

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes

Findings from a National Needs Assessment of Tribal Child Welfare Programs

National Child Welfare
Evaluation Summit
August 31, 2011



A Service of the Children's Bureau, a member of the National T/TA Network

<http://www.nrc4tribes.org>

The National Resource Center for Tribes (NRC4Tribes) joined the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Network to provide and broker training and technical assistance to support the enhancement of tribal child welfare systems. We provide training and technical assistance at no cost through the T/TA Network to eligible tribes.

<http://www.nrc4tribes.org>



Establishing a shared vision...

The NRC4Tribes Leadership Team - comprised of TLPI and its partner agencies - held a facilitated strategic planning session to plan the five year implementation of the NRC4Tribes.

As four separate entities, the agency staff felt the importance of developing a common vision, mission, philosophy and guiding principles specifically for the NRC4Tribes.



The vision...

The vision of the National Resource Center for Tribes (NRC4Tribes) is to facilitate the empowerment of Native Nations to nurture the safety, permanence and well-being of American Indian/Alaska Native children, families and communities by offering culturally relevant information, resources and technical assistance so that the dreams and sacrifices of the ancestors are fulfilled and honored.



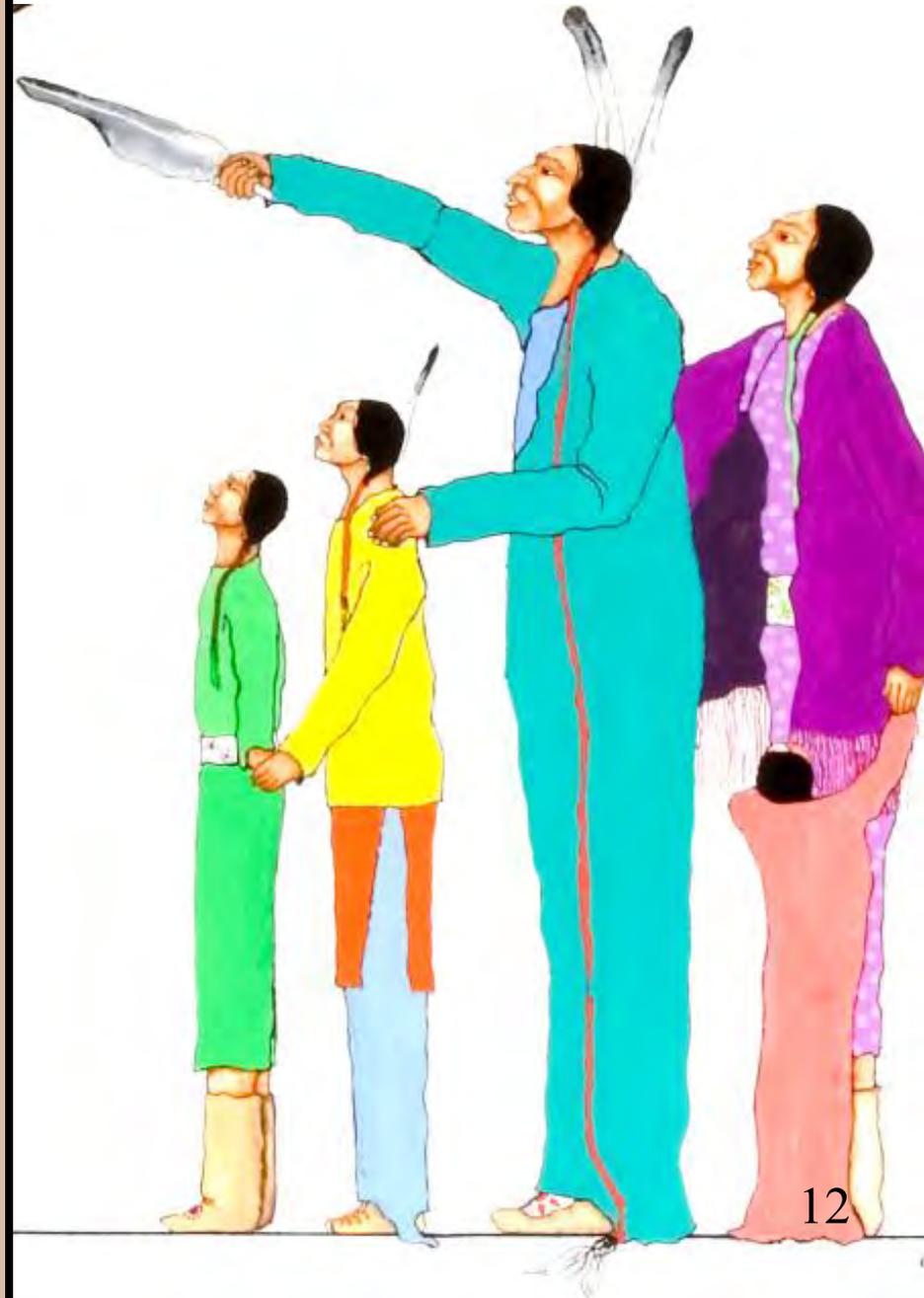
The mission...

Our mission is, as members of the Children's Bureau T/TA Network, to collaborate with Native Nations and our training and technical assistance partners to identify and effectively implement community, culturally based strategies and resources that strengthen tribal child and family services.



The philosophy...

Children are sacred and entitled to be cherished in a safe and nurturing environment with strong family, community and cultural connections. Their happiness and well-being includes nourishment of mind, body and spirit in order to fulfill their dreams throughout their journey toward becoming a healthy Elder.



Needs Assessment Purpose

- **Listen** to tribal child welfare program staff, families and community stakeholders talk about program strengths, gaps and challenges.
- **Gather** relevant information, which can then be distilled into an accurate profile of the tribal child welfare system.
- **Inform Decisions** about types of services, administrative functions, data and information collection, program management and reporting.
- **Provide Information** about the training and technical assistance available to tribes.

Needs Assessment Methods

General Online Survey

- 85-items; checklists, multiple choice, open-ended
- 262 surveys completed by representatives of more than 100 tribes

Tribal Director Telephone Interviews

- 31 tribal child welfare directors across 6 Children's Bureau regions (7 BIA regions; 10 states)

Tribal Stakeholder On-site Interviews

- 20 IV-B funded tribes were invited; 16 accepted
- 149 in-person interviews were conducted

A stratified random sampling process based on geographic region and size was used to select tribes to participate in on-site and telephone interviews.

Needs Assessment Consultants

Team of tribal child welfare experts from across the country selected to:

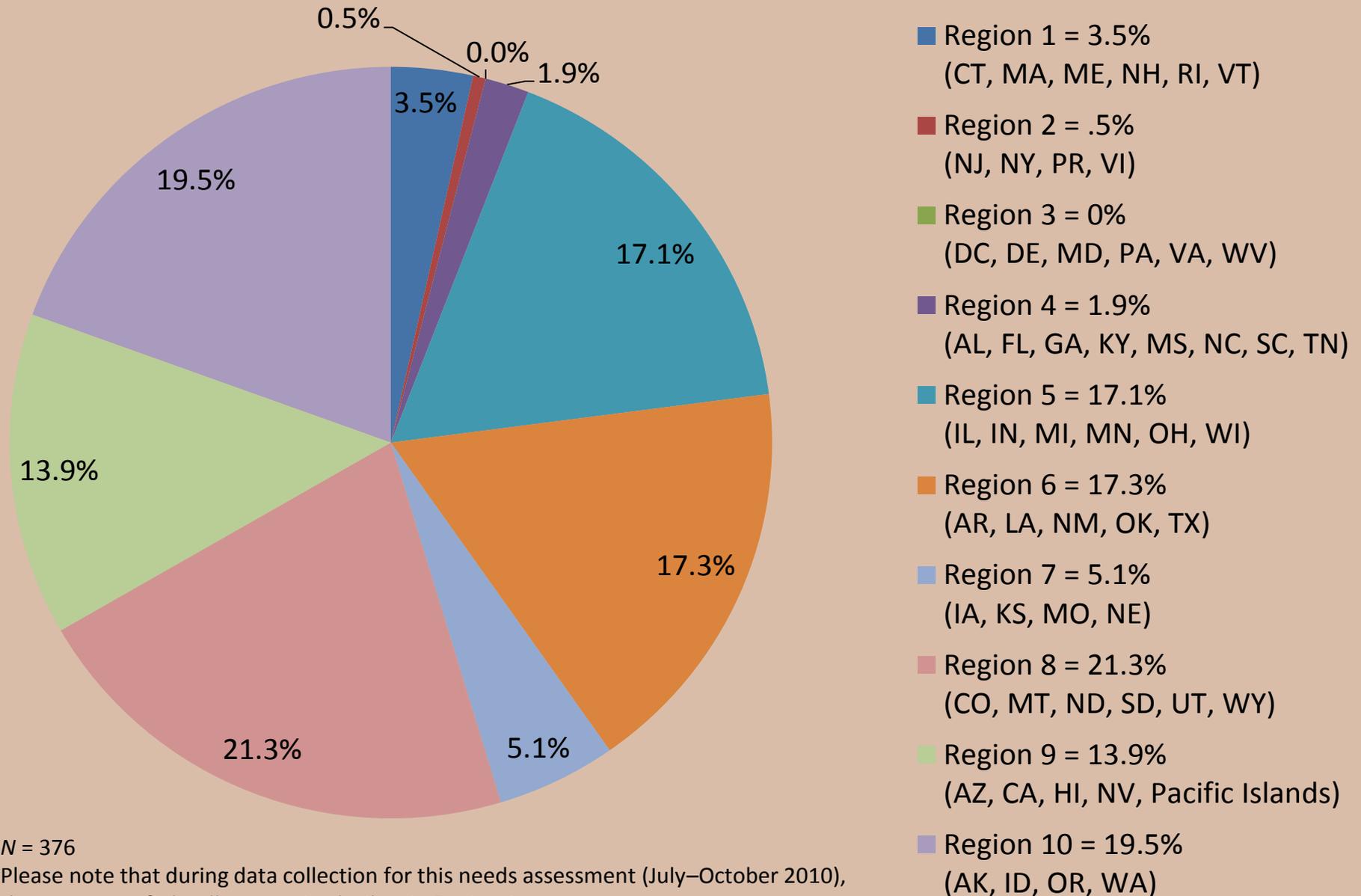
- Gather assessment data
- Advise on methods, tools, and outreach
- Conduct on-site assessments and telephone interviews
- Signed confidentiality agreement and followed data protocols



Needs Assessment Respondents

- 400+ individuals representing 127 federally-recognized tribes
- General Online Survey respondents: 42.8% involved with the tribal child welfare agency
- Interviewees:
 - 45.6% tribal child welfare staff
 - 17.4% foster parents and youth
 - 37% were other stakeholders

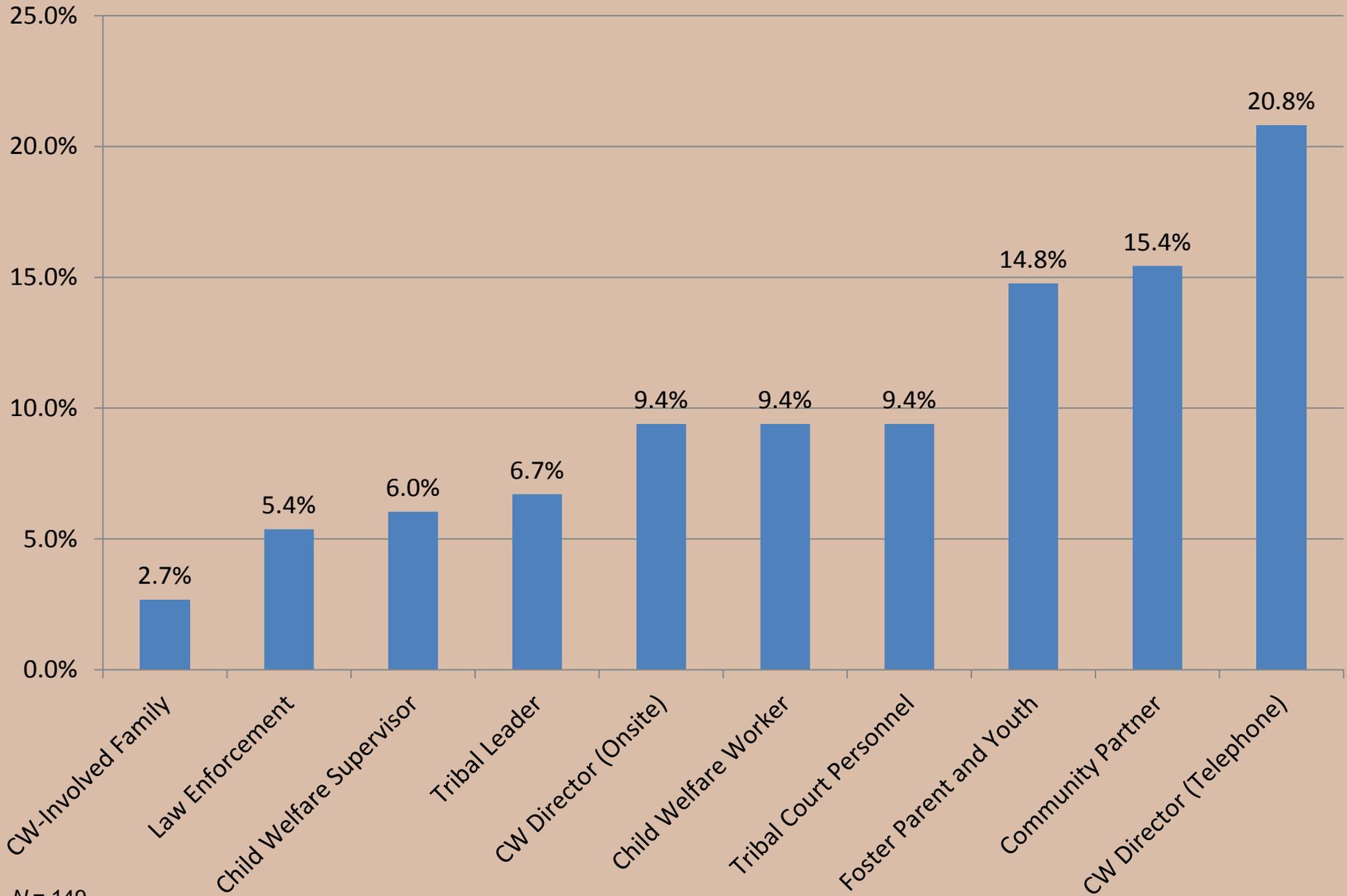
Needs Assessment Participants by CB Regions



N = 376

Please note that during data collection for this needs assessment (July–October 2010), there were no federally recognized tribes in Region 3.

Onsite and Telephone Interviewees



N = 149

Data Analysis

- All interviews recorded, professionally transcribed, and entered into Atlas-TI 6.2 for analysis
 - Some participants allowed handwritten notes only, and some agreed to be interviewed but not included
 - Selection of transcripts, interview notes and open-ended survey data open coded and analyzed by Coder 1
 - Trained 4 additional coders on preliminary coding scheme, and analysis team continued to openly code the remainder of the data (September-November 2010)
 - Reliability ensured through weekly meetings to discuss coding scheme, analytic methods and emerging themes and 2-day final analysis meeting to share findings and reach group consensus on results
 - Atlas-TI data manager role

Results

- Analysis of interviews resulted in 5 themes or topic areas, each with several subthemes
 - Tribal Child Welfare Practice
 - Foster Care and Adoption
 - Indian Child Welfare Act
 - Legal and Judicial
 - Tribal Child Welfare Program Operations
- Perspectives of interviewees and survey respondents were in alignment

Tribal Child Welfare Program Strengths

- Approach to working with families

“I would say just our knowledge of the local people is a strength. That would be a prevention in itself. And being able to find relatives in a timely manner.”

- Characteristics of child welfare staff

“We have a well educated and well trained staff who interact very well with the target population.”



Tribal Child Welfare Program Strengths

- **Available tribal services or resources**

“We work collaboratively with state agencies and services agencies to ensure appropriate culturally based services.”

- **Cultural understanding**

“Obviously, child welfare is very important no matter what walk of life you are, but for the Native American folks, it’s about us re-establishing traditions and language and the family togetherness. It’s more about trying to stop genocide, if you will, and I think that’s the greatest strength of all the tribal programs, is what we’re actually trying to accomplish. That is what we fight for every day.”

Tribal Child Welfare Program Challenges

- **Lack of funding for operations and services**

“I think money is a downfall and staffing and resources. Those are all of our bad areas. Foster care payments are hard, and our funds are limited so we can’t offer a lot of things that we want to make this a better program.”

- **Lack of staff**

“You might hear a lot of times, ‘we’ve only got one person.’ You have no idea what that is like, the impact of what that is like. I think it’s a barrier toward a better communication and any child welfare procedure, whether it’s strengthening from the beginning and working on a prevention road or if it’s working with a family that has children in custody. If you don’t have the staff then you’re limited.”

Tribal Child Welfare Program Challenges

- **Lack of prevention services**
- **Technology for data tracking and case management**
- **Collaborating with state or county child welfare departments**

“Well, we try to work with the state but they seem to have their own agenda and it’s hard, it’s really hard to work with them because, I mean for various reasons, but it’s kind of a contentious relationship.”

- **Accessing services and working with service providers**

“We do live in a very rural area so I think that transportation is a huge barrier for us as far as our families having access to those services.”

Topic Areas and Subthemes

1. Tribal Child Welfare Practice

Child welfare practice; culturally based services; service challenges; infrastructure; workforce issues

2. Foster Care and Adoption

Tribal foster care; foster parent recruitment, licensing, and training; adoption

3. Indian Child Welfare Act

Collaborations with state/county child welfare programs and courts

4. Legal and Judicial

Children's Codes; participants' experiences working with state/county and tribal courts; child protection teams

5. Tribal Child Welfare Program Operations

Topic Area #1

Tribal Child Welfare Practice

Infrastructure elements necessary for effective tribal child welfare programs

- **Documented practice model that includes:**
 - **Formal assessment protocols**
 - **Case management processes**
- **Tribal Children's Code that:**
 - **aligns with the practice model**
 - **reflects the culture and value of the tribe**
 - **meets federal child welfare requirements**
- **Job descriptions and staff performance reviews**
- **Management information system (MIS)**

Tribal Child Welfare Practice

Child welfare workforce is the area of greatest strength *and* greatest challenge for tribal child welfare programs

- **Workforce strengths**
 - Experience, skills, knowledge
 - Ability to engage with families
 - Commitment to doing whatever it takes to keep families together and children safe
 - Staff cohesion and peer support
 - Use of traditional practices to heal both families and themselves
 - Cultural and community understanding and engagement

Tribal Child Welfare Practice

- Workforce challenges

- Staff is overworked, overwhelmed, and burned out
- Vicarious, or secondary, trauma threatens physical and emotional well-being and work effectiveness
- Difficulty providing needed training in critical areas of child welfare practice



Topic Area #2

Foster Care and Adoption

Foster care programs should be managed by tribes

- to keep children in their families and tribal communities
- to maintain their connections to tribal culture and tradition
- **Resources described as “inadequate” for:**
 - program operations
 - worker salaries
 - foster home recruitment
 - foster parent subsidies

Foster Care and Adoption

“We don’t do very many adoptions. Our tribal code is a little bit different than other tribal codes. Under some circumstances with parental consent, there can be an adoption without termination of parental rights. Frequently, when that happens, it’s another family member that’s

doing the adoption and the parent permanently gives up custody but still retains some visitation rights of some sort.”

–Tribal Court Judge



Topic Area #3

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

Most tribes reported:

- that states and counties comply with ICWA notifications
- very few jurisdictional disputes with states/counties
- they do not have the financial resources and staff capacity necessary to address their large numbers of ICWA cases
- continuing adoption of tribal children by non-Indians in state and county courts

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

Many tribal respondents felt that often state/county workers:

- did not understand or correctly interpret ICWA
 - did not accept or understand the continued need for ICWA
 - lacked awareness of important cultural aspects and tribal processes, such as enrollment.
-
- Perceptions differed widely between tribal and state/county respondents regarding the quality and level of state/tribal collaboration and state ICWA compliance.

Topic Area #4

Legal and Judicial

A majority of tribes:

- administer their own tribal court
 - have access to a tribal attorney or one working directly for the child welfare agency
-
- Many participants reported that their **tribal children's codes need revisions** to make them more specific to the tribe's culture and traditions.
 - Several participants reported that their tribe was in the process of developing a children's code.

Legal and Judicial

- A majority of participants identified the **Child Protection Team (CPT)** concept as the team most widely utilized in reviewing child welfare cases.
- **Tribal CPTs** were generally composed of:
 - Tribal child welfare staff, community members, tribal enrollment, law enforcement, tribal court staff, behavioral health staff, and social services directors
 - FBI, U.S. attorney, BIA, state/county social workers, schools, CASAs, judges, attorneys, and prosecutors

Topic Area #5

Tribal Child Welfare Operations

Nearly half of the participating tribes currently have a tribal/state agreement.

- **Tribes who said their agreements were working well:**
 - **Have an agreement that clarifies jurisdictional authority and how services are provided**
 - **Meet regularly with state child welfare representatives**
 - **Have a close working relationship with at least one key individual from the state child welfare system**
 - **The tribe agrees with the terms**
 - **The agreement is consistently honored by the state**
 - **The tribe and state work collaboratively to serve Indian children and families in a culturally appropriate way**

Tribal Child Welfare Operations

- **Those tribes that reported challenges with their tribal/state agreements cited:**
 - **A lack of communication**
 - **A lack of state/county adherence to the terms and spirit of the agreement (especially the failure of states to notify tribes as per ICWA)**
 - **Issues with the agreement**

Tribal Child Welfare Operations

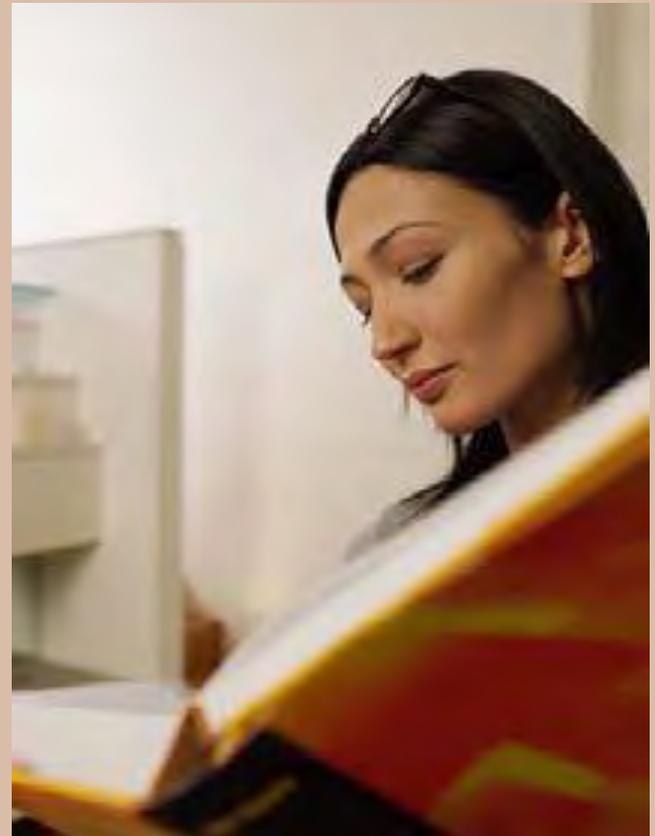
Program Funding

- Lack of funding for operations and services was a consistent theme

“I think money is a downfall and staffing and resources. Those are all of our bad areas. Foster care payments are hard, and our funds are limited so we can’t offer a lot of things that we want to make this a better program.”

“We don’t have the funding to hire more staff that can be on call. Staff are needing to update training skills each year, but the funding isn’t there for staff to attend trainings, and to maybe even go to other Indian sites to see how they’re doing things, and get contacts from there.”

–Tribal Child Welfare Director



Tribal Child Welfare Operations

Program Funding—Title IV-B:

- 45% reported currently receiving Title IV-B funding
- Primary reasons for not receiving Title IV-B funding
 - 35%—time-consuming application and management process
 - 21%—lack of information about the process
 - 14%—eligibility
 - 28%—other reasons (e.g., lack of buy in from their tribal court or state/county agencies)

Tribal Child Welfare Operations

Program Funding—Title IV-E through Tribal/State Agreements:

- **68% of survey respondents were familiar with Title IV-E funding**
- **47% currently receive Title IV-E funding through a tribal/state IV-E agreement**

Tribal Child Welfare Operations

Program Funding—Direct Title IV-E funding:

- Many participating tribes stated that they were interested in learning more about direct Title IV-E funding
 - 22% were definitely interested
 - 21% were definitely not interested
 - 57% were unsure
- Several tribes shared that they are considering options or were in the beginning stages of IV-E planning

Tribal Child Welfare Operations

So I think if these technical services are provided upfront on an individual tribe basis based on the number of IV-E cases, it will give a clear picture whether tribes should go into contract in their own IV-E as well as what's to be expected and how do



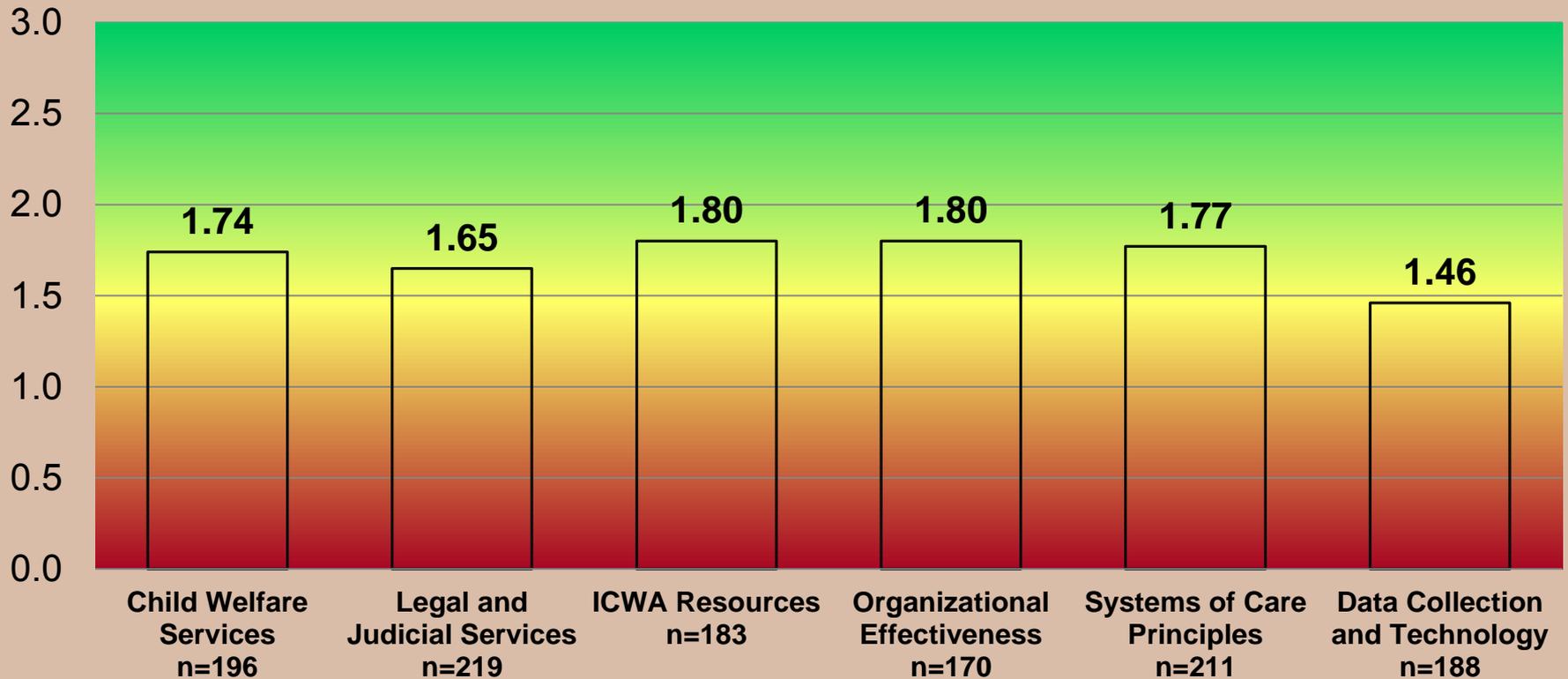
we sustain that and how many numbers before we hit the threshold before it's actually going to be beneficial for that tribe to do so. So I think it would help . . . that the feds, the state share that information to each tribe so that we can make a sound decision for our community.

– Tribal Child Welfare Director

TA Need Areas from Survey Respondents

1	2	3
Critical T/TA Needs Area	Moderate T/TA Needs Area	Strength Area (little need for T/TA)

Overall Mean Scores for T/TA Areas



Technical Assistance Needs

- Desire to develop supportive and ongoing relationships

“The main person that has been helping us has been our regional person. It was that face-to-face that really makes a difference.”

- Local TA providers

“We wish the federal agencies would choose someone to do our TA who has lived and worked within our tribal communities, who really understands exactly what it is like here and knows how to work with our diverse cultures. We want people who are willing to come in the winter and not just summer when we are busy with subsistence activities. The degree isn't as important to us as the understanding of how to work with our villages and work through interpreters and with different ages of people.”

- Providers able to address a variety of needs areas

Summary of T/TA Needs Areas for Tribal Child Welfare Programs

- **Increasing tribal child welfare program capacity and organizational effectiveness by:**
 - **Casework skills for addressing child and family issues**
 - **Incorporating tribal values, customs, and traditional practice;**
 - **Developing or revising policies and procedures (including a Children's Code)**
 - **Collecting data and evaluating program operations and child welfare outcomes**
 - **MIS data systems and technology (software and hardware)**
 - **Community outreach and involvement**

Summary of T/TA Needs Areas for Tribal Child Welfare Programs

- **Assistance in leveraging community, tribal, and state resources**
- **Support in developing collaborative partnerships**
 - **between tribal and state child welfare systems**
 - **with community providers**
 - **with departments within the tribe**

Summary of T/TA Needs Areas for Tribal Child Welfare Programs

- Training in:

- Child welfare practice knowledge and skills, including legal issues and court systems

“My staff is mostly younger, less experienced caseworkers. They are professional and dedicated to our families but need time to ‘season’. I think their biggest issue is working with the court system, both tribal and state/county.”

- Practice and legal aspects of the ICWA

“So I would say one of our challenges is, the tribe, the ICWA workers just don’t have the training to really be effective in court. We do go to ICWA trainings and all that but they don’t, unless you get an advanced ICWA class, you don’t really get into that aspect.”

Summary of T/TA Needs Areas for Tribal Child Welfare Programs

- Tribal values, customs and traditional practices

“More training needs to be available to current and new employees of the tribe to make them aware of the custom and cultural sensitivity of the tribe.”

- “Third party” training to increase understanding of child welfare related issues and the work of the tribal child welfare program

Summarized T/TA Recommendations for NRC4Tribes and Children's Bureau

Recommendation 1: Support the strengthening of the tribal child welfare program infrastructure to improve practice

Recommendation 2: Support the use of culturally based practices in tribal child welfare

Recommendation 3: Partner with the T/TA Network to support the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs

Recommendation 4: Promote the development and maintenance of successful tribal foster care and adoption (permanency) programs

Recommendation 5: Support the strengthening and improvement of tribal/state relationships

Summarized T/TA Recommendations for NRC4Tribes and Children's Bureau

Recommendation 6: Build tribal child welfare peer networks

Recommendation 7: Address workforce issues in tribal child welfare programs

Recommendation 8: Enhance multidisciplinary collaboration for prevention services

Recommendation 9: Ensure a targeted T/TA that meets the individualized needs of tribes

Recommendation 10: Partner with other federal agencies within the ACF, the BIA, and others to model effective systems of care that will support tribal child welfare programs

Dissemination of the Results

- Full report and executive summary sent to all participating tribes and posted on the website
- A series of webinars were presented to Children's Bureau, T/TA network, and tribal communities
- Individual summary reports being prepared for all tribes who participated in on-site assessment



National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes

NRC4Tribes

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