



## Child Abuse and Neglect in Indian Country

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“Protecting children from abuse and neglect so that they can thrive and mature is the most fundamental child welfare service that a society can provide.” Unfortunately many Native American children are not afforded the same protections that other non-Native American children are. This article brings to light many of the policy barriers that hinder Native Americans’ ability to protect the children of their tribes. These issues, coupled with a lack of consideration of tribal cultural values, create massive obstacles in the prevention of child abuse and neglect for Indian children. In an effort to bring awareness to policy makers and professionals, the authors make several recommendations about changes that could begin to deal with the widespread problem of child abuse and neglect in Indian Country.

Native American people have struggled for over a century to maintain their culture, beliefs, values and customs. The authors detail how, historically, Native American tribes had child protection mechanisms built into their culture. As Congress and the Federal Government began to “relocate” children and their families, tribes were stripped of their natural ability to protect their children. Add that to new problems of alcoholism, oppression, disease, and poverty, and the Native American people lived in an environment “where child abuse and neglect could develop and continue to exist.” In 1978, the Indian people were able to regain their sovereignty but were unable to regain effective means of protecting their children.

Many of the barriers that are faced by the tribes are predominately based in funding and administrative procedures. There are billions of dollars provided through the federal government for child welfare. Most of these programs are provided in such a way that Native American children do not have access to funding. The four largest programs are Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Service; Title IV-B (subpart 1) Child Welfare Services, Title IV-B (subpart 2) Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and Title XX Social Services Block Grant. All of these programs are relatively unavailable to Indian children due to eligibility problems, lack of jurisdiction, administration problems, and lack of flexibility and resources.

In two different sections, the authors provide realistic proposals for making changes that would effectively improve access to Federal child welfare funding, which in turn would provide new programs for serving Native American children. In the first section, the underlying objectives are identified “for any program that is going to serve tribal communities effectively” and in the second section, recommendations are made about how to gain access to resources, and gain the support of others. These recommendations include:

- Greater access to child welfare and child abuse funds
- Provision for a base level of funding
- Increased funding for evaluation and dissemination of resulting knowledge
- Public Law 95-608 and Public Law 101-630 be funded at the authorized level
- Promotion and support of service methods that are culturally based and strengths focused
- Training, technical assistance and resources that are fully funded and Indian specific
- Tribal access to children’s trust fund type funding for child abuse prevention
- Greater dissemination of information about models that work in Indian country
- Needs based funding be established so as to provide effective programs and services.