

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services and the Native American Training Institute

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Indian Child Welfare and Wellness Conference to be held in Mandan Feb. 17-19

BISMARCK, N.D. - "*Nurturing Lifelong Connections*" is this year's theme of the 15th annual Indian Child Welfare and Wellness Conference, Feb. 17-19, 2016, at the Baymont Inn and Suites, in Mandan, N.D. The conference features experts on child welfare issues, juvenile justice, cultural and tribal relations, health and wellness, child behavioral health, and the Indian Child Welfare Act.

"This year our planning team wanted to focus on nurturing lifelong connections and creating permanency, which is something many of us take for granted and it is not always so for children," said Sandra Bercier, director of the Native American Training Institute in Bismarck. "We want conference participants to walk away with a renewed sense of urgency and energy in their journeys with children and families."

Conference speakers will share their expertise on the Indian Child Welfare Act, the role of child advocacy centers in North Dakota, equine assisted therapy, building resiliency against secondary traumatic stress, ethics that guide professional social work practice, treatment of historical trauma among Native Americans, and the new Public Law 113-183, Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Family Act.

There will also be presentations on the Lakota Language Nest, a preschool that nourishes the Lakota language among Standing Rock's youngest citizens and the Safe Babies Court Teams Approach, a project that focuses on how the courts, child welfare agencies, and related child-serving organizations work together, share information, and expedite services for young children.

On Thursday, Feb. 18, from 6 to 8 p.m., Bismarck singer/songwriter Mercedes Gourneau will perform and there will be exhibition dancing by local Native American dancers. Also, on display will be ponies and discussion about equine assisted therapy. The event is free and open to the public at the Baymont Inn and Suites, Pier 7 room.

Conference attendees include social service professionals, counselors, child protection workers, judges, attorneys, juvenile justice and Tribal court personnel, foster parents, educators, behavioral health professionals, and others interested in child welfare.

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) hours and Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are available for licensed social workers and foster parents. United Tribes Technical College will be on-site to offer CEUs. Educational hours are also available for Wraparound Recertification from the North Dakota Department of Human Services.

Preregistration is encouraged, but registrations will be accepted at the door. For more details or a schedule of events, go online to www.nativeinstitute.org or call 701-255-6374.

The Indian Child Welfare and Wellness Conference is hosted by the Native American Training Institute in partnership with the North Dakota Supreme Court and North Dakota Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Division.

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