



2011 Annual Training Conference



Culture is More than the Color of Your Skin





2011 Annual Training Conference



Rita Olson, Foster Family Recruitment Coordinator, Native American Youth Association

Rita moved to Corvallis, Oregon in 1973 where she achieved her B.F.A. in painting and printmaking at OSU. Having moved to Portland in 1983, Rita has worked in Social Services in the area for the past 23 years. She has experience with community mental health, alcohol and drug, domestic violence, Dept. of Human Services-self sufficiency program, homeless population, developmentally disabled, community health, at-risk gang youth, and the Native American community. Rita is currently working to increase the number of Native foster families and respite providers for the disproportionate number of Native children in the foster care system in Portland. She also provides support to the current foster families and co-facilitates the Positive Indian Parenting curriculum class.

Tawna Sanchez, Director of Family Services, Native American Youth Association

Tawna is the Director of Family Services at the Native American Youth and Family Center. Tawna attended the University of California at Berkeley and achieved her certificate in Drug and Alcohol Studies and Marylhurst University where she received a BA in Psychology and Communications. Tawna founded the Healing Circle in 2000, a Native American specific domestic violence program in Portland, Oregon. She has facilitated and led workshops and training in culturally appropriate services, domestic violence, drug and alcohol prevention, diversity and internalized racism issues.

Culture Is More Than the Color of Your Skin

It is... The Way of Living...

The Way of Living: the foods we eat; the music we listen to; the dances we dance; the way we pray; our relationship to our children, family, community, country, the world, and the earth. It is the way we see ourselves in relation to everything. It is born into us. It is the blood that flows within our veins coming down from our ancestors.

When our children are taken from us and raised by non-native people these values become lost, but the need to be connected to culture and community remains. It is critical when Native children are raised in non-native homes that cultural support and activities be integrated into their day to day lives.

Statistical and anecdotal information show that Indian children who grow up in non-Indian settings become spiritual and cultural orphans.

They do not entirely fit into the culture in which they are raised and yearn throughout their life for the family and tribal culture denied them as children.

-NARF: <http://www.narf.org/icwalc1.htm>

Many native children raised in non-Native homes experience identity problems, drug addiction, alcoholism, incarceration and, most disturbing, suicide.

-NARF: <http://www.narf.org/icwalc1.htm>

*If you don't know your past
You don't know your future!*

Whether you're a Native who lives out on the Rez, or in the city, take pride in who you are and where you come from. Embrace your family and tribal histories – the good and the bad. Never forget the struggles your people had to face on their journey. Knowing your heritage and the hardships of your ancestors will give you strength...and the will to overcome your own challenges in life. Focus on your horizon, knowing your past will always be a part of your future.

- Rudy Rojas, Tiwa'Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo

Since first contact, when one set of values came up against another value system, native people have struggled to adjust to a changing environment. We now walk in “two worlds”.

Many of our teachings have been “clouded” by other values and concepts, and continue to present us with new challenges as societies, in general, evolve.

Our dance, is one of survival, figuring out where we are as a people. Where were we are as individuals. How can we maintain or develop a sense of identity after so many disruptions have hit our people. For native people, this process of evolution has hit strong and fast.

To understand how to better face the future, we need to understand how the past affected us, individually, before we can move forward and create the needed decisions to help our people, and ourselves.

—Desirée Allen-Cruz

“The practice of separating Native American children from their families and tribal networks had a devastating impact on Indian culture. Many Indian children were being raised without a sense of their traditions and history because they were abruptly separated from Indian adults with whom the children had formed stable attachments. Indian caretakers were denied opportunities to foster each displaced child's cultural and spiritual development and identity

Continued...

Native American people have diverse cultures, traditions, and customs that may not be consistent with the cultural backgrounds or training of many ... professionals. Yet, the ICWA requires the ... expert to be familiar with "prevailing social and cultural standards and child-rearing practices within the Indian child's tribe. The ... expert should consult with experts in the religion, education, health care, and other salient customs of the child's identified tribe; this information should be incorporated into the decision-making process and should be explained to the court.

Continued...

Examiners should be cognizant of the cultural differences among tribes. They should be willing to seek tribe-specific guidance from experts in Native American traditions and child-rearing practices regarding the roles of the extended family and community and of tribal hierarchies and traditions. They should be able to differentiate between culture-bound experiences and mental illness; understand the significance of spiritual rituals, including those involving tobacco and sweat lodges; and become familiar with community-based services designed to enhance the preservation of American Indian families."

- Custodial Evaluations of Native American Families: Implications for Forensic Psychiatrists, Cheryl D. Wills, MD and Donna M. Norris, MD

It takes little intellectual exercise to comprehend that to kill a culture's future is to deprive it of its children, and to deprive those children of their cultural heritage.

-Native Child and Family Rights For the children in exile

"It seems clear that the fate of most Indian children is tied to the struggle of Indian people in the United States for survival and social justice. Their ultimate salvation rests upon the success of that struggle." Whether the adoption of Indian children into non-Indian homes is acceptable, he said, is for "the Indian people to decide."

- David Fanshel, Ear from the Reservation

"The Indian people decided long ago that the practice was not acceptable. It was a form of cultural genocide."

-Terry Cross, NICWA

Responsibility and Regret

In April 2001, CWLA President and CEO Shay Bilchik spoke to an audience of 700 child welfare professionals from tribal and government organizations at NICWA's annual conference in Anchorage, Alaska. During his keynote address, Bilchik acknowledged and offered "sincere and deep regret" for CWLA's role in the Indian Adoption Project.

Continued...

"No matter how well intentioned and how squarely in the mainstream this was at the time, it was wrong, it was hurtful, and it reflected a kind of bias that surfaces feelings of shame," Bilchik said. He also apologized for the League's failure to support the passage of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act and for not providing enough leadership and support to Indian child welfare concerns and efforts.

Continued...

In recent years, CWLA has made efforts to improve its record by forming an internal Task Force on Indian Child Welfare, becoming more involved with NICWA, and committing to be better listeners. In May 2001, CWLA's Board of Directors passed a resolution acknowledging the League's role in the adoption of hundreds of Indian children and expressing "deep regret for its

Continued...

participation in any activities that were intended to break up Indian families, promote assimilation, and/or disregard Indian tribal governments."

The resolution also commits to a new era of respect and partnership, support for the Indian Child Welfare Act, and collaboration with NICWA.

Where are your women?

"Where are your women?" the speaker is Attakullakulla, a Cherokee chief renowned for his shrewd and effective diplomacy. He has come to negotiate a treaty with the whites. Among his delegation are women "as famous in war, as powerful in the council." Their presence also has ceremonial significance: it is meant to show honor to the other delegation. But that delegation is composed of males only; to them the absence of women is irrelevant, a trivial consideration. ~
Marilyn Awiakta, Cherokee, *Selu*, '93

Traditionally, American Indian women were never subordinate to men. Or vice versa, for that matter. What native societies have always been about is achieving balance in all things, gender relations no less than any other. Nobody needs to tell us how to do it. We've had that all worked out for thousands of years. And, left to our own devices, that's exactly how we'd be living right now.

— Winona LaDuke, Anishinnaabe, State of Native America

Boarding Schools

Despite the epidemic of sexual abuse in boarding schools, the BIA did not issue a policy on reporting sexual abuse until 1987, and did not issue a policy to strengthen the background checks of potential teachers until 1989.

— "Child Sexual Abuse in Federal Schools," *The Ojibwe News*, 1990.

Irene Mack Pyawasit, a former boarding school resident from the Menominee reservation testifies to her experience which is typical of many student's experiences:

"The government employees that they put into the schools had families but still there were an awful lot of Indian girls turning up pregnant. Because the employees were having a lot of fun, and they would force a girl into a situation, and the girl wouldn't always be believed. Then, because she came up pregnant, She would be sent home in disgrace. Some boy would be blamed for it, never the government employee. He was always scot-free. And no matter what the girl said, she was never believed."

— Fran Leeper Buss, *Dignity: Lower Income Women Tell of Their Lives and Struggles*, '85.

American Indians and Crime

BJS 1992-2002

The finding revealed a disturbing picture of the victimization of American Indians and Alaska Natives. The rate of violence crime estimated from self-reported victimizations for American Indians is well above that of other U.S. racial or ethnic groups and is more than twice the national average.

Continued...

The disparity in the rates of exposure to violence affecting American Indians occurs across age groups, housing locations, and by gender.

American Indians are more likely than people of other races to experience violence at the hands of someone of a different race, and the criminal victimizer is more likely to have consumed alcohol preceding the offense.

Reality of violence against Native Women:

USDOJ American Indians and Crime 1992 – 96 Report

Native American women are raped at a rate more than double that of rapes reported by all races on an annual average. (all races: 2 per 1,000, NA 7 per 1,000)

Native American victims of intimate and family violence are more likely than victims of all other races to be injured and need hospital care (Medical costs were more than \$21 million over a 4-year period)

The rate of violence crime experienced by Natives American women is nearly 50% higher than that reported by black males aged 12 and over.

Recommendations

“What does all this mean for foster parents, for social workers, for adoptive parents who work with and love tribal children? We have to become avid students of the children’s tribe, of their history, their stories, their griefs and triumphs. Watch television, read news stories and look at your children’s school books from a different perspective. Become sensitive and hear with an Indian ear for awhile.

Particularly as foster or adoptive parents, we have an *obligation* to keep our American Indian children in touch with their language and their heritage.

We need to keep our own culture intact while encouraging our Indian children to become or remain active in their culture. This is not saying that we need to become “wannabes”.

Continued...

Whatever tribe we work with; whatever tribe our children come from, we must interact with them and ask questions and get assistance to help our children embrace their heritage. Most tribes will have powwows during the summer. Non-Indians are allowed to attend (but you *must* acquaint yourselves with the rules of proper conduct). Your children can participate in the dances.

Continued...

If you don't know what they are, start asking questions. Read books, buy videos, visit as many powwows as you can. Buy cassettes or CDs and become familiar with dance music. Ask for elders to take your children "under their wings" to help teach them.

Do an Internet search on the tribe your children are affiliated with. See what language tools are available. Start to learn a little of the language yourself. Read the stories that are a part of that tribe's history and spirituality. Read some of these stories to your children at bedtime.

There is no substitute for an Elder of the tribe teaching your children, but if you don't have access to someone like that, use what resources you do have. Participate in every tribal activity that you can get your children to. If you are too far from the reservation or your children don't have a direct tribal affiliation, then choose events closer to where you live. Make phone calls, look in your state's tourism brochures, ask tribal members and be persistent. While we cannot ever take the place of an Indian home, we *can* communicate an appreciation for our children's heritage. We can validate their experiences and help them grow up with a sense of pride in their culture and their history. We can help them regain their language and identity."

-American Indian Children By Bobbi Andzijek

Make it a requirement that native children be consistently exposed to their own culture.

Listen to families and do not assume that all family members are dysfunctional or lacking in the capacity to be good caregivers.

Coming Home Children

Coming home children,
Faces formed rightly
By blood and birth
Stand just outside our circle,
Tentative.

*Are you my Uncle?
And you my Aunt?
I've come.
All Alone.*

*On my own
I found my way
Back Home.*

Coming home children,
Long ago lost,
Reared elsewhere, otherwise,
Stolen early in hope you would forget.

*I remember you
I do.*

*In my heart I've seen you
Waiting alone
For me*

To come home.

Coming home Children,
We would have paid
Any price, any ransom,
To buy you back. But we weren't
Allowed.

*Did you think of me
Did you miss me
And save a place in your heart
For me alone?*

*Till I came home?
Coming home children,
Finally seen,*

Finally touched, finally held.
Be assured of what you are.
For you are

Our
Coming home children,
Hello, my girl, Anin, my boy.

Welcome back to the circle.
You're the last we'll allow to be taken.

From now on
We're sending out search parties.

- Sandra King - Ojibwe, Red Lake

Culture Is More Than The Color Of Your Skin

Tawna Sanchez, Director of Family Services

Native American Youth and Family Center
503-288-8177x209 tawna@navayafdc.org

Rita Olson, Foster Family Recruitment Coordinator

Native American Youth and Family Center
503-288-8177x314 ritao@navayafdc.org

NAYA Family Center
5135 NE Columbia Blvd, Portland OR 97218
