

Connections:

Tribal Child Support News



**NATIONAL TRIBAL
CHILD SUPPORT
ASSOCIATION**

Connecting Stories, Sharing Insights

As we welcome you to the third edition of *Connections: Tribal Child Support News*, the National Tribal Child Support Association remains committed to highlighting program successes, important updates, events, and innovative efforts from child support programs across the nation. Through each edition, we hope to connect, inform, and inspire while celebrating the progress being made in our communities. We also continue to encourage readers to share stories, achievements, and updates for future issues because your voices and experiences help keep **Connections** strong.

Looking Ahead to Anchorage

PRESIDENT - BILL WOODS

Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

On behalf of the National Tribal Child Support Association, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of our new members and express sincere appreciation to those who continue to support and strengthen our organization.

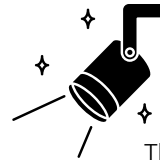
As we continue advancing tribal child support programs across Indian Country, your participation and leadership are more important than ever. Tribal child support programs play a critical role in strengthening families, promoting parental responsibility, and protecting the well-being of Native children and communities. Every new program, every trained professional, and every collaborative partnership helps further this important mission.

I encourage all members to become actively involved in the Association. Whether you are new to tribal child support or a long-time professional in the field, your voice, experience, and ideas are valuable. One of the best ways to contribute is by serving in leadership roles within the organization. We currently have upcoming board

vacancies and encourage interested members to consider running for election. Serving on the Board provides an excellent opportunity to help shape the future direction of our Association and support tribal child support programs nationwide.

This is also an exciting year for our organization as we prepare for our **25th Annual National Tribal Child Support Conference**, which will be held September 20–24 in beautiful Anchorage. This milestone conference will celebrate twenty-five years of collaboration, advocacy, education, and growth in tribal child support enforcement and family services. The conference will feature educational sessions, policy discussions, networking opportunities, cultural events, and opportunities to share successful practices from tribal programs throughout the country.

I encourage every tribal child support professional, tribal leader, attorney, judge, and partner agency to attend and participate. Your involvement helps strengthen our collective efforts to expand and improve tribal child support services for future generations.



Thank you again for your commitment to tribal families and communities. Together, we can continue building stronger tribal child support programs and creating lasting positive impacts for Native children and families across Indian Country.

I look forward to seeing you in Anchorage this September.

In this newsletter you can expect:

Conference
Excitement

Voices from
Alaska

Programs
Making a
Difference

Leadership
Opportunities

Giving Back
Together

Registration Now Open for the 25th Annual NTCSA Training Conference

We are excited to welcome you to beautiful Anchorage, Alaska, September 20–24, 2026, for the 25th Annual National Tribal Child Support Association Training Conference. This year's theme, **Northern Lights of Unity: Illuminating Pathways for Tribal Families**, celebrates 25 years of bringing child support professionals together to learn, collaborate, and strengthen services for tribal families.

We have something for everyone and invite all tribal, state, and federal child support professionals, tribes exploring child support funding opportunities, judges, attorneys, court staff, tribal leaders, and partner programs including ICWA, TANF, and Domestic Violence services. Our annual conference is a perfect opportunity to strengthen community impact, build valuable partnerships, earn CLE credits, share and learn best practices, and celebrate the achievements of programs across the country. Knowledgeable and compassionate presenters, engaging discussions, and networking opportunities make this conference a valuable experience for everyone.

Conference activities will be held at the William A. Egan Civic & Convention Center and the Hilton Anchorage. Our host hotel, the Hilton Anchorage, is conveniently located in the heart of downtown and just a short walk from the convention center. Fall in Anchorage offers cooling temperatures, spectacular autumn colors, and a unique opportunity to experience Alaska's natural beauty.

Be sure to visit supporttribalchildren.org to register for the conference, make hotel reservations, and access helpful travel information. We look forward to seeing you in Anchorage as we celebrate 25 years of partnership and collaboration, because **Together We Shine Brighter for Our Families**.



A Warm Alaska Welcome

Nick Phillips

Welcome to Anchorage, Alaska for the 2026 NTCSA Conference! We're thrilled to host our tribal partners and guests in a city that truly shines in early fall: when golden leaves line the trails, crisp air rolls off the Chugach Mountains, and moose occasionally stroll through town like they own the place. Downtown Anchorage puts you right in the heart of it all, with walkable access to local restaurants, vibrant Alaska Native art, the Anchorage Museum, and beautiful coastal views along the Tony Knowles Trail.

The State of Alaska Child Support Enforcement Division is proud to support this year's conference, assisting with planning efforts for key events and participating in select sessions throughout the week. We're committed to helping make this gathering meaningful, productive, and Alaskan.

Whether you're here to strengthen partnerships, share knowledge, or simply take in the beauty of Southcentral Alaska, we hope Anchorage offers you an unforgettable experience. Thank you for joining us, and welcome to the 2026 NTCSA Conference!

A Message from Tlingit & Haida Tribal Child Support

On behalf of Tlingit & Haida Tribal Child Support, we extend a heartfelt welcome to all traveling to Alaska for the NTCSA Conference. Whether this is your first visit or one of many, we hope you will take time to experience the unique beauty, cultures, and communities that make Alaska such a remarkable place. One of Alaska's greatest wonders is its diversity. From Anchorage's urban energy and mountain vistas to Juneau's rainforest-covered shores and island setting, each region offers a distinctly different Alaska experience.

Photo courtesy of
Alaska Native
Heritage Center



The cultural richness of Alaska is reflected in the Indigenous peoples who have called these lands home since time immemorial. Anchorage is home to Alaska Native peoples from tribes and communities across the state, creating a vibrant gathering place where diverse cultures, traditions, languages, and stories come together. Juneau is the home of the Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, which serves as an important center for tribal governance, cultural preservation, and services that support tribal citizens throughout the state.

The Tribal Child Support Program is honored to present on In-Kind Child Support, offering perspectives on how non-cash contributions can support children and families while recognizing the unique circumstances of tribal

BARBARA LAMAN

communities. In addition, the Tlingit and Haida Family Services Attorney will present on the unique aspects of child support enforcement in Alaska and working with Alaska Native populations, offering valuable insights to help child support professionals build stronger relationships and deliver more effective services in collaboration with Alaska Native agencies.

September is one of the most beautiful times to visit Anchorage. Fall colors begin to blanket the landscape, wildlife is abundant, and the crisp autumn weather provides the perfect backdrop for exploring Alaska's natural beauty. Visitors can experience Alaska Native cultures, enjoy fresh local cuisine, take in spectacular mountain and coastal views, and even have a chance to see the Northern Lights.

We look forward to connecting with colleagues from across the country, sharing knowledge and experiences, and contributing to meaningful conversations that strengthen services and support positive outcomes for children and families.



Photo courtesy of Central Council of the
Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Building Safer Pathways: Muscogee (Creek) Nation's SAVES Journey

APRIL BUCK

Muscogee (Creek) Nation applied for the Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security in July of 2025. We were able to integrate the program into our fiscal year 2026 financial planning. The application process was seamless. Michael Hayes from OCSE and his team were instrumental in helping us with the initial application. The paperwork was straight forward, and we submitted it successfully in time to add to our 2026 budget. We have hit the ground running and are so excited to share our current progress.

We applied to participate in the SAVES Learning Collaborative to ensure that the safety of both our staff and the parents we serve is provided with the best training and education available. Other departments of Muscogee (Creek) Nation have welcomed the broadening services offered by child support services at intra-tribal outreach events and are excited to collaborate to address barriers, such as transportation, education, job placement, and financial assistance. All of this is combined with existing Tribal Child Support programs, Pathways and TAIP.

Prior to joining the SAVES Learning Collaborative, we had often encountered cases that involve intimate partner violence, but not all our staff have felt confident to safely handle these complex situations. We believe that by prioritizing safety, the community will feel more secure in making child support applications. Frequently domestic violence survivors do not pursue child support, and it is our goal to provide services in a way that ensures their safety and encourages participation should the need arise. Our expectation is that there will be an increase in our number of cases based on this. We are in the process of developing a monitoring system to track open and active domestic violence cases.



We have recently hired a Safety Assurance Coordinator, Britt Bland, who has begun making strides in adjusting office policy and procedure, training, and outreach. In this, the advice and perspective of the SAVES Center's Learning Community and their monthly office hours comprised of domestic violence experts from across the country have been invaluable.

Updating policy and procedure has led to the development of a triage-approach Domestic Violence First Aid curriculum for case workers. The training focuses on identifying elements of power and control in the parents' relationship at the initiation of the case and creation of the file highlighting safety from the beginning. Trauma-informed best practice in proactive safety assessments will add a skillset and consideration to the handling of cases to best serve our community.

This is only the beginning, and we are excited to see how far we can take this approach to providing economic security with consideration to safety that our tribal members deserve.

For more information about Muscogee (Creek) Nation's SAVES initiative, please contact:

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Director/Attorney – Office of Child Support
abuck@mcnchildsupport.com

Britt Bland (she/her) CPRP, BHCM II, WC
Safety Assurance Coordinator
bbland@mcnchildsupport.com



National Child Support Enforcement Association Policy Forum

Tribal Session Recap

Tribal Child Support Leadership: Community Driven Innovation and Collaboration Across Jurisdictions
NCSEA Policy Forum, Washington, D.C., January 2026

At this year's NCSEA Policy Forum, we organized a plenary session which highlighted the strength, innovation, and community-centered leadership of Tribal Child Support programs across the country. With 63 Tribal IV-D agencies currently operating nationwide, and more Tribal Nations exploring or considering program development, the session offered a timely opportunity for state and Tribal partners to learn from Tribal approaches that reflect culture, sovereignty, and community priorities.

Our panel faced adversity before it even began, with severe winter weather in Oklahoma preventing a couple of planned panelists from traveling out to DC. In the spirit of collaboration that characterized the session itself, Lilly James (Nez Perce Tribe) and April Lauzon (Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe) stepped in to join Taylor Klein (Oneida Nation), April Buck (Muscogee (Creek) Nation) and Agnes Blackweasel (Grays Peak Strategies). Our group created a dynamic and thoughtful panel that resonated strongly with attendees, and our resiliency in the face of adversity represents the holistic approach which we constantly use to overcome challenges in our work.

Together, we shared practical insights and lived experiences across several important areas shaping Tribal Child Support programming today, including:

- Tribal community engagement rooted in relationships and trust
- Creative use of demonstration funding and waivers, including SAVES and NextGen initiatives
- Fatherhood and responsible parenting efforts grounded in culture and connection
- Whole-family and wrap-around service models
- Cross-jurisdictional coordination with state partners
- Case transfers and work involving non-IV-D cases
- Recognition of non-cash support and culturally relevant contributions
- Legislative developments expanding Tribal authority
- Unique intergovernmental collaboration scenarios



AGNES BLACKWEASEL

One of the strongest themes which emerged through the session was the community-driven nature of Tribal Child Support programs. Our panelists illustrated how Tribal agencies often operate not as isolated enforcement systems, but as relationship-centered community partners working alongside courts, workforce programs, social services, cultural leaders, and families.

We also discussed how Tribal programs frequently model:

- Flexible collaboration across agencies
- Strengths-based engagement with parents
- Culturally grounded service delivery
- Innovative approaches to supporting families beyond traditional enforcement frameworks



Within the context of NCSEA, our session highlighted that there is a lot that state programs can learn from Tribal approaches, particularly in areas such as partnership building, trust-centered service design, and whole-family support strategies. Our panelists demonstrated how collaboration is not simply a goal in Tribal programs; it is often the foundation of how services operate day-to-day. Despite last-minute travel challenges, the panel came together seamlessly and created a conversation that was both practical and inspiring. We hope that attendees left with new perspectives, actionable ideas, and a deeper appreciation for the leadership Tribal programs bring to the national child support community. This plenary served as a powerful reminder that strengthening Tribal-state partnerships strengthens outcomes for families everywhere.

Get Involved: Run for the NTCSA Board

Board nominations for the National Tribal Child Support Association will open **July 21, 2026!** If you're passionate about supporting the mission of NTCSA and helping strengthen tribal child support programs across the country, we encourage you to consider running or nominating someone you think would be a great fit.

To be eligible, nominees must have an active membership in good standing. In June 2025, NTCSA amended its bylaws to expand participation and representation within the association. All members, regardless of tribal status, are now eligible to take part in the voting process. Additionally, three positions on the NTCSA Board of Directors may be filled by any member, including those from state, federal corporate, or private sector organizations.

These individuals, however, are not eligible to hold officer positions. The remaining board positions continue to be reserved for tribal members or employees of tribal child support programs.

Board members serve a two-year term following the Annual Meeting in which they are elected, and candidates are encouraged to attend the Board Meeting held during the Annual NTCSA Conference.

We hope you'll consider stepping up to serve! Your ideas, experience, and dedication can help shape the future of NTCSA.

NTCSA Board Members

President: William Woods - wwoods@restel.com
Vice President: Carrie Yerby - cyerby@lfsic.com
Treasurer: Elysia Rodriguez - elysia.rodriguez@ho-chunk.com
Secretary: Stacey Koski - skoski@oneidanation.org
Lynette Dixey - lynette.dixey@sbtribes.com
Sue Smith - sue.smith@lco-nsn.gov
Stacy Caudle - stacy.caudle@kickapooocse.org
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Naomi Rich - naomi.rich@ho-chunk.com
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Jeff Jazgar - jjazgar@mitw.org
Raegan Hendrickson - raegan.hendrickson@whiteearth-nsn.gov
** Sandy Cloer - scloer@lfsic.com
** Marsha Harlan - harlanlaw@yahoo.com
** Lisa Skenandore - lisa.skenandore@smimail.net
** Jerry Sweet - jsweet@lfsic.com

*** Denotes Lifetime Advisory Member*

New Brief Highlights the 303 Indigenous Productions Project

DESTINEE STARCHER, Ph.D.

The Center for Policy Research published the first of three briefs describing the 303 Indigenous Productions project. 303 Indigenous Productions is the second cohort of the Colorado Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) implementation of the Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting Grant, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE).

The project focuses on engaging youth in a transformational learning process through the creation of original social marketing media content and the positive adoption of new media, aiming to strengthen their sense of cultural connectedness and urban Native identity.

The current brief provides an overview of the project, describing the development of the curriculum, including adaptations made to meet the needs of the target population. It also includes a description of the social marketing messages, including the film, brand creation, website development, planned film distribution, and paid social media marketing strategy.

For those interested in learning more about this innovative project, be sure to read the **attached brief** for additional details and insights.



Giving Back at the 2026 NTCSA Conference

NTCSA members and conference attendees have long demonstrated a commitment to helping others. Whether through raffle donations, scholarship fundraising efforts, or community service, your generosity continues to make a meaningful difference. This year, attendees will have three opportunities to give back during the annual conference.

Supporting Families Through Service

This year, we're excited to offer a new way for conference attendees to give back. Join fellow attendees on September 22 from 2:45 - 5:00 p.m. for the NTCSA Service Project benefiting **Covenant House Alaska**.

Using supplies purchased through sponsor-supported donations, attendees will assemble hygiene kits and housing starter kits for youth and families experiencing homelessness and housing instability. These kits provide essential items to help meet immediate needs and support the transition to stable housing.

Covenant House Alaska serves young people facing homelessness through shelter, housing, outreach, and supportive services. Many of the individuals and families served are Alaska Native and tribal community members. Josh Zullo from Covenant House Alaska will be onsite to share more about the organization's mission and the impact of this project.

No advance registration is required. Stop by and make a difference!

Helping Communities Recover

This year's conference raffle beneficiary is the **Western Alaska Disaster Relief Fund**, managed by the Alaska Community Foundation.

In October 2025, severe storms, including ex-Typhoon Halong, devastated Alaska's western coast. Homes were washed away, infrastructure was destroyed, and entire communities were displaced. Many families continue to face the long-term effects of the disaster, including homelessness, cultural isolation, and ongoing mental health challenges.

Funds raised through the raffle will help support direct relief efforts, including essential supplies, emergency financial assistance, replacement of subsistence foods, critical winter gear, support for displaced students, youth mental health and suicide prevention services, and other community-identified needs.

We welcome raffle donations of all kinds, including jewelry, gift baskets, gift certificates, tech items, food and beverage products, purses, bags, pottery, and more. Your generosity helps make a difference for Alaska families and communities still recovering from this devastating event.

Investing in Future Leaders

The **Jerry Sweet Educational Scholarship for Tribal Children** provides financial assistance to children whose parent or guardian has had an open child support case with a Tribal IV-D program.

Each year, up to 10 scholarships are awarded to help students pursue their educational goals. Donations to the scholarship fund may be made through the NTCSA website or in person during the Annual Training Conference.

The NTCSA Scholarship Committee will also hold fundraising drawings throughout the conference and welcomes donations of items for those drawings. Every contribution helps support educational opportunities for tribal youth and invests in the next generation of leaders.

Board Member Spotlights



ELYSIA RODRIGUEZ

Elysia Rodriguez, Tribal Attorney, Ho-Chunk Nation Department of Justice. Elysia has served the Ho-Chunk Nation Child Support Program for ten years. Originally from the metropolitan Detroit, Michigan area, she now resides in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Her previous experience as a research assistant for Public Policy Associates helped foster an appreciation for well-written laws and the importance of putting those laws into practice. Elysia credits her parents, along with a steady stream of Wonder Woman comics, Nancy Drew novels, sports, and Girl Scouts of America, for inspiring her passion for justice and improving the world around her.

In the Office

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Establishing paternity and coming up with creative solutions to program needs.

What's one accomplishment you're proud of in your career? *Proposing the idea for child support agencies throughout Wisconsin to capture unclaimed funds listed by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue.*

Off the Clock

Favorite TV shows or movies? *Period pieces and Gilmore Girls.*

Favorite comfort foods? *Goulash, Green lemon rice soup, and chili relleno.*

What's something people may not know about you? *I have two different colored eyes: one hazel and one brown.*

Favorite karaoke song or personal motto? *"Don't Stop Believing" by Journey.*

MICHAEL KIDDER

Michael Kidder is the Director of Osage Nation Child Support Services (ONCSS), where he leads the Tribe's Title IV-D Child Support Program. His leadership focuses on improving outcomes for children and families by strengthening parental responsibility, increasing child support collections, enhancing customer service, and ensuring compliance with federal and tribal child support requirements. Michael has championed initiatives to modernize tribal child support services, including expanding electronic communication with families, improving case management, collaborating with tribal, state, and federal agencies, and developing employment-focused strategies that help noncustodial parents overcome barriers to meeting their child support obligations. His work emphasizes collaboration, accountability, and culturally responsive services that respect tribal sovereignty while improving financial stability for children. Michael is committed to strengthening tribal communities, improving program effectiveness, and ensuring children receive the financial and emotional support they deserve.



In the Office

What do you enjoy most about working in Tribal child support? *I enjoy working with my staff and out child support families. I am proud of our program and of our Osage Nation staff, as I believe our strength is our customer service.*

What is something you wish more people knew about Tribal child support? *I believe since we have a smaller clientele base, we can offer a better service. Our customer service is better suited to help people on a more personal basis. We get to know our NCPs and CPs on a personal level and help guide them to other resources that may help in their situation.*

Off the Clock

What's a hobby or activity you enjoy? *I enjoy our cultural events, Hand games or our Osage Ceremonial Dances. It brings our families together in the community and keeps those family ties together.*

Dream Vacation? *Somewhere warm with sandy beaches.*

Guiding motto? *Treat people with respect and dignity*

KATERI CERVANTES



Kateri Cervantes is the Director of the Mescalero Apache Tribal Child Support Office for the Mescalero Apache Tribe. A proud member of the Mescalero Apache Tribe, she was born and raised in Mescalero, New Mexico. Kateri has worked for the Tribal Child Support Office for the past 18 years. She began her career as Lead Caseworker and was promoted to Director in 2014. She earned a Bachelor of Social Work and an Associate of Arts in Social Services and is passionate about supporting the children and families of her community. Kateri currently lives about 20 miles from Mescalero in Tularosa, New Mexico. She is the proud mother of two children and grandmother of four, and considers time spent with her family one of life's greatest joys. Kateri is grateful to work alongside an exceptional team at the Mescalero Apache Tribal Child Support Office. She credits her dedicated and hardworking staff for their professionalism and unwavering commitment to serving the community.

In the Office

What do you enjoy most about your work? *I enjoy helping the children of my community.*

What's something you wish more people knew about Tribal child support programs? *I truly wish that people would not look at child support as being a negative program.*

What's a challenge you've faced in the field? *Working with our court system in Mescalero is a challenge but we've overcome many obstacles through better communication.*

Off the Clock

What TV show, movie, or book have you rewatched or reread the most? *I can watch Friends or Golden Girls every day.*

Favorite food or comfort meal? *Tacos are my favorite food but they must be accompanied by a good hot salsa.*

Dream vacation destination? *One day I'm going to make it to Scotland.*

Thank You to Our 2026 NTCSA Conference Sponsors

The National Tribal Child Support Association extends its sincere appreciation to the organizations that have already committed to sponsoring the 25th Annual NTCSA Training Conference. Your support plays a vital role in helping us provide high quality training, meaningful networking opportunities, and an exceptional conference experience for child support professionals from across the country.

Interested in becoming a sponsor? Sponsorship opportunities are still available! Visit supporttribalchildren.org/sponsorship/ to view the available sponsorship levels and complete a Sponsorship Commitment Form.

Looking for something a little different? We'd be happy to work with you to create a custom sponsorship package that aligns with your organization's goals and enhances your participation in the conference. If you have an idea you'd like to discuss, please contact the NTCSA President Bill Woods at wwoods@mhanation.com.

Thank you to all of our sponsors for helping us celebrate 25 years of strengthening tribal child support programs and supporting families throughout Indian Country.



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