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## **Multnomah County Example of Successful Strategies for Providing Child Welfare Services to Native American Families**

The use of Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) units is a strong feature at DHS, providing topical experts available to collaborate and decision-make with case worker.

Multnomah County (DHS District 2) has recruited case workers that have knowledge, experience and desire to work with Native American families. Multnomah County has two ICWA units with two supervisors supporting 10 case workers.

The supervisors of the ICWA units are able to coordinate schedules to provide maximum coverage and availability to caseworkers. Additionally, both supervisors are familiar with all cases in the unit.

Through the work of the Multnomah County ICWA Units, we have realized the following benefits for our case workers and the Native American families and children they support:

- Workers have reduced caseloads which gives them the time necessary to ensure active efforts.
- Due to high retention, and low turnover of caseworkers, new workers can slowly build their caseload, vs. walking in to a full caseload on their first day of work.
- Supervisors and workers have close relationships with Native Americans providers and work together well. They problem-solve issues that arise together and provide cross-training between agencies.
- Strong emphasis on Family Decision Making meetings (evidence based practice) brings all parties together on a regular basis to support families and create transparency to all parties involved.
- The designated ICWA Social Services Assistant provides additional supports through providing transportation and supervised visits to families.

## Challenges and Barriers to Providing Child Welfare Services to Native American Families

Service area	Issue/Concern
Mental Health and Psychological Evaluation Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providers lack of (or in-depth) understanding of historical and multi-generational trauma specifically related to the Native American population</li> <li>• Providers misunderstanding of cultural norms related to social interactions of Native American families and communities</li> </ul>
Drug and Alcohol treatment services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding by community, providers, legal parties to the barriers for parents obtaining services</li> <li>• Parents needing additional time, outside of AFSA timelines to achieve sobriety and stabilizing lifestyle</li> <li>• Punitive reaction to relapse</li> <li>• Lack of ongoing recovery services for parents who have graduated from treatment</li> <li>• Lack of affordable transitional housing for parents exiting residential treatment</li> <li>• Lack of culturally specific drug and alcohol programs for teen</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of affordable, stable and safe housing</li> <li>• Children remain in foster care due to parents inability to locate housing</li> <li>• Lack of case managed housing for parents exiting drug treatment</li> <li>• History of criminal activity or prior evictions preventing parents from accessing housing</li> <li>• Extended family living arrangements may prevent reunification due to certain members having historical involvement with criminal or child welfare</li> </ul>
Relative Foster Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatives inability to be certified as foster parents due to historical issues</li> <li>• Sub-standard housing due to poverty issues preventing placement of children with relatives. (sleeping space for children, structural repairs needed etc.)</li> </ul>
Native Foster Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment efforts yield names of potential homes, but does not produce certified foster families</li> <li>• Lack of “hand holding” through certification process for potential Native American foster families</li> <li>• Lack of cultural sensitivity of certifiers/trainers specifically in regards to Native American culture.</li> <li>• Families may have negative perception of DHS due to their own involvement or involvement of family or friends with DHS.</li> <li>• Healthy families may have history with DHS that would prevent them from becoming foster parents.</li> <li>• No tracking of race through the certification process</li> </ul>

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