



American Indian Enhancement Toolkit: Talking Points for Leadership to Engage Child Welfare Staff

The Talking Points explain how promising strategies included in the AIE Toolkit can help counties achieve a reduction in disproportionality, disparities, and administrative costs. County management and supervisors can also use the talking points to communicate to staff and collaborative groups.

What is the American Indian Enhancement (AIE) Toolkit?

The American Indian Enhancement (AIE) Toolkit is intended to simplify achievement of ICWA compliance, improve outcomes, and advance the quality of child welfare practice for Indian families and children. The Toolkit provides a comprehensive set of resources to integrate the work of county directors, managers, and supervisors. Tools are targeted to strengthen culturally appropriate inquiry and placement, and enhance collaboration among counties, tribal communities, and other stakeholders.

Why is the AIE Toolkit Important?

California has the largest American Indian population in the nation with an estimated 443,719 Tribal residents (Census Bureau, 2009)¹. While this group represents only 1.2% of the state's total population, it presents historic and current challenges that are significant for social work practice (Census Bureau, 2009; Cross, Brown, Day et al., n.d)².

Approximately twice as many American Indian children are under the jurisdiction of the California child welfare system than would be expected based on the number of American Indian children in California (Needell, Webster, Armijo et al., 2010)³. Consequently, Tribal youth are disproportionately present in the caseloads of child welfare workers throughout the state. Tribal youth also may experience disparities in access to culturally appropriate services.

The AIE Toolkit provides the context and the tools for effective, culturally responsive practice to reduce disproportionality and disparities. The Toolkit was created for child welfare practitioners and all those committed to the betterment of Indian families and children.

How Can Use of the AIE Toolkit Help My Staff and the Families They Serve?

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, "Estimates of the Resident Population by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: July 1, 2008," release date: May 14, 2009, updated Dec. 22, 2009

² Cross, S. L., Brown, E. F., Day, P. A., Limb, G. E., Pellebon, D. A., Proctor, E. C., et al. (n.d.). *Final report: Status of Native Americans in social work higher education*. Council on Social Work Education Task Force on Native Americans in Social Work Education. Retrieved November 2, 2010 from <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=25694>.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, "Estimates of the Resident Population by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: July 1, 2008," release date: May 14, 2009, updated Dec. 22, 2009

The American Indian Enhancement (AIE) Toolkit provides guidance and action steps to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduce entries of American Indian /Alaska Native children into the foster care system
- Increase reunification of American Indian / Alaska Native children
- Decrease length of stay of American Indian / Alaska Native children in foster care
- Decrease time to permanence for American Indian / Alaska Native children

The AIE Toolkit advances culturally appropriate practice and effective case management by targeting four major issues facing American Indian and Alaska Native children in California's child welfare system:

Issue #1: Proper Identification of American Indian/Alaska Native Children

Many children who qualify for the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act are not identified as American Indians or Alaska Natives. The AIE Toolkit explains how to improve identification of native children through culturally sensitive inquiry.

Issue #2: Proper Placement of American Indian/Alaska Native Children

Children who are properly identified may not necessarily be afforded placements that honor their native heritage. The AIE Toolkit provides guidance for securing placements that are culturally appropriate for American Indian and Alaska Native children.

Issue #3: Disproportionate Participation of American Indian Children in California's Child Welfare System

The AIE Toolkit promotes appreciation of the history and culture of indigenous peoples that is foundational to promoting effective engagement and achieving equitable outcomes. The Toolkit specifies how to create and sustain respectful and productive relationships that will endure throughout the duration of the case.

Issue #4: Disparities in Access to Culturally Relevant Services

American Indian and Alaska Native children participating in California's child welfare system often do not receive services that are responsive to their cultural identities and experiences. The AIE Toolkit explains how to collaborate effectively with Tribes to identify and access culturally appropriate services.

The Steps of Engagement

The 2008-2009 Breakthrough Series Collaborative identified four promising practices to address and reduce the disproportionate numbers of American Indian / Alaskan Native (AI/AN) children in the child welfare system and to expand access to culturally relevant services:

- 1) Strengthen knowledge of local tribal resources;
- 2) Build and maintain positive relationships with representatives of tribes and tribal communities;
- 3) Involve tribal representatives in systems review efforts; and
- 4) Engage in collaborative efforts with tribes and American Indian /Alaska Native communities