

NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Winter 2025

The **LATEST
INSIDE**

It Takes Us All





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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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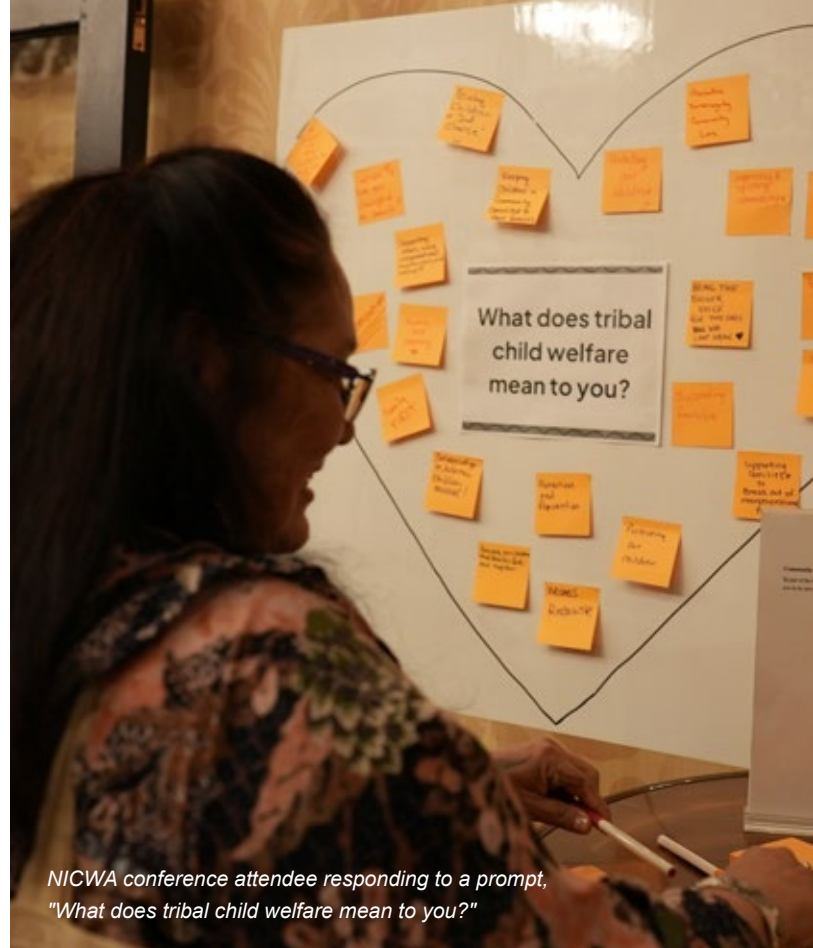
Executive Director

Sarah Kastelic (*Alutiiq*)

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



NICWA conference attendee responding to a prompt, "What does tribal child welfare mean to you?"

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Message from the Executive Director

Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,

Welcome to the Winter issue of *NICWA News*. The theme of this issue is ***It Takes Us All***.

As we move forward together, after decades of NICWA's work with Native communities, it's clear that creating a brighter future for children and families is not the work of one person or one organization. *It takes all of us*—working collectively; honoring our shared commitment to tribal sovereignty, cultural identity, and collective well-being; and bringing our unique strengths and gifts to the table.

This is the spirit of ***It Takes Us All***. Our work is only as strong as the relationships we foster, the shared vision we nurture, and the aligned actions we take. Each voice matters, each experience informs our work, and each effort contributes to our larger life's work of protecting Native children and strengthening tribal sovereignty.

Today, I am proud to share that our path forward has never been clearer. [ICWA 2050](#), our bold framework for the next generation of work, stands as a unifying guide for the field, a way that we can all situate and see our work in relationship to one another, leveraging our strengths. It identifies the strategies, goals, and resources needed to address critical priorities, enhancing tribal child welfare capacity, strengthening tribal-state partnerships, and improving federal accountability.

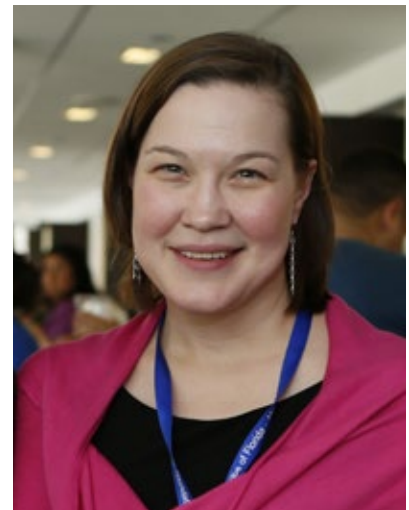
ICWA 2050 is not just a roadmap; it's an invitation. An invitation to every advocate, leader, partner, and ally to come together in advancing what we know works: honoring tribal sovereignty and ensuring Native children grow up connected to their families, communities, and cultures.

We need your voice, your perspective, your energy, and your commitment. As we progress ICWA 2050, I invite you to partner with us in shaping its implementation by participating in our environmental scan this Winter season. [Sign up](#) for NICWA emails for updates on the environmental scan and attend our [43rd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference](#) to join the in-person conversation during workshop and plenary presentations dedicated to this effort. If you can't make it in person, you can register as a virtual attendee to take part in our three plenary sessions.

It Takes Us All is more than a theme—it's a truth that sustains our work and inspires our progress. Thank you for standing with us, for lifting up Native children and families, and for being part of this journey. Only together can we ensure a future where every Native child thrives.

Sarah L. Kastelic

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD, MSW
(Alutiiq)



Congress Passes Federal Child Welfare Bill with Tribal Support

On January 4, 2025, President Biden signed the [Supporting America's Children and Families Act](#) (H.R. 9076) into law. This legislation reauthorizes two Title IV-B child welfare programs under the Social Security Act, which provide vital and flexible funding for tribal nations and states.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of tribal advocates, NICWA, and our partners, the bill contains key provisions that benefit tribal nations and support Native children and families:

- Increases funding for tribal nations under each of the two Title IV-B Social Security Act child welfare programs.
- Reduces administrative barriers in the operation of Title IV-B programs.
- Requirements for states to collect and report data on Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases in state child welfare systems involving Native families.
- Provides technical assistance to states and tribes to improve ICWA compliance.
- Increases funding for tribal juvenile court systems under the Title IV-B Tribal Court Improvement program.

This success follows more than two years of staunch advocacy to ensure that the legislation addressed tribal priorities. For more details, visit NICWA's website to read the latest *Child and Family Policy Update*.

Final Rule Establishes Requirements for States to Collect Data on ICWA Cases

For decades, the lack of data on ICWA cases has hindered efforts to improve ICWA implementation and reduce the disproportionality of Native children in state foster care systems. On December 5, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a [final rule](#) establishing new data collection requirements, many of which are tied to ICWA requirements, for state child welfare agencies.

Effective February 5, 2025, this rule mandates data collection with the reporting period beginning October 1, 2028 (first data due to ACF on May 15, 2029). This achievement is the result of over 30 years of advocacy by NICWA to address data gaps that are critical for improving ICWA implementation.



Congress Approves Legislation to Improve Tribal Child Abuse and Family Violence Grant Programs

Just before the holiday recess, the Senate passed the [Native American Child Protection Act](#) (H.R. 663). Signed into law on December 23, 2024, the Act expands eligible grant activities under two grant programs authorized under the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act (P.L. 101-630). This new law expands grant activities (prevention and treatment) to cover child neglect, in addition to child abuse and family violence issues. It also allows urban Indian organizations to partner with tribal nations or tribal consortia to receive grant funds, encourages the use of culturally appropriate treatment services and programs, and authorizes the establishment of a National Indian Child Resource and Family Services Center to support tribal nations and tribal organizations.

NICWA has championed the reauthorization of the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act, including increasing the grant program's authorized funding levels, for over two years. While H.R. 663 did not reauthorize the grant programs, NICWA is encouraged by the positive changes that were adopted and will be pursuing full reauthorization of the grant programs in the next Congress.

Strengthening Connections: Our Approach to Collaboration and Relationship Building

At NICWA, relationships are at the heart of everything we do. We believe that the strength of Native children and families is rooted in the cultural and community connections that surround them. Guided by this belief, we intentionally build and nurture relationships with service providers, policymakers, and advocates at tribal, local, state, and national levels to strengthen the interrelated and interdependent networks and systems that support Native children and families.

Our approach to coalition building is grounded in mutual respect, shared learning, and collective action in support of Native children and families. In 2024, this approach was especially notable in our work within a broad coalition of child welfare advocates dedicated to the reauthorization of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act ([H.R. 9076](#)). NICWA advocated for the inclusion of [key tribal provisions](#) that impact the well-being of Native children and families. The coalition's objective was to leverage our collective relationships to garner bipartisan support for the legislation. Coalition meetings served as a space for sharing resources, educating one another about provisions affecting various groups of children, and holding each other accountable in our pursuit of a comprehensive set of provisions that support the well-being of all children. This coalition's spirit of connectedness was a powerful contributing factor to the legislation's successful passage into law.

NICWA's guiding principles and values—centering on the strengths of cultures, community-based services, and child safety—extend to all aspects of our work. NICWA prioritizes fostering effective tribal-state relations, supporting tribal child

welfare workers and administrators, and strengthening tribal capacity. As we begin implementing [ICWA 2050](#) in 2025, we remain steadfast in our partnerships with tribal leaders, intertribal organizations, and our Protect ICWA Campaign partners, the National Congress of American Indians, the Association on American Indian Affairs, and the Native American Rights Fund.

We are committed to serving as a connector, bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders to ensure that Native voices are present in child welfare conversations and decision-making. We respect Native people who have passed down ancestral wisdom for centuries—knowledge dedicated to preserving the safety, health, and cultural identity of their children, families, and communities. NICWA is committed to building a future grounded in this wisdom, where every generation nurtures the next, and children can grow and flourish in culturally strong, unified communities.

Through the leadership of tribal nations and collaboration with public and private sector partners, NICWA bridges the gap between child welfare policies and culturally responsive services to ensure that Native advocates have an active role in shaping child welfare policies and practices to better serve Native children and families.

By centering Native values and cultures in our work, together we can cultivate community-based solutions and services that strengthen and uphold family integrity and tribal sovereignty for generations to come.



NICWA team at the National Congress of American Indians 81st Annual Convention and Marketplace

It Takes Us All: A Path Forward with ICWA 2050

The journey to **ICWA 2050** began with listening—listening to tribal leaders, community members, and child welfare experts. Over the past year, we hosted listening sessions across Indian Country to hear directly from Native communities about where Indian Child Welfare Act implementation faced challenges and how to strengthen tribal child welfare capacity.

That input, combined with the expertise of our Protect ICWA Campaign partners—the Native American Rights Fund, National Congress of American Indians, and Association on American Indian Affairs—and a dozen intertribal regional organizations, has shaped ICWA 2050 into a strategic vision grounded in tribal sovereignty and collaboration.



NICWA staff at NCAI's 81st Annual Convention & Marketplace with committee attendees of the Indian Child and Family Welfare Subcommittee



NICWA President Gil Vigil presenting at NCAI's Annual Convention

The Plan at a Glance:

ICWA 2050 is a unifying framework for a generation of work in service to the thriving futures of many generations of Native children, organized around four key goals:

- 1 Increase funding and support** to tribal nations so that every tribe can provide the full range of child welfare services needed by their children and families.
- 2 Establish strong working relationships** between tribes and states so that ICWA is rigorously implemented and all Native children and families in child welfare systems have the benefits of culturally based services and supports that improve outcomes.

- 3 Establish a federal-tribal relationship** that rigorously monitors and supports ICWA compliance and establishes increased child welfare capacity for every tribal nation and urban Indian organization to provide the culturally based services their communities need and assist them in helping support state ICWA implementation.
- 4 Increase public awareness** about ICWA as the gold standard of child welfare policy and the importance of honoring tribal sovereignty in child welfare through the voices of lived experience spokespeople, the use of data that identifies positive outcomes related to ICWA implementation, and strong media relationships with Indian Country and its allies.

These interrelated goals will change interwoven and multi-faceted systems, from funding to policy to courts, and change popular narratives.



NICWA staff at the Oregon ICWA Conference in October 2024



NICWA staff at the Oregon ICWA Conference in October 2024

What's Next?

The launch of ICWA 2050 is just the beginning.

Moving forward, an implementation plan will establish initial priorities and guide the first several years of ICWA 2050 work.

Starting with an environmental scan, we will collect data about the existing work that tribal nations, regional and statewide intertribal organizations, and other partners are already doing that is aligned with plan goals. The scan will conclude with a summary report enabling us to begin implementation to achieve our goals by sharing what's already working and leveraging existing efforts we can build on.

We invite NICWA members, those on the ground in tribal child welfare, to learn more about ICWA 2050 and participate in the environmental scan by attending our upcoming NICWA member webinar, "ICWA 2050: Protecting the Next Generation" on Tuesday, February 18. ICWA 2050 is a shared vision, but it takes all of us to make it a reality.

UPCOMING NICWA MEMBER WEBINAR:

**ICWA 2050:
Protecting the Next
Generation**

SIGN-UP TODAY! SCAN HERE:



Learning Our Traditional Parenting Ways Facilitates Community Healing

One Tribe's Journey with the NICWA's Positive Indian Parenting Curriculum

Positive Indian Parenting (PIP) reconnects Native families with traditional child-rearing practices, blending timeless cultural teachings with modern parenting challenges to nurture strong families, preserve traditions, and empower future generations. Historically, Native communities relied on ancestral wisdom to nurture children in safe, supportive environments. Colonization, however, disrupted these practices, separating Native children from their families and severing generational ties to cultural teachings. PIP addresses these historical impacts through a culturally responsive parenting curriculum grounded in traditional values. Developed over 40 years ago, this customizable train-the-trainer program equips community members with tools to deliver culturally specific parenting guidance.

In Washington State, the Suquamish Tribe adapted NICWA's PIP curriculum to bring parents, caregivers, and community members together for healing and prevention. The Changing Tides, Helping Hands Home Visiting Program is run by Suquamish Tribal member Cori Silvey, Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program Supervisor, and Shallee Moss, PAT Home Visitor.

When asked what drew them to use and adapt the PIP curriculum, Silvey shared, "I love using Positive Indian Parenting in Suquamish, because the curriculum makes space for us to use our individual and collective stories and experiences as tools. The PIP topics and exercises awaken conversations that us as Indigenous parents may not have had otherwise. We share stories that have been asleep or stored away because of shame or pain, and as we share them—with shaky voices and teary eyes—we watch as they shapeshift into lessons for parents to come."

As a PIP trainer, Silvey prepares her attendees at the beginning of each training series. She explains, "I start with a love letter to the participants in the space, letting them know that my role is to simply make space safe enough for all of us to learn. We carry these inherent teachings and values within us, and our emotional responses and releases during PIP validate that! I'm simply helping them better understand and reclaim that knowledge."

In December 2024, on the traditional lands of the Suquamish people, nearly 100 parents and caregivers gathered for a two-day Indigenous parenting conference titled



Attendee at the Suquamish PIP Conference



Shallee Moss and Cori Silvey, staff at Changing Tides, Helping Hands Home Visiting Program

“In this space, community healing and genuine connections helped to bond families and generations.”

Suquamish Indigenous Parenting Conference: The Power of Creation & Healing. The conference provided space to exchange parenting stories, laughter, tears, and traditional and modern parenting teachings and tools.

Silvey described the event stating, “In this space, community healing and genuine connections helped to bond families and generations.” The tribal program spent a year planning the conference with intentional outcomes in mind. Silvey shared, “The Suquamish Indigenous Parenting Conference: Power of Creation & Healing was a call to current and future parents and caregivers within the Suquamish Tribe/community.”

Topics covered during the conference included the roles of parents, Suquamish family values, healthy communication, nurturing future generations, the circle of life, child development, the trauma web, and understanding the impact of Healthy and Strong Fathers. Each day began with a community discussion prompt, such as “You will notice my healing when...” or “My legacy will be....” These were followed by multigenerational table talks where community members shared traditional teachings and innovative parenting ideas with those in attendance. This format created a safe space for families and the community to heal together.

One attendee reflected, “I just appreciate Cori and Shallee so much for this experience and opportunity. You brought a community together and created such a safe space to process, connect, and share love. You both truly brought one of the best things to this community that I’ve ever been able to experience.”

Another shared, “I was meant to be at this conference. At a time of self-doubt, I was surrounded by compassion, love, and healing that allowed me to process my feelings. The safe environment allowed me to connect with my mother, grandmother, and sister in ways that I haven’t been able to before.”

A third attendee added, “The conference meant healing, acceptance, understanding, confidence, and learning about being an Indigenous parent raising Indigenous children.”

The experiences shared at this conference are just one example of how one tribal community is working together, honoring their shared commitment to cultural identity and collective healing to build stronger and healthier families for tribal children to thrive and grow. To learn more about Positive Indian Parenting, visit www.nicwa.org/about-pip.



Group activity at the Suquamish PIP Conference

“The conference meant healing, acceptance, understanding, confidence, and learning about being an Indigenous parent raising Indigenous children.”

ICWA Online Course

Deepen your understanding of ICWA with NICWA's self-paced online course, designed for child welfare workers, legal professionals, and anyone new to ICWA. In just over four hours, this course explains the law using non-legal language, presents information in the order in which a child welfare worker might encounter them in an ICWA case, and describes social work best practices for implementation.


Structured around real-world case scenarios, the course equips participants to:

- Understand the circumstances that have shaped the American Indian child welfare policies that led to ICWA.
- Explain the purpose of ICWA and its basic provisions.
- Recognize when ICWA applies in child welfare and private adoption cases.
- Identify and understand best practices of state, tribal, and private child welfare workers.

Earn 4.5 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) while learning at your own pace. Start and stop anytime—perfect for busy professionals or newer caseworkers. This \$100 course is discounted for select NICWA members, or for those interested in 25 seats or more. Sign up today to gain tools to ensure the effective implementation of the act and safeguard the well-being of Native children.

Email training@nicwa.org to learn more, or register now at www.nicwa.org/online-icwa-course/.

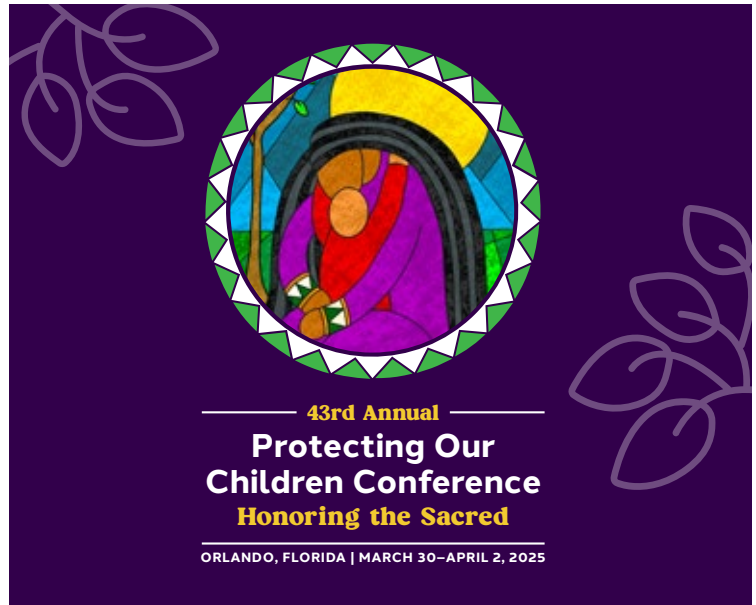
Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)



ASFA contains several federal requirements for states and tribes that operate the Title IV-B and Title IV-E programs under the Social Security Act.

- States and tribes have often added these federal law requirements into their own laws
- Complicated depending on what federal funds are being used to support services
- ASFA does not modify or eliminate the need to meet ICWA requirements in child custody proceedings

The law was enacted in response to concerns that children in foster care are there for overly long periods of time or are shuffled from home to home.



NICWA's 43rd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference

The NICWA 43rd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference is just a few months away. Join us in person from March 30 to April 2, 2025, in Orlando, Florida, or attend all general sessions virtually.

NICWA's annual conference is the largest national gathering dedicated to Native child advocacy, bringing together more than 1,600 participants each year. The conference serves as a vital platform for professionals from child welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, legal services, and education to exchange insights and share best practices aimed at improving the well-being of Native children and families.

This year's conference theme, **"Honoring the Sacred,"** reflects the deep respect Indigenous communities hold for their children, families, and traditions. The event will feature three general sessions with keynote speakers, speaking about honoring the sacred, urban Indian programs serving Native families, and implementing the ICWA 2050 plan.

The conference is designed to highlight successful strategies for service development, showcase innovative child welfare and mental health practices, lift up sustainable funding approaches, and promote youth and family involvement in policy and program development. It also aims to foster peer-to-peer networking opportunities and share the latest research on Native children's well-being. NICWA welcomes child welfare professionals, tribal leaders, mental health providers, educators, and community organizers to attend this transformative event.

Registration is open! We look forward to seeing you in sunny Orlando or connecting with you online. Learn more and register at www.nicwa.org/conference.

Philanthropic Partners

A Message to Tribal Nations: Finding Your Role in ICWA 2050

The launch of ICWA 2050, our agenda for the next generation of advocacy to protect Native children and tribal sovereignty, is an exciting moment for NICWA and for Indian Country. ICWA 2050 is a **high-level strategic plan** for the next 25 years of work; a **unifying strategy** to advance the well-being of Native children, families, and communities; and a flexible organizing framework that tribal nations, partners, and allies can use to situate their own work and recognize opportunities for leverage and collaboration.

This flexibility is a fundamental aspect of ICWA 2050. By focusing on broadly shared values and goals and building out many potential pathways to meet them, ICWA 2050 welcomes a wide range of concrete strategies to improve conditions for Native children, families, and communities. We know that a wide range of strategies are needed because Native communities are incredibly diverse, with different strengths, challenges, contexts, and priorities.

At NICWA, we are confident that because your tribal nation's specific priorities are based on the needs and best interests of your citizens, they are aligned with the values underpinning ICWA 2050. It's easy to see the connection to issues like preventing family breakups, expanding and stabilizing child welfare funding, pursuing child welfare policy improvements, supporting the tribal child welfare workforce, and reducing trauma by keeping kids at home whenever possible, but ICWA 2050 has even broader implications.

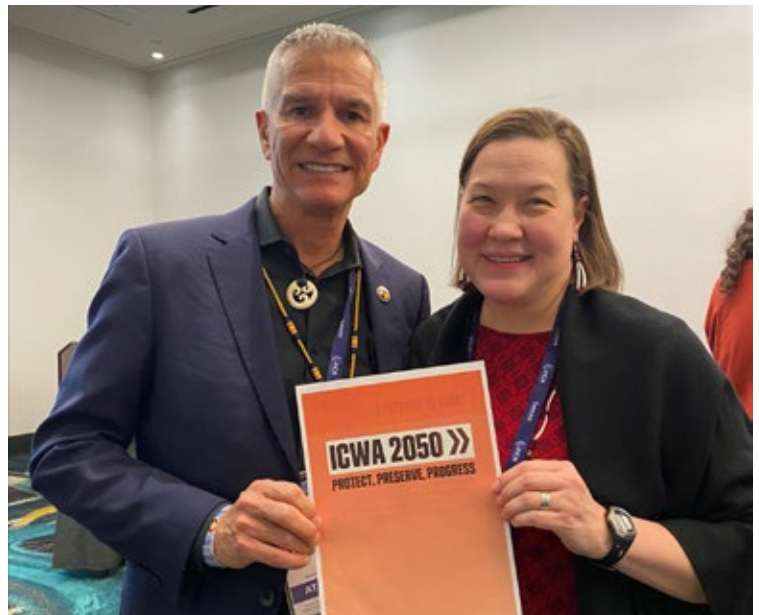
When you work for environmental justice and a stronger sense of place, you are improving the lives of Native children and families. When you are invested in building healthy families and communities, you are improving the lives of Native children and families. When you are dedicated to strengthening the continuity of your culture and your citizens' access to it, you are improving the lives of Native children and families. And when you fight to uphold tribal sovereignty, you are improving the lives of Native children and families.

NICWA is developing an implementation plan for the first several years of ICWA 2050 work, creating an accountability process to report back on the results of our advocacy to Indian Country, and conducting an environmental scan to determine where good work is already happening that can be expanded. **Your support of NICWA at this crucial moment is an endorsement of the values and goals that drive this work. We welcome your partnership in advancing ICWA 2050 and the next generation of work to protect and defend Native children, families, and communities.**



Conference attendees and families enjoying Culture Night at NICWA's 42nd Annual Protecting Our Children Conference

"... Native communities are incredibly diverse, with different strengths, challenges, contexts, and priorities."



NICWA staff at NCAI's 81st Annual Convention & Marketplace with committee attendees of the Indian Child and Family Welfare Subcommittee



NICWA

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

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Register as a virtual attendee and gain access to:

- Live-streamed keynotes
- On-demand general session recordings



Don't miss your chance to connect, learn, and engage with thought leaders and peers—*no travel required!*



Learn more and register at www.nicwa.org/conference.



43rd Annual
**Protecting Our
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Honoring the Sacred

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