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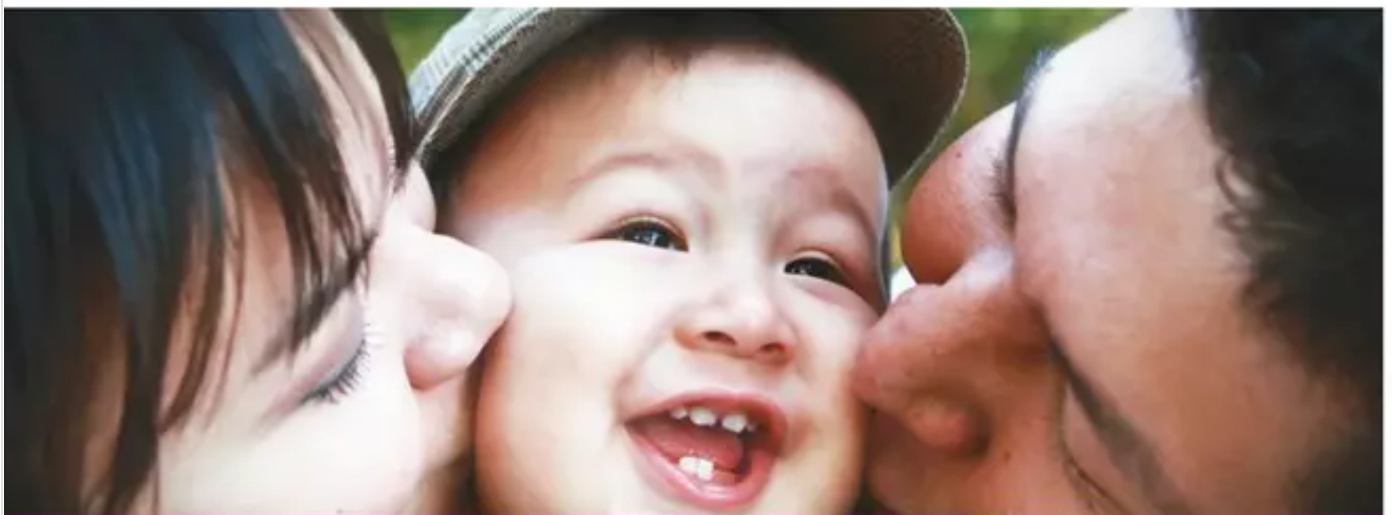
Before it's over, May is Foster Care Month: Native foster families are needed



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Tribes

A screen capture of the Utah Foster Care web page dedicated to Native families.

 by **Vincent Schilling** May 26, 2018 - edited

Before it's over, May is Foster Care Month: Native foster families are needed

The State of Utah is one example, there are an estimated 130 Native children in state custody, but less than 20 Native foster and kinship homes





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According to Stephanie L. Benally, Diné of the Red Streak People and born for Bitter Water, there is a great need for Native foster homes statewide and nationwide. Benally is also the Native American Specialist and Foster-Adoptive Consultant at Utah Foster Care.



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Utah Foster Care is a non-profit organization that covers the entire State of Utah. Utah Foster Care recruits, trains, and supports foster parents. They work with the Utah Division of Child and Family Services to find foster care homes for the children that come into state custody.

“I have been working diligently to recruit more American Indian foster parents and have partnered with the eight American Indian tribes in Utah and organizations that provide services to American Indian communities,” Benally told Indian Country Today.

“I believe if people are aware of need for safe and loving homes, they may think of becoming a foster parent or help spread the awareness. Studies have shown our Native children do better in a Native home.”

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Stephanie Benally, Dine', the Native American Specialist and Foster-Adoptive Consultant at Utah Foster Care says "studies have shown our Native children do better in a Native home."

In 1978, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act, after a 1976 report showed American Indian children were thousands of percent more likely (Utah Native children were 1500 percent more likely) to be placed in foster care than other children.

As of 2012, Native children are still four times more likely to be placed in foster care. Though Native people comprise 1 percent of Utah's population, they make up 6 percent of all children in foster care. The numbers are similarly out of proportion nationwide.

"They are better than they were, but they're not where they need to be yet," said Utah Appeals Court Judge William Thorne to the Salt Lake Tribune, who is a member of the Pomo tribe and serves on the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. "The children are still out of home more often than necessary."

Thorne supported Benally's statement in his interview with the Tribune. He said one study found that American Indian kids raised in non-Indian homes were more likely to have a negative view of their own culture, leading researchers to conclude the children were left without positive images of their own heritage.

He also noted American Indian youths have a suicide rate that is 1.5 to three times higher x





“We really need to be thinking about doing things a different way,” said Thorne, especially given the outcomes for children who age out of foster care. They are more likely to be undereducated, to have a mental disorder or post-traumatic stress syndrome and to end up homeless, in jail or dead within two years.”

What can interested families do?

The need for Native foster care families across the country is great. Interested families can Logindo a simple Google search of their state’s name and the term foster care to start.

One agency that sets a standard for other agency’s is Utah Foster Care. They have a specific dedicated web page titled “Native Homes for Native Children.”

On the page they have a dedicated [American Indian/Alaska Native Factsheet](#) which has a list of ways families and tribes can help.

For more information visit –



Tribes | Utah Foster Care

Native Homes for Native Children For American Indian/Alaska Native children in foster care, a Native foster or adoptive family can...

utahfostercare.org

Benally says she is grateful for the support from her colleagues at Utah Foster Care, “They are dedicated and passionate about the work of recruitment and support of foster parents. It is an honor to work with dedicated people in the field of child welfare.”

Reply to story in Indian Country Today

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