

Minority Youth and Family Demonstration Project **Woodbury County**

Woodbury County is conducting a demonstration project to address the disproportionate number of Native American children involved in the child welfare system. This project is one piece of the Child Welfare Redesign effort being undertaken by the Department of Human Services. The project is founded on the assumption that culturally sensitive methods of providing services must be developed and implemented. Several strategies are used and we will measure how they improve outcomes for Native American children, youth and families in Woodbury County. Some of the most significant elements include:

- Create processes whereby relatives are identified earlier and approved as placement options
- Review ICPC issues to enhance border state placements
- Recruit and retain additional Native foster homes
- Utilize family team meetings

(For a full list of the strategies see the Methods section of the Logic Model chart.)

Target Population and Baseline Data

For this project, the focus will be on Native American children, as self-identified, who come to the attention of the child welfare system through a CPS assessment. As a first step baseline data for Woodbury County will be established regarding the numbers of Native children served in within the child welfare system at the start of the project and those coming in throughout the project period. Other data to be collected will include:

- The number of Native foster homes licensed
- Assessment of Native services and culturally competent services available
- Reabuse/neglect rates
- Reunification rates
- Out of home placements for Native children

Community Involvement in the Planning Process

A local planning committee was organized to develop a plan for this project. The committee included representatives from a variety of entities. The committee met several times to brainstorm and share information for this proposal. Information regarding other initiatives and reviews were shared with the committee. Native and DHS representatives had already developed a Community Initiative for Native Children and Families (CINCF) several years earlier. The initial focus was to draft an Iowa ICWA law and have it passed. That goal was accomplished last year. The new focus of the group has been Tribal/State agreements. Other information provided included results of a recent QSR, ICWA compliance review, and the Federal CFSR. All of these had taken place within the last 18 months in Woodbury County.

The committee used a logic model format to formulate a plan after the brainstorming sessions. The model outlined the problem statement, goals, objectives and outcomes (see associated logic model).

Many items were identified as factors related to problems. The committee narrowed the focus to 3 primary objectives. Following is the full list of factors identified:

- Poverty
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Domestic violence
- Adequate housing
- Incarceration
- Inadequate knowledge of and availability of resources
- Culturally sensitive services
- Parents not connected to cultural community – haven't fostered a connection between children and community
- Communication "gap" between NA community and DHS/courts
- Lack of trust between families and system
- Relationship issues between DHS and Native community
- Trust – lack of confidence in tribes/system
- Anger
- Receiving TANF and number of children in families
- Lack of adequate service providers
- Understanding of Indian people
- ICWA understanding
- Biases – setting clients up for failure
- Unwillingness to work with other native service providers – that have resources
- Policy versus best practice
- Restrictions on who can be a placement
- Out of state ICPC issues
- Home study issues - passing requirements
- Restrictions on working with community members who could help
- Training, recruitment, and retention of culturally sensitive NA providers
- Difficulties in native people becoming foster parents, and lack of necessary supports for foster parents
- Lack of culturally sensitive licensing standards. Strategies identified were:
 - Nebraska precedent
 - Empowering tribes regarding home studies accepted by state of Iowa.
 - Memorandums of understanding and agreements, and tribal state agreements
- Tribal response to requests for cultural supports for kids
- Tribal resources may not stretch to non-reservation members
- Confusion about "connection to" and "a part" of the community
- Understanding of and access to all the systems and systems – tribal and DHS and courts

Project Description and Outcomes

The project is focusing on the provision of more culturally competent services being provided, increased numbers of Native children placed in Native foster homes, and increased Native children placed with relatives.

The planning committee identified the following measurable outcomes for the project:

- Decrease in the number of Native children in child welfare system
- Increase in the number of Native foster homes.
- Increase in the number of Native children placed within relative networks
- Increase in the number of Native FTM facilitators
- Decrease in number of Native children re-abused/neglected

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

Baseline data will be gathered from DHS. At quarterly intervals updated data will be reviewed for progress toward the outcomes. Information from pre and post tests will be utilized to determine effectiveness of the trainings. The University of Iowa will provide technical assistance in monitoring and evaluation. The information gathered is provided to the planning committee for review and comment.

Other Resources

IFAPA, University of Iowa Technical Assistance, NICWA, Consultation agreement with Meskwaki Family Services, PRIDE, and other resources will identified and used as appropriate throughout the project period. Training will be provided by Terry Cross and the National Indian Child Welfare Association through the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice.

Specialized Native American Unit

Effective the week of January 3rd Woodbury County organized a unit of social workers specializing in Native American cases. The unit is comprised of the following staff:

- Cathy Gray – Supervisor
- Mary Kohn –SW
- Kathy Lehmann - SW
- Megan Patterson - SW
- Gina Touney –SW
- Terri DeVos – CPA
- Sandy Jacobsma – SW Adoption
- Lisa LaCroix – Liaison

Betty Pratt has talked with most of you about ethnic coding for child welfare cases. This coding is based on an individual's self-identification of their ethnic background. Families should be asked when initially coming into our office about any Native background. The Iowa ICWA law affects some Native American children. The applicability of that law needs to be looked at for each Native American child. The court makes the final ruling on that issue.

Records indicate there are 123 Native American children on the Woodbury County caseloads. Of these 60 are also eligible under the Iowa ICWA. The caseload size for this unit will be around 30. Transfer of cases has begun by assigning cases to the new workers. New adoption cases are now being assigned to Sandy. The expectation is that all Native American cases will be transferred to someone in this unit. Supervisors will be working individually with workers to accomplish this change.

Arrangements have been made to move this team into one location on the 3rd floor. Chris Huisman is working out the logistics of the move.