

NICWA 2021 Annual Report
INTERDEPENDENCE

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MISSION

NICWA is dedicated to the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

VISION

Every Native child must have access to community-based, culturally appropriate services that help them grow up safe, healthy, and spiritually strong—free from abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and the damaging effects of substance abuse.

Dear NICWA Members, Donors, and Friends,



I am pleased to share with you the NICWA fiscal year 2021 annual report, *Interdependence*. Interdependence is a strong value in many Native cultures and in Indigenous cultures throughout the world. Our worldview, practices, and stories emphasize that human beings and all other aspects of creation, including animals, plants and the earth itself, rely on one another. We are relatives. How we conduct ourselves has consequences for our relatives. Everything we do affects the environment and all beings of creation. Our futures are intertwined.

Interdependence is an acknowledgement of the fact that we are different from one another, each a distinctive piece of creation.

We all have unique gifts and talents as well as challenges and gaps. Meeting the ups and downs of daily life as well as facing the extraordinary societal challenges to confront structural racism and systemic bias while halting climate change and healing our planet requires the wisdom, experience, and talents of the whole human race, in many cases learning from our environment and our relatives in creation. We need each other. We need all of us.

In the context of the child welfare system, we can't afford to lose one more family or one more child to the system. No one is expendable. While the long history of assimilationist policies and practices has damaged the natural safety net encoded in Native cultures, these teachings and practices can and have been reawakened. NICWA is helping bring back our positive ways of being with one another. Our reliance on our extended family and community to raise healthy children and keep kids safe has served us well since time immemorial. It continues to serve us well, and with our intentional focus on interdependence, it will continue to be so.

We can transform the formal child welfare system into a partnership between a child welfare agency and the community. The first line of support for a struggling family should be a neighbor or relative asking, "How can I help you?" long before a child welfare worker shows up at the door. This interdependence is the foundation for a new relationship that stops waiting for bruises or child abandonment—stops waiting until families are in crisis—and steps in as soon as we can tell that a family needs support. We can reorient the child welfare system to stop the intergenerational transmission of trauma and create a place where families can heal together.

Our interdependence binds us together in a shared future and common destiny. Treating one another, and the families we serve, as an acknowledgment of this value, is the way forward.

Stronger together,

Sarah Kastelic, PhD (Alutiiq)

Daroh kastelic

Executive Director

SUPPORTING FRONTLINE WORKERS

Protecting Our Children

As the world has changed, NICWA has adapted with it. In 2020, we saw how the ability to transition our programs virtually continued to meet the needs in Indian child welfare. On Monday, April 12, 2021, the 39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference began virtually for the second year due to the pandemic. Through 50 workshops, four general sessions, and a membership meeting, frontline workers from 47 states and provinces were able to connect with 142 speakers and engage in virtual networking. The theme, "Connectedness, Resilience, and Persistence," embodied that even in challenging times, our communities are resilient.

Traditionally, everything is done in a circle. We all have a place; we all contribute; and we all learn from each other. When we come together at annual conference, interdependence is realized. Conference brings together the diverse stakeholders and experts working day-in and day-out in child welfare, children's mental health, youth and family involvement, juvenile justice, and judicial and legal affairs for the shared purpose of addressing the needs of Native children and families. With 814 attendees and an average of 133 participants per workshop, sessions were recorded and watched 9,520 times.

"In the midst of addressing challenging issues, the conference was not just informative, but also a very inspiring and uplifting experience."

- NICWA Conference

Conference by the Numbers:

- 3 full days of content
- **50** workshops
- 4 general sessions
- 142 speakers
- 1 membership meeting
- 814 attendees
- 34 sponsors
- \$143,500 sponsor dollars raised
- 47 states and provinces represented
- 272 tribes represented
- 2 raffle prizes
- 133 participants on average per workshop
- 687 viewers on average at general session
- 9,520 sessions watched





39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference host sponsors Seminole Tribe of Florida (L) and Cowlitz Indian Tribe (R).

Fee-For-Service by the Numbers:

- **16** community-based trainings
- 7 Positive Indian Parenting trainings
- 3 Qualified Expert Witness trainings
- 2 Working with Substance-Abusing Families trainings
- **2** Enhancing Basic Skills for Tribal/First Nations Child Welfare Workers trainings
- 1 Understanding the Indian Child Welfare Act training
- 1 Child Protective Teams training
- 1 Tribal In-Home Services training

Training Institutes by the Numbers:

- 6 Positive Indian Parenting trainings
- **5** Enhancing Basic Skills for Tribal/First Nations Child Welfare Workers trainings
- 1 Working with Substance-Abusing Families training
- 1 Understanding the Indian Child Welfare Act training
- 320 total frontline child welfare workers trained



Cornhusk dolls with Choctaw Nation at the 39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference.

Trainings

At NICWA, in developing our training offerings, our intention is to meet the needs of frontline workers and the families, children, and communities they serve.

Many of the Native families who come into contact with the child welfare system are dealing with substance abuse issues, and for several years, we have received increased requests for training related to working with substance-abusing families in child welfare. This year, thanks to a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust, NICWA significantly revised and expanded our Working with Substance-Abusing Families (WWSAF) curriculum and training, and also created an online version of the training. The WWSAF curriculum is intended to be delivered through a two- or three-day in-person or virtual training in community or at a NICWA training institute. The online training is a nine-module interactive course that can be completed independently at your own pace. Both trainings are designed to give frontline tribal child welfare workers a culturally grounded overview of effective strategies for working with substance-abusing families from both direct service and systems collaboration points of view.

As NICWA continues to adapt to today's virtual world, we are enhancing the ways that communities have access to professional development and training. This fiscal year, NICWA conducted 16 fee-for-service community trainings or technical assistance sessions.

One popular topic was "Healing the Healer." Directed at frontline service providers, this curriculum acknowledges that work with families and children who are struggling with challenges that bring them to the attention of the child welfare system can be both incredibly rewarding and, especially because of the high workload, draining and isolating. It emphasizes that health and well-being are achieved through a balance between mind, body, spirit, and context and that, as human beings, we have the ability to do things that build our intentional resilience. Awareness of the state of our own mind, body, spirit, and context allows us to intentionally take action to strengthen our balance. In order to effectively serve our communities, we need to tend to our own balance and well-being, cultivating our resilience and ability to do work in service to our community.

It emphasizes that health and well-being are achieved through a balance between mind, body, spirit, and context and that, as human beings, we have the ability to do things that build our intentional resilience.

DECOLONIZING CHILD WELFARE

Child Welfare Redesign

How child welfare systems in the United States interact with Native families has been a long-held concern for tribal nations, urban Indian organizations, and other advocates for Native children, but within the last two years there has been increasing awareness of and attention to the need for a fundamental reform of child welfare. With generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, NICWA was able to host seven regional and two national listening sessions with participants from Indian Country on the topic of child welfare redesign. The listening sessions were designed to provide Native people with lived experience in child welfare, tribal child welfare professionals, tribal leadership, urban Indian organizations, and state Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) managers with an opportunity to share their experience about what works and doesn't work to help keep Native children safe. The sessions were held with tribes from every region of Indian Country, NICWA members, and in conjunction with NICWA's annual Protecting Our Children conference, with a total of 445 participants across the national and regional sessions. NICWA gathered information about what helps and hinders efforts to keep Native children safe, what role ICWA plays in supporting families, and what supports and resources advocates need to effectively participate in discussions and advocacy in redesigning child welfare. Four briefing papers, nine listening session reports, and a national summary of the listening session reports were produced.



Touchstones of Hope Dialogues

The Touchstones of Hope movement is a cornerstone in the work to decolonize child welfare for Indigenous children and families. In partnership with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, NICWA facilitated seven sessions as a bi-monthly dialogue series for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from the United States and Canada to actively engage in conversations about the Touchstones of Hope and the five principles that are at its foundation: self-determination, holistic approach, culture and language, structural interventions, and non-discrimination. The five principles reflect the unique context of Indigenous communities, tribes and First Nations, and organizations and serve as the foundation of the movement.

Redesigning Child Welfare Services: Supporting the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

For several years, NICWA has worked with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa to strengthen their child welfare program. This work began with a program review that included perspectives on how the program was serving the community from tribal leadership, service providers, community members, birth and foster parents, and foster youth. It also included reviewing tribal code, intergovernmental agreements, funding streams, budgets, policies and procedures, and case records. The review pointed out strengths and challenges along with recommendations to improve service coordination and collaboration to better serve families and children both on and off the reservation. Additionally, the Band wanted to take on administering some services that the county was currently providing.

In the last year, the Fond du Lac child welfare department has used their community's vision and values for how to keep their children safe to develop a practice model and identify the array of services needed to support their community. This includes thinking about the infrastructure as well as workforce and training needed to deliver the services. Supported by NICWA, a broad-based group of tribal program leaders and direct service providers have re-envisioned how their programs and services can work together to keep children safe and help families heal together. The team believes that their culture is their single greatest resource for helping families, and they are drawing on their culture to inform their programs and services.



ADVOCATING FOR NATIVE CHILDREN

Protect ICWA Campaign

In April 2021, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals published its en banc decision in Brackeen v. Haaland (formerly Brackeen v. Bernhardt), a case challenging the constitutionality of the ICWA. The multi-part decision was 325 pages long. Given its length and complexity, NICWA and our Protect ICWA Campaign partner, the Native American Rights Fund, provided a two-part webinar series to discuss the decision, its application, the implications for tribal and state agency practice in child welfare, and the potential next steps, including the possibility of an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Webinars included discussion regarding child welfare practice implications following the Fifth Circuit's en banc decision along with advocacy strategies for tribal leaders and child welfare workers regarding proper implementation of ICWA. In October 2021, 180 tribal nations and 35 Native organizations, 25 states and the District of Columbia, and Casey Family Programs and 10 child welfare and adoption organizations filed amicus briefs to protect ICWA with the United States Supreme Court. NICWA, along with Protect ICWA Campaign partners, will continue to advocate to uphold ICWA and its critical protections for Indian children and families who are in state court child custody proceedings.

NICWA Advocacy Scores Wins for Native Children and Families

Despite the pandemic and changes in the federal administration and Congress, NICWA was able to find ways to advance services and funding for Native children and families. A long-time goal for NICWA has been to restore ICWA grants for off-reservation Indian organizations. This funding provided grants to Indian organizations that were helping Native children and families in state child welfare systems find appropriate services and advocate for proper implementation of ICWA. The funding was especially helpful in cases where the child's tribe was not available to intervene.

In federal fiscal year 2020, after years of relentless NICWA advocacy, the funding was restored; in fiscal year 2021, off-reservation ICWA grants were once again awarded. Other notable advocacy achievements include:

- Language in House and Senate bills (H.R. 485 and S. 1927) to increase the tribal set-aside in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act from a shared 1% with migrant populations to a full 5% for tribal community-based child abuse prevention programs (House passed and Senate committee passed).
- Federal agency guidance to increase flexibility for states and tribes to use culturally-adapted prevention programs and services under the Title IV-E Prevention Services Program (see ACYF-CB-IM-21-04).
- Legislation to reauthorize and increase funding to two grant programs and a resource center for tribes under the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act. The legislation (H.R. 1688 and S. 2326) passed the House and was introduced in the Senate, with NICWA Board President Gil Vigil giving testimony at a hearing before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.
- With generous support of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, NICWA was able to provide regular written updates and presentations to tribal leaders, tribal program directors, and state and private agency allies on efforts and strategies to protect ICWA in the context of the Brackeen v. Haaland case.

Efforts Continue to Empower Native Families in State Child Welfare Systems

Since NICWA's inception, we have taken phone calls and responded to letters and emails, primarily from parents and relatives of Native children in state foster care systems, asking for information and resources on how to protect their rights and get the services they need. The San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and Spirit Mountain Community Fund have been generous supporters of this work. While NICWA saw a decrease in the overall number of requests in 2021, the needs of families were notably more serious with the complications of the pandemic and subsequent changes in availability of services. The overall decrease in number of requests mirrors a downturn in the numbers of child abuse and neglect cases being reported nationwide for all children but is expected to increase as the pandemic subsides.





TOP: Image of public service announcement of NICWA's new online resources developed to address child abuse and neglect investigations. BOTTOM: Terry Cross, NICWA Founder and Senior Advisor, and his son in big bird's nest while working with Sesame Street in Communities.

New Resources for Families and Professionals

For families involved in the child welfare system, the experience is often confusing and frightening. Child welfare workers ask a lot of questions, and the system has a variety of steps and processes that can often feel intimidating. Listening to Native families who have been in the child welfare system reveals how difficult it can be to get the support and information you need to navigate the system. With generous support from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and Spirit Mountain Community Fund, NICWA developed a series of new public service announcements for family members who are involved in the child welfare system. The new resources address child abuse and neglect investigations, removal of children into out of home placements, participation in voluntary services plans, and private adoption considerations. NICWA also revised our Indian Child Welfare Act: A Family's Guide and A Guide to Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act for child welfare professionals. Improving and increasing access to resources for Native families and those who serve them is a critical step to improving services and outcomes for Native children and families.

Sesame Street in Communities

NICWA's Founder and Senior Advisor, Terry Cross, has been working with Sesame Street in Communities over the past few years to help support foster parents and providers who support foster families. This work has included a new muppet character, Karli, who is living in a foster home on Sesame Street with her "for-now family," along with a series of videos, interactive tools, printables, articles, and a storybook about managing and expressing big feelings that are designed to support children and adults in the world of foster care. This fiscal year, NICWA served as an advisor on Paving the Way for Equality in Early Childhood, providing considerations and messages to help change perspectives and act against systemic racism. The considerations included the diversity among tribal nations, the history between the US government and tribal nations, and the rates at which American Indian and Alaska Native peoples experience prejudice, implicit bias, bigotry, and racism, along with messages to combat negative stereotypes.

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STRENGTHENING POLICY AND PRACTICE WITH DATA

2021 brought more opportunities to advocate for better research and data about Native children, families, and communities to inform federal, state, and tribal policy and child welfare practice. NICWA continued our 30+ years of advocacy to require new state collection of data elements related to how children subject to the protections of the Indian Child Welfare Act are faring in the child welfare system through the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System. Additionally, more broadly, NICWA advocated for collection of strengths-based data about families (as opposed to just deficits) and to aggregate and disaggregate existing data in ways that better support tribal decision-making.

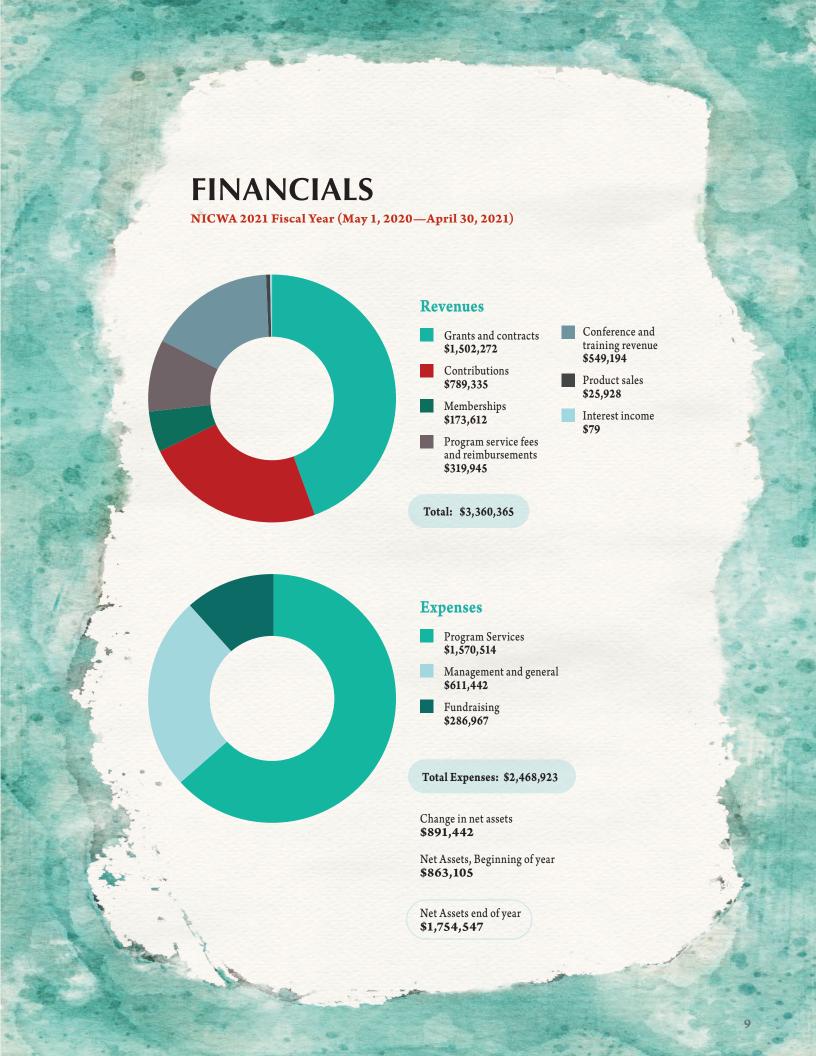
NICWA participated in an effort by Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the William T. Grant Foundation to develop and prioritize a National Research Agenda for a 21st Century Child Welfare System. This ambitious project, to identify the information and data the country needs to effectively transform our child welfare system, was based on values to be bold and transformative; engage individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system throughout; to focus on child, parent/caregiver, and family-level outcomes, and to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. NICWA partnered with the Child Welfare League of America to specifically invite feedback about research and data needs and priorities from tribal and urban Indian stakeholders. Evidence gaps in the areas of community-based prevention of maltreatment, child protective services and the prevention of foster care, and outof-home care were identified, and participants in the process to develop the agenda focused on the goals of reducing child maltreatment and promoting child, family, and community well-being while narrowing inequities. The agenda should be finalized and publicly available by December 2021.

Positive Indian Parenting

The Positive Indian Parenting (PIP) curriculum was developed by NICWA and has been in use for over 30 years. Thousands of parents and caregivers have been trained using PIP, and it has a strong reputation among communities, practitioners, and policymakers as a culturally specific curriculum that improves the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families. PIP is unique in that it has standard content that is covered in all communities, but there are also parts of the curriculum that may be tailored to each local community's culture and context. The curriculum was written to be delivered in either a one-on-one or group format, yet it had not been formally evaluated using either delivery approach. With recent federal investments in one-on-one, prevention-based, parent skills training, there is a clear need for greater understanding of the effectiveness of one-on-one delivery of PIP.

Native communities have valued the PIP curriculum for decades, and developing a stronger evidence base for it could allow access to new sources of funding. The recent Family First Prevention Services Act's emphasis on prevention-based parent skills training creates an opportunity for states and tribal nations with direct Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance funding to access additional support from the U.S. Children's Bureau.

Few culturally specific programs and services for Native communities have been evaluated in a way that meets evidence criteria for federal funding. To be both culturally sensitive and scientifically rigorous, the PIP pilot evaluation study relies on strong partnerships with a tribe. Together, we examined the feasibility of using a randomized, waitlist-controlled study design and data collection procedures intended for use in a future full-scale evaluation of the effectiveness of one-on-one delivery of the Positive Indian Parenting (PIP) curriculum for Native parents and caregivers.



Members by the Numbers:

There are NICWA members in **40 U.S. states**

There are NICWA members in **5 Canadian provinces**

There are NICWA members in 4 countries

There are 1,044 individual members

Over 150 tribal and organizational members

There are 1,200 total members

View the full list of NICWA Members.

View the full list of NICWA Donors.

Become a member of NICWA today!

Build your knowledge, join our national network, and work together to protect Native children and families for generations to come.

VIEW NICWA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS HERE.

NICWA MEMBERS

NICWA members: when you give feedback, we listen. Every year, during our annual conference, we ask members to share their thoughts and experiences about their work. Learning more about what's important to you helps us shape benefits, webinars, and networking events. We look to our 1,200 NICWA members for both insight and direction, and we are fortunate to be supported by actively engaged individuals, organizations, and tribes.

During the 2021 fiscal year, we sought presenters for our membership webinars who had both perspective and information to share. Nearly 400 NICWA members attended eight webinars with topics like "Healing from the Trauma of Indian Boarding Schools," "Re-Connecting Youth to Native American Culture," and "Decolonizing Child Welfare." NICWA makes these presentations and recordings available to members because we understand the importance of accessible educational tools.



NICWA Vice President Angela Connor and panelists from the 39th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference.

NICWA held seven Peer Support for Helping Professionals meetings, which are monthly online gatherings for those who benefit from networking, peer support, and problem solving with social workers, clinicians, community activists, and Indian child welfare workers. These sessions have been attended by people from a wide variety of backgrounds, and we've had two guest presenters who helped facilitate. The Peer Support for Helping Professionals meetings have become a great example of finding community support in digital spaces.

While we hold onto the collective hope that 2022 will be a better year for all, NICWA has worked hard to ensure our members are able to find resources, education, and connection virtually. Ensuring that we stay connected is critical to our strength, and we need to be strong to protect the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families. We wouldn't be here without your support, so thank you for championing our work!



FUNDER SPOTLIGHT

The Pokémon Company International (TPCi) is a new partnership this fiscal year as NICWA received a generous gift from the Seattle-based global entertainment company to support the organization's mission to strengthen the well-being of Native children and families. "As a company committed to improving the lives of children and supporting social equity, we appreciate the work that NICWA does," said Shasha Richardson, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Corporate Social Responsibility for TPCi. "Our partnership helps to build a future of equity and acknowledgment for tribal and Native nations, children and families." Both NICWA and TPCi place value on long-term and lasting relationships and are pleased to announce renewed TCPi support in 2021.

Thank you, TPCi, for being a valued partner.



You can donate online or call 503.222.4044 during the hours of 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PT.

If you would prefer to mail your donation, please download our donation form and mail with your check to:

NICWA 5100 S Macadam Ave, Suite 300 Portland, OR 97239

HOW TO SUPPORT OUR WORK

Join us in celebrating our successes and preparing NICWA for the year ahead with your special year-end gift. With your support, NICWA can continue our work to prevent child abuse and neglect, break the cycle of trauma, and help families heal.

In 2021, supporters like you gave NICWA the resources to:

- Train over 2,000 frontline workers who serve tribal communities with culturally specific trainings. In response to COVID-19, our trainings moved online, increasing the number of people that we can train.
- Respond to over 1,000 annual email and phone call requests for information about the Indian Child Welfare Act. This work helps families, service providers, and legal professionals get connected to essential resources to protect Native children in crisis.
- Support and connect 814 Native child welfare workers through our 2021 annual conference. This year's virtual conference highlighted successful strategies for developing effective child welfare services for Native families.
- Relentlessly advocate for Native children. Whether
 it is meeting with the Biden Administration or
 testifying at a virtual congressional hearing,
 NICWA stands up for Native children and
 families, defends tribal rights, and seeks
 equitable access to resources for American
 Indian and Alaska Native families.

NICWA Board and Staff

2021 Fiscal Year

OFFICERS

President - Gil Vigil (Tesuque Pueblo)
Vice President - Angela Connor (Choctaw)

Secretary - W. Alex Wesaw (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi)

Treasurer - Gary Peterson (Skokomish)

MEMBERS

Teressa Baldwin (Inupiaq)
Mikah Carlos (Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community)
Patricia Carter-Goodheart (Nez Perce)
Rochelle Ettawageshik (Little Traverse Bay
Band of Odawa Indians)
Jocelyn Formsma (Swampy Cree)
Debra Foxcroft (Tseshaht First Nation)
Luke Madrigal (Cahuilla Band of Indians)
Aurene Martin (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa)
Robert McGhee (Poarch Band of Creek Indians)

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John Shagonaby (Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians) Brad Earl (Nez Perce descent) Sherry Salway Black (Oglala Lakota) Allard Teeple (Bay Mills Indian Community) Victor Rocha (Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians) Derek Valdo (Acoma Pueblo)

Lance Sanchez (Tohono O'odham Nation) Mary Tenorio (Santo Domingo Pueblo)

NICWA Staff*

EXECUTIVE

Sarah Kastelic (Alutiiq), Executive Director
Elizabeth Brando (Cherokee Nation), Development Director
Jocelyn Orr, Individual Giving Manager
Jeremy Chase-Israel, Member Relations Manager
Amory Zschach (Cheyenne Arapaho),
Strategic Communications Manager
April Ybarra Black, Executive Assistant
to Sarah Kastelic and Library Specialist

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Tia Begay (Diné), Fiscal Director
Betty Bryant, Project Coordinator
Lindsay Early (Comanche), Deputy Director
Lauren Shapiro, Director of Events and Training
Nicole Stewart, Human Resources Coordinator
Vilma Vere, Fiscal Assistant
Sarah Wittmann, Events Manager

PROGRAM

Terry Cross (Seneca), Founder and Senior Advisor Alexis Contreras (Grand Ronde), Research Assistant Puneet Sahota, Research Director David Simmons, Director of Government Affairs and Advocacy

*As of the end of the 2021 fiscal year, 4/30/2021



Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

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