Virtual 2020 Conference Report

38th Annual Virtual

Protecting Our Children
Honoring Our Past, Present, and Future Generations
The 2020 Protecting Our Children Annual Conference was groundbreaking. With your support, we went virtual!

On March 11, the NICWA Board of Directors met to decide how we should proceed with our annual conference, scheduled to take place in Denver, Colorado, on March 29–April 1. They made the difficult but necessary decision that we could not convene in person for the conference. Out of a strong desire to provide our training conference and support for our constituents despite the unfolding pandemic, we pivoted and took the event online. With only two and a half weeks to plan the virtual conference (while ourselves working remotely), we convened 917 participants from a cross-section of fields and interests, including child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice service providers; legal professionals; students; advocates for children; and tribal, state, and federal leaders. Thanks to the incredible support from our 46 sponsors, the remote gathering took shape.

The event began on Monday, March 30, with a blessing given by the Honorable Paul Day (Leech Lake), chief judge of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Court. NICWA’s executive director Sarah Kastelic (Alutiiq) served as the virtual conference host, welcoming participants to the three-day conference and our annual membership meeting held on a Zoom platform. Terry Cross (Seneca), NICWA founder and senior advisor, provided the opening keynote, “Child Welfare as Medicine.” The conference theme, “Honoring Our Past, Present, and Future Generations: Living Our Tribal Cultural Values and Beliefs,” was woven throughout the three keynote addresses and nine workshops offered.

Our sessions included:

- “Family Healing to Wellness Courts and Active Efforts” (Carrie Garrow [Saint Regis Mohawk], JD, and Lauren van Schilfgaarde [Cochiti Pueblo], JD)
- “Working with Substance-Abusing Families” (Terry Cross [Seneca], MSW, ACSW, LCSW, DHL)
- “Promising Practices in Tribal-State Child Welfare Collaborations” (David Simmons, MSW)
- “The Family First Prevention Services Act: Is It a Tool for Providing Culturally Based Services for Families at Risk?” (Jack Trope, JD, and David Simmons, MSW)

### Conference By the Numbers

- **3** full days of content
- **9** workshop sessions
- **19** workshop presenters
- **3** keynote speakers
- **1** membership meeting
- **917** attendees
- **88** newsfeed posts
- **573** new members
- **46** sponsors for a total of...
- **178,700** dollars raised
“Evaluating Culturally Based Programs: Positive Indian Parenting” (Puneet Sahota, MD, PhD; Deana Around Him [Cherokee], DrPH; and DeeAnna (D.J.) [Crow/Northern Cheyenne] Personius)

“Recruiting and Engaging Foster and Adoptive Families” (Alicia Groh, Rebekah Main [Wasco and Warm Springs], and Mary Boo)

“ICWA in the Courts and State Legislatures: A Legal Update Covering the Federal Court Challenges to ICWA and Opportunities for State ICWA Laws” (Kathryn Fort, JD)

“A Relational Approach to Transcending ACEs and Intergenerational Trauma” (Jessica Elm [Oneida], PhD; Jessica Saniguq Ullrich [Nome Eskimo Community], PhD; and LaVerne Xilegg Demientieff [Deg Xit’an, Athabscan], PhD)

“We R Native, Healthy Native Youth, and Celebrate Our Magic: Promoting Inclusivity in Adolescent Health and Well-Being” (Michelle Singer [Navajo], Morgan Thomas, and Thomas Ghost Dog [Burns Paiute, Oglala Lakota])

Throughout the event, participants connected with one other through the virtual platform’s chat bar, responded to polls, and posed questions to the speakers in the Q&A function. All of the materials were available in the conference app, and participants were encouraged to network with speakers and one another with the contact information in the app. NICWA recognized sponsors in each session.

On the second day, after her keynote address, Dr. Cindy Blackstock (Gitxsan First Nation), executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, was virtually presented with the annual Champion for Native Children award by Jocelyn Formsma (Swampy Cree), NICWA board member and executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres, and Terry Cross.

On the third day, White Bison, Inc.’s president and founder Don Coyhis (Mohican) gave a closing keynote, and NICWA board member Patricia Carter-Goodheart (Nez Perce) offered a blessing to send participants off in a good way.

NICWA’s first-ever virtual conference was a huge success and greatly appreciated by our participants, who all have access to the session recordings for an additional two months. With creativity and nimbleness in shifting to a remote gathering, NICWA was able to host the premiere national event addressing tribal child welfare and well-being, the Protecting Our Children Annual Conference.

What attendees are saying

“This was my first conference. I gained an understanding of the issues, technical terms, and history. The heart and inspiration from all the topics motivated and helped me.”

“The most important thing I gained was how community can come together and bring relevant information during a pandemic.”

“The amount of resources that all of the presenters offered was just wonderful and very, very fulfilling. I have never had input like it was from the “comments” portion of the interactive site. Real time resources and citations and contacts ... it was marvelous!”
Thank you to our generous sponsors!

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