

**Washington State Department  
of Children, Youth, and Families**

**CONCEPT PAPER FOR**

***Piloting Culturally Responsive Prevention Services for Reducing  
Entries into Out-of-Home Care among Native Children***

**Disclaimer:** This document is intended to help DCYF share its expected plans for future procurements. This document does not, however, bind DCYF to follow through on this plan. DCYF reserves the right, without notice, to alter the plans described in this document. This right includes the right to procure nothing at all. Furthermore, this document includes descriptions of the upcoming WA DCYF procurements but does not fully elaborate on all required elements. As a result, this document does not supersede what is said in subsequent solicitation documents (i.e., RFPs or RFAs) or their appendices. Proposers are responsible for ensuring that their proposal is complete and accurate according to the information and requirements contained in the full solicitation.

## Introduction

In the coming months, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) will begin to expand its service array to include more culturally responsive services, beginning with a set of pilot contracts intended to help prevent entries into out-of-home care. Through this pilot, DCYF will explore the best ways to invest in culturally responsive services that keep Native children safe and supported at home with their families.

Recognizing that responding to a Request For Application (RFA) takes significant time and resources, a team of DCYF staff is working to ensure that the forthcoming funding opportunity is responsive to the feedback heard from the community, Tribal Nations, and Recognized American Indian Organizations (RAIOs). This first funding opportunity will build on those learnings, serving as an opportunity to better support Washington's Native community and to further our learnings about how to best reduce the number of Native children separated from their families and communities.

We hope that in reading this concept paper, Tribal Nations and RAIOs will have the information needed to consider this forthcoming funding opportunity and whether applying is a good fit for their organization and community's needs so you can plan accordingly.

## II. Background on DCYF and our work to expand the service array

Our work to better support Native families is part of a larger transformation that is focused on building a more equitable system to serve Washington's children and families. Native families experience among the worst child welfare outcomes in Washington State. An analysis of intakes in 2019 found that AI/AN children were placed 2 times more often than white children<sup>1</sup>.

Knowing that we need to address the over-representation of Native children in out-of-home care, DCYF spent one year developing a strategy for where to begin. Building on the work and feedback DCYF has received over many years, DCYF started with an evidentiary review of Tribal Child Welfare Prevention Programs<sup>2</sup> with the University of Washington's Indigenous Wellness Research Institute to identify culturally responsive prevention service models. DCYF also consulted with community-based organizations to understand the underlying causes of these disproportionately worse outcomes and what prevention services were missing from the current prevention service array. Together, these efforts to listen and learn about the opportunities and shortcomings of our existing approach to serving Native families have informed our work to expand this service array through this pilot.

---

<sup>1</sup> DCYF, "2019 Washington State Child Welfare Disparity Indices Report" 2019. Source: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/CWRacialDisparityIndices2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Angelique Day, Angelina Callis, "Evidentiary Review of Tribal Child Welfare Prevention Programs in Washington State – A Systematic Review" May 2020. Source: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/TribalCWPrevention2020.pdf>

Key findings from synthesizing previous feedback and DCYF’s internal diagnostic:

- 1) Native families prefer and benefit from culturally responsive and appropriate programs that are centered in the culture and customs of their communities<sup>3</sup>
- 2) Many service providers struggle to build authentic relationships with Native families to keep them engaged in services. Tribal Nations and RAIOS are seen as more credible and culturally aware than other providers serving Native families.
- 3) Many Tribal partners who provide services to Native families do not hold contracts with DCYF because they find the contracting process cumbersome and compliance with the various requirements puts a strain on existing resources<sup>4</sup>.

It is important to acknowledge that this pilot is also shaped by recent Washington State Supreme Court decisions that protect the rights of Native families in the child welfare system. The WA State Supreme Court has held<sup>5</sup> that state courts have a “reason to know” whether a child is or may be an “Indian Child” when that child may have tribal heritage. In circumstances when the child is an “Indian Child”, the Court further held that protections under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Washington State Indian Child Welfare Act (WICWA) must be applied. The Court has also clarified<sup>6</sup> that “active efforts” need to be taken to prevent the breakup of the Indian family and that the prevention services provided must be culturally appropriate to the child’s tribal heritage. To meet this higher standard for “active efforts”, DCYF will need to change both elements of its practice and contracts with Tribal Governments and RAIOS to provide culturally appropriate services to Native families in the expanded number of cases in which ICWA and WICWA apply<sup>7</sup>.

Both to achieve our agency’s goals and adhere to the WA State Supreme Court’s holdings, DCYF plans to make a multi-million-dollar investment to provide culturally responsive services for Native families. Historically, DCYF has not offered many culturally responsive services leading to limited access to and availability of such services in many parts of Washington State. DCYF wants to address this gap by providing a funding opportunity for Tribal Nations and RAIOS and by building the capacity of these organizations to provide services. Through those pilot investments, we are hoping to learn what it takes to address contracting and service delivery challenges and impact the over-representation of Native families in Washington’s child-and-family serving system.

### III. Request for Application (RFA) goals and the problems DCYF is trying to address

The forthcoming RFA’s will pilot the use of culturally responsive prevention programs is to reduce entries-into-care among Native children. **Culturally responsive prevention services may include programs such as, but not limited to, Positive Indian Parenting, Family Spirit, Healing of the Canoe, and Family Circle.** Each of these programs are designed and developed to incorporate the culture of specific Tribal Nations. Because of that grounding, DCYF believes that these programs are

<sup>3</sup> DCYF, “Indian Child Welfare 2019 Case Review” 2019. Source: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/state-ICWCaseReviewReport2019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> DCYF, “Indian Child Welfare 2019 Case Review” 2019. Source: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/reports/state-ICWCaseReviewReport2019.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> In re Dependency of Z.J.G. and M.E.J.G.

<sup>6</sup> In re Dependency of G.J.A., A.R.A., S.S.A., and V.A.

<sup>7</sup> DCYF, “2021-23 First Supplemental Budget Session”. Source: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/gov/PLIC.pdf>

better suited to empower parents, caregivers and families; promote family healing; and meet the needs of children because they are grounded in Native culture and values.

DCYF also believes that these programs are best delivered by “**proximate providers**”, meaning **providers that are physically close to the communities they serve, which are staffed and led by people who have shared lived experiences with their clients, and have greater cultural awareness that comes from those shared experiences.** Proximate providers are an important part of DCYF’s vision for the service array because we believe they can best build authentic relationships, a key driver of outcomes. This belief is rooted in an increasingly large body of research that points to the ways in which proximity can lead to improved outcomes for clients from historically marginalized groups. For example, a study on cardiovascular health outcomes demonstrated that Black patients were much more likely to accept preventative, elective procedures when they had a Black doctor<sup>8</sup>. Another study found that between 30-70% of therapy benefits can be attributed to a therapist’s ability to empathize, affirm, build consensus, and form a relationship with their client<sup>9</sup>.

While this pilot is primarily focused on piloting the use of culturally responsive services provided by proximate providers, we also hope to address several other challenges that we’ve identified during our efforts to listen and learn. **By modifying our standard approach to procurement and contracting, we hope to identify strategies that help address challenge. A summary of these challenges and adjustments in contracting and procurement approaches are described below.** If we have overlooked challenges facing Native families and Tribal Nations / RAIOS and you wish to provide further feedback, please contact [kembreab.hailegiorgis@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:kembreab.hailegiorgis@dcyf.wa.gov) and [dcyf.tribalrelations@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:dcyf.tribalrelations@dcyf.wa.gov)

- **Accessibility of services:** The families who most need additional support often live in “service deserts” that require families to travel long distances to access supports. This is especially true for Native families residing on Tribal land, where many of the barriers to accessing support exist. *DCYF is designing this initial RFA to test different ways to expand access in service sparse areas and invites applicants to propose solutions as well. This could include tele-health program models, non-traditional staffing models (e.g., telecommuting, remote staffing, co-location with other offices), encouraging sub-contracting where appropriate, and variable funding schemes to reflect the increased cost of rural service delivery. DCYF reserves the right to negotiate these details with selected Tribal Nations and RAIOS as part of the contracting process.*
- **Mistrust of providers:** DCYF recognizes that many Native families are deeply skeptical of both the child welfare system and the providers that contract with DCYF. As described above, we are very focused on contracting directly with Tribal Nations and RAIOS who are proximate to these communities as one way to help create a more trusting experience for families. *For this reason, DCYF is limiting the pool of qualified applicants to Tribal Governments and RAIOS.*
- **Workforce development in Tribal Nations and RAIOS:** DCYF has learned that many Tribal Nations and RAIOS struggle to contract with DCYF due to restrictions imposed by the program models that DCYF provides. For example, we recognize that, as is the case for some of our EBPs, requiring graduate level education limits the workforce pool available to Tribal Nations and RAIOS.

---

<sup>8</sup> National Bureau of Economic Research, “Does Diversity Matter for Health? Experimental Evidence from Oakland” 2018. Source: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w24787>.

<sup>9</sup> Imel, Zac E; Wampold, Bruce E (2008). “The importance of treatment and the science of common factors in psychotherapy”. In Brown, Steven D; Lent, Robert W (eds.). *Handbook of counseling psychology* (4th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. pp. 249–262. ISBN 9780470096222.

*As part of this pilot, DCYF is focusing on funding culturally responsive prevention services that do not have strict qualifications related to educational and licensing requirements and invites applicants to identify and propose other programs not described below.*

- **Simpler, more inclusive contracting process:** DCYF has heard that standard approach to procurement and contracting makes it difficult for smaller providers to win contracts. Providers often need time and support in successfully navigating and applying for contracts. DCYF anticipates building on prior solicitations that sought to better support providers during the procurement process, such as the recent Tribal Fatherhood RFA, by piloting procurement process changes to support providers. *These approaches may include offering office hours for Tribal Governments and RAIOs to ask questions, creating a frequently asked questions document that helps clarify key details, creating response templates that make it easier to ensure applicants adhere to DCYF's required format for applications, and including more detailed information about how applications will be scored so that they can better draft their proposals. This concept paper is also meant to support potential applicants by giving Tribes and RAIOs the information needed to plan and prepare for the forthcoming RFA opportunity.*
- **Ensuring adequate funding to support high-quality service delivery:** DCYF recognizes the importance of paying for full cost of new programs so that they can achieve the desired outcome goals. Oftentimes, there are “hidden” costs in delivering services (e.g., transportation, food, etc.) that are critical to the success of the program. *DCYF anticipates contract awards between \$120,000-\$200,000 with a possibility of further renewal. Leveraging both state dollars and funds from the Ballmer Group, DCYF expects to supply funding for both program start-up and for on-going delivery of services. DCYF encourages applicants to thoughtfully articulate the variety of costs they will incur in their budgets.*
- **Support to and collaboration with Tribal Nations and RAIOs:** To successfully meet the needs of families, DCYF believes that we must find ways to support Tribal Governments and RAIOs and create space for shared learning. During the program's launch, DCYF is committed to ensuring Tribal Governments and RAIOs are paid on a timely basis, that DCYF provides support across all stages of roll-out, and that challenges are addressed collaboratively and proactively. DCYF is also committed to creating a collaborative and data-informed space for shared learning across services, to maximize the pilot's impact. DCYF anticipates learning not only about what it takes to successfully deliver services to Native families but also what agency practices and policies need to change to best set Tribal Governments and RAIOs up for success. *Successful RFA applicants will be asked to regularly meet with an appointed DCYF program manager for the duration of the contract. We anticipate some of these meetings to be one-on-one and others to include all successful applicants as a collaborative learning community. Agendas for these meetings will be made in collaboration and include reviewing metrics that help us gauge whether we are making progress on our shared goals.*

### III. Overview of eligible program models

Based on the learnings and insights in the section above, DCYF will accept applications from qualified organizations to provide culturally responsive program models, including but not limited to the four

described below. **Tribal Governments and RAIOs who choose to apply for funding through the forthcoming Request for Application (RFA), can apply to fund any of these four programs or other prevention program models that they believe could help DCYF reduce entries into out-of-home care for Native children.** Over the long-term, DCYF will work with Tribal Governments and RAIOs to monitor and evaluate the success of these programs, re-allocating resources and adding new services to meet the needs of Washington's families. Please note that this section is a summary of [A Systematic Review of Tribal Child Welfare Prevention Programs in Washington State](#). Further information about all programs below can be found in the link above.

**Positive Indian Parenting (PIP):** Western parenting programs often fail to address unique challenges faced by AI/AN parents, children and families. These programs often neglect the rich tribal traditions and knowledge passed down from generation to generation. PIP offers participants a structured exploration of traditional AI/AN values concerning parenting and helps participants apply those values in a modern setting. PIP is designed to meet the needs of both Native and non-Native parents, relatives, caregivers, foster parents and others who strive to be more positive in their approach to parenting. *Note: DCYF plans to sponsor a training to train PIP Trainers who can in turn train facilitators, regardless of whether they hold a contract with DCYF. More details to follow from the Office of Tribal Relations in the coming months.*

**Family Spirit** is the only evidence-based home-visiting program designed for, by, and with Native families. It addresses intergenerational behavioral health problems, applies local cultural assets, and overcomes deficits in the professional healthcare workforce in low-resource communities. It is a culturally tailored intervention delivered by community-based paraprofessionals to support young parents from pregnancy to 3-years post-partum. It is used in over 100 tribal communities across 16 states and is also used in several other low-income urban communities in Chicago and St. Louis.

**Healing of the Canoe (also known as "Canoe Journey"):** The curriculum was developed as part of a project which is a collaboration between the Suquamish Tribe, the Port Gamble S'Klallam and the University of Washington Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute. The curriculum uses the Canoe Journey as a metaphor, providing youth the skills needed to navigate their journey through life without being pulled off course by alcohol or drugs - with tribal culture, tradition, and values as compass to guide them. It is intended to be used in a way that best fits each community or organization. The developers encourage each community and organization to fully adapt the curriculum to their culture and traditions. Some communities may not identify with 'Canoe Journey' as a metaphor for life. Any metaphor that can be used to represent a life journey or experience is valuable, such as coming of age ceremonies. The curriculum is currently focused on preventing substance abuse and suicide; however, the focus could also be shifted depending on what the community finds to be most important. It could be used alongside mental health treatment, chemical dependency treatment, or to help with job readiness skills.

**Family Circle (also known as "Talking Circle" or "Healing Circle")** is a way of bringing people of all ages together in a quiet, respectful manner for the purposes of teaching, listening, learning, and sharing. Talking circles are useful when the topic under consideration has no right or wrong answer, or when people need to share feelings. During circle time, people are free to respond however they want as long as they follow specific guidelines. The classes begin with a history of the Traditional Talking Circle with the students, reviewing Guidelines to Talking, Healing, and Sharing Circles. Then students

divide into groups and are encouraged to talk about anything they wish, or the facilitator can give the group a topic.

#### IV. What possible applicants can expect from here

DCYF will share more information about this pilot opportunity in the coming weeks. Detailed information will be shared through the Office of Tribal Relations's webpage and Dear Tribal Leader letters. DCYF anticipates that the RFA will be posted in weeks after the launch of this concept paper. Building on the approach taken in the Tribal Fatherhood RFA, DCYF will host an optional pre-proposal vendor conference and offer "office hours" to organizations who have questions as they assemble their applications. Any comments or feedback on this document can be sent via email to [kebreab.hailegiorgis@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:kebreab.hailegiorgis@dcyf.wa.gov) and [dcyf.tribalrelations@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:dcyf.tribalrelations@dcyf.wa.gov). Please note that DCYF reserves the right to not answer any questions or to post responses in a public forum to ensure all organizations have an equal opportunity access to relevant information.