

## **Model Court Summit – ICWA – Tuesday, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

With the direction our agency is heading and the racial reckoning happening across this country we have a rare opportunity to create structural, institutional, and systemic change that will serve our next generation well. Some of the larger shifts that is happening right now is the awakening of our society and people of all backgrounds rising together in the demand for justice, equity, and inclusion for our black relatives. The Black Lives Matter movement has created awareness and visibility on issues that have been long fought for. We are seeing ripple effects from BLM and for the first time we are witnessing justice happening in Indian Country.

This past month we watched the removal of the Washington D.C. football team mascot that was based on a stereotypical image – where people all thought this would never happen until it did. We have witnessed the complete shutdown of the Dakota Access Pipeline that began in April 2016 – Standing Rock shows power and prayers of the people prevail. We have also seen the ruling heard around Indian Country where half of Oklahoma is now tribal jurisdiction and belongs to tribal nations – which was obvious from the beginning, right? These are a few examples where tribal people are finally the victors in the story and there is hope for a brighter future.

With history unfolding before our eyes we see a new narrative being reclaimed by tribal people where we are the protagonists. Today is our chance to play our part in this story, in this movement, and in this revolution to change the course of how we serve our tribal children and families. With the wind at our backs we must view ICWA not just as a policy or law or something “we have to follow” but as a navigational tool to protect tribal children, preserve tribal culture, and maintain the tribal family structure. This is the beauty of ICWA – A part of that beauty in ICWA is its ability to prevent history from repeating itself. The only way it does that is through intentional practice. ICWA is only as good as its full utilization by our workforce, which is all of us.

As we move forward now is the time we all take responsibility to ensure the spirit of ICWA is woven into our practice and most critically into our attitudes and mindsets. When we begin to shift how we think and view ICWA that’s where the real sustainable change lies. Although times might be uncertain and we don’t know when the pandemic will end, what we can control is ensuring we embody active efforts and use ICWA as it was intended by its tribal founding mothers and fathers. In this pandemic filled, protesting ripe, and zoom connected story let us be supporting actors in this narrative where we build a more equitable environment for our children. In this story let us redesign how our systems and institutions operate that promote healing, uplift our communities, and strengthen relationships with tribal children, families, and nations. I ask you to join me in positively contributing to this narrative because the window for change is open but for how long, we don’t know. Let’s act now! Thank you!

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