Transcript of Closing Luncheon

Drawing on Cultural Strengths to Move Toward a More Child-Centered, Family Friendly Society

The following is a transcript of the Closing Luncheon, including keynote speaker Dr. Hilary Weaver.

Kim Amos

Welcome to the 16th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, and I'll introduce you to our guest on the dais this afternoon. To my left is our keynote speaker, Hilary Weaver. She's Associate Professor at the SUNY Buffalo Graduate School of Social Work. You'll hear more about her background in just a few minutes. On my right is Ms. Vicky Wright. She's the child welfare program specialist and the lead on tribal issues at the Children's Bureau. Next to Vicky is Terry Cross, Executive Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association. I'm going to now turn the podium over to Vicky Wright. (Applause)

Vicky Wright

Thank you, everyone. In a sense, it is so good its Saturday. I love the closing luncheon, and that it's such a small group, and the conference just brings so much energy and so much to take back. It's sort of like I have so much energy and I'm so exhausted. You all are probably in that same space. But you know another fun thing about the conference is that they can be so formal, so I'm the introducer of the introducer of the speaker. And I do want to say that in the Children's Bureau, I do have the tribal specialty, and we are very busy implementing for everyone, but the tribes got a 3% satisfied and went from about 90 tribes to about 170 tribes that are eligible for the safe and stable families' funding. So we are very busy across the country implementing that and getting plans put together and so forth. And hopefully that's going to continue for awhile, and tribes are really going to be able to build on their child and family services programming with better funding from the Federal government. A little more to go, but probably better funding. So that's a good thing.

One of the people who has been most instrumental in helping, in moving the Federal government along towards better funding for tribes is Mr. Terry Cross, and I'm just really delighted to be able to introduce him. He has spoken to us once yesterday and talked some about the reconciliation effort that he's been doing. He is the Executive Director and, quite frankly, the developer and founder of the National Indian Child and Welfare Association (or NICWA) and it's headquartered right here in Portland. NICWA has long been co-sponsors of this conference. They also hold their own and work with many, many others on various tribal conferences on child abuse and neglect.

NICWA is dedicated to the well-being of all American children, and especially all American Indian children and families. The organization works to ensure that every Indian child has access to community-based, culturally appropriate services that help them grow up safe, healthy and spiritually strong, free from abuse and neglect, sexual exploitation, and the damaging effect of substance abuse.

Terry has been in this field for more than 30 years and has worked ten years directly with children and families. He served on the faculty of Portland State University School of Social Work, which is our local host agency. I just wanted to go over some of the few things that he has written, curricula that he's written. Terry just got selected as the best practice for the whole positive Indian parenting curricula that has been around for some time. He's trained often, and I kind of think of training as like voting, early and often, and positive Indian parenting curricula are done often and is well done. He's also done curricula on cross-cultural skills in Indian Child Welfare, and the one that's been the best for me is the relational world view of Indian tribes.

And now that's all the formal things, and now I just want to say a few personal words about Terry's advocacy. I just think he is a first-rate advocate, and you know what advocates do? They make you feel uncomfortable; they teach, they explain, they confront, and they work towards the better. They just keep reminding you that things need to be better for children and families, and things do happen, and they help that happen, and they do that sometimes in a quiet way and easy, and sometimes they need to just speak out and be vocal and insistent, and I think that's hard work. I think that's discouraging work, and I think I just want to say, "Thank you, Terry," because he keeps doing it, and he keeps doing it very well. I think the 30 years that Terry has been in this business, just think how much good he has done for Native children and families. And so I just want to thank you for that and introduce Terry Cross. (Applause)

Terry Cross

That's high praise coming from someone I have to make feel uncomfortable every once in a while. One of the things that I've learned over the years is that some of our best friends are in the bureaucracy, the folks who can make things happen for our children and families. And so my daughter, who is now 30, used to go with me to meetings when she was very young. She was one of those kids who could come and sit, and sometimes she would sit at the table and watch the adults sit around the table, and after the meetings we used to play this game. I'd ask her if she could tell me who were the bureaucrats and who were the dreamers (at 5 and 6), and she could pick them out. I told that story one time to a group of friends, and a person from SAMHSA come up to me afterwards feeling quite injured. She said, "I want you to know that bureaucrats can be dreamers, too." And that was a learning experience for me. I realized that bureaucrats can be dreamers, too. All of us have a piece in this—all of us—from the work that we do directly with children and families to the programs that we develop.

We all walk in a difficult circle. We all want the same things for our children. We all want children to be safe. We want a voice in their safety, and want those children to be raised in a family, and for those families to be strong and to be intact. We also live in an environment in which our thinking, our ways, our doings, and our beliefs are shaped by the culture around us. Vicky mentioned we've been doing some work at NICWA on truth and reconciliation in child welfare, and one of the underlined premises of that work is that there's no such thing as a culture-free child welfare. All of the notions that underpin social work practice, child welfare practice, are in some way rooted in culture. It's harder to see that in the mainstream culture, but it's there. The trap that we can enter into, that we get caught in when we do this work, and we are not understanding the cultural nature of our work, is that we start thinking that our way is the only way, that our way is the better way, and we forget that others have ways of solving problems, of bringing resources to bear, of structuring families, and a whole range of things. And once we forget that others' ways are as legitimate as our own, we run the risk of colonial oppression, imposing our ways on others. This is something that changes easily, something we have to pay attention to, something we have dialog deeply about, that we have to have difficult discussions about.

I have a friend here in Portland, one of our traditional elders, teachers, storytellers. His name is Ed Edno. Ed talks about his experience in the mainstream world as a tribal person as being as if he were walking into the wind all the time. Ever had one of those days when you were out on a windy day, and in an open area, and you had to walk against the wind? Well, when you walk against the wind, you get tired. It's fatiguing. It takes a lot out of you. You can easily get blown off your path. Ed says that it's his cultural ways, his teachings, his family, the things that he does to keep himself connected with his cultural community that keep him on his path. He looks for places along that path for shelter. He looks for people from the mainstream who would be allies that would help provide that shelter.

We also find strength in common ground with others in our profession, in our community, in our families. One of the people that I look to for her writings, for her thinking about these issues, is Dr. Hilary Weaver. She is a member of Lakota Nation. She has a BA in Social Work and Cross-Cultural studies. She has a MSW, DSW from Columbia (University), and is an associate professor, as you heard. Her specialty is social work with indigenous people. She spent time in New Zealand. She's the author of "Explorations and Cultural Competence." She's the current president of American Indians Social Work Educators Association. She's the chair of the Indian caucus at NASW. She serves on several boards and committees. She's a mom, a community activist, a teacher—not just of social work students, but for many of us who follow her career as we learn more and more about the integration of culture into practice. Hilary… (Applause)

Hilary Weaver

Thank you for that very kind introduction. I am so honored and so happy to be here with you today. When I got the invitation to come to speak at this conference, and I learned that it was a place for people of different disciplines to come together to really talk about what we need to do to protect children, that was so important to me—very, very meaningful. As Terry said, I am Lakota, I'm a social worker, and I'm a mom or nohtya. I raised my children in the Haudenosaunee tradition, my adopted territory, and so we use the Seneca language as much as we can. I am nohtya, so as I speak here today I look through a lens not just as a professional but as somebody with children, and I know that all of you work with children, so it's very, very important for me to be here today.

I'd like to talk to you about culture. How can we draw on cultural strengths and move toward a more child-centered and family-friendly society? I think it is so important to include culture in our work because only through understanding culture can we understand the beliefs, the values, the behaviors, of the people that we work with. Culture really informs these processes and, through culture, we can begin to strengthen and empower the families that we work with.

Now while culture has a central place in understanding the people that we work with, I think we often don't use culture, or we don't look through that particular lens. We are so frequently busy with the crisis nature of our work with children and families in trouble, children being harmed, that we forget to take that step back. So I'd like to urge you today to remember that cultural piece.

Now in my native tradition, sometimes we talk about a time of balance and harmony when we were very culturally balanced, before that balance was disrupted. A utopian sort of time and I think that teaches us that, through culture, we can return to a balance, to a better place. But I also don't believe that things were perfect before others came here. In fact, we have stories that tell that, as well. If I were to believe that things were perfect before indigenous cultures became disrupted and then now they are bad, that puts things in terms of good and bad. We know that things are not that simple, are not clear-cut. There is good and bad in all of us.

I'd like to share with you a story from the Haudenosaunee traditions. It's the story of the star children, and it teaches of a time in a village where at first things were fine. There was balance. There was a harmony. The people had their culture. They practiced their ceremonies, their spiritual traditions, but then they began to drift away from that. Specifically, the adult members of the community began to forget things, stopped doing their ceremonies on a regular basis, got too involved in what they wanted to do, and began ignoring the children, the needs of the children. The parents became abusive. They became neglectful—not only of the children, but of the culture. Things became very bad at that time.

The children, however, did not forget. They remembered the old ways, they remembered the culture, they remembered the teachings, and they continued to practice these things, but they had to do this in secret because it was not acceptable to the adults. So the children would meet in secret. They had their different roles. They had leaders, people who took on different responsibilities amongst them. At one point, the parents became

suspicious. Where the children and what were were they doing? So they started to follow the children, and they discovered these ceremonies that were going on in secret, and the parents became angry, and they took this anger out on the children. The children, however, were not discouraged, in spite of the bruises, in spite of the harmful words. They continued their ceremonies.

They continued the culture and had to be more secretive about it. There was only one family in the village that did not have harsh words with their child. They didn't quite understand what the children were doing, but they did not take out anger on the child. As all of the children gathered to continue their ceremonies, they began to feel lighter. It was a renewal for them, a weight was being lifted from them, and, in fact, as they became lighter, they literally began to rise. And the children were dancing, and they were singing, and they were continuing the cultural traditions, and then the parents came and discovered them and begun to yell and begun to scream. And as they did, the children continued to rise up back to the Creator where they had come from. They became the stars that we see now. They continue in a positive way. One child, the child from the family that was not harsh heard his parents calling as all of the parents cried out, "Where are you going. What are you doing? Why are leaving us?" The one child reached back to the family, and he became the shooting star as the rest of the children rose. The parents then experienced a profound sadness because they knew that their children were gone forever. They had become stars. As the parents recognized the impact of their actions and the responsibility that they held for this, they were devastated. They knew that the children were gone forever.

I find this a strong story of the division that can happen between parents and children, of the strength that can continue to exist in children in spite of everything, and, at the end, a kind of reachable-ness in the parents that, unfortunately, came too late. If there is something that we as helping professionals can do, before it is too late, to empower the families—the parents—to reach out to their children, that's a very important role for us to take on. I think we can draw on cultural strengths as we try to work toward protecting children.

I would like to think that we are past the point of thinking of culture as pathology, but I'm not sure we are there yet. We know intellectually that people come from a lot of different belief systems and value systems and that it would be inappropriate for me as a social worker to impose my value system on a particular client that I'm working with. But values are very potent. Values are valuable. I think my values are good—that's why they are valued. So when I see somebody else with a different set of values, it may be very challenging for me, very difficult for me to recognize the legitimacy of a different value system. We need to somehow find a way to make that bridge between our values, our ideas about raising children, and ideas that other people may have coming from different cultural backgrounds. A lot of the early literature on Native Americans and parenting pointed out how perhaps native parents may be seen as neglectful because we may have indirect ways of guiding our children. So social workers need to be careful not to erroneously charge families with neglect or disrupt families for something that isn't necessarily harmful to children.

I'm reminded of a time when my daughter was not quite so peaceful (after I already told you she was peaceful and would sit with us). I used to always take her to the Council and Social Education meeting. We have an all-day Native American symposium that goes along with that, and I run that symposium. I've done that for 13 years now, long before I had children, so as I started having children, I started bringing them with me. The first year, my daughter was two-months old. She slept a lot, which was good, and I proudly wore this cloth on my shoulder, just in case she was going to spit up, and I was doing the professional things and the mom things at the same time. It was wonderful. It felt like a great balance to me. The second year we had the conference, she was a little over a year old, not quite starting to walk yet. She was at the meeting, and she would go around (we sat around in a circle), and she would pull up on people's chairs, and everybody smiled, and everybody was happy. The next year at the conference, she was two-years old, and we know about two-year olds. She screamed and had a fit at every single opportunity. I barely made it through my all-day Native American meeting. In fact, at one point she was sitting on my lap, and I'm trying to chair the meeting (at these meetings they always have these big candy dishes), and I don't really allow my children to have a lot of candy, but she'd been reaching for candy after candy after candy. After I cut her off and the dishes were removed, she grabbed my water glass, threw it down, broke it, and started bleeding in the middle of the meeting. It was really quite dramatic, but I survived that. We got through that part.

Fortunately, at the exhibit hall of that conference, somebody had been passing out these band-aid dispensers. So we even had band-aids at out meeting; patched her up. The meeting ends. I'm standing outside the door of the room saying good-bye to some friends. (Really hello and good-bye, because we had just come together and would be together throughout the Council and Social Work Education meetings.) My daughter throws another fit. It was an area outside the doors, fully carpeted, and my daughter threw a fit, and I'm thinking she's safe; she's not going to hurt herself. We've bandaged her up already, and she thrashed around on the floor, and I continued to speak to my friends. Now this is a conference of social workers. People came like, "You know whose child that is over there?" Well yeah, she's my child. In my viewpoint, I didn't feel neglectful. There's no way she can hurt herself. She's just playing around on a carpeted surface and I'm standing right there. Boy, did I get some looks, but my friends from the Native American Social Work meeting were pretty much on the same page with us. The child is safe, she's two-years old, and she's throwing a fit. It's normal. It's not a problem.

I share this story to remind us that what we might initially see as a problem could be something normal within a particular culture. So I always hold my breath at social work conferences that I won't get charged with child neglect, but I do believe I'm an appropriate parent for my children. We need to look at the strengths, not just apparent problems. And there are so many strengths in different cultures.

If you look at for example the African American family, that family tends to be so child-centered. The reason for the family is the raising of children, the growth, and the positive development of children. Many cultures—African American, Latino, Native-American, Asia-American—are much more collective in their orientation than we find in the

dominant society. I see that as a fabulous strength. The collectivity means that there are many adults invested in the life of a child. It also means that there are many alternate caregivers when perhaps the biological parent is not able to care for that child. This is a strength. This is a resource.

There are also roles for the extended family, for kith and kin, for people who are like family members even though they are not biological relatives. When I think of God-parenting in, say, the Latino culture, comadre, compadre—literally translated as co-mother, co-father. Not just some title, not just some honorary thing, "Oh you are the Godparent." People who can really be involved in the life of this child. That's a cultural strength and a cultural resource and, of course, as they pass on their culture to their children, there is a lot of role modeling and racial socialization, preparing children for a world that is not always accepting of them, preparing that African-American child, that Latino child, that Native child for negotiating the mainstream society.

Children have a lot of meaning and a lot of value in many different cultures. In my Lakota tradition, we believe that children are sacred. They are sacred because they are closer to the Creator than adults are. They have recently arrived from the Creator. So they remember things, they know things that I have forgotten, that we have forgotten but they know. My teachings tell me that children choose parents, that when the child is with the Creator before they come to Earth and have a body, they are looking down and they are deciding, "You know what? There's some people who would be good parents or perhaps over there." What an honor to be chosen to parent my daughter and my son. I see this as an awesome responsibility and a great gift. In my tradition, the children are sacred, and they are the future of my culture. I am a temporary caretaker. They will be here after I'm gone. A lot of cultures celebrate specific birthdays to honor the sacredness of their children. In Native Hawaiian culture the first birthday is a huge celebration, a very festive luau in honor of that one-year old.

In Latino cultures you often see a huge fiesta for the 16th birthday. These are landmarks and illustrate how these cultures really value children. I also think of the Hmong culture, the Hmong being a tribal people, South East Asian, who were relocated to the United States after the Vietnam War. They value children. They are very child-centered and, as such, they tend to have very large families as well. They also value special-needs children or children with disabilities. In particular, I'm thinking of epilepsy. In the Hmong tradition, a child with epilepsy has a spiritual gift and, yes, there are some complications and there are some problems associated with that, but epilepsy is also associated with shamanism—that the child may have an ability to see above and behind what the rest of us can't see.

Well, if children are so important in all these cultures, we need to find a way to account for contemporary circumstances. How can children be maltreated if we really value them, if they are really the spiritual center of our families? I have a couple of answers to that. One being cultural disruption—that the valuing of children is often an ideal, a traditional way that may or may not be continuing after things like colonization or some sort of societal disruption.

And, of course, culture is just one factor, not <u>everything</u> that goes into who somebody is. There are other factors that play major roles, and disrupt families, and lead to maltreatment of children. We need to consider what the larger contexts for these families are. Even if the families try to value children, we live in a non-child centered context. The society that we have here in the United States I do not find to be very family friendly. So how can we, as people concerned about the well-being of children, begin to shift society in a way to be more child friendly? I believe that would be proactive prevention. If the society is more child friendly, more family friendly, we would be preventing child maltreatment.

I came across a very interesting article a couple of weeks ago—some cross-cultural research that was done looking at the rearing of children in different cultural societies and the use of corporal punishment. One of the findings of that study is that corporal punishment and, ultimately, the harming of children is much more likely in societies with colonization, where you have one culture that has come in and supplanted another or in society with imposed power and inequality. In the United States, we have a very stratified society. We don't like to talk about class, but it certainly is a reality. We don't like to talk about power, but some people are much more powerful than other people, and a lot of the people that we work with are some of the most vulnerable and powerless people. In a society with these power inequalities, we will continue to have a lot of child maltreatment.

The violence and oppression that we have on a societal level shapes the attitudes and behaviors that we have about violence and oppression in the home. I'm reminded of the old story: Say you have a man who has a job where he is not very empowered, doesn't receive much respect. The boss yells at him, tells him he did a terrible job, or didn't do something right, so this fellow goes home to his wife, and then he has harsh words with the wife. He yells at her, says she didn't do something right, she didn't have the dinner ready on time. In turn, the wife turns to the children, has harsh words with them, oh, they are not doing anything right. Then the children go and kick the dog. That sort of cascading violence, whether it is verbal violence or physical violence, that if we have a society where one person is feeling oppressed and disempowered, they take it out on another, and that is how societal problems manifest themselves in our homes.

Shifting society requires attention to the macro level. We need to look at our policies, we need to look at our laws. But it's often difficult to think about that on a day-to-day basis, when you are doing hands-on work with children and families. Even if we are not in jobs where we are doing things on a macro level, we can still make a difference with the children and the families that we work with. We must support smaller examples of valuing children, and this may involve recognizing cultural strengths and perhaps some reframing as well.

We still like to talk about reframing in social work, a different perspective, a different way to look at things. I don't know how many of you are familiar with the book, *When the Spirit Catches You, You Fall Down*. Is anybody familiar with that one? I see a number of you are. I received that book a number of years ago as a gift from a student. I read it. I couldn't put it down. It's amazing. It's a best seller. It's very moving. It's a

very painful story of a Hmong family, refugees who had resettled from South East Asia to California. They came with a large family, including a daughter who had a particularly severe form of epilepsy. That's where the title of the book comes from. It's a very visual description, "When the spirit catches you, you fall down." That's an epileptic seizure. The family did not use the term "epilepsy" —that's what the western medical establishment used—but they understood what was happening. They just understood it differently.

The differences in understanding became tragic in this case. This family dealt with the Western medical establishment and social service establishment for years, and it was conflict, after conflict, after conflict. At one point, the child was removed from the family and the family was charged with medical neglect. The family had not been administering the medication in the way the medical providers would have liked them to administer the medicine. One, they had a huge language barrier, and parents that were not literate in any language. The child was put on a very complex medical regimen—lots of different medicines, different dosages, different times—and there never was a clear understanding on the part of the family as to what they were required to do. In their understanding of the child's illness, which they believed had a spiritual component, they thought that a spiritual answer was in order. They sought the guidance of shamans. They used herbal treatments, and they didn't understand why they were given all these different pills. And the doctors constantly changed the pills. "Oh, let's change this dosage; let's change that. Let's try this medicine instead of that one, or half of this and half of that, at all these different times of the day." It would be confusing to any of us.

As the family sought their own ways of caring for their daughter, this was seen as wrong, not as their expression of love and their understanding of the best way to care for her. The family loved this daughter very, very deeply. As the illness progressed, the child lost the ability to walk. The family's response? The mother embroidered a fabulous, very large child–holding device, and she carried this child on her back everywhere. Social workers' take on it? This is very infantilizing. Of course, your child is not going to walk anymore, you're carrying her everywhere. This is a problem. This was the family's expression of love and could be reframed as such, but was not in this particular case. The family doted on this child. They would make special foods for her, even as she got closer and closer to a vegetative state. Sounds initially positive, this special loving care, these special foods, but this was seen negatively by the medical establishment and the social work community. "You are feeding her too much. She's getting fat." And in spite of the increase in weight, again, the mother is carrying this child everywhere.

It seems that the Western establishment—the social workers, the medical providers—saw nothing but negativity in the behavior of the family towards the child. But as I read the story, I see the love, the caring. I just wished there could've been a bridge person. Somebody who could help clear up this terrible misunderstanding between the medical providers and the family. In fact, there is a social worker who does some of that. There is a social worker. The first person after years of work with this family, who asks the family, "What do you think the problem is?" And the family has very clear ideas about causation, the nature of the problem, but no one had asked them until years into this case.

The family had also had clear ideas as to why things were getting worse with their daughter. They believed it was the Western medical care that she was receiving. They believed the pills were making her worse and, in some ways, the family was right. There were side effects to the drugs. There were drug interactions, and apparently this girl had a rare but severe reaction to a vaccine that ultimately led to her deterioration to a vegetative state, and her death. The family was right. The treatments were hurting their child.

There is one other person in this story who had a positive role, in a largely negative story. In fact, when the daughter was removed and put in foster care, the foster mother became a bridge. She was the only person who kept the family very much involved in the life of their child. The foster mother recognized the love that this family was expressing for their child and did not see the family as bad, dysfunctional, or neglectful.

As the foster mother saw it, nothing this family did could have been seen as neglect. All they did was love her and care for her and feed her, even as she deteriorated. And they helped her to have a death with dignity; reframing from a cultural perspective. Is there a way that we can be that bridge? Can we help those who don't recognize the importance of culture—not necessarily even change their minds, but to look for just a minute through this different lens? Is there a different perspective? Is there a different way to understand this? By being this bridge, we can begin to prevent some neglect and support families. I think we have large roles to play in being culturally competent.

Micro and macro levels. At the micro levels, both prevention and intervention. Certainly, when we are doing assessments of child maltreatment, we need to figure out what's really going on. Is there a sort of discipline that perhaps is alien to us, that we don't understand, but may not necessarily be abusive? In the region where I live, it is common among Latino families to punish their children by having them kneel on rice. It has become so common that this is well documented and now is understood by foster care workers, by child abuse investigators, that this is a cultural practice and is not necessarily harmful. Ten or 15 years ago, there were many, many misunderstandings about this.

It's also common in my community, particularly the Native American community, to discipline children by throwing water on them. This could initially be seen as very strange, very shocking. Why would you just throw a glass of water on your child? Is it abusive if it's cold? Is it abusive if the child stays wet for a certain period of time? I think that these questions can only be answered if you really understand the cultural piece and don't automatically assume, "Well, how can you do that to a child? How can you throw water on a child?" So we need to think in this cultural context, in these micro terms, and perhaps with an understanding like this the tragic story that I just told you of the Hmong family could have been prevented.

We need to be culturally competent on a mezzo level. We need to go back to our agencies. What are agencies doing in terms of prevention and intervention? What needs to be changed in our agencies? It is not possible for an individual to be culturally competent in an agency that does not respect cultural competence. That individual might

have the knowledge, the skills, the values to move toward cultural competence and work with the child and family—but if the agency is not culturally competent, that person's hands are tied and it will not be possible to work as productively as needs to happen.

And, of course, the macro level, the societal level. If the violence at the societal level is really what is perpetuating violence in the home, we need to do something about that. And we certainly need to look at our policies. Are our policies supporting families, including families with challenges like poverty, disability, racism, and the increasing xenophobia that we see in the United States? We need to question our policies, we need to be advocates, we need to change our policies if we are going to be child friendly. We have to be family friendly, and that requires a tremendous amount of change. We need to join together. We need to have interdisciplinary partnerships, which is much easier said than done, because I find that we often don't talk across disciplinary boundaries.

One of the things that I find so attractive about this conference is that it does try to include people from different backgrounds. I do a lot of work in the area of cultural competence, and I see that social workers do a lot on cultural competence. Psychologists do a lot on cultural competence. Nurses do a lot on cultural competence. Do the nurses know what the social workers are doing? And do the social workers know what the psychologists are doing? Just barely. We really do not talk to each other, and if we are going to make this a reality, we really need more cross-disciplinary pollination. We need to reflect on the focus of our work. Is protecting children accomplished through punishing or through supporting families? And I see the pendulum swing back and forth in our policies. Are we really going to try to keep the child in the home and support the families, or are we going to try to remove the child and put our money in foster care? We need to reflect on how we are spending our money. What is the policy emphasis? And, of course, this mirrors other society struggles, which put more into social control than social welfare.

Look at all the money that we are spending on prison in this society. Look at all the money we spend punishing drug users rather than rehabilitating drug users. If the money is going into punishment, it's not there for support and empowerment. We are very much connected. Things are related. Nothing exists in a vacuum. So our policies and the money that we spend on children are very much related to policies and money that's spent on drugs, on prisons, on welfare reform. It's very much connected to money that we spend on war. Energy and money that goes into one thing is not available for another. The current cultural violence that we have in this country does support violence in the home and abuse in the home. We need to find some way to support families, to support children, because what we are doing is not working. It is difficult, difficult, difficult work that you do, and we need to find creative ways around things. If we have obstacles in our way, if we have policies in our way, find a way around, or find a way through, or find a way over.

I did a little bit of traveling around the region yesterday and I took my kids up to Bonneville dam and we looked at the fish ladder, and I thought of the fish. You know, they just turn and swim up stream and do their thing, what they are programmed to do. Somebody put a huge dam right in the middle of their river. A huge dam, and blocks

them, but they have the fish ladder. We need to find a fish ladder, a child ladder. I don't know what you would call it, but some way around the things that block us and prevent us from supporting children and families. We also need to find a way to avoid the sea lions that are waiting for us on the other end our fish ladder. We have a lot to do, but it's crucial. If we don't help the kids now, what sort of society will we have in the next generation? We need to be responsive. We need to see families and parents as our clients, in spite of policies that may tell us differently. We need to have a holistic focus. The immediate safety concern of children may lead us to a narrow focus in the short-term, but we must not remain narrow in the long term. We need a lot of support for our work. We need to nourish ourselves. The things that we see on a day-to-day basis are very difficult, are very discouraging.

Nourish your own cultural roots. Pursue your joys. For me, I love quilting. It comes from my culture. Quilts are very important in Lakota culture, and they also have an Appalachian side to my family where I saw my grandmother quilting as long as I can remember. I'm doing more bead work now. I'm beading my pow-wow outfit with an iris for my daughter Iris and an eagle for my son Wanbli. Wanbli is the Lakota word for eagle. Through this sort of work, it is a prayer, it is nourishing, it is sustaining, and you know—sometimes it's fine to find substance in other places as well. I love Tai Chi. I'm a member of the Daoist Tai Chi Society and as I explore Daoism, I find a parallel with my own culture. I find that nourishing as well. Recognize your own cultural needs; recognize your own professional needs. Things like this conference, ongoing professional development ,which is really good for learning, for the "head stuff," but I think can be even more important for the sustaining "heart stuff," the networking, the knowing that you are not struggling alone, but there are other people across the country going up that same hill, working on these same issues.

We need to recognize our own familial needs. If we are working for the betterment of the children in the child welfare system, but are not paying attention to our own children and our own families, then we've missed something. That's why I travel with my family. I am not willing to be a lone professional, talking about children and not being with my own children. It is a struggle, because my family has their own needs, and it's difficult to pull children out of school as they get older. But one way or another, I will be with them, and if that means less travel for me, so be it. Or if it means more travel for them, sounds good, too. But we do need to pay attention to the needs of our families. This is holistic. This makes us better people. We need to recognize society's needs. Society needs healthy families and healthy children in order to be healthy. It is all connected. It is all inter-related. The compassion that we show to children will help tomorrow's leaders shape compassionate policies and a compassionate world.

We are building the future. And keep in mind that as we change society, as we reduce oppression in society, I believe we will ultimately reduce child abuse and maltreatment. We need to be the change that we want to see. This may look different in different disciplines, whether it's social work, law enforcement, policymaking, medical personnel.

Our paths may be somewhat different, but we are all going to that same place, a better place for children.

We need to be cognizant of the cultural strengths of those that we work with. Recognize the positive. Don't just see negative because it may be different from your own culture or your own values. This includes an awareness that being child-centered need not be individualistic, but can indeed be family friendly. As I wrap up today, I want to revisit the story of the "Star Children" and the things that impressed me about that story—the strength of the children against all odds, the resilience that I know you have seen in children whose families are very troubled. The star children have closeness to the Creator. They have a cultural and spiritual knowledge that adults have lost. And I believe that children have things that we as adults do not have. They may have a grounded-ness, centeredness, a particular talent. I don't know what a particular child would have, but I do believe that that child is not just somebody waiting to become an adult. They are strong and valuable in their own right. We have something to learn from children, and what we learn can help lead us toward a more balanced society. I really value the work that you do. I value that you have come to this conference to nourish yourselves. I know it's has been a long conference. You are probably tired, but I hope that there's a spark in here, that there's something warm, that there's something powerful that you will take back with you. I am very honored to be able to share this little bit of time with you, so thank you very much. (Applause)

Kim Amos

Thank you, Dr. Weaver, for that very thought-provoking and inspiring message. Well, well, well, this afternoon marks the conclusion of another remarkable adventure in learning and sharing. I hope that, over the course of this week, you've had an opportunity to note our conference flags which really speaks to the longevity of this conference— since its inception in 1976 in Atlanta, all the way to Portland, Oregon, in 2007.

During this week, we've heard from a wide array of phenomenal speakers—social workers, and direct practice physicians, researchers, advocates, policy makers, the media, and those willing to share their experience as victims of abuse and neglect. Their associations within the field may differ, but notably they all share a commitment to protecting children, promoting healthy families, and preserving communities.

A single goal unites us: to prevent child abuse and neglect in all its forms. Many questions have been answered and many strategies outlined. Hopefully, we also have opened a vast array of issues to be addressed both in research and in practice. We close this conference fully aware that the challenges facing us are formidable, and that our response is not only urgent but absolutely critical. I trust that you, like me, will return to your communities and organizations invigorated and inspired, eager to meet the challenges we have identified and those yet to come and fully prepared to lead your communities in new and exciting directions.

Finally, I'd like to thank my staff—and I'd like for your guys to stand. Your hard work and dedication have been essential to the planning, organization and implementation of this conference, and for that I thank you. Once again, I'd like to thank Katharine Kahn, Tony Stroh, David Udlock, the local steering and planning committees, and the numerous volunteers—many of you who are here today, who faithfully have given of your time and energy to assure the smooth running of our conference. Just as a little note on the side. You volunteers and anyone else, as you leave today, we do have some conference tote bags that we would like for you to take with you as a token of our appreciation. We really do appreciate your generous contribution to the success of the 16th National Conference. On behalf of the sponsors and cosponsors and all who contributed to making the 16th National Conference happen, thank you for participating. I look forward to seeing all of you in 2009 at the 17th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect. But don't leave just yet; we want to hear from Ms. Catherine Nolan, Director of the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect.

Catherine Nolan

I think that Kim has really said it all. I was jotting down some notes but you already said what I was going to say, and said it beautifully—better than I could say it. I only have two additional comments and one is…Katharine, I'm just wondering since you really were our local presence here and we can't do this conference (if you look at all those banners, every city has a local host agency) and we cannot do this conference without our local host agency. I'm just wondering Katharine, do you have a couple of words for us as we end the week…

Katharine Cahn

I have two words, and the two words are, "Thank you." I want to say thank you to you, (Catherine). About a year and a half ago, Kim sidled up to me and said, "We are trying to choose between two cities, and we need a city where there will be a local host and a community who will support it," and it took me just a demi-second to say yes. I grew up in Oregon. I moved back recently, and I love my state, and I love the people in my state, and I knew we would host you in this way because we love having people over. And we don't get much of a chance to share the wealth of our culture and our environment and our children and families. So thank you for giving us the opportunity to have you over and have the rest of the country over, and thank you for tracking me down at that conference (to Kim).

And thank you to all the volunteers who made it such an easy and graceful and gracious time. Thank you, everyone, for your heart and your soul and your creativity and your imagination and all the extra things you did that only you know about, and thank you to my Dean, Kristine Nelson. Dr. Weaver has talked to us about what it is like to live in congruence, alignment, and when you live and work with people who share your values and who empower you, and say "Go and do what's important for you to do—makes all

the difference in the world. So Kristine, thank you for chairing this conference and for having us over, so thank you.

Catherine Nolan

I'm really lucky to have the job that I have back in Washington as the Director of the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. I often call us "the little engine that could." We are a very tiny staff, but I have to say the women who work for me are "tops" in the field and in the country, and I couldn't do my work without them. They are here, and I would like them to stand—Irene Bocella, Melissa Lim-Brodowski, Catherine Luby, and our intern from Catholic University Jennifer Green. Irene is our Federal project officer for this contract, and she really, really deserves an outstanding ovation because she is the Federal person behind all this. (Applause)

And I want you to know that she individually and solely has contributed to the gross national product of the City of Portland this week - on a daily basis, she's bringing back all kinds of goodies for everyone back in Washington. And finally, you know, when we do this conference the other key player is the conference planner, logistics contractor, all rolled up into one. We compete this contract every five years. Pal-Tech has successfully won the contract for the last several conferences, as you know. So Dorothy Harris and Kim Amos, you know what—we just can't do this without them either. They do a wonderful, wonderful job, for years and they're real pros. Thank you. And on that note, I think it is time to go home. So safe journey, everyone.

Bon Voyage. We'll see you on the East Coast in 2009.