

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Conference highlights milestone anniversary of the Indian Child Welfare Act; provides training on child welfare topics to protect native families**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The Native American Training Institute will host the 17<sup>th</sup> annual North Dakota Indian Child Welfare and Wellness Conference, Feb. 26-28, at the Spirit Lake Casino and Resort in St. Michael, N.D. This year's conference celebrates the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the hope, healing and perseverance the federal law has brought to Native American families.

“This year, we are honored to host this conference at Spirit Lake where the national ICWA movement began four decades ago,” said Stephanie DeCoteau, director of the Native American Training Institute. “The conference agenda puts a focus on this milestone and provides training and insight on various cultural and tribal relations topics, child welfare issues, and health and wellness strategies to help conference participants in their work with children and families.”

On the opening day, Feb. 26, retired Judge William Thorne Jr. will share information on ICWA, and there will be a presentation on child welfare code of ethics. Afternoon topics include truth healing reconciliation in Indian child welfare and what research and science is showing about trauma, resilience and relationships among children and families. From 3:15 to 4:45 p.m., there will be a panel discussion on how ICWA is being implemented within each North Dakota tribe and in the justice system.

The conference continues on Feb. 27 with morning presentations on understanding N.E.A.R. (Neuroscience, Epigenetics, Adversity, and Resilience) and managing professional stress while caring for others. At noon, there will be a special recognition luncheon honoring the members of the original ICWA leadership team from Spirit Lake who went to Washington, D.C. and advocated for federal legislation to protect native children.

There will also be breakout sessions on human trafficking in Indian country, the history and culture of Spirit Lake, the gift of healing brought by today's youth, fostering children impacted by domestic violence, and the benefits of meditation and yoga in classrooms and homes. Additional sessions are also scheduled.

On Feb. 27, at 6 p.m., the public is invited to a free showing of “Te' Ata,” a movie based on the true story of Mary Thompson Fisher, a woman who traversed cultural barriers to become one of the greatest Native American performers.

The conference wraps up on Feb. 28 with two morning presentations on healing communities and weaving the past into the present.

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Additional sessions are also scheduled throughout the conference.

DeCoteau said the conference is open to 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 the child welfare system. To date, about 150 people are registered for the conference.

Continuing Education Units are available for licensed social workers. Educational hours are also available for Wraparound Recertification from the North Dakota Department of Human Services.

Preregistration is encouraged, but people can also register at the door. Registration ranges from \$80 per day to \$225 for the full three-day conference. A student and foster parent rate of \$20 per day or \$60 for the entire conference is also available. To preregister or for more information on the conference, call the Native American Training Institute at 701-255-6374.

The conference is hosted by the Native American Training Institute in partnership with the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Division.

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