their participation as a Host sponsor this year.





The Lessons of Culturally Adapting Services for Native Children and Families

An interview with Dolores Subia BigFoot, PhD, (Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and affiliated with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana), a trained child psychologist, director of Indian Country Child Trauma Center at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

What is the difference between culturally adapted and culturally based programs or services? Why are more people talking about this now?

When we talk about culturally based services, those are usually the kind of activities, approaches, or protocols that come from the community or practices that they are teaching *in* the community. For example, the canoe journey or the sweat lodge would be culturally based programs. Other culturally based protocols include talking circles and honoring ceremonies. These are teachings that the community are familiar with and are part of their history in the community.

When we talk about culturally enhanced (or culturally adapted) programs, we are talking about programs that are being introduced into the community. An example is equine therapy. Horses are a part of many tribal communities but the uses of horses in a specific therapeutic treatment would be considered an adaptation to how horses are used typically. Equine therapy might be considered a culturally enhanced, evidence-based program because it might have added features within the program or service.

Both culturally based and culturally enhanced programs have cultural aspects to them. Both can be something that springs up from the community, however culturally based programs are more typical of what has been on-going.

For example, in my work, we have culturally enhanced evidence-based treatment models, primarily Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (TF-CBT). We culturally enhanced it into Honoring Children, Mending the Circle. There is a protocol that's followed, and we take those principles that drive the protocol of TF-CBT and then talk about how historically thinking, feeling, and doing has always been part of our cultural teachings. Behavioral theory, for example, is what the behavioral part of the treatment was built around. Part of TF-CBT is affect regulation, and we know about feelings and their role from our cultures, e.g., "The Wiping of Tears ceremony" and the "Goodbye Song." The principles that drive cognitive behavioral theory have always been part of our culturally based teaching and practices. When we emphasis cultural enhancement, we are talking about those known theories, particularly an evidence-based approach which is based on the cognitive behavioral theory, then the enhancement is by adding spiritual and relational elements. We are social beings; we are spiritual beings. When we think about a culturally enhanced practice, we take these evidence-based protocols and add these enhancements to it.

Today, conversations about evidence-based practices include asking if culturally based practices have the evidence behind it. We can say it has the "test of time" evidence. Test of time evidence should be adequate in that it stands the test of time or else we would not continue to use it and have it in our communities. If you consider the shape of a canoe, it hasn't changed. What it does and how it is used has remained the same. The canoe has stood the test of time and that is a culturally based application. It's the same concept that can be considered with how we get maple syrup or the process of ricing: these practices are culturally based, have stood the test of time, and these practices can be offered in a way that shows there is evidence to it.

What are some cautions about culturally adapting a program or service?

There are several concerns that any individuals or community should have when looking at any program. Program services can be harmful. When we think about tribal communities, there has been so much experimentation, both formally and informally: the sterilization of women, taking children to boarding schools, and sending people out on relocation programs. There has been so much done that has been harmful, and you don't want to do something that would limit the potential for good outcomes, especially when it involves children. You want to have programs with evidence or a level of positive effectiveness behind it.

Some questions you might ask include:

- What is the risk for potential harm? If you don't know, do you have evidence that it will do something good?
- How do we weigh services or practices that might in certain circumstance have good outcomes but for those that might be more vulnerable, there could be a potential for harm or injury?
- Is there a financial cost? What is the training required for the person delivering the services? What is the standard time of implementation? Does the program need specialized training or technical access? Does it require internet access? Are there other aspects that should be consider or other items that might be needed to put services into place?
- Do you have support, evaluation, and feedback from the community? To look at anything that could be culturally adapted, the community must assess it.
- What are the tools that are necessary to get the most positive end results?

If the program adaptation has not been thought out, there may be a possibility of it not being practical or implemented in a way that makes it work best. A lot of times we blame families, we say they are resisting or avoiding, when the problem could be the approach itself. For example, there have been efforts to have elders tell their stories, which is a great thing to do, yet the recalling of traumatic times in their lives resulted in elevated anxiety and depression. We need to consider what impacts could arise by a particular protocol being in place.

Do you have some tips for tribes or American Indian organizations that are considering culturally adapting a program or service?

Answers are not going to come from outside, they are going to come from within the community. It is important to make sure tribal leadership or local leaders select what they want to be brought into the community. It is important to ask how to enhance programs based on the community's cultural teachings and elders' understanding and knowledge of raising children. That is, approaches should be recognizable, familiar, and embraced by the communities.

If you see someone who wants to be independent, they don't want to be spoon fed. When you spoon feed someone, it's based on your choice of taste. When people make their own decisions, they make the choice based on their preferred taste and are more likely to embrace it. This is where we have made mistakes historically, as funding agencies have entered communities saying "this is what you need." The decision-making needs to happen within the tribe, not be imposed from the outside.

We need to recognize that tribes have been and were historically self-sufficient. They understood and lived

within a climate or environment that they interacted and lived within. They had means and practices to be self-sufficient and for self-governance. Any culturally based program should recognize and support this. Does your service or program lead towards self-sufficiency? More and more tribes are reassessing approaches to decolonize infrastructure put in place by outside governments, tribes wish to reclaim their heritage and culture, so their services align with their values, beliefs, and teachings. The value of culturally based services is twofold: they are more meaningful for families, and it is also part of a larger process to decolonize child welfare.

NICWA Hosts Listening Sessions on Redesigning Child Welfare

Across the country, important conversations regarding systems change are taking place. There are many approaches and many different names for these child welfare system-change conversations. At NICWA, we call this systems-change work **redesigning child welfare**. As these conversations gain momentum around the country, NICWA is working to ensure that tribal concerns, which do not always fit neatly into any of the current approaches, are part of the conversation.

With support from the Annie E. Casey Family Foundation, NICWA is holding regional and national listening sessions. Most recently, NICWA held a national listening session, titled "Redesigning Child Welfare to Promote Racial Equity," at the 39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference. The goal of these listening sessions is to share information with and to hear from tribal peoples across the country about what is most important; what policies, tools, and resources are needed; and who needs to be involved to ensure that child welfare redesign efforts are inclusive of American Indian/Alaska Native perspectives and solutions.

Much of the current focus on child welfare redesign is based upon achieving racial equity. Overwhelmingly participants of the listening sessions agreed that the race equity focus does not adequately address the unique political status and concerns of Native people and communities in the United States. While NICWA supports racial equity, we also recognize that fundamental changes to child welfare need to address barriers that are unique to Native children and families.



Working with Substance Abusing Families

New Working with Substance-Abusing Families Online Course Launching

We are excited to announce our new *Introduction to Working with Substance-Abusing Families Online Course* this spring! Tribal and First Nations child welfare workers can learn a culturally based and trauma-informed approach to helping families restore safe parenting capacity as part of substance abuse recovery in this nine-module interactive online course designed for practitioners working in the field of Indian child welfare,

Participants will learn about the basics of addiction and recovery in the context of child welfare; identification of alcohol and drug use; the roles of the child welfare worker when working with substance-abusing families; and the importance of, and strategies for, mobilizing treatment and systems collaboration for successful outcomes. The self-paced course is fully narrated with case examples to help you understand the content. The course takes about three hours to complete, and the cost is \$75. Upon completion of the final exam, participants will earn three continuing education credits.

To learn more about the online course, *Introduction to Working with Substance-Abusing Families*, visit www.nicwa.org/substance-abusing-families-course/.

For even more training on this topic, consider enrolling in our three-day virtual Training Institute on June 7, 9, and 11. This live training will include three sessions per day to cover the nine core lessons. Additionally, for the first time ever, NICWA is offering follow-up technical assistance focused on

supporting programs in implementing new practices from the curriculum framework for interested programs participating in the training institute. To learn about the training institute and new follow-up technical assistance, visit www.nicwa.org/training-institutes.

San Manuel Band of Mission Indians: Supporting NICWA for Fifteen Years

NICWA's impactful partnership with the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians (SMBMI) started in 2012 when the tribe funded staff time to update our curriculum and training program, including Understanding ICWA, our three-day training about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Around that time, NICWA gained national attention due to the *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl* (Baby Veronica) case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. Our website reached over 1,000,000 unique visitors, and since then our social media has steadily grown to over 74,600 combined followers. Thanks to SMBMI's generosity, our campaign to raise awareness of ICWA requirements has caused requests to NICWA about Indian child welfare to grow exponentially, with more than 1,000 calls, emails, and Facebook requests for information received annually. Native families in need have always been out there, and due to our increased profile thanks to SMBMI, they know where to call for social work support. It is mission-critical that we continue to respond to this need, and with ongoing support from SMBMI, we have had the capacity to do so. In 2020, SMBMI awarded us a two-year, \$300,000 grant to continue our work to protect ICWA. Thank you, San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, for our partnership to support families and protect tribal sovereignty.



Upcoming 2021

NICWA Member Webinars

Member webinars are one of the many great benefits of NICWA membership. At NICWA, we pride ourselves on listening to member feedback, and we work hard on finding compelling, informative presenters for our monthly sessions. We're always on the lookout for new ideas and presenters, so if you're interested in a particular topic, or if you've prepared a presentation that would benefit NICWA members, please reach out to Jeremy Chase-Israel at membership@nicwa.org.

Here is a preview of a few upcoming webinars:

Technology as a Tool for ICWA Outreach, Dissemination, and Training

Defend and Prepare: What Tribes Need to Know About the Legal Efforts and Strategies to Defend ICWA

Make sure to read your monthly NICWA Member Bulletin to register for upcoming member webinars.

Member of the Year: An Interview with Michelle Singer

Michelle Singer (Navajo), NICWA's 2021 Member of the Year, is the Healthy Native Youth project manager for the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board and is a long-time NICWA partner and supporter. NICWA's member relations manager Jeremy Chase-Israel had the chance to sit down with her virtually after the annual conference. Here's what she had to say:

Q: How do you feel about being selected as NICWA's Member of the Year?

A: It's truly an honor. There is a feeling of awkwardness, as one of our values is humbleness, but I look at being named Member of the Year as an accolade. I think of my mom and dad and how they would be proud of me. I was brought up to be proud of where you come from. I am honored by the people who came before me, shaped me, and I hope to lead by example.

Q: How has NICWA helped you?

A: I've attended the conference a number of times, and the tools, resources, people, and dialogue are invaluable. I love the bulletins, alerts, and the ways in which NICWA

empowers allies so we can continue upholding the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Q: What has NICWA taught you?

A: NICWA has taught me that the trauma of Native children being separated from their families—that devastation—still affects people to this day. The creation of NICWA has shown that it can really change the course of a generation, and while there are still challenges, ignorance provides all the more reason why an organization like NICWA has to empower Native children and their families. We must be all hands-on deck to help this cause.

What advice would you offer NICWA members?

You can't complain if you don't get in the game. You have to be there and suit up. Create change by reimagining systems. NICWA and Native people need to continue to be present to make the invisible visible through advocacy and communication. Children, families, and community can all be part of that process.

Q: What would you like to see NICWA do more of?

A: Youth delegates. An internship program in social work or community health. It would be beneficial for these youth to connect with NICWA members, who could act as mentors and help young advocates develop their voice. Many young people want a cause to get behind to underscore who they are and where they come from. ICWA can be one of these focal points.

*Michelle Singer (Navajo)
NICWA's 2021 Member of the Year*





NICWA News

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