



NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN IN MICHIGAN

Though Native Americans have continuously lived in cities, towns and rural areas throughout Michigan for hundreds of years, it can be said that they are largely invisible within the broader context of the state's existence. The consequences of this overlooked status have a particular impact on Native children.

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“Native American Children in Michigan,” provides a historical context for the tenuous relationship between Michigan’s 12 federally recognized tribes and the state government, paying particular attention to the erosion of Native American education programs and the disproportionate number of Native children who find themselves in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. It also highlights how data on Native Americans is simply not collected by county officials, leaving policymakers ill-equipped to make informed decisions on items affecting Native children.

This report also places special emphasis on the field of child development science and how researchers are finding the similarities between the best practices of the field and Native American family beliefs. The report notes that an “ecobiodevelopmental” framework to understanding children—where ecology, social determinants and genetics affect learning capacities and lifelong health—mirrors the Native American approach in which cognitive, physical, mental and spiritual development are key components of family life.

In keeping with the value of raising the visibility of Native people in Michigan, the

report solicited recommendations from tribal stakeholders on the needs and services relative to Native children, with the most pressing being to:

- Provide families with holistic prevention strategies (e.g., health, violence and substance abuse);
- Incorporate Native language and culture into early childhood development;
- Increase collaboration among existing programs to maximize resources;
- Communicate effectively to families about available programs and help;
- Provide healthy food and more exercise for children;
- Develop a community-wide blueprint to support children’s success; and
- Provide more child development training to parents.

The challenges—and opportunities—highlighted in this report and the data, perspectives and recommendations are offered with the hope that more leaders and concerned citizens in the state of Michigan will join this important and ongoing discussion for the future of all children and families.