

*Promising Community
Approaches to
Addressing Child Abuse
in Indian Country*

The Mission Statement for the Choctaw
Nation of Oklahoma is:
*To enhance the lives of all
members through
opportunities designed to
develop healthy, successful
and productive lifestyles.*

Is there a way to prevent child abuse
and neglect by creating a community
wide, coordinated approach that
supports families and their children?

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is committed to preventing child abuse before it occurs. The maltreatment of children is a multi-faceted problem with a multitude of causes. We realize that our approach must respond to a range of needs.

Education Programs For Adults and Children

- **Choctaw Nation Head Start**
The services provided by this program are very comprehensive. Five major component areas serve the needs of the children enrolled and their families: Education/Literacy, Health, Parent Involvement, Family Services and Nutrition.



STAR - Success Through Academic Recognition

- The **STAR Program** is an Education Incentive Program to reward students in grades 2 through 12 who show an excellence in their schoolwork and attendance.
- Beginning at the end of the fall semester, students who are members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma may apply to receive awards from the tribe if they have all A's on their report card, all A's and B's, or Perfect Attendance. In addition to a Certificate of Recognition, an incentive gift will be given to each student.

Upward Bound Program

This educational program is designed to give to high school students an opportunity to prepare for college life. Students will experience college-prep course work, state-of-the-art laboratory work, tutoring, career exploration, intensive academic skills enrichment, motivation, financial aid/scholarship assistance, and numerous field trips intended to prepare them for success in high school and college.

Higher Education and Grant Program

- The Choctaw Nation contracted the Higher Education Program on March 1, 1984, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This program expends funds appropriated by Congress for the education of eligible Choctaws by providing financial assistance to attend an institution of higher learning, such as Junior Colleges and Universities.

In 1998, the Choctaw Nation contributed funds to start a scholarship program. Students are assisted based on academics, rather than financial need. This program ensures more Choctaw students the opportunity to receive educational assistance.

Adult Education Program

- This program is designed to provide educational opportunities for adult Native Americans who did not finish high school and will provide the basic education skills needed to acquire their GED Diploma





The Career Development Center offers a variety of services to facilitate student development in the academic, career, and personal/social areas.

• Services include assessment, academic advisement, career information and planning, college and/or technical school, financial aid and scholarships, job readiness assistance and personal and professional growth workshops. Our staff includes certified, licensed or qualified professional career counselors.

Prevention Programs
The Community Based Social Work Program is a program which serves Choctaw individuals and families. Being a community-based program, services are taken directly to the community and assistance is given where families are more comfortable.

The mission of the program is to help Choctaw families find permanent solutions to long-term problems by initiating change, setting goals, making a plan and following through. The program's primary goal is to assist Choctaw families in locating resources to help meet immediate needs.

The Adolescent Family Life Care Project (AFL) was established September 1, 2005.

The program provides services to pregnant and parenting teens under 19 years of age, their infants, male partners and families who reside in the 10 ½ county service area of the Choctaw Nation.

- The project provides comprehensive and integrated services to reduce repeat pregnancies, improve health outcomes for mother and infant; increase healthy parenting skills; provide opportunities for education and job training; and increase healthy relationship skills.



Victim Assistance provides comprehensive services that incorporate all necessary victim support services for Native American victims of crime residing within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Services include: court system advocacy, intervention services, accompaniment to hospitals for medical examinations, emergency food, clothing, transportation, shelter, and other emergency services that will restore the victim's sense of dignity and self dignity.



Counseling and Faith-Based Services for Crime Victims in Indian Country: Provides faith-based counseling services to restore the balance and harmony in the lives of crime victims.

Through the collaboration of spiritual leaders, victims service providers and community members, we work to overcome the violence and abuse within our native families who reside within the 10 ½ county service area of the Choctaw Nation.

Project EMPOWER

Educating, Motivating, and Providing Opportunities for (Victims) Working to Enrich and Reclaim (their lives)

- Project EMPOWER's goal is to provide a broad range of services that include:
 - Transitional Housing and Support
 - Safety and Life Planning
 - Transportation
 - Healing Circle Gatherings

The Choctaw Nation Youth Outreach Program was established in 2005 and our goal is to assist young Choctaw students in finding solutions for hardships that may occur throughout adolescent and teen years.

This program also assists in goal setting, plan development and preparation for the future. The Youth Outreach program strives to provide services to the Choctaw youth who may need the support or guidance in their lives to become successful in life.

Youth Outreach's range of services include:

- Mentoring
- Short and long term goal setting
- Locating resources
- Home and school visits to clients
- After school activities
- College preparation

Choctaw Nation Transit provides or assists with transportation to and from **non-emergency** medical appointments. The goal of the Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit Program is to develop and implement a comprehensive, transportation strategy that will enable tribal members and all community members to have reliable transportation to Choctaw Nation Health Care Facilities and to participate in other aspects of community life.

Currently, home visitation is the most innovative and holistic program used in approaching the difficulties of educating and supporting the at-risk family, while at the same time, making a wide range of community and Tribal services available to the family.

Family Preservation is a preventative service which promotes family strength, stability, parental functions and the protection of children. The program is designed to prevent family disruption and out-of-home placement by meeting the needs of a family in times of crisis.

The goal is to empower families to provide adequate and safe care for their children by identifying their strengths, assisting them to find solutions and supporting self-reliance through short-term services in the home.



Services may be provided for a period of approximately 90 days and should not exceed six months. There may be a one time financial assistance due to a sudden crisis situation within the family. The program services the 10 1/2 counties of Choctaw Nation and serves all federally recognized tribes.

Family Violence

This program assists Native American families who have been in a domestic violence situation. The Family Violence program is designed to help women and children escape a dangerous home life. This program can assist with outreach, prevention, counseling, transportation needs and shelter.

There is an increasing need among all families for support, advice and role models. The **Family Preservation** department also provides parent education which encourages the participation of all parents without regard to a specified risk. By targeting all families, rather than low-income or otherwise at-risk groups, parent education is marketed and encouraged.

Project Falvmmichi

Domestic violence is a national problem. It is an acute problem as well in Indian Country, something recognized by the Choctaw Nation, a nation of more than 80,000 citizens, which knows that its own communities face the scourge of domestic violence and abuse. But the nation also recognizes that violence of this sort is a learned behavior and that it is important to include the young in efforts to address it.

Project Falvmmichi was conceived by a sixteen-year-old citizen of the Choctaw Nation who believed that the cycle of violence could be broken by reaching out to younger generations of Choctaws. She presented the idea to the leadership of the Nation and they gave it their support. The theme of the program is "Let's just help the children."

The program uses a customized curriculum to foster a sense of respect for self and others among public school children and to teach non-violent means to resolve conflicts. It targets second-graders - seven-year-olds - and teaches that "it is not cool to hit or to be hit." One of the keys to the program is that teen-aged citizens of the Nation - known as mentors - are the ones who deliver this curriculum, in person, in the classroom, supported by adult sponsors with training in counseling, social work and related fields.

Today, more than 300 teen mentors work with more than 1200 students in more than 30 schools. Thus, the nation enlists its youth, supported by its adults, to teach its younger children. These children look up to their teen-aged mentors while the teen-aged mentors have discovered that they have a critical role to play in their community; that their voice and actions can have practical effects on future generations of Choctaws.

Teenagers who could not wait to leave now want to stay and take on a leadership role among their people. Perhaps most importantly, the program has led to a decline in violence in the classroom and within the community, to a growing intolerance for violent behaviors that once threatened citizens, families and the nation's future. In the children, there is hope.

It is the belief of the **Choctaw Nation Youth Advisory Board** that through community service, mentorship, communication and education, Choctaw Nation Leadership can and will empower future generations to be a healthier and stronger nation. The Choctaw Nation Youth Advisory Board meets each month, while participating individually at the local level (community) on an on-going basis.



Choctaw Project SAFE
Striving for an Abuse-Free Environment Project SAFE encourages collaboration among domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking victim service providers, tribal and non-tribal law enforcement, courts, prosecutors, community service providers, educational institutions and health care providers in order to strengthen partnerships for safer communities.



Project SAFE has been successful in implementing a SAFE DATES curriculum in our local schools to raise awareness of teen dating violence. SAFE DATES is a research based curriculum that educates 5th-12th grade students to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships and appropriate and inappropriate dating behaviors.



The Choctaw Nation maintains and operates with the philosophy that Alcohol and Substance Abuse is a disease amenable to treatment, not a moral issue. With this belief and conviction the following is our goal:

Provide a comprehensive and professional program, to show positive outcomes in preventing, reducing and treating all individuals suffering from chemical dependency whether young or old.

Choctaw Nation Recovery Center offers a 28 day program including individual counseling, group counseling and marriage and family counseling. The Recovery Center is a spiritually based treatment facility. Individual counseling is one-on-one counseling between the client and their primary counselor.

Project Chi Hullo Li (a Choctaw phrase meaning "I care for you") is a comprehensive, culturally sensitive residential treatment program for Native American parenting women who are between the ages of 18 and 35, suffer from alcohol, marijuana, methamphetamine, inhalant abuse and other drug problems and are parenting up to two children between the ages of 1-10.

Because child abuse is often cyclic, many health and developmental problems in early childhood can lead to behavioral, educational and psycho-emotional problems in later life which could lead to the occurrence of abusive behavior. For this reason, detecting and treating health and development problems early in life is important.

The Choctaw Nation is the first indigenous tribe in the world to build their own hospital with their own funding. The Choctaw Nation **Health Care Center** is a 145,000-square-foot health facility with 37 hospital beds for inpatient care and 52 exam rooms. The \$22 million hospital is complete with \$6 million worth of state-of-the-art equipment and furnishings. It serves 150,000 - 210,000 outpatient visits annually.

The hospital also houses the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority, the hub of the health care services covering the 10 ½ county area of Southeastern Oklahoma. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma also operates eight clinics within the 10 ½ counties.

**Bernadette..a success story. Bernadette came to Chi Hullo Li after losing custody of her 2 children to the State of Oklahoma due to domestic violence and substance abuse.

Community Approaches to the Investigation of Child Abuse In Indian Country
*Detective Valerie Bribiescas
Gila River Indian Community*

Law Enforcement

- Completion of **Cultural Sensitivity Training** in Field Training Phase
- Officers learn about the history and traditions of the tribe from elders
- Extended family concepts- multiple families living in one area
- “Be aware of Dynamics and Don’t Assume”
- Most of our Indian children are generally considered everyone’s responsibility

Skills

- Verbal and nonverbal responses when communicating
- Send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages accurately and appropriately
- Intervene respectfully and advocate

Advanced Forensic Interview Training

- AFIT is sponsored by Prevent Child Abuse in Arizona
- 40 hour course - Training includes interviewing the reluctant child, recantation and disclosure patterns, parent interviews, developmentally delayed children, Cultural issues, Courtroom testimony and practicum, legal considerations and Role-play
- Participants include Law Enforcement, CPS/Social Workers, and Prosecutors throughout the state of Arizona

Investigation

- Tribal Law Enforcement must rely on the strength of Tribal Laws, Codes, Ordinances, to begin the prosecution process
- Collaboration with the Tribal Law Office, Child Protective Services, and Victim services
- At the Federal Level collaboration includes the Assistant United States Attorney's office and the FBI
- GRIC has adopted/revised several ordinances which have been effective in protecting our children

Children's Code

- The GRIC community found that the current provisions were outdated and required revisions in order to serve the best interests of our children
- GRIC Human Resources is currently training all departments regarding the area of mandatory reporting of child abuse or neglect
- Including Employees charged with and offense against a child
- Effective April 1, 2010

Victim's Rights

- The GRIC Community Council recognized that a Victim's Rights Ordinance was necessary to protect and provide rights to victims of crimes
- Notification- DV cases
- Confidentiality of Victim's Information
- Right to be informed of case progress
- Privilege between victim and advocate
- Effective December 1, 2007

Sex Offender Registration and Tracking - SORT

- The GRIC Community Council recognized the need to provide the Community residents information regarding sex offenders entering and residing within GRIC
- Assisted in several Federal convictions to include non-members
- SORT Detectives are responsible for training of 7 Districts and GRIC Departments
- Adopted April 2008

Domestic Violence

- Yearly Domestic Violence Training for the Community is mandated through the GRIC Domestic Violence Ordinance
- In the last 5 to 10 years, research has exposed the interrelated nature of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse
- Domestic Violence is one of the leading crimes in Indian Country
- According to the 2008 Indian Country Report GRIC (17,500 members) referred 8 murder cases to the Assistant U.S. Attorney's Office

Working Together

- Council Member involvement
- Tribal Newspaper
- MDT meetings- Multidisciplinary Team AUSA/Victims Services, GRIC Law Office, CPS, GRPD
- School Resource Officer involvement
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Parenting Classes

The 911 Call

A frantic call to 911 sends the police to a local home, responding to a report of DV. They have been called to this house before; a couple married for seven years fights often, and the wife typically ends up in the emergency room but she vigorously opposes charges against her husband.

911 Call continued

She has a secret fear that if she does, he will kill her or hurt her children. Their five-year-old daughter made the call, frantic because Daddy was hitting Mommy with a chair and her baby brother was in the room. Police arrive to find Mom with visible injuries, Dad in the backyard smoking a cigarette.

911 call continued

The five-year-old is in the corner of the living room, hovering over her baby brother's carriage to protect him.
