

Ain Dah Yung (Our Home) Center

Agindaso Abinoji-yag

"He/she/they reads or counts children"

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By Stella Barnes
ICWA Court Monitor
and Resource Navigator
1089 Portland Ave
St. Paul, MN 55407
(651) 418-7488
stella.barnes@adycenter.org

Dakota County ICWA Court

ICWA Compliance Newsletter

Q2 2026



Pictured: Judge Jamie Cork and Judge Christopher Lehmann at Hastings High School.

Dakota County celebrated the opening of its Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Court this June. The celebration took place at Hastings High School and featured the installation of Tribal flags from the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Dakota County has now received Tribal flags from all 11 of the federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota as well as the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.

The event included remarks by Minnesota Supreme Court Associate Justice Anne McKeig, former Lower Sioux Indian Community Tribal President Robert Larsen, Prairie Island Tribal Elder Sam Wells and Sheldon Spotted Elk. There was a performance by the Little Horse Singers followed by bison bowls for lunch.

The court is the result of efforts to support American Indian families and follow federal guidelines outlined in ICWA and Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA). These laws are in place to protect Indian children from modern laws that echo historical boarding school removals.

Dakota County Children and Family Services Director Nikki Conway spoke about the spirit of ICWA, "These flags behind me represent the importance of Tribal sovereignty. And today they also represent relationship, partnership, and shared commitment to our community. And the presence here reminds us that our work is strongest when it's done together."

Minnesota was among the states that historically had the most boarding schools, and currently the highest rate of out of home placements for American Indian children.



Pictured: Sheldon Spotted Elk (Casey Family Programs)

ICWA Courts are known as the “gold standard” of court processes, inviting families to have a seat at the table with attorneys, judges, guardians ad litem, social workers and tribal representatives. Through education and skill development, parents are given the opportunity to be a collaborative part of the court process.

Though ICWA Courts are about more than skill development and fairness. It’s about giving people the freedom and confidence they need to learn from their mistakes. It embraces the idea that where possible, we can overcome family crisis and hardship, and be together at the end of it.

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services (2024), American Indian children are 14 times more likely to be removed from their homes in Minnesota than other racial or ethnic groups. The child protection system as it stands does not take into account historical cultural oppression, and the aim of ICWA and MIFPA is to add additional protections to account for this loss.



Pictured: Judge Jamie Cork.



Pictured: Sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and cedar, placed in the cardinal directions of the medicine wheel at the Dakota County Courthouse in Hastings.

Nikki Conway, Children and Family Services Director for Dakota County stated, “These flags behind me represent the importance of Tribal sovereignty. But today they also represent relationship, partnership, and shared commitment to our community, and the presence here reminds us that our work is strongest when it’s done together.”

ICWA Courts do more than protect American Indian sovereignty and rights. They bring community and culture back by giving families the resources they need to repair and rebuild their lives and become whole again.

Chi Miigwech Judge Jamie Cork and Judge Christopher Lehmann, the entire Dakota County First Judicial District, and the Tribes, honor guards, and justice partners involved to make this event a success.

American Indian Metro Suicide Prevention Coalition

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Ain Dah Yung Center's American Indian Metro Suicide Prevention Coalition has been growing in popularity over the course of the past 6 months. Led by Suicide Prevention Coordinator Bryce Premo, the meetings are held every third Tuesday at 11:00am at Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung. The coalition invites members from across Hennepin and Ramsey counties to reduce suicide and strengthen community partnerships that support protective factors for youth.

For anyone who hasn't met Bryce, it's worth a trip to a coalition meeting to see him in action. Alongside community members and partners, we center culture and connection as the strongest preventative measures against suicide.

American Indians have the highest rate of suicide in Minnesota. Youth and young adults aged 15 to 34 account for 55% of all suicides within Minnesota's American Indian community. For tribal adolescents specifically (ages 15 to 19), data from the Minnesota Department of Health shows rates over 4 times higher than their white peers.

In addition to solving problems together as a community, staff at ADY are certified in safeTALK and ASIST trainings.



The coalition's work focuses on positive identity, empowerment, and positive community relationships. Each is represented by one of the three sisters, which are traditionally grown together for mutual support.



corn as identity,



and beans as community relationships.

squash as empowerment,



The Three Sisters are planted together because each contributes to the well-being of the others: corn provides support for the beans, beans enrich the soil, and squash protects the ground and helps retain moisture. Together, they remind us that people and communities also thrive through connection, shared strengths, and mutual care. (ADYC website).



If you or someone you know is in crisis, experiencing thoughts of suicide, or needing emotional support, please call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, available 24/7. This service is free and confidential. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with the Crisis Text Line, or call 911 for an immediate emergency.

4TH ANNUAL CULTURE AS PREVENTION YOUTH RETREAT

The collage features 12 photographs capturing various activities at the 4th Annual Culture as Prevention Youth Retreat. The images include: a person ziplining over a forest with a rainbow in the background; a group of people participating in a team-building exercise on a grassy field; a person crouching on a log; two young girls in white t-shirts smiling; a group of people in blue aprons standing behind a food service counter; a person in a blue shirt and life vest in a canoe; a person in a blue shirt and life vest on a zipline; a person in a blue shirt and life vest on a zipline; a person in a blue shirt and life vest on a zipline; a person in a blue shirt and life vest on a zipline; a person in a blue shirt and life vest on a zipline; and a group of people in blue shirts and life vests on a boat.



FINGER WEAVING WITH PAULA



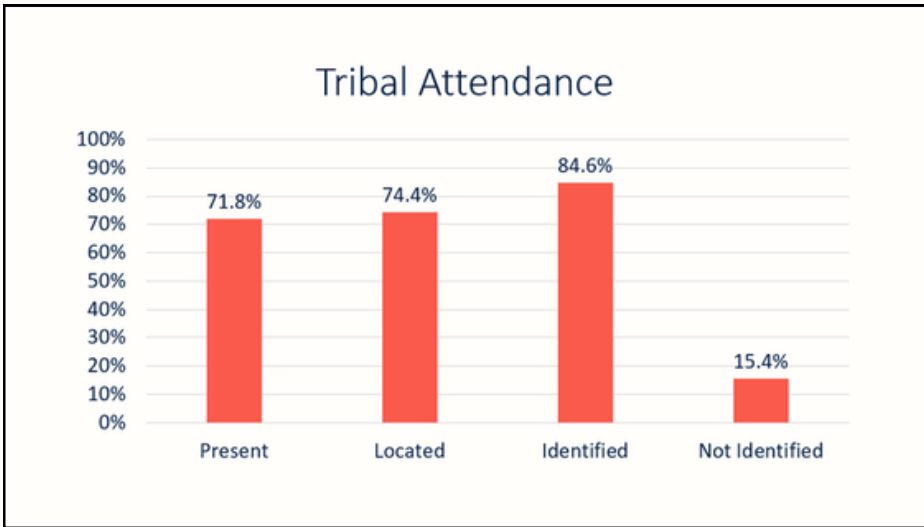
Quarter 2 Data

Data was collected from April 1, 2026 to June 30, 2026. This data was collected by the court monitor at hearings, talking to the parties involved, and reading case files. This data reflects hearings attended by the court monitor and does not include all Ramsey County ICWA hearings.

Tribal Attendance

The following chart indicates the Tribes involved in ICWA cases in Ramsey County during Quarter 2. The chart includes the Tribes involved, the number of hearings that occurred, and the number of times the Tribe attended hearings.

TRIBE	NUMBER OF HEARINGS	TRIBE PRESENT
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	1	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	3	3
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	1	1
Oglala Sioux Tribe	1	1
Red Lake Nation	4	4
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	2	2
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate	3	3
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	1	1
White Earth Nation	7	7
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska	2	2
Unknown/Tribe Not Identified	16	-



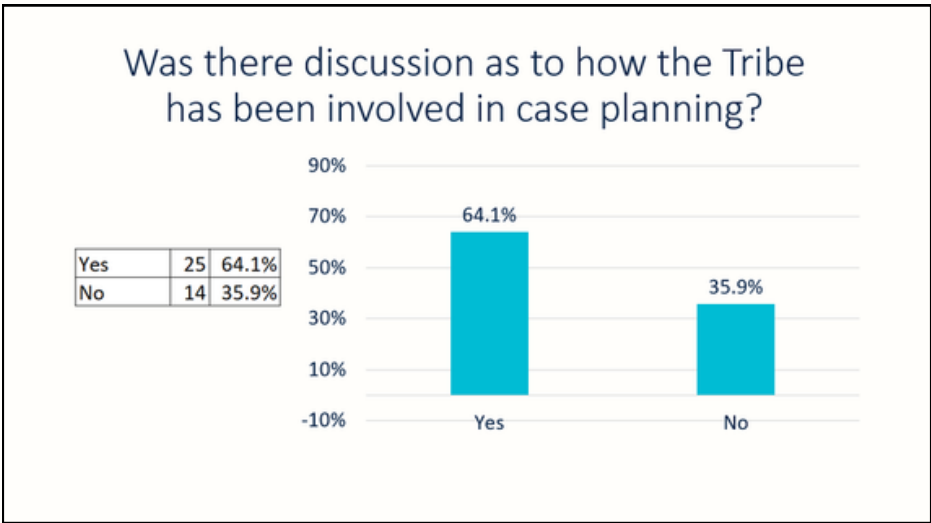
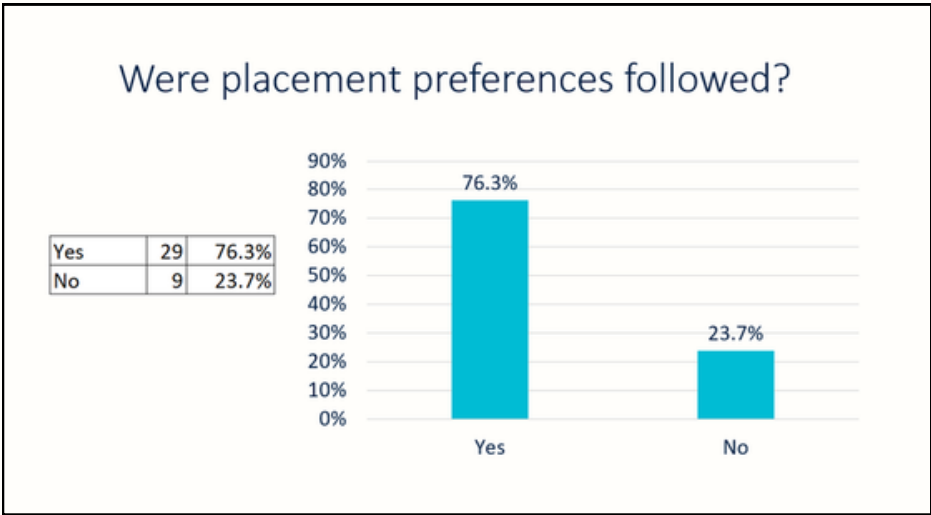
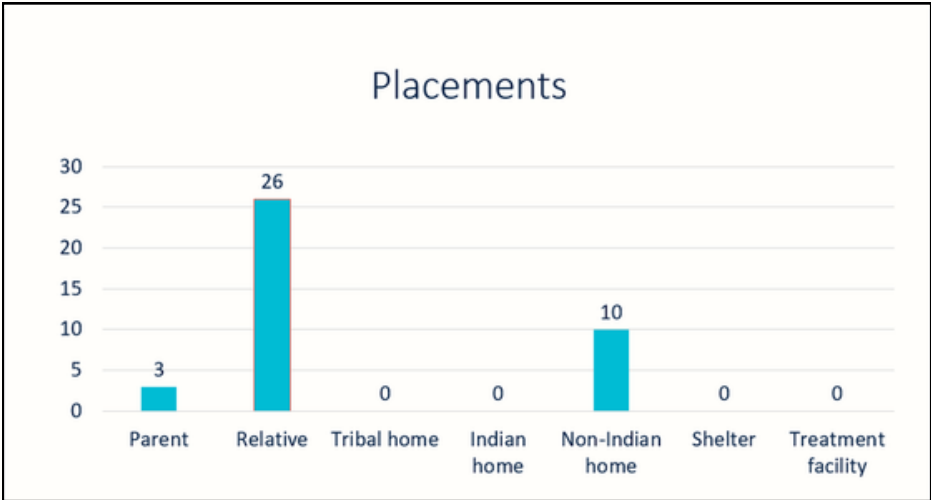
Quarter 2 Data

Placements and Case Planning

During Quarter 2 2026, children in out-of-home placement were placed with relatives 66.7% of the time and in non-relative homes 25.6% of the time. For non-relative placements, the court made a finding 100% of the time that there was good cause to deviate from the ICWA placement preferences.

For the 9 cases that deviated from placement preferences, there was discussion about the reasons preventing placement with a relative. This includes parent or child preference, and overcoming barriers to move children into relative homes. All non-relative placements were approved by the Tribe.

There was discussion of how Tribes have participated in case planning 64.1% of the time. This includes collaborating on writing case plans, visiting parents and children, and connecting with Tribal resources.



GIGAWAABAMIN MIINAWAA GIGAWAABAMIN

About this newsletter

Three women were walking alongside a river and saw a baby floating by. As the first woman jumped in to rescue the baby they spotted other babies floating downstream. All afternoon they rescued babies, but more and more babies floated past them. The second woman decided to go upstream to teach the babies how to swim to stop from drowning, but the number of babies only increased, and she could not teach all of them to swim. Finally, the third woman went further upstream to find out why so many babies were falling into the river.

We are Agindaso Abinoji-yag, or *she/he/they reads or counts children*.
Chi Miigwech Elder Nelda Goodman for blessing our newsletter with its name in 2023.

For more information, please visit our website at www.adycenter.org/about
Questions? Email stella.barnes@adycenter.org

