

# Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

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## Summary

As DCYF enters its sixth year as a cabinet-level agency, our guiding principles continue to be a focus on outcomes for children: a commitment to collaboration and transparency; a commitment to using data to inform and reform, leveraging and aligning services with desired child outcomes; and a focus on supporting our staff.

DCYF continues to collaborate with a Tribal/state work group to revise Indian Child Welfare (ICW) policy and procedures. Staff worked diligently with Tribal partners throughout the year to navigate updates and changes. On July 20, 2023, a formal consultation was held, and a consensus was reached regarding the new policies and procedures. The policies go live Jan. 2, 2024, and we will post them on our Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) website after technical edits are complete.

Tribal Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC) meetings are held bi-annually, and we invite all Tribes and recognized American Indian Organizations. We also continue to hold monthly ICW Sub Committee meetings, where state and Tribal staff discuss child welfare policy, opportunities, and issues. DCYF schedules annual meetings with the Tribes to develop Tribal plans (under the 10.03 policy) if the Tribe requests it. The Indian Policy for Early Learning (IPEL) meets every other month and the Governor's Tribal Leader's Social Service Committee (GTLSSC) continues to meet twice a year. DCYF also continues to act as lead agency for the Justice Subcommittee of the GTLSSC.

## Highlights

### Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability

In 2023, DCYF's Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability hired an ICW evaluator to report and evaluate the effectiveness of our ICW practice changes. Currently, the evaluator is drafting a literature review that summarizes and relies on existing evidence that supports the changes to DCYF's ICW policies and practices. The evaluator is also creating a logic model that details specific mechanisms and metrics of these changes to ICW policies and practices that will inform the upcoming evaluation work. In the upcoming year, the evaluator will meet with Tribal partners across the state to make sure the evaluation is culturally informed and meets the needs of Tribal partners.

These relationships and research will help us develop an evaluation plan and rigorously evaluate how our changes to ICW policies and the recent Washington State Supreme Court decisions impact child welfare system-involved Native children, families, and communities across the state. We anticipate releasing evaluation reports every two years, with the first one released in 2024.

## Office of Tribal Relations (OTR)

As part of our policy, DCYF must offer each Tribe the opportunity to develop a plan that includes key issues that we identify together (Administrative 10.03 Consultation Policy—our government-to-government policy). We review these plans quarterly or when a Tribe requests a review.

- Work with Tribal partners to schedule site visits. These increase collaboration and share cultural information with DCYF.
- Provide Tribal partners updated information to our contracted services. This increases access to services.
- Share all state and local area training to increase participation, improve knowledge, and provide Tribes access to available training.
- Our managers, supervisors, and ICW workers will attend the government-to-government training and 10.03 training.
- Work with Tribal partners to offer DCYF staff additional Tribal training. This will increase staff's understanding of disproportionality as it relates to the individual history and culture of Tribal partners.
- Providing read-only FamLink access to the identified Tribal staff so the Tribe can have access to accurate information about their families in our FamLink database.
- Collaborate with Tribal partners to expand opportunities for culturally responsive services that Tribal families can access.
- Collaborate with Tribal partners to increase diversity within DCYF and invite them to the hiring and recruiting process.
- Incorporate more early learning services for Tribal families into 10.03 plans.

### *Program or rule change, and benefits*

We amended language in the law (WAC 110-110-0010 Definition of Indian Child) that removed the requirement that a person needs to be the “The biological child of a member of Indian Tribe” to meet the definition of Indian Child, and we added “As determined by the Indian Child’s Tribe.” This new language will make it easier to determine membership and makes it clear that the Tribe decides who their members are.

### *Staffing updates*

We added several positions to our OTR team this year to keep supporting DCYF and our Tribal Nations. Positions include an operations manager, a qualified expert witness (QEW) coordinator, a Local Indian Child Welfare Advisory Committee (LICWAC) coordinator, Tribal training specialist, Tribal prevention services specialist, and an OTR contract position.

### **Tribal Early Learning Fund (TELF)**

OTR received \$7.5 million from the Legislature through the advocacy efforts of Tribal early learning advocates, directors, and parents. TELF will provide resources to ensure early learning programs can best serve Tribal children in an inclusive, culturally appropriate manner. These include early childhood education and assistance (ECEAP), Early ECEAP, child care, Head Start, Early Head Start and home visiting programs. Tribes could use grants to provide culturally appropriate mental health supports, incorporate Indigenous foods, provide culturally responsive books and materials, offer staff professional development, explore curriculum adaptations and supplements, and offer tribal language education. OTR will collaborate with the 29 federally recognized Tribes in Washington, and other Tribally affiliated and urban Indian populations to best meet the needs of our earliest learners.

### **Cultural Services Landscape Analysis project**

We contracted with Kauffman and Associates (KAI), an American Indian and woman owned small business with headquarters in Spokane, WA, for this project, which started April 2023. We will complete the analysis by April 30, 2024. The purpose is to understand the strengths, resources, and needs of specified children, youth, and families that our Child Welfare Services support.

KAI will conduct the landscape analysis to understand the strengths, resources, and needs of specified populations of children, youth, and families that we serve including: 1) American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN); 2) Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI), 3) Black and African American, 4) Hispanic and Latino, 5) immigrants and refugees, as well as 6)

non-English primary language/American Sign Language (ASL)/Sign language/limited English proficiency (LEP)/families using interpretive services. Additionally, it will help us understand the current reality of services we provide and how these meet legislative requirements for cultural alignment.

## **Child Welfare Program**

Child welfare staff collaborated with OTR to redraft ICW policies following court opinions concerning Indian children and families. This work included active efforts needed to prevent Indian children from being placed outside the home, provision of culturally relevant services, and termination of parental rights. Given anticipated increases to the number of cases that will be considered ICW cases — at least in the beginning of the life of a case — the legislature has approved funding for additional regional staff to be dedicated to active efforts requirements.

Training is also being developed in collaboration with the University of Washington's Alliance for Professional Development, Training, and Caregiver Excellence. This training will be delivered in the fall with a current anticipated date of Oct. 2 for policy rollout.

## **Licensing Division**

The Licensing Division continues to collaborate with Tribal childcare throughout the certification process for interlocal government-to-government agreements, and the Outdoor Nature-Based (ONB) childcare certification outreach continues. The ONB team partners with Tribes and Tribal support stakeholders to certify ONB programs while honoring the pedagogy of nature being the first teacher of our children. Many of the lessons learned from ONB Tribal programs are being honored in traditional childcare settings.

In 2023, Senate Bill 5683 authorized the agency to issue a child specific license to an Indian child's family who opts to become licensed to place a specific Indian child(ren) in the custody of an Indian Tribe or Indian Tribe's child placing agency. Child specific licenses remove barriers for kinship caregivers, provide needed financial support, and promote relational and cultural permanency for children placed in out of home care. Along with OTR, this division is actively working with Tribal nations including Tribal Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) to address barriers to families getting licensed through Tribal CPAs or DCYF. We will arrange a series of in-person meetings between DCYF licensing and Tribal CPAs to improve working partnerships between DCYF licensing and Tribal nations.

## Administrative Services

In response to the *In re Dependency of Z.J.G* decision and the efforts of the Tribal State work group, we worked closely with our Tribal partners for the past two years to revise forms and guides.

In policy, we placed special emphasis on providing active efforts to cases where there is “reason to know” children are, or may be, Indian children. Once we determine if the situation needs agency involvement, we act quickly to prevent the children’s removal or to promote the timely reunification of Indian families if children are removed. As a result of this close collaboration, 26 ICW chapters were developed.

We also created a new ICW Legal Unit to help caseworkers navigate the ICWA Notice process and partner with the Office of the Assistant Attorney General.

To inform staff of these changes, we gave them access to an e-Learning training on the topic in July 2023. The training also highlighted important ICW history and 40 years of collaborative highlights between Washington and Washington Tribes. We will develop further mandatory training for staff on the ICW policies beginning September 2023. We will implement the ICW policies Jan. 2, 2024.

## Early Learning

In March, we welcomed over 35 Tribal early learning staff participants in British Columbia to attend The LOVIT (Learning to Observe, Value, Inspire and Transform) Way facilitator training. The LOVIT Way is a culturally sensitive program evaluation process (PEP) and planning tool, created by the Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia. Facilitators can implement this training in their early learning program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program’s (ECEAP) worked on creating the definition of an Indian Child throughout the year. Activities included Dear Tribal Leader Letters, Tribal ECEAP work group monthly meetings, Indian Policy Early Learning Committee (IPEL) feedback, surveys, and four roundtable meetings with early learning Tribal staff. ECEAP held monthly community learning gatherings with Tribal family support staff to share updates and learn from each other.

### *Program/rule change and benefits*

- We established a dual language/language revitalization designation ([RCW 43.216.592](#)), which recognizes the ongoing effort and incredible work of Tribal early learning programs across the state to preserve and revitalize Native language, starting with their youngest learners. DCYF prioritized the funding award to provide all eligible Tribal providers with \$4,100 per classroom, totaling more than \$254,000 to Tribal early learning programs.
- Added language to the ECEAP performance standards that includes Tribal holidays and government closures as valid reasons to temporarily close ECEAP.
- Updated the ECEAP Early Learning Management System (ELMS) to recognize dual language/language preservation work in ECEAP Tribal classrooms. This includes:
  - Adding a language teacher and a culture teacher roll to recognize when teachers with specific skills are working in the classroom.
  - Adding the Tribal language from every Tribe in Washington, with a space to type in additional Tribal languages, to identify when a child or teacher speaks their Tribal language as their first or second language.
- Updating Tribal school information to correctly identify if a child will attend kindergarten at a Tribal school. From July 2022 through June 2023, approximately 5,300 children identified as Native American were eligible for Working Connections Child Care (WCCC). WCCC paid 28 unique Tribal certified providers during this time frame for a total of 302 children.

### *Number of new contracts/grants*

- Early Learning distributed over \$250,000 to support culturally appropriate infant and early childhood mental health principles and methodology in Tribal programs. Programs used this funding to provide training and professional development for their staff, and to purchase resources and materials that support social emotional learning in young children.
- DCYF distributed the following amounts in grants to Tribal providers:
  - \$1,000 in Early Achievers Needs Based grants
  - \$536,500 in Stabilization grants
  - \$54,600 in Workforce Retention grants
  - \$230,478 in Complex Needs funds

- 16 Tribal providers requested dual language designation funding, for a total of 62 classrooms supporting eight Tribal languages. \$254,200 was awarded to these programs in the summer.

ECEAP received private funding to support curriculum supports, and used some unanticipated state funding to support Tribal culture and language supports at Tribal ECEAP locations. With this one-time funding, six Tribes received \$456,703 overall. This funding will support Tribes as they develop language and cultural activities for their programs and children. Examples of activities include purchasing materials for the classroom, developing Tribal language programs, increasing outdoor learning spaces, establishing traditional food gardens, expanding trails, maintaining playground buildings and equipment, and supporting other family culture and language activities.

## Partnership, Prevention, and Services Division

### *Strengthening Families Washington*

**Cash grants and concrete goods:** \$5.5 million of federal funds provided one-time \$250 per child grants to families. This went to 22,000 children who may be at risk of child welfare system involvement and have experienced economic impacts of COVID-19. In the end, 7,393 families across the state benefited. Of these families, 564 (7.66%) identified as Native American or Alaska Native. The number jumps to 756 (10.27%) when we include those who identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

We contracted with nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations to purchase and deliver concrete goods to low-income families. We allocated \$27,146 to Tribal nonprofits. They used the funds to serve over 300 families through grocery gift cards, baby supplies, clothes, hygiene supplies, and short-term rental assistance.

**Workforce incentives:** We allocated \$500,000 and a state supplement of \$700,000 (\$1.2 million total) to acknowledge and honor home visiting staff who stayed in their job during the pandemic. This hazard pay incentive went to the Home Visiting Service Account (HVSA) funded home visiting programs. This included 14 staff from four Tribal organizations: United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, Lummi Indian Business Council, Suquamish Tribe, and Tulalip Tribes.

**Home visiting:** We significantly expanded our voluntary, early childhood home visiting program, with dedicated funds of at least \$480,000. In the end, \$567,114 were invested to Tribal communities, and 57 Indigenous families were added. This brings the total annual allocation from DCYF home visiting to more than \$1.6 million and this program served 124 families from Tribal communities. We accomplished this through six contracts: four contracts directly with Tribes (Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, Suquamish Tribe, and Tulalip Tribes) and two contracts with Tribal organizations (United Indians of All Tribes Foundation and Hummingbird Indigenous Services).

This program also hosted a statewide Family Spirit training in May, bringing trainers to the state to support 17 participants from state and Tribal staff. Attendees gained skills in administering this evidence-based practice designed by and for use within Tribal communities. Several state and program staff participated in the first National Indigenous Home Visiting Conference in Washington D.C. in June.

**Child abuse and neglect prevention:** A Request for Application (RFA) was released for Tribal Fatherhood supports and we successfully executed three contracts with Tribes (Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, and United Indians of All Tribes) using American Rescue Act



funding. These contracts support strength-based parenting programs for AI/AN fathers and father figures to help increase family strengths and enhance child development.

The Child Welfare Early Learning Navigator (CWELN) project continued its momentum and growth. We had a Tribal navigator working out of Region 6 (Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Gray's Harbor, Jefferson, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Skamania, Thurston, and Wahkiakum County) with the support and oversight of OTR, and plan to add a second Tribal navigator as we expand this project.

## **Early Support for Infant and Toddlers (ESIT)**

Early intervention services support families as they meet the needs of their child, which makes a big difference in a child's life. The Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program provides services to children from birth to age 3 who have disabilities or developmental delays. In partnership with families, services can help children be more active and successful during their early childhood years and in a variety of settings. ESIT has continued to identify needs, provide support, and build relationships with Tribal partners to promote this service.

### *Highlights*

- ESIT entered interlocal government agreements with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and Lummi Nation. This will increase funding for early intervention services.
- The program's Tribal program consultant supports the ESIT team, and internal and external partners with specialized training/presentations. The weekly ESIT publication includes Tribal Terms of the Week to support learning in the early intervention community.
- The program coordinated with two Tribal representatives who are now members of the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC). These members provide insights, advice, and assistance in their roles as representatives of Washington Tribes.

## **Help Me Grow Washington**

In 2022, Help Me Grow Washington contracted with Kauffman & Associates, Inc. to lead a planning and engagement process with Tribes and urban Indian organizations (UIOs). It explored the relevance of HMG and potential ways Tribal partners could adapt the model for their communities.

## **Tribal Independent Living program (IL)**

We work with Tribes to help them provide their own IL services to Tribal youth and young adults. The contract provides an overall structure of what the Tribe can provide for this demographic. DCYF works closely with each Tribe as they create their own culturally responsive program, which is designed to support a successful transition to adulthood. Activities and programs include help with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, and stronger connections to caring adults.

## **DCYF to expand Native Culturally Responsive Prevention Services**

We will expand culturally specific and responsive programs and services that support families, which will safely reduce the number of Native children and youth that experience out-of-home placement. A Request for Application (RFA) was posted in May to contract with Tribal nations and Native-serving organizations to deliver these services. We initially received three responses and have extended the submission deadline.

## **Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR)**

*Meetings, summits, conferences, etc.*

- Five 10.03 meetings with Tribes across the state.
- Green Hill School in Chehalis hosted a powwow April 2023.
- Echo Glen hosted an Indigenous People's Celebration November 2022 that consisted of a ceremonial dancing event. Echo Glen Youth made traditional soup and bread and distributed it to attendees.
- JR staff attended a Resiliency and Suicide Prevention Summit that the Suquamish Tribe hosted.

*Program or rule change, and benefits*

- Reorganizing JR operations and adding key positions and supports for safety, education, vocation/employment, training, homelessness prevention, and youth without aftercare.
- Implementing a 'back-to-basics' approach and modernizing JR security structure while using data to address challenges.
- Focusing on a trauma-informed care approach as well as safe and secure facilities.
- Developing the Community Transition Services (CTS) program where young people can serve 18 months of their sentence living with family or on electric monitoring.

- Establishing a specialist to provide a peer support program using Peer Bridger Reentry Support.
- Revising the Crisis Management Intervention Systems (CMIS) and implementing Advanced Crisis Intervention Training (ACIT). This will reduce physical interventions and help staff promote safety and a trauma-informed approach to intervention and de-escalation events.

#### *Number of new contracts/grants*

- 10 Community Juvenile Accountability Act (CJAA) Tribal agreements
- 15 Residential Custody service agreements (RCSA)

As of June 30, 2022, there were 16 AI/AN self-identified young people in JR residential facilities. During fiscal year 2023, 20 Tribal youth were admitted to secure facilities, and nine youth were transferred to community facilities from secure facilities.

### **Staff contact**

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