

Native American Services

The Office of Children and Family Services is one of three state agencies (with the Department of Education and the Department of Health) charged with specific obligations to New York's Native American population. The general responsibilities for Native American Services are found in Section 39, "Indian Affairs," of the Social Services Law.

The statute, enacted in 1924, conferred upon the New York State Department of Social Welfare (later named the New York State Department of Social Services) the bulk of the state's responsibilities with regard to Native Americans. Implementation of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 expanded the agency's consulting and training role with respect to the delivery of services to Native American children. Native American Services came under OCFS when it was formed in January 1998, by melding programs and services administered by the New York State Division for Youth with the family and children's programs formerly administered by the Department of Social Services.

OCFS' Native American Services (formerly known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs) responds to the needs of Indian Nations and their members both on reservations and in the state's other communities. Its broad responsibilities include:

- Serving as liaison between state agencies and tribal groups;
- Mediation with local social services districts;
- Information and consultation to both public and private agencies, educational institutions, and individuals;
- Social work and educational counseling for students and parents on career opportunities, college entrance, recruitment and financial aid;
- Payment of annuities and related obligations to the state's various Indian Nations;
- Serving as designated trustee to administer trust accounts for Cayuga minors;
- Appointment and payment of the Onondaga Indian agent and attorney for the Tonawanda Band of Senecas;
- Supervision and maintenance of the Tonawanda Indian Community House.

Native American Services may also provide technical assistance in regard to issues which may be before the courts; provide certification of age for Social Security purposes; help obtain

tribal identity and support the importance of cultural identity for Native American children in foster or adoptive homes. Native American Services works with the federal Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs in processing applications for training schools and colleges. It also assists with interstate services concerning tribal identity and other matters.

One of the unique responsibilities of Native American Services is the maintenance and supervision of the Tonawanda Indian Community House (TICH) located in Akron, New York. This facility, a two-story cypress log structure, was erected by Native Americans under the Works Progress Administration and dedicated on May 13, 1939. It was built to meet the social, cultural, recreational and health needs of the Tonawanda Reservation. In addition to a gymnasium/auditorium, locker room area, kitchen and various meeting rooms, TICH houses a library and medical clinic funded by the New York State Department of Health. Genesee County and the New York State Office for the Aging provide a daily meal at TICH for elderly residents of the reservation. There is also a small museum located in the facility that exhibits the Tonawanda Seneca culture on permanent loan from the Rochester Museum.

OCFS is the only state agency responsible for providing such a wide scope of services to Native Americans. Further information and assistance is available by contacting:

New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Native American Services
295 Main Street, Suite 545
Buffalo, New York 14203
Phone: (716) 847-3123
Fax: (716) 847-3812

Additionally, the following publications are available through the Office of Children and Family Services:

4757 - Guide to Compliance With the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act in New York State
(48k)

4629 - A Proud Heritage (602k)