

NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Summer 2024

The *LATEST*

INSIDE

Belonging





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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.

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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



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Message from the Executive Director

Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,

Welcome to the Summer issue of *NICWA News*. The theme is *Belonging*. This deep, universal human need to belong is nurtured differently across societies and cultures. Native communities cultivate a strong sense of belonging and interdependence throughout life, connecting us to others, our environment, and something bigger than ourselves.

Many traditional practices emphasize care for one another, the land, and the plants and animals; they help maintain our continued existence as unique peoples. We draw on our ancestors' teachings to raise thriving, spiritually strong children who are secure in their identity. Our communities are organized around extended families and kinship networks that create a natural helping system and protective capacity for children. We have clear responsibilities to other human beings—including those who came before us and those who will come after us—and to the environment on which we depend. These responsibilities are encoded in our values and creation stories, which some cultures view as their original instructions from the Creator.

The [Kodiak Alutiiq worldview](#) describes “a set of interrelated and valued elements that sustain our well-being,” including physical, emotional, social, ethical, and cognitive well-being. Our worldview emphasizes interdependence—out of necessity, we rely on one another. Each human being has different gifts and talents, all of which the community needs. Community members have the responsibility to contribute their gifts and talents; we are bound together, and each person is indispensable.

To ensure that all of these gifts and the natural resources on which our survival depends continue to support our existence, stewardship is essential. We are responsible for ourselves, other people, and our environment. We cannot afford to discount or ignore the very things that will allow us to continue to exist as humans, and specifically as the unique Alutiiq people we are.

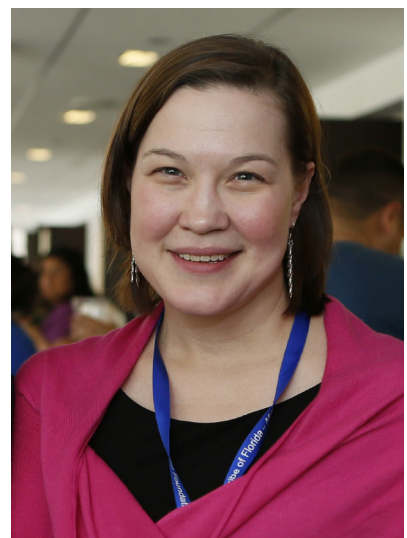
Spirituality, including faith and prayer, is integral to how we are bound together and how we care for the relationships and resources that sustain us. Our interdependence and spirituality connect us to something larger than ourselves, give us purpose, meaning, and a sense of belonging, which all humans need.

Finally, conducting ourselves properly in human and environmental relationships is not enough. We are called to continue to learn more about our language, history, ancestors, and traditional arts and skills and to share that knowledge—to pass on what we know to continue our way of life.

In the spirit of belonging,

Sarah L. Kastelic

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD, MSW
(Alutiiq)



Legislation on the Move

As the election season draws near, there is still important legislative work in the 118th Congress to pass crucial bills that impact the well-being of Native children, families, and tribal nations, including the Strengthening Tribal Families Act.

On June 5, 2024, the bipartisan Strengthening Tribal Families Act ([H.R. 8621/S. 4471](#)) was introduced by Representative Don Bacon and Senator Tammy Baldwin. The legislation seeks to amend Title IV-B of the Social Security Act to support state implementation of the federal requirements under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). The Strengthening Tribal Families Act directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create a technical assistance plan to assess state strengths and challenges in implementing ICWA by collecting data using six metrics. Senator Tammy Baldwin shared about the vital need for this new legislation.

“For years, Native children were unjustly separated from their families, disconnecting them from their communities and cultures,” said Senator Baldwin. “We took a significant step forward to address this longstanding problem – but there’s more work to do. My legislation will ensure states have tools and resources to preserve and strengthen tribal families and communities for generations to come.”

The Strengthening Tribal Families Act has been one of [NICWA's policy priorities](#) since the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case. The Act would support robust ICWA implementation for generations to come.

TAKE ACTION NOW!

1 Tribal advocacy is needed to strengthen congressional support for these bills and to encourage their inclusion in a larger Title IV-B reauthorization bill this year. NICWA encourages tribes, tribal organizations, and ICWA advocates to contact their Senate and House of Representative members to sponsor the Strengthening Tribal Families Act.

2 To read more information about the Strengthening Tribal Families Act, learn how to contact your congressional representatives, and for more policy updates, view NICWA's latest Child and Family Policy Update at www.nicwa.org/policy-update.



ICWA Advocacy Update

As of June 2024, NICWA, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), and regional tribal organization partners have conducted 11 listening sessions across Indian Country to collect feedback from tribal leaders and tribal child welfare directors on regional priorities for strengthening ICWA at the tribal, state, and federal levels. In the coming months, we will complete 2-3 additional regional listening sessions and begin drafting a tribally driven long-term strategic plan titled ICWA 2050 as a comprehensive vision to ensure ICWA's compliance and strengthen its implementation and, on a necessary parallel track, strengthen tribal child welfare.

In May 2024, [Resolution #24-18](#) was presented at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) Mid-Year Convention for consideration by the Indian Child Welfare Committee. The resolution summarizes key themes from the listening sessions and seeks ATNI's support in the development of ICWA 2050. With a quorum present, the resolution was adopted. In June 2024, [Resolution #NC-24-005](#) went through the committee process at the NCAI Mid-Year Convention and was later reviewed and adopted by the NCAI Executive Committee.

Join us at the [2024 NCAI Annual Convention](#) in the fall for the rollout of ICWA 2050. Stay tuned for the launch by subscribing to NICWA's emails at www.nicwa.org and follow the Protect ICWA Campaign on Instagram and X at [@ProtectICWA](#).



Photo: NICWA training Institute participants at courthouse in Portland, Oregon.

Embracing Belonging: Reflections on June Training Institute

By Andrea Zaragoza, NICWA Operations Coordinator

Amidst the sunshine and festive energy of the Portland Rose Festival, this June's Training Institute brought participants from across the country for training on Positive Indian Parenting, Qualified Expert Witness, and Child Protection Teams in Indian Country. Together, these trainings aim to strengthen community support systems and promote knowledge and collaboration among teams in Native child welfare.

I attended the training institute as a first-time attendee. I experienced a profound feeling of interconnectedness and community building that went beyond my initial expectations. As someone without a background in child welfare, I entered the training with uncertainty but left with a newfound sense of purpose and admiration for the field of tribal child welfare. The training emphasized the crucial interconnectedness between members of Child Protection Teams, stressing that collaboration is not merely beneficial, but essential to protect our children.

The training emphasized the crucial interconnectedness between members of Child Protection Teams, stressing that collaboration is not merely beneficial, but essential to protect our children. When the trainer taught about eliminating team silos and the importance of cohesiveness, the notion that

active communication and unity can transform our efforts resonated deeply with me, highlighting how delays and inefficiencies vanish when collaboration thrives.

In our learning group, comprised of individuals from across the region with varied backgrounds and expertise, I found my place. The familial networks, identity, and sense of belonging fostered here were palpable. Despite my initial apprehensions, I felt included in our mock cases, realizing my role was integral to our shared goal. One participant said, "I realized I am not alone; it gave me hope." Listening to the experiences shared within the group broadened my perspective. I learned about the challenges and triumphs in the field, gaining a deeper cultural awareness and appreciation for the importance of this training.

This experience was a personal call to action. It sparked a desire to advocate for cohesive, culturally based practices within child welfare systems for Native children. It illuminated a path forward, showing that each person's role in this field is meaningful and necessary. I left the training with not just knowledge but newfound respect and commitment to service, knowing that through teamwork and collaboration, we can truly make a difference in the lives of Native families and communities.



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.

Nurturing Belonging: Developing Culturally Relevant Foster Care Standards in Tribal Communities

This article has been adapted from [Development and Implementation of Tribal Foster Care and Relative/Kinship Care Standards: Second Edition](#).

Tribal nations have always exercised sovereign authority over civil relationships in their communities, including child custody and welfare services. These services are crucial for maintaining the familial networks, identity, community, and sense of belonging that are vital for all Native children. Since the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978, tribes have increasingly taken responsibility for child welfare services, such as foster care. When a tribe assumes responsibility for a child's care through its tribal code, judicial process, and foster care system, it subcontracts this care to a specific family. The tribal child welfare program must ensure the substitute family provides adequate care by addressing these critical questions:

- What constitutes an adequate level of care?
- How should children be treated?
- How will a child's cultural ties to their tribal community be maintained and nurtured?
- At what level should a child's needs be met?

These questions form the basis of foster care standards, which are used by the tribal child welfare program to license and regulate foster homes.

Historically, foster care models available to tribes were developed within the dominant society's child welfare system, often making it difficult for tribal programs to implement these standards, as they did not reflect tribal values or community needs. While many non-tribal foster care models exist, there is limited information on setting tribal standards and managing foster home licensing within the tribal context.



Foster Care and Relative/Kinship Care Standards

Foster care standards reflect a tribe's assumptions and beliefs about children, based on safety concerns, developmental needs, and traditional cultural teachings about child-rearing. They translate these beliefs, values, and goals into written policies and procedures guiding foster care services. "Foster care" can include both care by relatives and non-related care providers.

Foster care standards define the level of care expected from foster care providers. These standards serve as criteria for determining which homes are suitable for foster children. When relative care (sometimes referred to as kinship care) standards differ from non-relative care standards, they serve the same purpose but are tailored to specific relationships. **Clearly written foster care standards, based on a tribe's goals, beliefs, and values, protect the needs of children under the tribe's care.** They also provide credibility for the tribal child welfare program with community members, the tribal council and administration, and external funding sources like state and federal agencies.

Relatives play a vital role in supporting their families, both as support to a child's parents and sometimes as a placement resource when the child's safety is a concern. In many Indigenous communities, the responsibility for the care of children extends beyond birth parents to include extended family, close non-related caregivers, and community members, creating an interdependent network for the child's safety and well-being. Only the tribe can define who qualifies as a relative and under what circumstances relative care becomes formalized and subject to tribal government oversight through standards and regulations.

Supporting relative care providers who care for children, whether voluntary or involuntary, requires a clear definition of who is considered a relative. This definition and the development of standards should reflect community values and the strengths and resilience of long-standing traditions of caring for extended family.

The [Development and Implementation of Tribal Foster Care and Relative/Kinship Care Standards: Second Edition](#) discusses important considerations and suggests a process for tribes to develop locally appropriate standards,

emphasizing that these standards are most effective when developed by the tribal community and when a broad segment of that community participates in the development and implementation process.

NICWA's founder and senior advisor Terry L. Cross, MSW, ACSW, LCSW, and NICWA's government affairs and community development specialist Mariah Meyerholz, MSW, co-authored the second edition of the standards as part of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network). The Network helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information on free technical assistance related to kinship care, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

The Network is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$523,684 and 5 percentage funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors

and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

You can find the Development and Implementation of Tribal Foster Care and Relative/Kinship Care Standards: Second Edition at www.nicwa.org/service-providers under Kinship and Relative Care Resources.

(Pictured: Mariah Meyerholz attending a tribal advisory meeting)



Key Considerations for Relative Care Standards

Tribal child welfare programs creating foster care standards for relative caregivers may consider the following policy-related questions.

1. How will licensing or approval standards be crafted to align with the tribe's cultural practices and values as well as meet conditions associated with funding sources?
2. Will standards for relative care providers specify a licensing or approval process that is tailored to the needs and experiences of relatives caring for their relative children?
3. Will standards outline the level of flexibility they will permit?
4. Will standards describe how the agency can collaborate to develop solutions for addressing non-safety-related concerns that meet the licensure or approval requirements for placing children in relative homes?
5. Will unlicensed relative caregivers have access to the services and training provided to licensed families?



Native Values and Voices in Child Development

For generations, Indigenous families around the world have relied on traditional methods of child rearing and education to foster their children's growth. For instance, in many Indigenous communities, extended families play pivotal roles in teaching and nurturing children, working closely with parents. **Recognizing traditional practices—including the significant role of extended family in caring for children—is essential for service providers.** By understanding how these practices influence family dynamics and decision making, providers can effectively assist Native families in preserving and passing down their cultural values and traditions to the next generation. This awareness enables providers to offer more culturally responsive support that strengthens familial connections and enhances child development.

Native children and families exhibit diverse connections to their culture due to historical trauma such as loss of language, land, and traditional ways of life. This connection influences how cultural values are expressed and can vary based on tribal affiliation, cultural identity, degree of assimilation, and worldview. Colonization and assimilation have caused some Native families to adopt mainstream societal values, while others maintain traditional values or navigate between cultures. Many Indigenous communities experience the world through a relational worldview, emphasizing holistic wellness encompassing mind, body, spirit, and context. This contrasts with mainstream society's linear worldview focused on cause-and-effect relationships. Comprehending and elevating these diverse worldviews and values helps service providers tailor interventions that respect and align with the cultural experiences and needs of Native children and families.

Native families and communities are reclaiming and revitalizing traditional child rearing practices, guided by their own perspectives on nurturing children.

This includes embracing collective community responsibility, involving parents, extended family, elders, and community healers and helpers who serve as caretakers, storytellers, teachers, and traditional knowledge holders. While these practices vary among families and communities based on their values and customs, Native families remain dedicated to creating safe, supportive environments where their children can learn and thrive.

Understanding traditional child rearing practices and their impact on family wellness and cultural connectedness is crucial for service providers. Awareness of these practices enables providers to engage effectively with Native families, fostering meaningful dialogue and supporting the nurturing network that shapes child development throughout their lives.

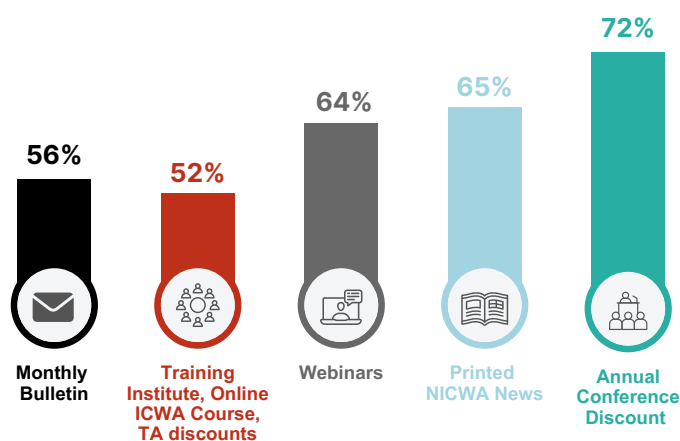
Service providers can support Native families raising their children by

1. Building awareness of how historical events, lived experiences, and cultural values can influence child development.
2. Understanding the diversity of cultural identities and how parenting practices may be influenced by this experience.
3. Developing collaborative relationships that build trust and empower families to be active facilitators in their child's learning journey.
4. Encouraging families to share their expectations for their child's learning and growth.
5. Asking families what healing looks like to them, what practices have been most effective in their path to healing, and how healing can support their child's growth and development in time.
6. Engaging extended family in program development and service provision to strengthen the child's connections to their family, culture, and community.
7. Actively acknowledging, respecting, adapting, and integrating Indigenous knowledge of child development into their service delivery practices and learning environments.

NICWA Members Weigh in on Workforce Needs

Earlier this year, we began asking NICWA members to weigh in on challenges they face in the field of tribal child welfare. We received feedback from **160 members** in a listening survey and spoke to dozens of members daily at NICWA's 42nd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference. Overall, members shared the biggest challenges are related to recruitment, retention, and training the workforce. Below are two questions about NICWA member benefits currently offered and a highlight of the topics members want in future member webinars. Questions about your membership? Contact membership@nicwa.org.

Which benefits are members most familiar with?



What topics or issues would members like NICWA to address in virtual meetings or webinars?

- Qualified Expert Witness Trainings
- Positive Indian Parenting
- Implementing Culture
- Behavioral Health
- Historical Trauma
- Substance Abuse
- Youth Mental Health Resources
- State Custody Strategies
- Legal Updates
- State ICWA Laws Best Practices
- Legislation and Court Cases
- Advancing Child Welfare Policy
- Government-to-Government Relationships
- Supervision Strategies
- Foster Parents
- Kinship Care

Tribal Child Welfare Codes as Sovereignty in Action: You're Invited to Participate!

In 2024–2025, NICWA and partners will update an analysis of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal child welfare and juvenile codes. Join us to make sure your tribe's code is included!

In 2014–2016, NICWA and partners collected and analyzed a sample of 107 publicly available tribal child welfare and juvenile codes. The report described tribes' varied approaches to culturally based provisions, child removal, termination of parental rights, permanency options including tribal customary adoption, and more. This information has been widely used by tribal leadership, judges and attorneys, and social services and child welfare directors making tribal child welfare policy and program improvements.

This year we will update the analysis, using updated tribal codes that were part of the original sample and collecting additional codes from tribal nations in the US. A primary focus will be to add more examples of specific tribal code provisions to our final report, and we're seeking additional

funding to create a web-based resource that's more easily navigable and able to be updated more frequently.

To make sure your community's codes are included in this project, please send a copy of your code to Dallas Archuleta at dallas@nicwa.org.



Announcing "Foundations in Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice"

In direct response to community requests, NICWA is pleased to announce the launch of "Foundations in Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice," a specialized training designed exclusively for tribal and First Nations child welfare workers. This interactive, one-day virtual training will equip participants with essential skills tailored to their unique roles and responsibilities.

This new curriculum will address crucial aspects of tribal child welfare, guided by the relational worldview model. Participants will learn best practices for engaging and assessing families and ensuring culturally sensitive approaches that honor Indigenous values and traditions. Special emphasis is placed on preparing for court proceedings, including report writing and providing testimony that effectively upholds the best interests of children and families.

The training will also cover strategies for enhancing children and family engagement within the tribal context. A key focus

is on effectively using supervision to support professional growth and ensure successful service delivery to families. Participants will gain insights into basic case management practices specifically relevant to tribal settings, enhancing their ability to navigate complex casework scenarios.

This virtual training, which will be held on September 24, 2024 from 8:30 a.m.–3:00 p.m. PT, provides a convenient and accessible learning experience for tribal child welfare professionals in the United States and Canada. Registration is now open, welcoming all those eager to expand their skill set and make a meaningful impact within their communities.

Secure your place to strengthen tribal child welfare practices. Register for the virtual training at www.nicwa.org/training-institutes/. Register before August 26th to save \$75!

Upcoming Training Institutes:

Location	Dates	Topics
Anchorage, AK	September 17–19, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive Indian Parenting, Working with Substance-Abusing Families, Cross Cultural Skills in Indian Child Welfare
Virtual	September 24, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice
Virtual	October 21–24, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive Indian Parenting
Scottsdale, AZ	January 28–30, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding ICWA, Cross Cultural Skills in Indian Child Welfare, Positive Indian Parenting, Tribal Customary Adoption
Orlando, FL	April 2–4, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding ICWA, Positive Indian Parenting (PIP), Establishing PIP in Your Community (one-day training)

Philanthropic Partners

Funding the Future: Philanthropic Support for ICWA 2050, the Work After Brackeen



A year after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision upholding the Indian Child Welfare Act and tribal sovereignty in *Haaland v. Brackeen*, NICWA's development department is focused on funding what comes next: the work to strengthen protections for ICWA and improve tribal child welfare capacity, both of which are vital to the well-being of Native children and families.

Through ongoing listening sessions with tribal leaders and tribal child welfare staff around the country, NICWA has affirmed the importance of this work, and we are developing a strategic plan to strengthen ICWA protections and improve tribal child welfare capacity that we are calling ICWA 2050. This advocacy and systems change work needs to happen at multiple levels to be effective and sustainable.

At the tribal level, we know that tribes are the best providers of services for Native children and families, but they need improved access to funding, training, information, and workforce development. While NICWA continues to advocate for tribal access to federal and other funding streams, our staff provide information, training, and technical assistance to tribes and service providers working with Native families as well as directly to families. Improving and formalizing tribal-state relationships is another key strategy to improve ICWA compliance, and we continue to support the development and implementation of state ICWA laws around the country as well as other avenues to improve ICWA compliance and relationships with tribes.

At the federal level, there are clear needs for better data collection related to ICWA compliance, ICWA enforcement tools, and increased access to child welfare and related funding for tribes. NICWA has been working with the Biden Administration to restore ICWA data elements to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System—the comment period on the proposed regulation closed this spring and garnered overwhelming support for restoring the

data elements. We continue to work to improve tribal child welfare funding and strengthen ICWA implementation through reauthorization of the Title IV-B Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program in the Social Security Act.

Finally, we know that tribes across Indian Country benefit from improved public education about tribal sovereignty, tribal histories, the importance of culture as a protective factor, and ICWA's success as the gold standard of child welfare policy. NICWA is supporting public education and media engagement efforts that center the values, perspectives, and needs of Native children and families.

Securing unrestricted operating support is an important strategy for NICWA's ability to carry out this ambitious agenda. Unrestricted operating support is flexible, allowing staff to pivot as needed as conditions shift and windows of opportunity emerge to move the work of ICWA 2050 forward. We are grateful for the general operating support and project grants over the past year from our foundation partners, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Flagstar Foundation, Ford Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, May & Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, Meyer Memorial Trust, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and an anonymous foundation partner; our corporate partner the Pokémon Company International; and our tribal partners, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, Seminole Tribe of Florida, and the Suquamish Tribe. The significant contributions of these tribes and organizations to NICWA's ability to carry out this agenda demonstrate their belief in the power of this work for generations to come.





NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

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CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

Presenters are the heart and soul of this annual convening, recognized as the premiere national gathering dedicated to tribal child welfare and well-being.

Our conference will take place in Orlando, Florida on March 30–April 2, 2025.

Submit your proposal today!