

NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Spring 2023



The **LATEST**
INSIDE

Healing Our Spirits:
Nurturing and Restoring Hope



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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

Message from the Executive Director

Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,

Welcome to the Spring issue of *NICWA News*. This issue embraces the 41st Annual Protecting Our Children Conference theme, *Healing Our Spirits: Nurturing and Restoring Hope*. As Indigenous peoples, we know a lot about healing. Healing is culturally specific and nonlinear. It happens collectively with our families and communities. It's not all or nothing, but a life-long journey of reestablishing our balance. Healing starts with truth telling and feeling all of our feelings because we're strong enough to feel them and survive. We have ways of commemorating loss, grieving, focusing on survival, and expressing gratitude for our ancestors. Our cultures guide us to heal ourselves, our families, and our communities. Through healing ourselves, we can stop the transmission of intergenerational trauma, help families heal together, and protect our children.

Often healing is a natural result of culture, relationships, spirituality, and the balance across our mind, body, spirit, and context. We heal for ourselves and others. Each Indigenous nation's cultural teachings originated and evolved with our ancestors who were connected with our natural environment and the spiritual realms with teachings that the people needed to survive and thrive. Today, those teachings still exist in many tribes, and even for those whose culture has been devastated or diminished by colonization, they have access to the same spiritual realm that gave the teachings to our ancestors.

Tribal teachings about healing share common elements. Culture, hope, safety, gratitude, respect, laughter, our medicines, the land, truth, tears, stories, honesty, trust, generosity, spirituality, courage, wisdom, kindness, faith, and love all heal us and are all intertwined. Living these and embedding them in our policies, service structures, practice models, and daily work is the challenge.

In times of uncertainty and stress, when we lose balance and a sense of well-being, we come together in small and large groups. We gather our energy, share burdens and joys, and reaffirm the indispensable truth that we are here and will continue to be here. We are healing ourselves for ourselves, for the seven generations before us, and for the seven generations to come.

As you'll read in this issue, we're on the heels of an incredibly successful 41st annual conference, the largest in our history. We welcomed 1,802 people to our first in-person conference since 2019, and it was good to be together again! Our conference is a powerful reminder of the commitment and impact of those who work in tribal and state helping programs and systems. Thousands of you have dedicated your careers to serving Native families and strengthening their well-being, intervening to stop the intergenerational transmission of trauma, and creating a place for families to heal. Thank you for your hard work and for your heart for Native families.

With gratitude for your service to Native children and families,

Sarah L. Kastelic

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD (*Alutiiq*)





(Pictured left to right: Sam Daughety, Amy DuBose, Shannon Keller O'Loughlin, Frank Ettawageshik, Sarah Kastelic, and David Simmons at the NCAI Annual Conference receiving the National Congress of American Indian's 2023 Government Leadership Award on behalf of the Protect ICWA Campaign)

Supreme Court Addresses Backlog of Cases While Indian Country Waits for *Haaland v. Brackeen* Decision

The United States Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case (21-376) on November 9, 2022, with many court watchers expecting a decision late in the term given the complexity of the questions the court is considering. Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court has come under some [scrutiny](#) regarding the slow pace of decisions being released this term, with many expecting a larger than usual number of decisions coming at the end of the term in June. In *Haaland v. Brackeen*, the court was asked to assess whether the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was constitutional on several different grounds. Materials for the case, including oral argument [audio](#) and [transcripts](#), are available online at the Native American Rights Fund's website, the [Tribal Supreme Court Project](#). NICWA is monitoring the release of case decisions from the U.S. Supreme Court and working with tribal leaders and other allies to prepare communication and policy materials in response to the decision.

NICWA, National Congress of American Indians, Native American Rights Fund, and Association on American Indian Affairs are working together as the Protect ICWA Campaign to serve and support Native children, youth, and families through upholding ICWA. Together, the Campaign works to inform policy, legal, and communications strategies with the mission to uphold and protect ICWA. You can find information on how to support ICWA by following the Protect ICWA Campaign @ProtectICWA on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Tribal Family Fairness Act Reintroduced

Congresswoman Sidney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) with co-sponsors Representative Don Bacon (R-NE) and Representative Sharice Davids (D-K) introduced the Tribal Family Fairness Act ([H.R. 2762](#)) in the House of Representatives on April 20, 2023. The bill would provide additional funding for tribes under the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (Title IV-B, Subpart Two under the Social Security Act) that funds flexible family preservation and support services. The legislation also seeks to streamline the grant application and reporting requirements for tribes and increase funding for tribal court improvement grants for tribal family courts. The legislation is an important step forward in helping tribes secure more flexible child welfare funding that can help prevent removal of children from their homes and strengthen families so children can be returned home safely. The legislation was introduced first in the 117th Congress in 2021 but needed to be reintroduced to be considered in the current 118th Congress. Senate members are considering introducing a version of this legislation in the Senate as well.

Make Your Voice Heard

We encourage NICWA members and advocates for Native families to join us in our support to pass the Tribal Family Fairness Act. As a constituent, you can have a real impact by asking your representative to sign on as a co-sponsor and support the Tribal Family Fairness Act.

NICWA Provides Testimony on DHHS Budget

Each year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) holds a tribal budget consultation, typically between March and April, to solicit testimony on DHHS programs that fund tribal governments and urban Indian programs. The budget consultation begins DHHS development of the budget they will submit to Congress the following year and allows tribal nations and urban Indian programs to provide information on the need for DHHS funding, priorities, and funding level recommendations. This year, the tribal budget consultation occurred on April 19, 2023; it was the 25th annual budget consultation.

You can read NICWA's testimony on child welfare and children's mental health programs, provided by NICWA President Gil Vigil, at www.nicwa.org/latest-news/25th-annual-DHHS-tribal-budget-testimony.

Meet NICWA's Newest Staff



Training Manager
Allie Brady

Allie Brady is excited to join our team as NICWA's training manager! She is a professional who comes to us with nearly 10 years of experience designing and implementing effective training programs. Allie says she is looking forward to helping create training that meets NICWA's high standards and is in line with the strong values and priorities of the organization. Allie is passionate about making change by empowering individuals and organizations to achieve their goals through high-quality education and training.

Outside of work, you can catch Allie running on some of Oregon's beautiful trails or walking her two dogs, Charlie and Ollie, around Gresham. Allie also enjoys poetry and gardening.

Announcing Organizational Changes and Promotions

"NICWA's growth as an organization is a testament to our cultural values and the steadfast focus we have to our mission dedicated to American Indian and Alaska Native children and families," said **NICWA's Executive Director Sarah Kastelic**. "To continue delivering our annual conference in a good way and planning for the long-term future of NICWA's membership program, NICWA's events and training and membership departments have transitioned from operations to the program department. I am pleased to announce the following promotions."

April Ybarra-Black, Development Manager:

Born and raised in San Diego, California, April moved to Portland, Oregon, to earn a bachelor's degree in history from Reed College and also holds a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Washington's iSchool. After spending a year serving as the AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer program specialist at the Native American Youth and Family Center in Portland, April joined NICWA in 2010 as a member of the project support team and became executive assistant to Sarah Kastelic in 2013. In 2023, April was promoted into her current role as development manager, where she uses her background in research and information organization to secure resources that support NICWA's important work in service of the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

Mariah Garcia, Executive Assistant to the

Sarah Kastelic: Mariah was born and raised in central California and is a descendant of the Numu Kutzadika (Paiute) people of Mono Lake as well as Tachi-Yokut.

She is a graduate of Humboldt State University, where she received a bachelor's degree in socio-cultural anthropology. Mariah spent those four years intensively studying issues on gender, culture, race, colonialism, language, and power. She also supplemented her coursework with an independent ethnographic research project, an internship, volunteer work, and other extracurriculars. During her time there, Mariah discovered her passion for social justice work, public health, and community building. She is excited to apply her skills, experiences, and passion in her new role as executive assistant.

Amory Zschach, Communications Director:

Amory is an enrolled citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes. Amory joined NICWA in May 2018 and was promoted to communications director in November 2022. She brings deep experience in media relations, crisis communications, content strategy, and brand management for nonprofits. For the past 5 years, Amory has focused on building NICWA's strategic communications, engaging NICWA's audiences, and influencing the public's understanding and support of the Indian Child Welfare Act through the Protect ICWA Campaign. Amory will continue to lead strategic communications and earned media, while supervising the expansion of NICWA's communications team and efforts.

Please join us in congratulating April, Mariah, and Amory as they take on these new responsibilities.

41st Annual Protecting Our Children Conference



“...That empowering and humble feeling of being in a room with almost 2,000 like-minded Indigenous people who care about the Indian Child Welfare Act and are trying to make positive changes in their community.”

“I will be re-evaluating the approaches I’m taking when working with families and more mindful about using the techniques I’ve learned and working on finding ways that I can help support myself and my work in decolonizing how we do the work that we do.”

“I really appreciate all the hard work and effort that goes into putting on such a huge and important event and just want to thank everyone that helped to make this possible because it really does help to support the work we do for the Native families we work with.”

Healing Our Spirits: Nurturing and Restoring Hope

Each year, NICWA hosts the largest national gathering on American Indian and Alaska Native child advocacy issues. In April, we held our largest conference yet with over 1,800 attendees representing 380 tribal and First Nations peoples. The conference theme, *Healing Our Spirits: Nurturing and Restoring Hope*, reminded us that, as Native people, we have lots of knowledge about and experience with the process of healing. Our hope was to provide a space where Native people could come together and support our collective healing.

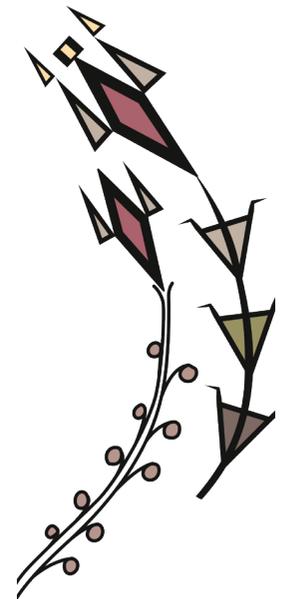
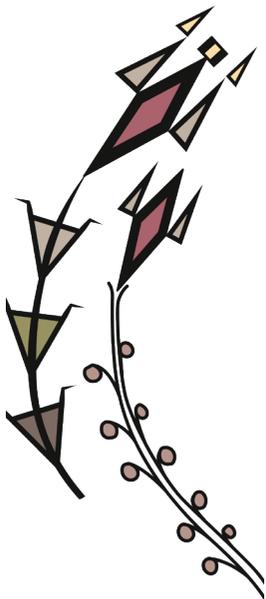
During the four days of our gathering, over 85 keynote speakers and workshop presenters provided meaningful and interactive programming, space for conversation and collaboration, and an opportunity for attendees to learn more about tribal/First Nations child welfare and Indigenous well-being. Each workshop room was filled with speakers and attendees representing the beautiful diversity of our communities and included a wide range of experts in their fields: tribal child welfare workers, tribal leaders, students, advocates, and legal professionals.

A few key moments of gathering for the 41st annual conference included the **National Day of Prayer for Native Children**, where people from many backgrounds came together to focus their prayers on the well-being of children and their families and Tuesday’s banquet dinner. During banquet, after partaking in heavy but meaningful work for two full days, we honored **NICWA’s 2023 Champions for Native Children**, individual awardee Karan Kolb (*Luiseño*) and organizational awardee the Pueblo of Pojoaque Family & Children’s Services. Everyone came together and held hands and participated in a round dance so large that it took up the entire space. Shortly after, before parting for the night, laughter filled the room as comedian Marc Yaffee (*Navajo*) took stage, leaving us to part in the evening in a good way. Conference attendees were able to make vital connections with individuals and organizations across Indian Country, while forming new and sustaining existing networks. Overall, the ability to not only learn collectively but to also just be in community was a healing balm after years of meeting virtually.



Conference By the Numbers

- 1 Snowstorm
- 2 Dance Groups
- 4 Days
- 14.5 CEU Credits
- 34 Volunteers
- 39 Exhibitors
- 46 States and Provinces
- 380 Tribal and First Nations
- 40 Sponsors
- 73 Workshops
- 268 Member Surveys
- 131 Presenters
- 315 International Attendees
- 601 Store Items Sold
- 1,304 App Logins
- 976 New Members
- 1,802 Attendees
- 5,712 Cups of Coffee
- \$211,496 of Sponsorships



[WATCH THE VIDEO HERE](#)



The Seminole Tribe of Florida supports NICWA in partnering to progress in our fight to protect our children. The Seminole Tribe of Florida Advocacy Program's goal is to promote and support the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

You Inspire Us

The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians was honored to host the 41st Annual Protecting Our Children Conference.

We are deeply dedicated to ensuring Indian children stay with Indian families and staunchly defend the rights of Indian children so they will never again endure the devastating consequences of generations of cultural genocide.



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Programs

Grandfamilies Guidance: Considerations for Tribal Child Welfare Programs

Historically, the traditional systems of child-rearing in Indigenous communities created a natural system of child safety, family support, and community wellness. While who is considered family varies by culture, responsibility for the care of children is often embraced not solely by the child's birth parents but also the child's extended family, close family friends, and community members. Although relative caregivers are central to child safety and well-being, little attention has been paid to ensuring that child welfare policies honor and support the integrity of extended family systems.

Today, tribal child welfare programs are reclaiming the strengths inherent in these interdependent networks. In supporting whole families, tribal child welfare programs may need to develop policies that address how to engage and support extended family networks at different stages of child welfare intervention. Crafting policies consistent with tribal cultures, values, and teachings is critical to actively engaging relative caregivers in a way that recognizes their needs and concerns as intertwined with the child's need for safety, the parents' need for support, and the family's collective need for healing.

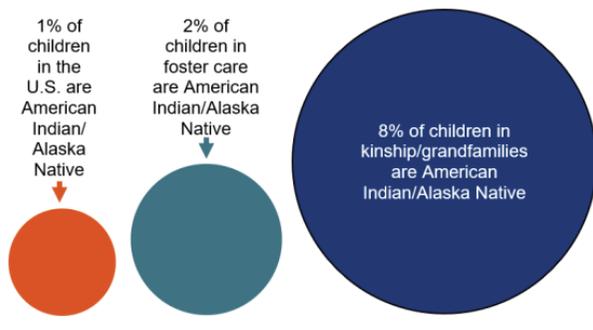
Over the past few months, NICWA has been developing a policy toolkit on relative caregiver or kinship services in tribal

child welfare in partnership with the [Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center](#).

Part one of the two-part toolkit examines several issues tribal child welfare programs may want to consider when drafting policies and procedures regarding engagement of extended families in services, the support of relative caregivers who step into parenting roles through informal family arrangements and in formal kinship care when a tribal child welfare agency is involved. Part two of the toolkit provides policy guidance and sample trauma-informed language to support the development of tribally specific child welfare policy to address the issues outlined in part one. Along the continuum from prevention to substitute care, the toolkit highlights key policy themes in child welfare and how relative caregivers may be prioritized in policy development as an important resource for child safety both as support to birth parents and as a placement resource. The toolkit explores the ways in which policy can inform practice approaches that minimize the trauma and loss associated with family separation, build on family strengths and capacity, preserve cultural identity, enhance placement stability, restore nurturing networks, and create space for healing. The toolkit will be available for viewing on the Network and NICWA's websites in the summer of 2023. If you would like to request technical assistance or training regarding kinship related policies, contact Alexis Contreras at alexis@nicwa.org.

Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe Creates Resource for Grandfamilies

Kinship/Grandfamilies Data¹



¹ The data presented in this graphic is from the [United States Census Bureau](#), the [Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center](#), and the [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System \(AFCARS\)](#).

As part of the Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center, NICWA had the opportunity to work with tribes to learn and share about the good work that they are doing with grandfamilies or relative caregivers. One of the resources NICWA is developing in partnership with the Network is called Tribal Grand Fact Sheets. NICWA worked closely with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe (PGST) to create the

[PGST Tribal Fact Sheet for Kinship/Grandfamilies](#) for their community members. The fact sheet provides detailed information about the services that may support families who are raising their relative children. In addition to being a resource for the community, it also serves as a resource for those in neighboring communities that work with Native families raising their relative children and as an opportunity for other tribes to learn more about how tribes are supporting this work.

Many working in Indian Country may know that Native children comprise 1% of all children in the U.S. and 2% of all children in foster care. However, did you know that 8% of children being raised in grandfamilies or kinship care are Native (United States Census Bureau, Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System)? While the overrepresentation of Native children in kinship/grandfamilies is likely a product of the centuries-long shameful treatment of Native communities by the United States and the many inequities our communities continue to face, it is also a reflection of cultural strengths and resilience. The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe recognizes this strength and resilience and addresses this in their kinship definition and their programming for kinship caregivers. If you'd like to learn more about their kinship programming, please view the fact sheet at www.nicwa.org/service-providers/.

Trainings and Resources

Protecting the Indian Child Welfare Act through Data and Research

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) has been challenged by opponents in multiple arenas, including in courts, the media, and legislative contexts. Research and data are powerful tools for protecting ICWA in each of these contexts. Over the last several years, NICWA's research team has developed products that summarize and analyze different types of data and research that can be used to protect ICWA.

Recent research products include

- [Contemporary Attachment and Bonding Research: Implications for American Indian/Alaska Native Children and their Service Providers](#)
- [Understanding ICWA Placements Using Kinship Care Research](#)
- [Cultural Connectedness and Indigenous Youth Well-Being](#)

Some examples of how these briefs can be used in different scenarios include:

Court cases where a non-Indigenous foster family argues they should be the permanent placement for a Native child because of attachment and bonding. Recent literature shows that attachment and bonding continues to develop beyond childhood and across the adolescent years, years, which are a critical time for identity formation. This research also shows that there is growing recognition of the

ecological model of attachment, which emphasizes the entire social and cultural environment a young person is raised in as part of their healthy development.

Media statements made by ICWA opponents that it is harmful for a child who was in care to be returned to their family of origin, including extended kin, because those relatives are “strangers” to the child. The kinship care brief reviews key research showing that relative care placements have many long-term benefits to mental health, well-being, education, and other outcomes.

Program design and gathering data to support culturally based programs. The cultural connectedness brief reviews recent research showing that a sense of connection to culture has clear mental health protective benefits for American Indian/Alaska Native youth. There are validated data collection tools which have already been used with Indigenous populations that can measure a sense of cultural connectedness, as discussed in the brief.

Finally, the [State of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families Report](#) is our latest resource summarizing data highlighting the American Indian and Alaska Native population definition, economic conditions, adverse childhood experiences, and child welfare experience.

September Training Institute (In Person)



Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

September 12–15, 2023

- Positive Indian Parenting
- Understanding ICWA
- Cross Cultural Skills

September Training Institute (Virtual)



Virtually, via Zoom

September 18–21, 2023

- Positive Indian Parenting

January Training Institute (In Person)



Albuquerque, New Mexico

January 9-12, 2024

- Tribal Customary Adoption
- Understanding ICWA
- Positive Indian Parenting

April Training Institute (In Person)



Seattle, Washington

April 10–12, 2024

- Positive Indian Parenting
- Understanding ICWA



The Pokémon Company

INTERNATIONAL

The Pokémon Company International: A Growing Partnership

NICWA has been fortunate to develop a growing relationship with The Pokémon Company International (TPCi), the organization responsible for management of the Pokémon brand outside of Asia, over the last several years. In 2020, the TPCi Diversity Equity and Inclusion and Corporate Social Responsibility team within TPCi reached



out to NICWA to explore the opportunity to collaborate as it embarked on a [corporate mission](#) to improve the lives of children and support social equity. We discussed the goals we had in common: bringing adults, kids, and communities together; supporting children in growing up healthy and strong; and acknowledging the joy of play and discovery in supporting holistic well-being. Moreover, with their U.S. headquarters in Bellevue, Washington, TPCi and Portland, Oregon-based NICWA were relatively close neighbors. In 2020, TPCi made a \$250,000 general operating support grant to NICWA as part of their overall effort to donate \$5 million to organizations around the world following Pokémon GO Fest 2020.

In subsequent years, TPCi continued to make general operating grants to NICWA. By late 2022, we received a total of \$500,000 in support. In addition to supporting NICWA's work with grants, TPCi has also generously matched individual employee giving to NICWA.

TPCi and NICWA continue to talk with one another about NICWA's work with the Protect ICWA Campaign, the

importance of protecting tribal sovereignty, and other ways we might work together. In November 2021, NICWA staff were invited to make a virtual presentation at a TPCi Lunch & Learn event celebrating Native American Heritage Month. In February 2023, NICWA board members Alex Wesaw and Aurene Martin joined Executive Director Sarah Kastelic for a visit and tour of TPCi's offices in Bellevue and an opportunity to have lunch and share with employees about the Protect ICWA Campaign. We talked about the importance of tribal cultures to Native child well-being.

TPCi and NICWA have also begun to talk about NICWA's 2024 Annual Protecting Our Children Conference, which will be held in Seattle, Washington, and the partnership opportunities that may exist with NICWA members and constituents. A representative of TPCi's DEI & CSR team attended our 2023 Annual Conference in Reno to get a sense of the event and brainstorm about what we may be able to do together at the 2024 conference. As this relationship grows, we've been grateful for the multiple ways TPCi has supported NICWA's mission, and we look forward to seeing how it continues to evolve.





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