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Best Outcomes for Indian Children

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The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center are collaborating with Wisconsin's tribes and county child welfare agencies to improve outcomes for Indian children by systemically implementing the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act (WICWA). This groundbreaking collaboration will increase practitioners' understanding of the requirements of WICWA and the need for those requirements, enhance communication and coordination between all stakeholders responsible for the welfare of Indian children in Wisconsin; it is designed to effect the systemic integration of the philosophical underpinnings of WICWA.

The implementation work described herein is supported by cooperative agreement 90CO1043 from the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In December 2009, Governor James Doyle signed the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act, signaling the end of a historic collaborative effort to enact the law and marking the beginning of a new initiative to effectively implement it. Like the work that led to enactment of the statute, the work required to effectuate it requires the involvement of stakeholders with very diverse views and interests. However, this group has a common goal to which all members are committed: to achieve better outcomes for Indian children in Wisconsin. The Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center, a member of the Training and Technical Assistance network of the Children's Bureau, is privileged to assist the 11 tribes, the state of Wisconsin, and its project partners in a four-year implementation project toward the achievement of that goal. This article describes the early years of that journey and the plan for its current segment, which is in progress.

Historical Status of Indian Children in Wisconsin

Like other states, Wisconsin has historically not fully complied with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Prior to the passage of the ICWA in 1978, witnesses testified during Congressional hearings that Indian children in Wisconsin were 1,500 times more likely than non-Indian children to be involuntarily placed out of their homes (Association on American Indian Affairs [AAIA], 1977). Wisconsin had the fourth-highest rate of Indian children in out-of-home placements (AAIA, 1977): "The underlying premise of the [federal] ICWA is that Indian tribes, as sovereign governments, have a vital interest in any decision as to whether Indian children should be separated from their families" (Carleton, 1997, p. 27).

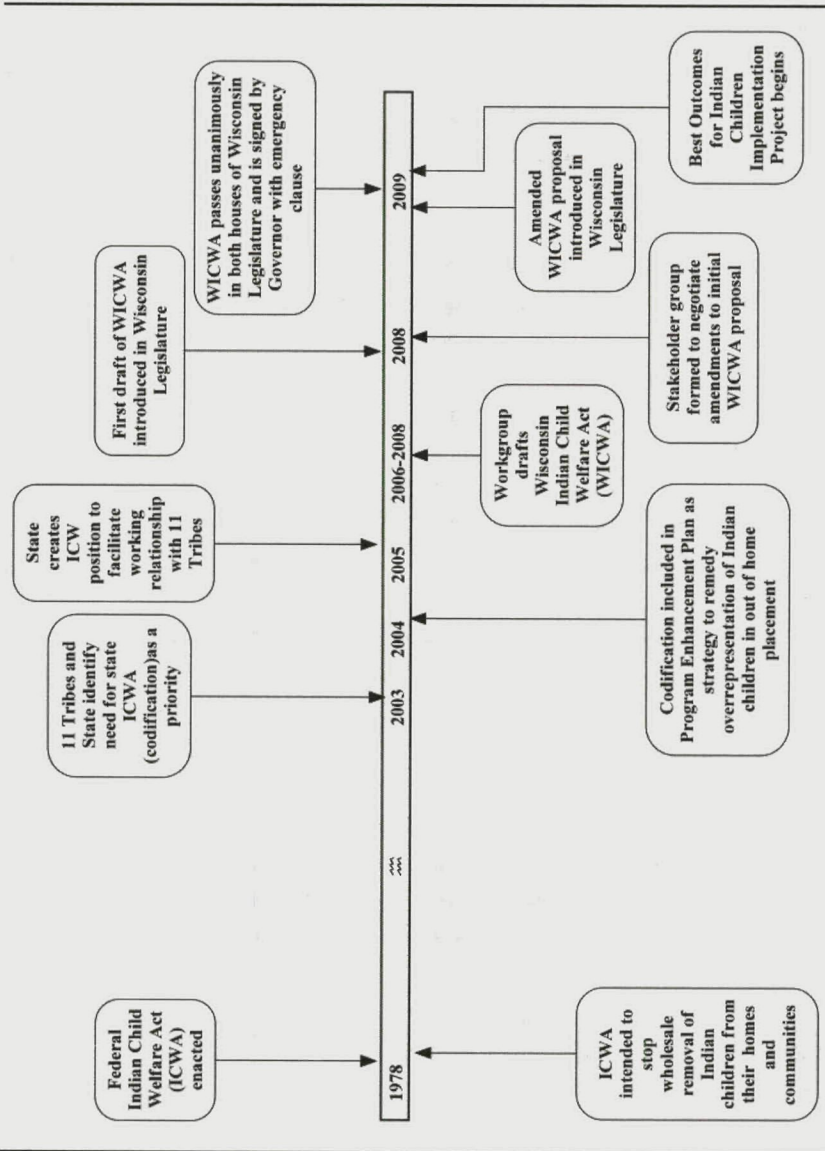
Over thirty years later, the disproportional removal of Indian children in Wisconsin continued: A study published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2011) compared disproportionality rates in Wisconsin from 2004 to 2009. The study found Wisconsin in the top seven of all states for the disproportional foster care placement of Native American children in 2009, an increase in disproportion since 2004. This disparity was a driving force for the need to codify the ICWA into Wisconsin law.

To address this state of affairs, Wisconsin enacted its own Indian Child Welfare Act, referred to as "WICWA," in 2009. Passage of this statute was the result of years of inter-jurisdictional and inter-agency collaboration of historic dimensions (Figure 1). Dedicated professionals from the 11 Wisconsin sovereign tribes and from state, county, and private agencies were involved in the unprecedented effort to achieve better outcomes for Indian children (see Appendix for list of tribes).

As early as the fall of 2005, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services' Division of Children and Families (DCF) began initial discussions with tribal representatives to design legislation to codify the federal Indian Child Welfare Act into state law. A workgroup of tribal social services directors and Indian child welfare staff, tribal and DCF attorneys, and DCF staff began the arduous process of drafting the legislation. The workgroup met monthly and performed in-depth legal research and analysis of ICWA cases from state and federal courts to learn about areas of conflict that consistently appeared in appellate court decisions. The workgroup also examined the Indian child welfare laws of other states to identify statutory provisions that seemed difficult for practitioners and courts to interpret and apply. Attempting to clarify those areas, the workgroup completed several drafts of the bill, and in May 2007 submitted a consensus draft to various stakeholders for comment and responses. The stakeholders identified a number of specific issues requiring further discussion and refinement. Consensus was reached on a final draft bill, which was unanimously approved by both houses of the Wisconsin legislature. Soon after, the bill was signed into law by the governor.

Within weeks after WICWA was enacted, a series of nine roundtable meetings regarding the general content of the Act were held in metropolitan and rural communities across Wisconsin. These informational meetings were approximately three hours in length, and provided practitioners with an overview of the purposes and content of WICWA. Approximately 650 stakeholders from diverse child welfare agencies—tribal, county, private, and state—attended this early introduction to the provisions of the new law.

Figure 1
History of WICWA Codification



Support for WICWA Implementation

In 2008, the Children's Bureau established five Child Welfare Implementation Centers to provide states, territories, tribes, and tribal consortia with individualized training and technical assistance to facilitate sustainable systems-change initiatives designed to build the capacities of child welfare systems for improved practice and agency performance. Each implementation center solicited applications for proposed implementation projects from within its geographic service area and partnered with selected jurisdictions to support a number of long-term implementation projects. The Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center (MCWIC) was funded to support the states and tribes in a ten-state area, including Wisconsin.

In 2009, with the support and guidance of the Wisconsin Intertribal Child Welfare Committee, DCF developed an application for an implementation project. The committee consists of tribal social service directors, Indian child welfare directors, and social workers from all 11 federally recognized tribes in Wisconsin. It is difficult to overstate the historic significance of the state/tribal partnership that resulted in both the passage of the WICWA and the design of this project.

Wisconsin's project application identified four major areas necessary for positive and sustainable systemic change: (1) incorporate the WICWA into regulations, policies, and practice; (2) strengthen the working relationships between tribes, state, and county child welfare stakeholders; (3) increase the knowledge of practitioners in state and county child welfare agencies of the intent, purpose and history of the ICWA; and (4) increase the identification of Indian children covered by the WICWA.

The key result of successfully implementing the WICWA will be the significant reduction of unnecessary removal of Indian children from their families, communities and tribes. That outcome will require uniform and consistent application and interpretation of the Act, establishment of policies and standards integrating the Act, and implementation of consistent case practices reflecting the best interests of Indian children and an understanding of tribes' child welfare roles.

The project approval process included the collaborative development of a logic model and work plan for the project. The logic model (Table 1) was, and continues to be, a planning tool to clarify and graphically display the project's design, relevant resources, and intended impacts. It is also a framework for evaluating whether the project achieved its intended impacts. This collaborative approval process—involving the Children's Bureau, MCWIC, and DCF—was an iterative process of refinement and clarification, designed to ensure that the project results in sustainable system change that improves outcomes for children and families. (Iterative processes consist of repeated rounds of analysis, designed to bring a final decision closer to realization with each successive round.) The resulting logic model and work plan are regularly reviewed by MCWIC and Wisconsin project staff to assess fidelity to the logic model and progress on the work plan. They are modified by mutual agreement when necessary to achieve intended system impacts. The four-year "Best Outcomes for Indian Children" implementation project began in October 2009 and will conclude in September 2013.

Though several states have codified the Indian Child Welfare Act in some form,¹ the authors are unaware of any state beyond Wisconsin that has utilized an implementation project to assist with the systemic statewide integration of the new law. As a result, there is a lack of data on statewide implementation of ICWA codification.

Using Implementation Science to Inform Project Structure

MCWIC's conceptualization of effective systemic change is derived from both the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005) and Kotter's (1996) theory of organizational change. Using this framework, MCWIC identified the critical elements (in the language of NIRN,

1 Based on statutory research compiled by the authors, the following states have codified ICWA in some part: Alaska, California, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Washington.

Table 1
Abbreviated Logic Model

Inputs	Short Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes	System/Child & Families Impacts
WICWA Staff & Staff Training	WICWA project staff hired and trained	County child welfare staff and other stakeholders comprehend WICWA and tribal child welfare policies	Uniform interpretation and consistent application of WICWA
Advisory Board	Advisory board reviews and recommends implementation standards and practices	Child welfare system will have increased understanding of the history and purpose of WICWA	Child welfare system reflects WICWA integrated policies and standards
State to Country Integration	Tribes and counties consulted regarding WICWA implementation	Increases in: Identification of WICWA eligible children; formal notices to tribes; adherence to placement preferences, and documentation of WICWA compliance	County child welfare agency practice reflects understanding importance of Tribal role
Policy Development	Revision of existing WDCF administrative rules & program standards	WICWA requirements integrated into WDCF Administrative Rules and Program Standards	WDCF case practice will reflect best interest of the Indian child.
County Training and Technical Assistance	County child welfare staff training delivered & TA provided by WICWA facilitators	Increases in: Identification of WICWA eligible children; formal notices to tribes; adherence to placement preferences, and documentation of WICWA compliance	Increased number of cases with active efforts and tribal connections maintained
Communication & Coordination	Mechanisms and models for communication among child welfare system stakeholders established	Strengthen the working relationships between state, county, tribal child welfare agencies, adoption agencies, and state and tribal courts	Unnecessary removals of Indian children are reduced and permanency outcomes are founded in tribal standards

“implementation drivers”) needed to support and sustain implementation, as well as the key stages to be expected in the project’s progression. These stages include:

- *Exploration*, in which Wisconsin analyzed data, engaged stakeholders, identified state-specific strengths, and identified the creation and implementation of WICWA as one of the major developments best suited to “ensure the best outcomes for Indian children in out-of-home care;”
- *Program installation*, which consisted of securing the necessary resources to facilitate the implementation of WICWA;
- *Initial implementation*, which is when practitioners start to acquire and use the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to fully and consistently apply WICWA;
- *Full operation*, the project’s current stage, which occurs when project personnel, tribes, counties, and other stakeholders are working collaboratively to effectively implement both the letter and the spirit of WICWA; and finally,
- *Innovation*, which will be the period when a full evaluation of the approach is available and regularly analyzed to modify the application of WICWA, including necessary changes in the statute, policy, and practice to achieve best outcomes for Indian children.

Implementation drivers (or components) consist of processes, tasks and tools designed to improve practitioner competence and to create a systemic environment that can successfully support a new program or practice. Generally, these drivers fit into one of three categories: competency, organization, and leadership. The competency category of drivers includes the selection, training, coaching, and performance assessments for practitioners using the new approach. Drivers in the organization category include decision support data systems (assessing key aspects of the organization’s performance), facilitative administration (e.g., policy analyses, procedural changes, and funding allocations that support the change effort), and systems interventions (the alignment of supportive influences across multiple systems and levels of systems). The leadership driver category refers to both adaptive and technical leadership, insuring fidelity to

the new practice and sustainability of the approach (Metz, Blasé, & Bowie, 2007).

Sustainability, which is the embedding of effective practice of WICWA within and across multiple relevant systems in Wisconsin—is planned for during every stage of implementation. Through utilization of this framework, the project will contribute to the general body of knowledge regarding the implementation of Indian child welfare protections. The strengths and challenges learned through this approach may be instructive to other jurisdictions' attempts to achieve outcomes and system impacts similar to those identified in this project.

Stakeholder Engagement

One critical aspect of the systems intervention component (or driver) of successful systemic change is the active engagement of stakeholders. Once relevant stakeholders are identified, they must be informed about the planned intervention: what it is, why it is necessary, how it will be installed (put in place), and how stakeholders might contribute to the process. Finally, effective stakeholder engagement involves a process of "iterative consultation" (International Finance Corporation, 2007, p. 34) with and among key stakeholders.

Identification of stakeholders was, in this instance, an organic aspect of the process begun in 2004, when Wisconsin's Intertribal Child Welfare Committee made codification of a state ICWA a legislative priority. As progress was made towards the realization of this priority, the identified community of child welfare practitioners expanded.

Recognizing the criticality of authentic stakeholder engagement to successful implementation, project staff proposed the development of the WICWA Advisory Board (Advisory Board) to monitor, modify, and support attainment of the goals and objectives of the project. The Advisory Board represents the diverse community of Wisconsin child welfare practitioners, including tribal child welfare directors and attorneys, county child welfare agencies, the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (in Milwaukee County, child welfare services are state-administered, and are county-administered in all other Wisconsin

counties), Wisconsin's state court system, DCF, private agencies, and attorney-based agencies.

Logistic support for the Advisory Board is provided by DCF. Its membership is required to be cross-jurisdictional (tribal, county and state) and multi-disciplinary, representing the various disciplines responsible for the continuum of the child welfare process in Wisconsin.

The Board's members are committed to successful implementation of WICWA, and take an active role in making recommendations for cross-jurisdictional actions necessary to achieve true system-wide change. The Advisory Board meets quarterly to review the project's progress toward the outcomes and system impacts identified in the project's logic model and work plan, provide guidance to project staff, identify resources needed to address any barriers to implementation, and to make recommendations to DCF regarding changes to practice standards and policy necessary for successful implementation of WICWA.

Project Staff

Prior to WICWA's enactment, core stakeholders recognized that child welfare practitioners would require significant targeted supports to enable them to uniformly and consistently implement WICWA. Therefore, provision of technical assistance to practitioners regarding the intended purposes of WICWA, as well as its proper application, was an early planning priority. The implementation project included funding for the creation of three key on-site staff positions devoted to providing technical assistance—a project coordinator and two facilitators. These project staff positions are responsible for: establishing working relationships with counties within their assigned region; attending regional supervisor meetings; proactively reaching out to counties to identify county-specific WICWA needs; developing technical assistance modules to address those needs; and delivering or coordinating the technical assistance necessary to address those needs.

Recognizing the importance of tribal involvement in the project, DCF decided to subcontract with a tribe to provide the administrative

infrastructure to support these three positions. With the support of the other ten Wisconsin tribes, the Ho-Chunk Nation accepted the sub-contract. It was also important to maximize the accessibility of the implementation staff to facilitate direct contact with county and tribal child welfare agencies. Thus, office locations for these staff were established at the St. Croix Chippewa of Wisconsin in the northwest area of the state, the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians in the northeast, and the Ho-Chunk Nation in west-central Wisconsin.

Additionally, all parties recognized the importance of tribal membership as a requisite for these professionals. There is a history of miscommunication and mistrust between the Wisconsin tribes and the state/county governments, as in many states with Native American populations. These implementation staff must understand this history to assist in achieving the project's goals of improving communication and cooperation between tribal and state/county child welfare agencies and practitioners. Developing the job descriptions and qualifications for implementation staff, then hiring and training them are elements of the selection component of successful implementation.

The project coordinator and facilitators have the flexibility to respond statewide to the unique needs of the county agencies, based upon a variety of needs assessment strategies, ranging from analyses of county-level aggregate data from the state's automated child welfare information system (known as eWiSACWIS), referrals, or county self-identification. Over time, trends in requests for technical assistance and training provided by these implementation staff will be tracked and will serve as an additional source of needs assessment data to inform the development of other resources and supports.

Primary Implementation Components

The plan for implementation of WICWA is focused on a number of essential interventions: training for multiple levels of practitioners; technical assistance to county and tribal child welfare agencies; development of resources, tools, rules, and policies; and data system modifications. A more detailed description of these on-going activities and

tasks is set forth below. Together, these components provide the systemic supports child welfare practitioners need in order to carry out the provisions of the law.

Training for Multiple Levels of Practitioners

Training is a critical component of successful implementation. The WICWA training curriculum is focused on application of the law to social workers' job responsibilities. Development of this new curriculum took almost a year, including pilot training, an extensive review by an Advisory Board subcommittee, and the integration of revisions representing tribal, legal, and practitioner perspectives.

The final WICWA curriculum consists of eight interactive and engaging modules, with lecture, small and large group activities, videotape segments, and fictional case examples. The focus is on participant involvement, and trainees have multiple opportunities to apply the material to current cases they may have. Before the project concludes, the WICWA curriculum will be integrated into the state's existing core training program to ensure sustainability. The WICWA curriculum will also be adapted and enhanced to create additional specialized curriculum modules for other stakeholder groups, such as judges, attorneys, and guardians *ad litem*.

Delivery of training using the new WICWA curriculum began in the summer of 2011 at multiple locations in Wisconsin. Training is currently delivered as a two-day session, although each of the eight modules can be presented as a stand-alone session, either in a classroom or webinar (asynchronous) format. According to the Director of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System, with a target audience of approximately 2,800 state and county social workers in the state of Wisconsin, providing meaningful training in a manner that fosters learning retention will be a challenge (C. Sieck, personal communication, September 1, 2011). To that end, a variety of strategies for training delivery will need to be considered in the future.

The WICWA training is currently co-trained by teams of two trainers specifically selected for their expertise: a tribal trainer who currently works for a tribal social service agency and a non-tribal

trainer with both county and tribal social service work experience. The trainers are encouraged to share their personal perspectives to enhance the training. The use of co-trainers was a targeted strategy designed to effectively model the cooperative communication that can occur between county and tribal social services, and which is an essential prerequisite for successful implementation of WICWA.

Technical Assistance to County and Tribal Child Welfare Agencies

In addition to the initial WICWA training, stakeholders identified a need for county and tribal child welfare agencies to receive ongoing, individualized technical assistance to enhance and build upon concepts presented in training, to provide more in-depth specialized knowledge, and to provide a forum for within- or cross-agency dialogue on local implementation issues. In this project, technical assistance is comprised of two implementation components—training and coaching. The focus of this intervention strategy is on providing social workers and other local practitioners (judges, attorneys, providers) with the information they need regarding the new law and how to effectively apply WICWA in their work.

The primary role of the three dedicated project implementation staff will be to solicit and respond to requests from the field for technical assistance, which will be delivered via email, telephonic, or on-site sessions, individualized to the needs of the requestor agency. Project staff is developing an electronic request form for social workers to ask specific practice-related questions and to request technical assistance. This instrument will be located in the eWiSACWIS system to maximize its accessibility to practitioners across the state. Early requests from county child welfare agencies indicate interest in this customized technical assistance: out of eight initial training sessions held in 2011, six have resulted in requests for additional technical assistance or follow-up training sessions.

Development of Resources, Tools, Rules and Policies

Another critical source of support (or *facilitative administration*) for WICWA implementation has been the development of resources, tools, policies, and administrative rules to support desired practice.

Providing tangible materials—desk aids, handouts of presentations, and supplementary WICWA material such as historical information about Indian child welfare—encourages practitioners to reference these materials in their everyday case practice, which is particularly helpful to reinforce newly learned skills. Promulgation of new administrative rules or policies is an essential step in assuring that expectations are clarified and sustained.

The *WICWA Desk Aid* is a laminated, four-page reference guide that was created to succinctly summarize the requirements of WICWA at each step of Wisconsin's child welfare continuum. It includes a listing of contact information for Indian child welfare departments in all 11 tribes. Approximately 5,500 copies of the desk aid have been disseminated to social workers and other stakeholders across the state, and it is also available on the DCF website found at <http://dcf.wi.gov/publications/pdf/2536.pdf>. Early response to this tool has been encouraging; preliminary data indicate that in the short time since this tool has been disseminated across the state, several tribes have reported an increase in the receipt of WICWA-required notices. Specifically, comparisons of the eWiSACWIS data for the time period of July-December 2010 versus July-December 2011 indicate that the percentage of notifications to tribes documented in eWiSACWIS increased from 8% to 36%. Notice to tribes that an Indian child had been placed in out-of-home care was an area of concern identified by the Child and Family Service Review (Children's Bureau, 2004), and the Children's Court Initiative review (Children's Court Improvement Program, 2011), and is an evaluation outcome that will be assessed on an ongoing basis as part of the project.

A number of other resources and tools are currently in or planned for development, including: laminated WICWA case flowcharts for judges and attorneys; a revision of the *WICWA Desk Aid* that includes information on how to determine if a family qualifies for a public defender; a list of "frequently asked questions" (FAQ) on WICWA on the DCF website; guideline policies for Qualified Expert Witness (QEW) testimony at particular stages of judicial proceedings; and an attorney guidebook on WICWA. In addition, the state will integrate WICWA into its administrative rules and program standards.

Data System Modifications

A final essential component of successful implementation (the decision support data systems component) of WICWA lies in the integration of indicators of desired practice changes into the agency's administrative data systems. Within the first year of WICWA enactment, DCF established new data collection fields within relevant sections of eWiSACWIS, and required social workers to enter evidence of compliance with the new law. For example, if a child is identified as Native, the system requires entry of the name of the tribe; relevant supporting and notice documents are then automatically generated by the system. The system also provides aggregate summary data regarding Indian children placed in out-of-home care in Wisconsin, and data are exportable into excel spreadsheets for ease of viewing and reporting.

Program Evaluation

Project partners worked collaboratively to develop a formal evaluation plan for this initiative, guided by the project logic model. The evaluation plan (another aspect of the decision support data systems implementation component) includes both *process* and *outcome* evaluation strategies. The process evaluation tracks the completion of major implementation activities, such as the creation of a project advisory board, the recruitment and hiring of key project staff, and the provision of relevant training and technical assistance. Mechanisms for providing progress feedback for program improvement have been included. The outcome evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the technical assistance efforts and impacts on child and family outcomes.

The evaluation includes a number of research questions, including the following:

- What are the project outputs (e.g., products/tools created, numbers of staff receiving training or coaching, numbers and types of meetings held, committees formed)?
- Do those individuals targeted for change adopt the new WICWA processes in their work?
- Does case practice become consistent with the new WICWA practice standards?

- In what ways does the organization and system change over time?
- How do child and family outcomes change during the project period?

Each of these primary research questions encompass a number of indicators and utilize multiple data sources, including interviews with key informants, administrative (eWiSACWIS) data, case file reviews, surveys of child welfare staff, and training records. The examples described here illustrate the breadth and scope of evaluation measurement that is underway.

One of the expected systemic outcomes is an improved working relationship between tribal, state, and county child welfare agencies and external stakeholders (e.g., the courts, adoption agencies). Achievement of this outcome will be assessed through the analysis of interviews with key informants from across the system. Other expected systemic outcomes focus on improvement in the identification and documentation of Indian children and the establishment of case practices specific to WICWA. These outcomes will be assessed through an analysis of eWiSACWIS data over the course of the project period, for such variables as:

- the percentage of Indian children's cases with active efforts,
- the percentage of cases maintaining tribal connections,
- the number of ICWA-eligible children, and
- the number of formal notices sent to tribes.

Another set of outcome indicators will be assessed through data collected by case file reviews, including assessment of whether ICWA compliance documentation exists in the case records, and a determination that the permanency outcomes for each child are founded in tribal social and cultural standards. Additional evaluation questions will be informed by data collected through interviews or focus groups of key informants (e.g., DCF representatives, members of the project Advisory Board, and tribal child welfare directors), surveys of child welfare staff, and on-site technical assistance and training records.

Because training is an integral component of the overall project implementation strategy, evaluation of training effectiveness is of

utmost importance. The evaluation plan incorporates the first three levels of Kirkpatrick's (1994) four-level training evaluation framework through assessments of trainee reactions, trainee knowledge, and trainee job behaviors. Specifically, each training event will be evaluated through the use of a trainee reaction instrument, a pre-post training knowledge test, and a post-training follow-up survey assessing trainee's self-reported transfer of learning to their job.

Preliminary results of the trainee reaction measures (Kirkpatrick Level 1) for sessions conducted thus far indicate that the two-day intensive training on WICWA has been well-received by participants. Average trainee satisfaction ratings across sessions have ranged between 4.1 and 5.0 on a five-point Likert scale (5 = Agree/Very Satisfied, 1 = Disagree/Very Dissatisfied) on various dimensions of training content, trainer quality, trainee expectations, and perceptions of the utility of the sessions. Sample trainee comments have included:

- "This should be a mandatory training for all staff and supervisors."
- "Good blend of county/tribal [emphasis]."
- "Real life practice examples were helpful."

Preliminary results of the knowledge testing indicate that training participants have made substantial increases in their knowledge and understanding of WICWA as a result of the training experience (Level 2). Results of a paired-sample t-test comparing pre- and post-test scores on the knowledge test revealed a statistically significant difference in the percentage of correct answers from pre- ($M = 67.90$, $SD = 11.91$) to post-test ($M = 82.00$, $SD = 9.71$); $t(51) = -6.96$, $p < .000$. While examination of individual trainee (social worker) job performance measures (Kirkpatrick's Level 3) is beyond the scope of the project, we plan a 3-month follow up with all training participants to assess their self-reported transfer of learning from classroom to case practice. In addition, an assessment of aggregated eWiSACWIS data may permit some tentative inferences regarding the effects of training on agency-level results (Kirkpatrick's Level 4, i.e., child and family outcomes).

Lessons Learned, Recommendations, and New Challenges

Although specific recommendations for successfully resolving barriers will continue to emerge as the project progresses, several lessons are already clear. Though it is possible that some of these lessons are unique to this project, they likely have implications for most cross- or inter-jurisdictional systems change efforts. We present a list of the most significant aspects of what we have learned to date:

- Information does not travel through an organization, or across jurisdictions, in the expected manner. Messages may be ignored, not transmitted, corrupted/degraded/ or misinterpreted. Therefore, communication plans must anticipate these events, and build in sufficient flexibility to permit rapid response to an evolving environment.
- Child welfare practitioners may not recognize the utility of available technical assistance, for a number of reasons: they are rarely involved with Indian child welfare cases; have heavy caseloads; or they lack exposure to or understanding of available data. While project staff “cannot lead a horse to water,” they must learn to “salt the hay.” In other words, practitioners need to see the need for, and want to access, available technical assistance. Establishment of personal relationships, clear and objective presentation and explanation of data, and easy access to technical assistance are all important precursors to the actual delivery of technical assistance.
- Unresolved but unrecognized or unstated historical inter-agency disputes/contention resulting in mistrust obviously creates a serious barrier to the collaboration necessary to effectively implement systemic change. Change agents must create environments for frank discussion, which then must be channeled into energy and motivation for positive change. Overcoming long-standing suspicion is a process, not an event, and must be carefully planned and managed.
- Implementation projects have a finite life span. To accomplish sustainable positive systemic change, stakeholders must

clearly identify, articulate, and prioritize desired outcomes and impacts. Collaboratively designed work plans and logic models are important tools for this process. Stakeholders and project staff must recognize these tools are dynamic, which requires frequent, regular and honest review. Evaluation plans should provide mechanisms for data-informed recommendations for necessary adjustments.

- Systemic change takes time, measured in years rather than months. Project staff and stakeholders must protect each other, and themselves, from losing heart, wearing out, or becoming cynical. Prevention of burnout is beyond the scope of this article, but there is a wealth of useful information available. Burnout prevention should be honestly discussed, built into the work plan, and not taken lightly.
- It takes time for people to accept and trust each other, because stakeholders have distinct and diverse perspectives, based on their professional focus, their personality and their history. Patience, persistence, identification of common goals, acceptance of differences, and willingness to face and resolve conflict are all traits required to accomplish systemic change.

Conclusion

Codification of WICWA, and its effective implementation, grew out of recognition that in Wisconsin, the purposes of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act were not being achieved. The premise of WICWA's design is the need to protect Indian children in a new way. The history leading to its passage reflects the political position of tribal sovereigns in Wisconsin. Systemic integration of WICWA is dependent on the structure of the state child welfare system, and requires that practitioners within that structure understand and appreciate not only the text, but also the spirit and intent of the law. The intent and spirit of WICWA was determined by a community of stakeholders, including social workers from counties and tribes, private, public and tribal attorneys, judicial officers, and tribal, public and private service providers. The three branches of state government also participated in

determining the spirit and intent of WICWA: the legislature, as it unanimously passed the WICWA; the judicial branch, by holding judicial WICWA training seminars, creating WICWA-specific court documents, and ensuring the provision of the act's procedural protections; and the executive branch, the Department of Children and Families, by supporting the achievement of the goals identified by the community of stakeholders.

So, the lengthy and arduous journey to achieving best outcomes for Indian children in Wisconsin is underway. It is a journey well worth taking, and deserving of the commitment and sacrifices of all the dedicated practitioners involved with it. Success will be measured not only in improved compliance with the requirements of the statute, but in strengthened inter-jurisdictional relationships, deeper understanding of the historical dynamics which created the need for Wisconsin's Indian Child Welfare Act, and, ultimately best outcomes for Indian children in Wisconsin.

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Appendix

Federally Recognized Tribes of Wisconsin

The following is a list of the 11 federally recognized tribes located in Wisconsin:

- Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- Forest County Potawatomi Community
- Ho-Chunk Nation
- Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians

- Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- Oneida Nation of Wisconsin
- Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- Sokaogon Chippewa Community
- Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians
- St. Croix Chippewa of Wisconsin

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