

NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Fall 2024

The **LATEST**
INSIDE

Finding Strength
in Family





National Indian Child Welfare Association
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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 Fall issue of *NICWA News*. The theme of this issue is *Finding Strength in Family*.

We're at the end of summer, and kids are back in school. As I write this letter, I'm on late summer vacation to visit my parents, who relocated to Florida with my brother and his family last year. Most of my immediate family lived in the Washington, DC metro area for many years, meaning that I could frequently add on or squeeze in a quick visit with my parents, siblings, and nieces and nephews when I was in DC for work. A big segment of that family moved last year, making our visits less frequent and requiring more intention and planning.

For many of us, our extended families are the source of our identity—how we learn who we are in relationship to those who will play a significant role in caring for us and shaping our lives. Our families are our first teachers and frequently the context for our earliest experience of love and belonging. Our families ground and center us. They remind us that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Especially if you're the oldest child, like me, our families take away selfishness and expand our sense of ourselves. Our families are the training grounds for many of life's important lessons: how to work hard and cooperate, care for others, learn life skills, discover some of our gifts and talents, find the first of our life's purposes, cope with disappointment and loss, and experience healing. Our families may also teach us by example some of the things we don't want in our lives when we're old enough to make our own choices and choose our own path.

Our families may even be the place we test out some of our ideas about who and how we want to be in the world. In second grade, I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be a teacher or a professional roller skater. My three younger siblings were the subjects of many experiments as I explored the idea of being a teacher. They sat for endless hours doing "homework" worksheets I made for them and were the first registrants in the neighborhood bike safety class I created.

Because our families are so central to our life experiences, our work for the well-being of children necessarily includes families. This is a core value of NICWA—our cultures are organized around family relationships, so our services must be family-focused, addressing the whole family's needs.

The child welfare system in our country has its earliest roots in the Elizabethan poor laws. The system was founded on determining whether families were "deserving" of help. Child safety was attained through "rescuing" children from their families rather than helping families achieve safety through services, supports, and concrete resources. In many places, the child welfare system still too closely resembles this archaic model. Fortunately, many tribal nations are refounding their child welfare program based on their traditional values, worldviews, and teachings. Extended families are recognized as the natural safety net to meet the needs of children and support parents. The shift to valuing parents and families and partnering with them in formal and informal ways to keep kids safe and preserve their sense of identity and belonging as part of a large nurturing network is critical to help ensure well-being and permanency.

In appreciation of our families,

Sarah L. Kastelic

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD, MSW
(Alutiiq)



Biden Administration Expands Flexibility for Tribes to Provide Cultural Services in Federal Programs

On July 30, 2024, the Children's Bureau introduced [new policies](#) in its Child Welfare Policy Manual that expand flexibility for tribes operating the Social Security Act's Title IV-E program in partnership with state Title IV-E agencies. These policies clarify that tribes may offer prevention programs and services adapted to the culture and context of the tribal communities they serve—going beyond the programs and services approved by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#), which states are required to follow.

Under the new policies, tribes in agreements with states can now utilize cultural programs and services not approved by the Clearinghouse, provided they document the program's or service's effectiveness. Tribes must supply information on the programs and services offered, demonstrate how they meet the specific needs of the eligible children or caregivers, and include outcomes achieved from past use. While Title IV-E tribes can still use Clearinghouse-approved programs and services and culturally adapt them, they are no longer limited to these. Previous guidance for tribes operating Title IV-E directly from the federal government under the statutory language (ACYF-CB-PI-18-10) is also the basis for these new policy changes. Future updates to the guidance will likely include specific instructions for tribes with state agreements.

The Family First Prevention Services Act, passed by Congress in 2018 (P.L. 115-123), established a new program component within the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Program. The new component allows states and tribes with approved Title IV-E plans to seek reimbursement for eligible prevention services provided to children who were at imminent risk of foster care placement, as well as to their parents or relative caregivers. Like other parts of Title IV-E, this program reimburses services already provided as opposed to grant style funding. However, participation in the prevention services component of Title IV-E is optional for states. Whether a tribe can operate the prevention services component depends on whether the state with which they have agreement chooses to opt into the program. Currently, about 130 tribes operate Title IV-E programs through agreements with states.



If your tribe is operating the Title IV-E program through an agreement with a state and is interested in learning how to utilize this new policy guidance, please contact your [regional Administration for Children and Families office](#) and your state Title IV-E agency for more information.



Welcome New NICWA Staff!



Evan Roberts (Tlingit)
Community Development and Government Affairs Associate

Evan is Tlingit, with family from Klawock and Kuiu Island, Alaska; she grew up in Colorado. She joined NICWA as a community development and government affairs fellow in 2023 and is now a community development and government affairs associate. Evan graduated from Yale University with a Bachelor's in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration, with a focus in Indigenous studies. There, she was very involved in the Yale Native community, including serving as president of the Native and Indigenous Student Association at Yale and a mentor for the Yale Native American Cultural Center. Evan is passionate about advocating for Native communities and is excited to continue to work with the NICWA team.



Leyna O'Neill
Fiscal Assistant

Originally from New Jersey, Leyna moved to Oregon in 2018 in search of tall trees and mountain views. She officially joined NICWA's fiscal team in September 2024. She is excited to support the busy fiscal team and the crucial work that they do. As a curious person with a love of learning, she brings over ten years of operations experience across various industries from energy efficiency to fine chocolate. She enjoys digging into the numbers and ensuring efficient and accurate systems and processes. She considers it an honor to contribute her interests and skills to NICWA's mission and enjoys immersing herself in our organization's wealth of knowledge and kindness. Leyna lives in Portland, Oregon, and enjoys spending time with family and friends, hiking with her dog, and playing music.

Strength Through Connection

This August, our all-staff retreat unfolded as a vibrant celebration of connection and collaboration, reflecting the core values at the heart of NICWA's work. Gathered in a space filled with laughter and heartfelt conversations, we set out on a journey to explore our shared purpose, focusing on how our unique strengths—as revealed by the CliftonStrengths Assessment—can enhance our organizational impact.

With an engaging facilitator, we delved into our individual strengths through lively discussions and activities and shared an Indigenous meal. We gained valuable insights into our personal attributes and talents and how they manifest within and across our interdepartmental teams. This experience reinforced the importance of teamwork and mutual support, appreciating how our individual strengths blend to form a powerful, unified staff. As one staff member reflected, we gained “lessons that helped realize the meaning of the course and the moment we were in.”

An analysis of our collective strengths identified relationship building as our foremost attribute, a quality that defines how we approach our work. Together, we reaffirmed our commitment to uplift one another and the communities we serve, recognizing that our greatest impact comes from working as a cohesive team.



As we move forward, the connections and insights gained from this retreat will continue to strengthen our work towards our mission. Our unity—built on understanding and respect—remains our greatest strength as we work together to protect and support Native children and families.

How does your organization approach team building and professional development? We would love to hear your approach! Contact us at info@nicwa.org.

Bridging Systems to Strengthen and Support Family Placements



(Photo: Family Wellness Team)



Within the tribal child welfare system, finding strength in families, such as relative/kinship caregivers, has been characterized as a best practice for achieving the best outcomes for children in care. Relative/kinship caregivers provide

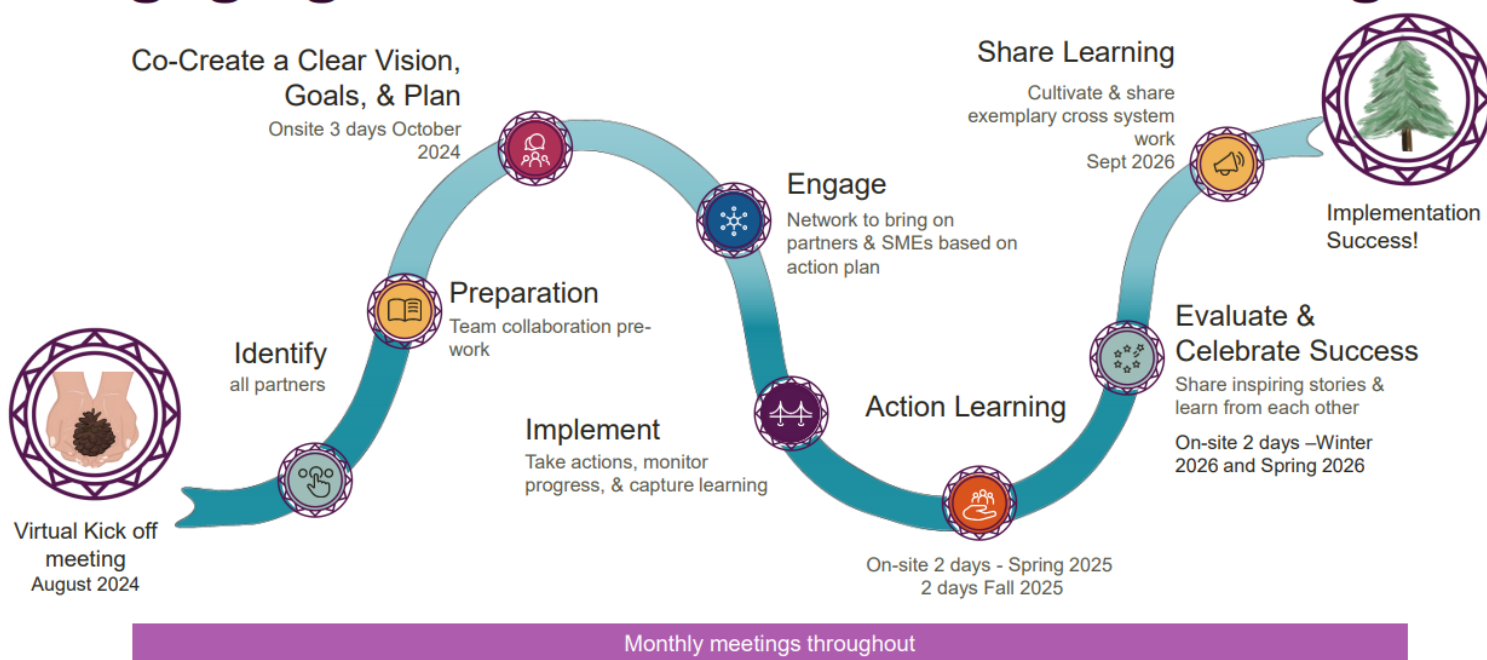
a natural safety net to meet the needs of children when parents are unable to do so. However, supporting these caregivers requires intention and effort, as they often face challenges navigating complex social services, child welfare, and court systems. These barriers can hinder

successful, sustainable placements. When service providers work together to create a safe, reliable system, caregivers are better equipped to support children, who, in turn, thrive and have an opportunity to stay connected to their families and tribal community.

NICWA follows a culturally based model known as the Relational Worldview (RWV) when providing technical assistance to tribal communities. This model draws on the cultural traditions and teachings of many tribes, offering a holistic approach to examining essential elements for systems change. As part of the *Bridging Systems for Kinship Families initiative*, NICWA will partner with and engage in collaborative learning with Oneida Nation Family Services during an onsite tribal community visit in October 2024. The goal is to collaboratively develop specific objectives identified by the department, their partners, and lived experience experts to collaborate across tribal and state government systems to better serve all kinship and relative families, whether they are involved in the child welfare system or not. Together, we will look for ways to address service barriers, break down silos, and leverage resources to maximize support to families.

NICWA is proud to collaborate with the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin Family Services Department on this project. Ten representatives across the nation's social services departments and a tribal council representative attended the virtual kick off meeting in August 2024. Attendees

Engaging in Collaborative Action Learning



shared a willingness to engage in this project as being rooted in one of the Oneida Nation's core values of Yukwahwa:tsi'le (Our family and our Nation). This value demonstrates shared ownership for the safety and well-being of children and families, beautifully showcasing the enthusiasm and will to work together in serving families in a way that reflects their tribal values.

Louise Padron, Oneida Nation Family Services supervisor, shared that stakeholders participating in the project are excited to develop new ways to better serve their relative caregivers. She stated, **“They are some of the most valuable resources for children in the community and often the least supported. This project will ensure that our traditional value of Twahwahtsilay^ (all of us are family) will be honored.”**

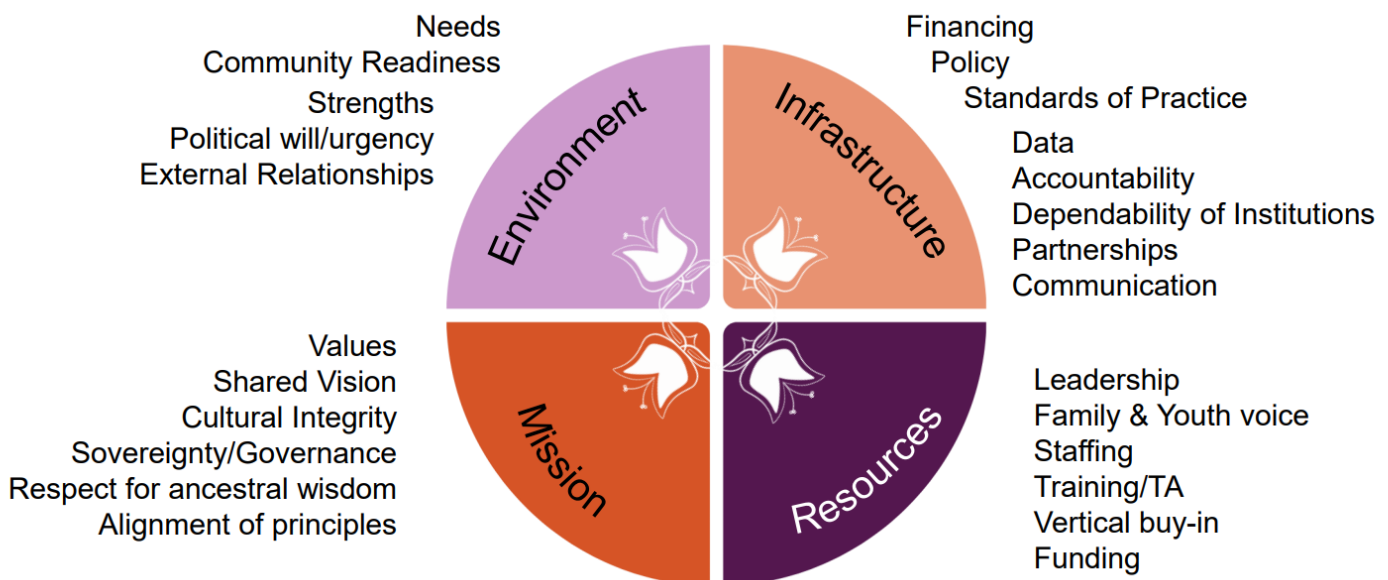
Facilitating this kind of systems change can seem like a daunting goal, especially with the disproportionate adversity the Oneida community has faced due to historical and intergenerational trauma. Relative caregivers within the Kinship Care Program are the most valuable and needed providers. They serve as a prevention resource, keeping at-risk kids out of the child welfare system and providing vital intervention support, serving as placement preferences that align with the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act.

Kinship care strengthens family preservation and wellness for the Oneida community, and NICWA is excited about the opportunity to work with and learn from the Kinship Care Program over the next two years.

Oneida Core Values

- Kahletsyalu'sla - ga lay ja lou sla
• The heartfelt encouragement of the best in each of us
- Kanolukhwa'sla - ga no lou kwa sla
• Compassion, caring, identity, and joy of being
- Ka?nikuhli:yo' - ga nee goo lee yo
• The openness of the good spirit and mind
- Ka?tshatst^'sla - ka jat stunh sla
• The strength of belief and vision as a People
- Kalihwi:yo' - ka lee wee yo
• The use of the good words about ourselves, our Nation and our future
- Yukwahwa:tsi'le - you kwa wa gee lay
• Our Family and our Nation
- Yukwatsi'stay^ - you kwa gee sta yunh
• Our fire, our spirit within each one of us

Relational World View: Essential Elements for Systems Change



Department of Interior Releases Volume II of Boarding School Report

On July 30, 2024, the Department of the Interior (DOI) released the second and final volume of its [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report](#). The first volume, published in May 2022, detailed the conditions under which Native children lived in federal Indian Boarding Schools. This second volume updates the list of federal Indian boarding schools and other institutions that supported the system, confirms the known number of Native children who died while attending these schools, identifies treaties between the U.S. government and tribes that implicated boarding schools, and estimates the amount of federal funding allocated to support the boarding school system and related policies.

Notable data from the report include:

- 417 federal Indian boarding schools were identified across 37 states.
- In addition to federal Indian boarding schools, 1,025 other institutions that advanced similar assimilation and education policy goals were identified.
- At least 973 American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children died while attending federal Indian boarding schools.
- There are at least 73 different marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 different school sites.
- Adjusted for inflation, the U.S. government appropriated more than \$23.3 billion between 1871 and 1969 to support the federal Indian boarding school system.

The DOI report notes that as the federal Indian boarding school system began to decline in the late 1960s, federal efforts to assimilate Native children shifted to state and public child welfare systems. These child welfare systems received increased federal funding in the 1960s and 1970s while removing large numbers of Native children from their families and placing them in foster care and adoptive homes, often with non-Native families far from their communities. The report identifies the devastating effects this shift had on Native children, families, and tribes, underscoring the significance of Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)'s enactment in 1978. The report states, "The enactment of ICWA marked

the United States' official repudiation of forced assimilation through child removal as national Indian policy" (DOI Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II, page 20). In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of ICWA in *Haaland v. Brackeen*, noting the law's continued relevance in protecting Native children and families.

NICWA has been active in efforts to address policies and impacts of the boarding school era by supporting DOI, tribal nations, and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS). NICWA has provided expert testimony on the impacts of state and private child welfare systems on Native children and families. In 2021, NICWA met with DOI staff to offer insights and support, and more recently provided testimony in support of the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools Policies Act ([H.R. 7227](#) and [S. 1723](#)). NICWA will continue to advocate for passage of this critical legislation, which seeks to establish a national commission to publicly explore, document, and recommended actions to address federal Indian boarding school policies.

National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services: Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

Due to traumatic life events and challenging early circumstances, children who have been involved in the child welfare system face heightened risks of developmental, health, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. These





National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services

Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

experiences significantly impact their well-being and family stability. The American Academy of Pediatrics has identified mental health issues as the greatest unmet need of children in foster care. Up to 80% of children in foster care have significant mental health issues, compared to 18-22% of the general population. We also know that the mental health of caregivers and parents is inextricably linked to their children's well-being. Children, especially those with developmental trauma, heal best in the context of relationships—specifically with family. This is why children and families need improved access to child welfare competent mental health services. When children and families who have experienced the child welfare system address their mental health needs, they

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should not face insurmountable barriers that impede their ability to achieve good outcomes. [The National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services](#) is focused on providing support to the behavioral health workforce to effectively meet the needs of all families, especially those who have historically been underserved. It is crucial to address equity and recognize tribal sovereignty in order to reduce barriers to care. Families need to receive services delivered by a workforce with the knowledge, skills, and experience to effectively meet their needs. The mental health providers they work with must understand the impact of their experiences with abuse, neglect, trauma, and loss, and their work must be culturally based and culturally and linguistically responsive. Being well skilled is an important part of the equation, but these mental health services must also be accessible to all who need them. Positive mental health outcomes for these children and families can be achieved when both child welfare and mental health systems work in partnership to ensure a skilled workforce is available to all. We must transform our systems to deliver what families need. Our children and families across the nation desire better. Please reach out to Mary Wichansky at Wichansky@adoptionssupport.org to join the conversation about how the National Center and their tribal experts can support you.

Relative/Kin Caregivers: A Pillar of Family Strength

On July 30, 2024, the Department of the Interior (DOI) released the second and final volume of its Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report. The first volume, published in May 2022, detailed the conditions under which Native children lived in federal Indian Boarding Schools. This second volume updates the list of federal Indian boarding schools and other institutions that supported the system, confirms the known number of Native children who died while attending these schools, identifies treaties between the U.S government and tribes that implicated boarding schools, and estimates the amount of federal funding allocated to support the boarding school system and related policies.

In partnership with the [Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center](#) (the Network), NICWA has developed a range of resources to assist service providers in helping relative/kin caregivers access useful information and services. For instance, NICWA recently published a tip sheet on [How Relative/Kin Caregivers Can Access Services and Advocate for Native Children in Their Care](#). This tip sheet was created to support relative/kin caregivers as they take on the responsibility of caring for a Native child, including help with accessing services, utilizing them effectively, and advocating for Native children in their care. While the tip sheet is not exhaustive, it highlights how collaboration with service providers can help relative/kin caregivers can effectively advocate for essential services and resources needed to promote positive outcomes for the children in their care.

Here are a few additional resources developed by [NICWA](#) and the Network that service providers can utilize when serving relative/kin families:

- [How Relative/Kin Caregivers Can Advocate for Relative Native Children in State Child Welfare Agency Custody](#): This tip sheet is designed for tribal service providers to share with relative/kin families seeking to become caregivers for minor relatives, or who want to support or advocate for a relative child in out-of-home placement.
- [GrandFacts—Fact Sheets for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children](#): These fact sheets are available for all 50 states and several tribes, including a recently published fact sheet with the Catawba Indian Nation. The fact sheets include data, information, and community services and programs (e.g., social supports, housing, education, legal, among other community programs and services).

Nominate a Champion for Native Children



Nominations for NICWA's 2025 Champion for Native Children are now open. Nominate a leader, social worker, case manager, or foster parent in your community who has demonstrated incredible care and commitment in the foster care system.

At our 43rd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference in Orlando, Florida, we will present two Champion for Native Children awards: one honoring an *individual* with an outstanding body of work, and the other recognizing the tireless contributions of a *tribe* or *organization* to the field. Thousands of tribal and state professionals dedicate their lives to their communities, families, and sacred traditions. This award is a gesture of gratitude to all the champions who make a difference.

Last year, NICWA recognized Department of Children and Family Services Director Julie Taylor from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation as our individual awardee and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community's Social Services Department as our organizational champion. Both have demonstrated work across generations to protect and best serve the interests of Native communities.

If you know someone who has created positive change for Native children, please submit a nomination application postmarked by Wednesday, January 8, 2025. Our selection committee will choose our awardees based on your application and their work. We will present both the individual and organization awards at our annual conference in Orlando, Florida, on March 30–April 2, 2025.

Please visit www.nicwa.org/champion-native-children to learn more and submit an application today!

Submit your presentation today for NICWA's Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida!

NICWA is accepting submissions for workshop presentations for our 43rd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference in Orlando, Florida, but time is running out! Submissions are due November 1st, and we encourage submissions that reflect this year's theme "Honoring the Sacred." Share your best practices and innovative approaches to ensuring the safety, dignity, and respect of every individual we have the honor and privilege of serving.

If you're reading this there's a good chance that you have spent the past year doing some incredible, innovative, and inspiring work in tribal child welfare, adoption, mental health, and/or family involvement, and we want to hear all about it.

Submit a presentation proposal today and share your success and knowledge with 1,800 attendees on March 30–April 2, 2025. These workshops are the heart and soul of our conference, and they are the reason NICWA's largest annual event continues to be the premiere national gathering dedicated to tribal child welfare and well-being.

We are pleased to offer a reduced registration fee for up to three presenters per selected workshop.

The richness of our conference directly reflects the diversity of presenters who share their experiences and contributions with the field. NICWA deeply values broad representation from presenters of varied backgrounds and communities.

Visit www.nicwa.org/call-for-presentations to learn more and start your application today!



Philanthropic Partners

United in Purpose: A Lifelong Commitment to ICWA and Native Children

We are deeply grateful for the generosity of our donor community. Your support enables us to strengthen our advocacy efforts for Native children, families, and communities. We are pleased to recognize some of our remarkable longtime supporters and new friends who share our commitment and vision for thriving Native children for generations to come. Thank you for your partnership in this important work.

“I believe wholeheartedly in the work NICWA does. In 1992, I was a business major in my first year of college at age 44. I've been a member of NICWA since. My advisor told me I needed to attend the NICWA conference for him. I had never been in a room full of that many Indians before (other than a powwow), let alone that many focused on ICWA issues. I was hooked! ICWA was my calling so I jumped into membership, and I will be a member until I die.”

Myrna Gooden, MSW (*Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians*) is a retired Social Worker and a longstanding Abalone NICWA member. Myrna's commitment to NICWA's mission and serving tribal communities includes presenting at numerous NICWA annual conferences, the U.S. Children's Bureau, the University of Utah, and the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Canada.

“I am drawn to NICWA's work ensuring tribal sovereignty, family preservation, and our culture.”

As a Clinical Consultant and Coral NICWA member, **Lea Ann Holder** (*Chickasaw Nation*) works to ensure students pursuing clinical licensure are well-informed about ICWA. Lea Ann integrates both micro and macro practices to promote health, safety, well-being, and self-determination in her work. She serves as a tribal liaison for the Local Indian Child Welfare Advisor Committee in SW Washington.



Three new NICWA donors shared these reasons for supporting NICWA's work:

“I am a foster parent. I am the maternal grandmother raising two grandsons that have autism and my granddaughter. We are Dine (Navajo). Thanks [to ICWA] for this service we have our grandkids. If it wasn't for the Brackeen decision, my grandkids would have been separated. I think you guys are doing a great job.”

—**Connie M.**

“To give back to our Indigenous brothers and sisters.”

—**Bret B.**

“I am a member of the Catawba Nation. We hope to be able to adopt a Catawba child in the near future. If we can do anything to help the cause, we will.” —**Caitlyn M.**



**THANK YOU TO ALL
OUR INVESTORS
WHO MAKE NICWA'S
MISSION POSSIBLE!**



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
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NICWA News

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43rd Annual
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43rd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference

Join us in Orlando, Florida or virtually on
March 30–April 2, 2025

Space is limited so register today. Early-bird
pricing ends January 31, 2025

Registration is now open!



Sponsorships are available!

Reach out to april@nicwa.org to learn about
exciting conference sponsorship opportunities.