

# Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

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## Summary

DCYF is a cabinet-level agency focused on the well-being of children. Our vision is to ensure that Washington state's children and youth grow up safe and healthy—thriving physically, emotionally and academically, nurtured by family and community.

One of our agency's core guiding principles is a commitment to collaboration and transparency. It is through DCYF's government-to-government relationship with Tribes that this guiding principle can be actualized. Either through direct contracting with Tribes, or through formal Consultation and community engagement, DCYF seeks to foster this partnership to strengthen our agency's ability to effectively serve Tribal children, youth and families.

The following highlights provide a high-level overview of DCYF's child welfare, early learning and juvenile rehabilitation programs and services that exist to improve physical, mental, and emotional outcomes for Tribal children and communities.

## Highlights

### Administrative Services

DCYF rescheduled the implementation date for the revised Indian Child Welfare (ICW) policies and procedures to July 1, 2024. Revisions to ICW policies were made in collaboration between DCYF and Tribes; a two-and-a-half-year process that followed several defining Washington Supreme Court cases. Rescheduling the launch of the revised policies and procedures allowed time for the Office of Tribal Relations (OTR), Child Welfare (CW) and Administrative Services to:

- Develop strategies for integrating new concepts into child welfare practice.
- Coordinate with The Alliance for Professional Development, Training and Caregiver Excellence to develop and offer staff comprehensive, mandatory, in-person training.
- Develop case management system technology to capture the accurate identification of ICW caseloads and to track ICW legal data.

Additional Administrative Services efforts included:

- Updating applicable child welfare policies so that they align seamlessly with ICW policy updates.
- Preparing for the new ICW Legal Unit to help caseworkers navigate the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Notice process and partner with the Office of the Attorney General.
- Providing legal guidance on issues relating to child welfare and early learning, as well as legal support for drafting memoranda of understanding with Tribes.

### Child Welfare (CW)

In the past year, CW undertook the following work:

- Collaborated with OTR to refine and finalize the ICW policies and develop a training plan and curriculum for Child Welfare staff. To date, 1,278 staff have completed with 117 registered for additional sessions.
- Worked with Licensing Division to establish an initial licensing process for relative caregivers, supporting all families to care for their kin.

- Worked with Office of Public Defense to promote their Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) hotline for parents, providing access to free legal consultation at a point of critical decision making. CW also succeeded in having law and policy change to allow placement with suitable others on VPA.
- Approximately 18% reduction in Native children and youth coming into care over the last fiscal year. The ongoing understanding and implementation of DCYF’s safety framework, coupled with shared decision making within Safe Child Consults appears to show a direct impact on the reduction.
- Worked with Partnerships Prevention and Services (PPS) to reduce the number of Native children and youth experiencing out-of-home placement by expanding culturally specific and responsive programs under DCYF’s Service Continuum. Contracted with five providers to pilot culturally specific services with the anticipated outcome of adding these services to the Combined In-home Services dashboard.
- Increased timely placement entry by 12%, leading to more timely access to services and supports for caregivers and youth.
- The percentage of youth in the DS class decreased by 15% in just under two years. The total number of children and youth experiencing Night to Night/Placement Exceptions from July 2023–December 2023 decreased by 31%.
- Yakima County became the third county in Washington and 22<sup>nd</sup> county in the United States to create an ICWA docket. A dedicated workgroup formed of Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation) and Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) Tribal representatives, as well as partners from DCYF, Yakima County, Casey Family Programs, Administrative Office of the Courts, and other community/court members to spearhead this work.
- Attended the government-to-government training, sponsored by the Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs (GOIA), to gain a better understanding of Tribal sovereignty, Tribal culture and the relationship of Tribes to the state government.
  - Region 1 participation included 16 CW staff and eight OTR staff.
  - Region 2 participation included 29 CW staff and one OTR staff.

## Early Learning (EL)

### Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

A new definition of “Indian child” was solidified after a three-year process which included a Tribal Consultation held in October 2023. The new definition took effect on July 1, 2024. A new enrollment form was made available in June 2024.

#### Contracts and grants:

- There are currently five Tribal nations that contract with DCYF, three that subcontract with the ECEAP program, and one Recognized American Indian Organization (RAIO) that subcontracts.
- DCYF anticipates adding one additional Tribal ECEAP contractor for the 2024–2025 school year.

Other contributions of note include:

- A new ECEAP Tribal Specialist was hired in January 2024, who attended five Recruitment, Eligibility and Enrollment trainings in person to present the new definition of an “Indian child.”
- The ECEAP Tribal Specialist attended bi-monthly Indian Policy on Early Learning (IPEL) meetings.

### **Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP)**

There are currently 3,187 households approved for CCSP with one or more Native American children in the home. A total of 5,170 children have identified as Native American, of which 3,647 are currently authorized for care. There are currently 40 Tribal certified providers and 268 children with CCSP care authorized to one of those providers.

### **Federal Initiatives and Collaboration**

#### *Early Learning Coordination Plan (ELCP) Core Network Convening*

Early Care and Education (ECE), other service providers and partners from various state and local agencies and nonprofits convened in October 2023 to launch an Impact Network around the ELCP. The ELCP is the state’s comprehensive, outcome-driven plan designed to guide our ECE system towards the goals that matter most to our children, families and the professionals who support them. Participants mapped networked participants, shared understanding of the network context and opportunities, discussed strategies on mutual support for each other’s work, and continued building strong relationships across service sectors.

DCYF drafted the 2025–27 Child Care and Development Fund Plan. Prior to submitting the plan to the Federal Office of Child Care, DCYF met with Tribal nations at the Indian Policy Early Learning Committee (IPEL) and with stakeholder groups to receive comment. DCYF further convened two public meetings as opportunities for communities to comment on the plan.

### **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH/IECMHC)**

EL and Holding Hope at Child Care Aware of Washington is working with Dawn Yazzie, a Navajo Tribal member and an expert in IECMHC. Dawn has been contracted to grow a Tribal Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Development Pathway.

Dawn collected feedback from IPEL meetings and hosted an in-person IECMH/IECMHC workshop in partnership with the Yakama Nation Trauma-Informed Care Conference in May. A half-day training was provided by Dawn and information gathering was conducted regarding existing strengths and needs related to Tribal IECMH for a Tribal IECMH Landscape Analysis.

A Tribal IECMHC Proviso Advisory Group meeting is held bi-monthly to support the creation of the Tribal IECMH Professional Development Pathway and the Landscape Analysis.

### **Early Achievers, Washington’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)**

Early Achievers established an optional alternative Tribal program evaluation process for quality recognition. This alternative process is known as The LOVIT Way: Learning to Observe, Value, Inspire and Transform. The LOVIT Way is a culturally sensitive program evaluation process and planning tool, created by the Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia.

## Grants and Awards

- EL worked with OTR to host two Early Childhood Equity Grant technical assistance sessions specifically for Tribes.
- The DCYF Child Care Grants team (and the Early Learning Communications, Engagement, and Language Access leaders) attended the GOIA government-to-government training to learn more about Tribal sovereignty, Tribal government, historical and legal issues, and the cultural perspectives that affect the relationship between Washington’s Tribes and state agencies.
- Between June 2023 and June 2024, DCYF issued the following amounts in grants to Tribal providers:
  - Child Care Complex Needs Fund: \$82,395 (two grants)
  - Early Childhood Equity Grant: \$390,957 (four grants)
  - Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant: \$3,000 (three grants)

## Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR)

### Meetings, summits and conferences:

- Five government-to-government (10.03) meetings with Tribes were held across the state, as well as ongoing communication to share updates, job postings, training announcements, resources and presentation at conferences hosted by Tribes.
- Green Hill School in Chehalis hosted a Pow Wow in October 2023.
- Sweat Lodges were provided at Green Hill School and Echo Glen Children's Center (Echo Glen), as well as other cultural services such as beading, regalia and drum making.
- JR hosted tours for Tribal leaders at JR facilities, including Green Hill School, Echo Glen and Oakridge Community Facility.
- JR participated in the 2024 Trauma Informed Conference at Yakama Nation by presenting on mental health wellness and care.

### JR programs and rule changes:

- The [Community Transition Services](#) program began implementation for eligible young people to serve up to 18 months of their sentence living with family while on electric monitoring.
- Expanded opioid treatment for young people with moderate/severe Opioid Use Disorder and continued to provide opioid/overdose prevention education for all young people, including post-release.
- Advanced Crisis Intervention de-escalation training provided to staff.
- The Medicaid rule changed to allow coverage up to 90 days before a young person leaves Green Hill School or Echo Glen (note: Medicaid is already active for young people in a community facility).
- OTR hired a full time JR Tribal Liaison in December 2023 to support JR Tribal services.
- Community Assisted Reentry (CAR) was developed as a pathway for young people to receive critical community-based support necessary for their successful transition. Participation in CAR services are voluntary and available for up to 12 months post-release from residential sentence. This is an option for youth committed to JR by Tribal Courts through the Residential Service Custody Agreements with Tribes.

Tribal contracts and grants:

- Ten Community Juvenile Accountability Act (CJAA) Tribal contracts were enacted. CJAA, as outlined in RCW 13.40.500, provides Tribes and RAIOS with small flexible grants to support youth and families to avoid youth incarceration.
- Six Residential Custody Service Agreements (RCSA) were developed to allow youth to enter state JR facilities via a Tribal court order. In fiscal year 2023, six youth were served under an RCSA.

## Licensing Division (LD)

DCYF's OTR employs two Tribal licensing consultants: one for foster care and one for child care. LD coordinates and partners with OTR regularly. The Workforce Development Team (WDT) continues to work with OTR to increase LD staff awareness of ICW policy and legislation changes, Tribal sovereignty, and considerations when working with Tribal children and families.

Child-specific licensing and initial licensing were fully implemented for caregivers caring for Tribal dependent children. Foster care licensing is coordinating with Tribal communities on the development of new Kinship Licensing Standards. Kinship and Foster Licensing worked with OTR to organize a series of Tribal roundtables to discuss future organizational assignments for Tribal Child Placing Agencies.

The Group Care and Foster Care WAC Revision Projects have engaged with Tribes through the following ways:

- Presentations, including OTR, Tribal Policy Advisory Council (TPAC), ICW Sub-Committee and at Licensing Ad Hoc Meetings.
- Developing recruitment content for both projects.
- Sending dedicated recruitment messages via the OTR e-newsletter, Tribal engagement and Dear Tribal Leader letters.
- Distributing invitations to orientation, listening and learning sessions and Tribal roundtables.

Child Care Licensing attended IPEL meetings to discuss current policy development needs. Child Care Licensing continues to collaborate with Tribal child care throughout the certification process for interlocal government-to-government agreements. Child Care Licensing implemented announced monitoring visits for Tribes, requiring child care licensors to request entry into Tribal program sites that are located on Tribal lands.

The Foundational Quality Standards for Outdoor Nature-Based (ONB) child care went into effect on June 1, 2023.

On March 21, 2024, [House Bill 1879](#) was signed into law, changing the name of a training for ONB child care providers to honor the efforts of John McCoy (Iulilaš). This training supports student and educator learning about the history, culture and government of the 29 federally recognized Indian Tribes in the Pacific Northwest by renaming the curriculum to "The John McCoy (Iulilaš) Since Time Immemorial Curriculum." DCYF has made all necessary edits to its website, publications and curriculum to reflect this change.

## Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA)

OIAA's ICW evaluator has been working towards publishing the first ICW Evaluation Report. Building from the literature review and logic model that was developed in 2023, a report of recent ICW trends will provide metrics that the agency can continue to monitor in the coming years. This work is designed to track and understand child welfare trends in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) and AI/AN-Multi-racial communities and how changes to practices and services may improve these outcomes over time. It is the goal to meet with Tribal partners across the state to review these trends and eventually develop an evaluation plan to assess how changes to ICW policies have impacted child welfare system-involved Indian children, families and communities.

## Office of Tribal Relations (OTR)

### **Staffing**

OTR is now fully staffed with 25 team members supporting a diverse range of programs including ICW, EL and JR, strengthening DCYF's government-to-government relationships with Tribes. Additionally, DCYF has nearly a dozen dedicated Tribal specialists located in various divisions across the state.

### **Programs, Grants and Contracts**

OTR has supported \$7.5 million in Tribal Early Learning Funds, which provide resources to Tribal early learning programs and Tribal-serving early learning programs. Funding goes toward programs providing culturally appropriate services in an inclusive manner.

DCYF plans to update its government-to-government administrative policy this year through consultation with the Tribes and in alignment with the best practices from the American Indian Health Commission's work to support a uniform consultation policy.

### **Meetings**

Tribal Policy Advisory Committee meetings are held bi-annually; all Tribes and RAIOS are invited to attend. OTR also continues to hold monthly ICW Subcommittee meetings where state and Tribal partners discuss child welfare policies, opportunities and issues. DCYF schedules annual meetings with Tribes, when requested, to develop Tribal plans under the 10.03 policy. IPEL meets every other month.

### **Conferences and Trainings**

OTR successfully hosted the fourth annual Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families (ICYF) Conference on Nov. 1–2, 2023. There were over 300 participants in attendance during this free, virtual offering.

DCYF, in partnership with National Indian Child Welfare Association, held three Positive Indian Parenting train-the-trainer training sessions. One session was virtual, and two were held in person in Eastern and Western Washington. There were approximately 50 individuals who participated.

OTR also presented at state and national conferences throughout the year, such as The Alliance's Program Manager Conference, the Children's Justice Conference, and the Race Equity Improvement Collaborative.

## Partnership, Prevention, and Services Division (PPS)

### **Parent Recognition Month**

During February 2024 when DCYF celebrates Parent Recognition Month, two Tribal fathers were celebrated as Unsung Heroes. Their stories were featured in "Seattle's Child" magazine and in a ceremony held by DCYF in Lacey.

### **SFY24 Concrete Goods**

The Strengthen Families Locally team contracted with nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations to purchase and deliver concrete goods to low-income families. DCYF allocated \$129,200 to Tribal nonprofits, which used the funds to provide families with grocery gift cards, baby supplies, clothes, hygiene supplies and short-term rental assistance.

### **Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention**

There are various community-based child abuse prevention efforts supporting community capacity to support families, including family resource centers, fatherhood programs, family support programs and perinatal mental health. Below are a few highlights from these efforts.

### *Community-Based Family Support*

DCYF has a contract with First Step Family Support Center in Clallam County that is providing pop-up light-touch family reconciliation services to the Hoh Indian Tribe and Quileute Tribe. Health and safety items are delivered to families monthly and staff aid with identifying resources when possible. This initiative was created at the request of the Tribal leadership councils. To date, 60 families have been served.

### *Tribal Fatherhood Program*

Funded by the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention American Rescue Act, DCYF is completing its second year of Tribal Fatherhood supports with three contracts with the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation and United Indians of All Tribes Foundation. These contracts support strength-based parenting programs for AI/AN fathers and father-figures to help promote family strengths and enhance healthy child development. The programs are rooted in Indigenous knowledge and practice and incorporate cultural practices such as music, food and drum-making. Programs honor participants with celebratory events and gifts. One participant shared that through participating in this program, he now feels that he belongs and has come home, completing a long journey that started when his grandfather “was basically stolen from his people.” Since these contracts started in November 2022, approximately 22 fathers or father-figures have participated.

### *Crisis Respite*

Preparations have been made over the past year to support three community-based organizations in building capacity for crisis respite care in their communities. Crisis Respite is short-term care for children for when parents/caregivers need a break for any reason, whether they are exhausted and worn-out from the demands of parenting or when they experience difficult life circumstances or other unexpected events and have no safe alternatives for care. One of those organizations is partnering with at least one local Tribe to assess community needs and assets and plan for a system that will meet those needs.

### **Child Welfare Early Learning Navigators (CWELN) program**

The CWELN program continued its momentum and growth this year. The first Tribal Navigator worked out of Region 6, supporting the child welfare office in Kelso. Since then, DCYF has experienced a staffing transition; the current Tribal Navigator now supports Pierce County, specifically the Puyallup Child Welfare office. With the support and oversight of OTR, DCYF plans to add a second Tribal navigator as the program is now permanently funded and expanding.

### **Home visiting**

The voluntary Early Childhood Home Visiting program continues; DCYF seeks to expand partnerships with Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations. In fiscal year 2024, DCYF allocated more than \$1.6 million, serving 124 families from Tribal communities. This was accomplished through six contracts: four contracts directly with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, Suquamish Tribe and Tulalip Tribes, and two contracts with the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation and Hummingbird Indigenous Services.

During this fiscal year, DCYF is moving home-visiting contracts from cost reimbursement to rates-based payment. DCYF has been meeting with contractors and partners throughout the year to support development and plan for implementation in state fiscal year 2025.

### **Early Support for Infant and Toddlers (ESIT)**

Early intervention services support families as they meet the needs of their children. The ESIT program provides services to children from birth to age 3 who have disabilities or developmental delays. In partnership with families, services can help children be more active and successful during their early childhood years and in a variety of settings. ESIT has continued to identify needs, provide support and build relationships with Tribal partners to promote this service.

Highlights include:

- ESIT has continued to be in interlocal government agreements with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and Lummi Nation.
- ESIT's Tribal program consultant supports the ESIT team and internal and external partners with specialized training/presentations.
- The weekly ESIT publication includes Tribal Terms of the Week to support learning in the early intervention community.

### **Help Me Grow Washington**

In 2023, Help Me Grow Washington continued to contract with Kauffman & Associates, Inc. (KAI) to build upon the 2022 efforts of exploring the relevance of Help Me Grow among Tribes and urban Indian organizations (UIOs) and potential ways Tribal partners could adapt the model for their communities. As some Tribes expressed interest in participating in a demonstration project, KAI worked this year to develop a Tribal-specific communications toolkit to facilitate Help Me Grow Washington in its outreach and engagement efforts with Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations interested in becoming part of the Help Me Grow system and enhancing access to resources for AI/AN families.

### **Native Culturally Responsive Prevention Services**

We will expand culturally specific and responsive programs and services that support families, which will safely reduce the number of Native children and youth that experience out-of-home placement. A Request for Application (RFA) was posted to contract with Tribal nations and Tribal-serving organizations to deliver these services, which resulted in five contracts with Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations in western Washington. In June 2024, DCYF re-opened the RFA with a focus on outreach and funding to eastern Washington Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations.

### **Fentanyl Response**

PPS division is busy working to support the CW division as it implements expanded responses to support changes in child welfare practice when interacting with substance-using families involved with high-potency synthetic opioids (see SB 6109 enacted in the 2024 legislative session). Additional support includes a public health nurse pilot in high-need areas of the state. DCYF would like to partner with Tribes to implement an intervention with at least one Tribe or Tribal-serving organization.

## **Staff contact**

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