

# NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Spring 2024



*The* **LATEST**  
**INSIDE**

**Together We Stand:  
Preserving the Spirit of ICWA**



**National Indian Child Welfare Association**  
 5100 S Macadam Avenue, Suite 300  
 Portland, Oregon 97239  
 P (503) 222-4044  
 F (503) 222-4007  
[www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)

The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) is a 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.

### Board of Directors

#### President

Gil Vigil (*Tesuque Pueblo*)

#### Vice President

Angela Connor (*Choctaw*)

#### Secretary

W. Alex Wesaw (*Pokagon Band of Potawatomi*)

#### Treasurer

Aurene Martin (*Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*)

#### Members

Teressa Baldwin (*Inupiaq*)

Justine Bautista (*Northern Cheyenne*)

Mikah Carlos (*Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community*)

Patricia Carter-Goodheart (*Nez Perce*)

Rose Domnick (*Orutsararmiut Native Council*)

Brad Earl (*Cohville descent*)

Rochelle Ettawageshik (*Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians*)

Debra Foxcroft (*Tseshaht First Nation*)

Charles Martin (*Morongo Band of Mission Indians*)

Robert McGhee (*Poarch Band of Creek Indians*)

Gary Peterson (*Skokomish*)

Robin Sigo (*Suquamish Tribe*)

Stephanie Weldon (*Yurok Tribe*)

Steven Wilson Jr. (*Oglala Sioux Tribe*)

#### Board of Trustees

John Shagonaby (*Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomis Indians*)

Sherry Salway Black (*Oglala Lakota*)

Allard Teeple (*Bay Mills Indian Community*)

Victor Rocha (*Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians*)

Derek Valdo (*Acoma Pueblo*)

#### Founder and Senior Advisor

Terry Cross (*Seneca*)

#### Executive Director

Sarah Kastelic (*Alutiiq*)

*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](mailto:info@nicwa.org)*



Cover photo: Gary Peterson (*Skokomish*), NICWA founding board member and conference emcee at the National Day of Prayer for Native Children.

# Contents

4 Policy

5 Inside NICWA

6 Together We Stand:  
Preserving the Spirit of  
ICWA

8 Programs

10 Host Sponsors



# Message from the Executive Director

Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,

Welcome to the Spring issue of *NICWA News*. This issue embraces the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference theme, *Together We Stand: Preserving the Spirit of ICWA*. The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 powerfully proclaims "...that it is the policy of this Nation to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian families..." (25 U.S.C. § 1902). The spirit of ICWA ensures our children grow up with strong cultural identities, rooted in the language and traditions of our ancestors, so that our tribal communities remain strong.

For over 45 years, tribal nations fought to uphold this declaration and constitutional protection of their children. This stance was evident in the coalition-building, including grassroots efforts, during the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case. We saw 502 tribal nations, 62 Native organizations, 23 states and D.C., 87 congresspersons, and 27 child welfare and adoption organizations declare in unity their support for ICWA. Standing in solidarity with one another is how we achieved success.

With this decision on the record, Indian Country is emboldened in our work to ensure compliance with ICWA and strengthen its implementation. With ICWA's solid legal foundation affirmed, now is the time to work together to lift up tribal best practices and increase tribal child welfare capacity. To strengthen ICWA implementation, we must put our sights on tribal and state relationships and agreements; increased funding for tribal services, including culturally based services; and federal policy and data collection. The time to set our comprehensive vision for ICWA 2050 is now, with about 25 years to work toward our long-term strategic plan. Within roughly one generation, we can change the trajectory and outcomes for generations of Native children.

As you'll read about in this issue, we've just wrapped up our incredibly successful 42<sup>nd</sup> annual conference, the largest in our history. We welcomed 2,026 people to our first hybrid in-person and virtual conference. We gratefully acknowledged 40 sponsors who generously contributed nearly \$300,000 to create this enriching experience. This was a gathering of service providers,

community members, and advocates who came together for four days of learning, networking, and celebration together, furthering NICWA's mission of strengthening the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

Our conference is a powerful reminder of the commitment and impact of the workers in our tribal and state helping programs and systems. Each one of you, thousands in number, has dedicated your career to serving Native families and strengthening their well-being. Your interventions have stopped the intergenerational transmission of trauma and created a place for families to heal, truly preserving and carrying forward the spirit of ICWA. Your hard work and your heart for Native families are truly appreciated.

With gratitude for your service to Native children and families,

*Sarah L. Kastelic*

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD (*Alutiq*)





*Photo caption: David Simmons, NICWA government affairs and advocacy director, and Stephanie Weldon, NICWA's public policy committee chair, presenting at NICWA's 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference.*

## AFCARS Comments Overwhelmingly in Support of Proposed ICWA Data Elements

Data on Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases has been extraordinarily difficult to access since ICWA's enactment in 1978. No federal database has required collection of this data from states, and no federal agency has compiled or provided ICWA data for public access. This lack of data collection is shocking since almost every other major federal child welfare law has regular data about state implementation collected by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The result is that little is known about ICWA's implementation within and across states, except for a handful of states that collect ICWA data voluntarily. Absent comprehensive data, anecdotally and through other proxy measures of ICWA compliance in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), there are valid concerns about inconsistencies in states' ICWA implementation and the barriers to improving implementation.

---

**The AFCARS system tracks a variety of data elements on children that have been placed in out-of-home care, such as foster care, adoption, or relative guardianship.**

---

On February 23, 2024, ACF took a significant step towards addressing the data gap on ICWA cases. They published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that aimed to establish new ICWA data elements in the AFCARS data system. If approved, these data elements would be the first comprehensive set of ICWA data elements that states would be required to report on since ICWA's enactment. The NPRM invited public comments on the proposed data elements with the comment period closing on April 23, 2024.

NICWA analyzed the 80 comments submitted in response to the NPRM and noted these findings:

- All 30 tribal nations and tribal organizations that submitted comments supported the establishment of the ICWA data elements in AFCARS.
- Seven of ten states that submitted comments supported the establishment of the ICWA data elements.
- States that raised concerns about the establishment of the ICWA data elements primarily expressed concerns about the timeline for implementation (two years) or administrative burden.
- Ten regional or national child welfare organizations supported the establishment of the ICWA data elements.
- Several individual letters of support for the ICWA data elements were submitted by researchers, students, legal advocates, and other child welfare professionals.
- Overall, only five comments submitted could be read in full as not supporting the establishment of the ICWA data elements.

The next steps in the rulemaking process are ACF's analysis of public comments, which will include developing changes to the data elements that are deemed necessary, developing responses to the public comments, and developing the final ICWA data elements and final rule. This process will likely take several months, so a final rule is not expected until after September 2024.



## Welcome, New NICWA Board Member and Staff!



**Steven Wilson Jr. (Oglala Sioux Tribe)**  
**NICWA Youth Board Member**

Steven Wilson Jr. is an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Steven is the lead male trainer for Wahwala Iyohlogya— Peaceful Means Sexual Violence Prevention Center. Peaceful Means is located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and works toward protecting the future of the Oglala Sioux Tribe by implementing a culturally adapted sexual violence prevention curriculum for Lakota youth in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade across the reservation. “I’m so excited to join NICWA, and I hope to expand my abilities for helping and protecting our youth so they can have a healthy, bright future. Our elders always told us that it is the responsibility of the next generations to be and act in a way that will be good for the next seven generations, and that is something that I live by.”



**Andrea Zaragoza (Pueblo of Acoma, Hopi Tribe)**  
**Operations Coordinator**

Andrea Zaragoza comes from the Pueblo of Acoma and Hopi Tribe. With a professional background in healthcare and an academic background in tribal health, she is driven by a profound commitment to uplift and strengthen Native populations, all the way from cradle to elder status. She has a strong understanding of the importance of culturally sensitive approaches and the positive impact they have on Native children and families. Through her dedication to NICWA, Andrea strives to make a meaningful impact on the well-being of Native communities and beyond.



**Lauren Shapiro-Neiwert**  
**Events and Projects Director**

In May 2024, Lauren Shapiro-Neiwert joined the NICWA program team as the events and projects director. Lauren started at NICWA in 2013 as event manager and then was promoted to director of events and training. Since then, the department’s work has grown significantly, more than doubling the size of the annual conference and expanding NICWA’s program offerings. Lauren briefly left NICWA to expand her knowledge around the intersection of events and technology and then returned. With over 15 years of project management work, we look forward to Lauren’s leadership with our annual conference and help with project planning. Lauren’s exceptional project management skills will help us meet the needs of the communities we serve and ensure accountability to our funders. Lauren is based in Portland, Oregon, and lives with her partner, toddler, and dog. Before joining NICWA she worked at other youth-serving organizations like Girl Scouts of Oregon and Southwest Washington and a Native wilderness-based teen substance abuse program called Raven’s Way in Alaska.

## NICWA Founder and Senior Advisor Staffing Transition

### **Terry Cross (Seneca), Consultant**

After 40 years of service to NICWA as its founding executive director and senior advisor, on May 1, Terry Cross stepped down as a NICWA employee. While he will no longer be at the office every week working alongside staff, he will continue to be involved in NICWA’s work. In his new role as senior advisor emeritus, Terry will continue to serve as a consultant, advisor, contract trainer, institutional historian, and elder. He’ll maintain his office and his NICWA

email address and phone number. He is also spending a lot of time writing. At the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference, Terry was recognized for his many years of dedicated and exemplary work as well as exceptional contributions to NICWA and Indian Country. When presented with his award, Terry promised conference goers that he would continue to see them annually at the NICWA conference each April.



42<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL

# Protecting Our Children

Together We Stand:  
Preserving the Spirit of ICWA  
April 7–10, 2024 • Seattle, WA

## Host Sponsors



“This conference exceeded my expectations. I was able to make both personal and professional connections. It was very healing as a Native person who has a history of adoption in their family and is also entering social work.”

—Conference Attendee

“This conference inspired me and motivated me to become a better worker for the children and families I serve. I was losing my spark and questioning my purpose in this field, but I came home wanting to make change.”

—Conference Attendee

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference, held from April 7 through April 10, 2024, showcased significant advancements in the field of tribal child welfare. More than 2,000 dedicated advocates committed the well-being of Native children and families convened both in-person and virtually, marking NICWA’s largest conference to date.

The conference theme “Together We Stand: Preserving the Spirit of ICWA” reflects the window of opportunity we are in right now. With *Haaland v. Brackeen* behind us, Indian Country’s stance to ensure compliance with ICWA and strengthen its implementation is stronger than ever.

The first general session panel on Monday highlighted decolonized programs serving Native children, youth, and families. “Indigenizing the Future: The Journey of Healing of the Canoe Youth Curriculum,” led by Robin Little Wing Sigo, Albie Lawrence, and Vincent Chargualuaf, highlighted the Suquamish tribal healing program, the Healing of the Canoe. This community driven program

offers culturally relevant substance abuse and mental health intervention for tribal youth.

The second general session panel featured Cheri Goodwin, Fred Desjarlait, Andrea Goodwin, and Amy RedCloud with “Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog Uplifting Our Relatives—Taming the Beast: Decolonizing Child Welfare.” Panelists shared insights on rebuilding community trust, prioritizing traditional ways, creating intentional systems change, and wielding tribal sovereignty in their decolonized child welfare approach.

During Tuesday’s general session, Veronica Krupnick, Robert Mesa, Alejandra Gomez, and Shannell Lavallie provided diverse yet interconnected perspectives on Indigenous youth experiences and identities within the child welfare system. The panel, “Indigenous Youth’s Perspective on Child Welfare,” underscored the importance of maintaining connections to communities, cultures, traditions, land, and families for children



removed from their tribal communities.

Wednesday's closing general session concluded with a call to collective action towards a future transcending our lifetimes. Sarah Kastelic, David Simmons, Amory Zschach, and moderator Jack Trope discussed opportunities to connect practitioners and advocates, drawing insights from tribal leader listening sessions to guide priorities and inform a long-term strategic plan. ICWA 2050 represents a generational commitment in service to the well-being of many generations of Native children.

ICWA 2050 represents three principles:

- Protect the safety, well-being, and spiritual strength of current and future generations of Native families.
- Preserve ICWA as the gold standard of child welfare policy and maintain inherent tribal sovereignty.
- Progress and strengthen ICWA; move beyond the status quo to expand tribal capacity and funding in service of tribal self-determination.

We know the complexities of the interconnected systems we aim to change, spanning funding, policy, narrative, and judicial processes. ICWA 2050 represents a uniting vision spanning decades and sectors. It is a commitment to a future where Native children are woven into the fabric of our cultures with care and intention. Under the banner of our conference theme "Together We Stand: Preserving the Spirit of ICWA," attendees left equipped with tools, resources, and connections to help our children grow up with strong cultural identities, rooted in the language and traditions of our ancestors.



## Conference by the Numbers:

- 4 Days
- 6.5 Hours of virtual content
- 14.5 CEU credits
- 44 Volunteers
- 31 Exhibitors
- 40 Sponsors
- 52 States and provinces
- 412 Tribal nations represented
- 40 Sponsors
- 83 Workshops
- 184 Speakers
- 376 International attendees
- 924 Store items sold
- 946 New members
- 1650 Pokémon plushies given out
- 2026 Attendees
- 7152 Cups of coffee
- \$17,891 Paddle Raise dollars
- \$295,500 Sponsorship dollars raised



## Addressing Tribal Child Welfare Workforce Needs

In recent months, NICWA has gathered feedback through multiple channels to better understand and address tribal child welfare workforce needs. This comprehensive approach involved a listening survey for both members and non-members engaged with NICWA's work. Additionally, a peer-to-peer virtual discussion was organized exclusively for members. Finally, during NICWA's 42nd Annual Protecting our Children Conference, a dedicated listening session was held to address tribal child welfare workforce concerns. Engaging with NICWA's community, we heard input about resources and NICWA's programmatic work. Key feedback included the need for resources on strengthening caseworkers' knowledge of the requirements of ICWA, having more youth-centered conversations, and having more educational and support resources concerning active efforts. The survey, widely shared on NICWA's social media platforms and member bulletin, served as a tool to learn what elements of NICWA's programming the community has been involved in, heard about, and wants to see improved upon. Data collected covered a diverse range of topics, including requests for varied training formats, mental health resources, family support networks resources, and updates on challenges related to the Indian Child Welfare Act.

As an organization, NICWA is dedicated to providing strong and effective trainings for those who work in tribal child welfare because having a trained and supported tribal child welfare workforce directly impacts the mission and effectiveness of ICWA. Ensuring the retention of well-trained tribal child welfare workers is vital for the children and families ICWA seeks to protect. With a stable workforce, families can thrive, leading to improved outcomes in prevention, reunification, and permanency. It is important to recognize how tribal child welfare workers partner with state welfare workers to implement ICWA to highlight the principle that states should always consult with tribes when enacting policy or practice changes that affect Native children. The stronger the tribal child welfare workforce is as partners, trainers, and educators, the more both tribes and the state will benefit. NICWA is committed to providing training for tribal child welfare workers to meet the needs we hear from those in the field. Guided by this feedback, we continue to update and strengthen our training resources to best support communities that protect and serve Native children.



## Qualified Expert Witness Training

NICWA's training staff had a busy winter beginning in January with a Training Institute in New Mexico. Following immediately in February, NICWA's Senior Program Director, Tara Reynon, traveled to Wisconsin and Oklahoma, where she trained over 70 tribal child welfare professionals to testify as Qualified Expert Witnesses (QEW) in their communities.

The three-day QEW training prepares participants with information about the legal requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) that a QEW must address when testifying. It trains participants on how to provide testimony in ICWA cases, as well as addressing practice issues. Attendees learn about how to recognize bias in forming an opinion to give to the court, conduct best practice assessments that are culturally responsive to tribal communities and key requirements a QEW gives expert testimony on such as proper notice, active efforts and placement preferences. The conclusion of the training involves participants putting their learning to action by participating in mock trials, where they were cross examined with questions drawn from cases by tribal attorneys and representatives.

After receiving many requests for similar trainings, as well as the feedback from the two trainings in February, NICWA recognizes how vital these trainings are to communities. Trained qualified expert witnesses are vital to the meaningful implementation of ICWA, yet there remains a shortage of trained experts adequately serving Indian Country. With this in mind, NICWA is excited to be offering this training again June 4 through June 6 in Portland, Oregon, where trainees will spend time in the classroom as well as the courtroom to help prepare them to be skilled qualified expert witnesses in their own communities. Learn more and register for an upcoming NICWA training at [www.nicwa.org/training-institutes/](http://www.nicwa.org/training-institutes/).





# Programs

## Honoring the late Daniel (Dan) Gargan (*Rosebud Sioux Tribe*)



*Photo caption: Dan Gargan with his two children, Matthew Gargan and Katie Gargan, in 1996 in Coos Bay, Oregon.*

NICWA was saddened to learn of the passing one year ago of our longtime board member, Daniel (Dan) Gargan, and shares this remembrance of him.

Around 1990, when NICWA was first known as the Northwest Indian Child Welfare Association, Dan attended our annual fundraising auction, Positively Indian. There, Dan connected with NICWA staff and offered to volunteer. At the time he owned and operated his own marketing research firm, Gargan Research. He offered to help NICWA conduct focus groups to improve our fundraising and marketing for our art auction. He later helped conduct focus groups at our annual Protecting Our Children conference to help make sure NICWA could respond to the needs of our members. In 1993, Dan was invited to join NICWA's board of directors. In 1994, he became our board treasurer, a position he held until

2003. Dan continued to serve on our board until 2009. NICWA was extremely dear to Dan, perhaps foremost because he was an adoptee in the 1950s. As an adult he reconnected with his tribe, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, and with his family there, both to fulfill his profound need for reconnection and so that his children would have the benefit of growing up with their culture. While on the NICWA board, Dan attended many trainings and conferences where he met other adult adoptees and dived into reclaiming his culture. He changed careers and moved full time into service to Native children and families, and to tribes, including his own. NICWA is pleased and grateful to have been a part of Dan's journey. He will be deeply missed in Indian Country.

## Pokémon Company International

On April 8, 2024, The Pokémon Company International (TPCi) Chief Diversity Officer Raquel Daniels welcomed attendees to the 2024 NICWA Conference and shared her gratitude for the growing relationship between NICWA and TPCi in partnering to improve the lives of children. In 2020, TPCi made a \$250,000 general operating support grant to NICWA as part of its overall effort to donate \$5 million to organizations around the world following Pokémon GO Fest 2020. NICWA is also a long-term strategic partner of TPCi as part of its five-year, \$25 million dollar mission to support kids and families as well as organizations supporting social equity in the global, regional, and local communities in which it operates. Learn more about Raquel and what has made her an advocate for children and underrepresented audiences.

### **Can you tell us more about what it means to be the Chief Diversity Officer at TPCi?**

My role is to help organizations realize their full potential to be the best places to work. My specific opportunity at TPCi is to foster an environment of meaning, belonging, and impact through the joy of Pokémon for all our people. Specifically, that means creating inclusive spaces where people work better together, play together, and build community together, so we can be the best organization we can be.

### **How did you get into DEI and social impact work?**

My career trajectory has been a lattice not a ladder. I started in

the Texas Department of Child and Human Services, and since then I've had the opportunity to create opportunities for underrepresented audiences in partnership with either government entities, nonprofits or for-profit organizations. The commonality throughout these experiences has been providing individuals with knowledge that will enhance and enrich their lived experiences.



### **How do you see NICWA's mission and values aligning with TPCi's mission and values?**

We both care about the safety and joy of children. We both want to bring positivity to the communities we serve and people we touch.

### **What might you say to non-Native individuals and companies who want to support Native children and families?**

In any work that we do on an individual or professional level, it's important to understand the audience we serve and be willing to have a dialogue to serve them in a culturally relevant way. That can mean through tone, language, and content, so they can effectively resonate to build relationships and connect with the hearts and minds of Native children and families.



The Seminole Tribe of Florida is proud to sponsor the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference and support NICWA's work dedicated to the well-being of Native children and families.

---

**WELCOME TO SEATTLE,  
WASHINGTON!**



# Welcome to Seattle!



Jaison Elkins, Chair      Donny Stevenson, Vice-Chair      Jessica Garcia-Jones, Secretary      John Daniels Jr., Treasurer



Virginia Cross      Leeroy Courville Jr.      Mike Jerry Sr.      Anita Mitchell      Louie Ungaro



## MUCKLESHOOT TRIBAL COUNCIL



Ancestral Homeland of the Muckleshoot People.

### The Puyallup Tribe of Indians is a proud sponsor of the 2024 NICWA Protecting Our Children Conference.

The goal of the Puyallup Tribe's Children's Services Foster Care Program is to keep Native Children with Native or Tribal community foster parents. It is vital to keep our children connected to their culture, especially given the traumatic history of Native children being taken away from their communities.



3009 E Portland Ave. Tacoma, WA 98404  
253-573-7800 | puyalluptribe-nsn.gov

Thank you to our 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Sponsors!  
To view our Host Sponsors and read more about the conference, turn to pages 4-7.

Four Directions Sponsors



MORONGO  
BAND OF  
MISSION  
INDIANS



A SOVEREIGN NATION



Pokégnek Bodéwadmik  
POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI



*the*  
**Chickasaw  
Nation**

Sacred Circle Sponsors



SHAKOPEE MDEWAKANTON  
SIOUX COMMUNITY



NOTTAWASEPPI HURON  
BAND OF THE POTAWATOMI  
A FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBAL GOVERNMENT



STILLAGUAMISH  
TRIBE OF INDIANS



**Humana**  
Healthy Horizons.®

Morning Star Sponsors



EDUCATION IS THE ANSWER

**FIRST NATIONS**  
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



People. Partnership. Potential.



Council of Friends Sponsors



A good mind. A good heart. A strong fire.

