

Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You



Osiyo -

A new program created by the Cherokee Nation's Indian Child Welfare department is called 4C – short for Cherokee Children's Cultural Connection. It's designed for children ages 4 to 18 who are in tribal custody. The program incorporates Cherokee Nation culture, heritage and history for children who come into our care. The program has multiple tracks - slow, medium and fast - depending on how long ICW caseworkers think the case might take.

Since the program launched a little over a year ago, it has been a success in giving Cherokee children an educational and cultural foundation to build upon not only while they are in foster care, but throughout their lives. Since we started 4C, we have served about 60 children, and we have approximately 25 Cherokee youth at all times involved with 4C. Some are very familiar with Cherokee culture, while others know much less. It is our responsibility to care for, teach and mentor them all.

4C is one part of our continuing effort to assist children as they hopefully one day reunite with their Cherokee families. The 4C effort connects these young Cherokees to their culture, giving them a foundation for their journey in life as a Cherokee.

We have an educational approach where basic Cherokee words are shared and Cherokee history is taught. In this cultural curriculum, children can complete games and lessons that teach them more about their Cherokee heritage. Cherokee stories are passed down that incorporate traditional games, textiles, or clay. Children love all of the hands-on activities and don't even realize the vast amount of learning that is taking place. We visit the Cherokee Heritage Center and make sure the children have a general understanding of our past. We teach them about how as Cherokees we are a resilient people who always overcome adversity.

To further enhance the comfort level, we also utilize equine therapy and canine therapy with our specially trained dog, Unali, which is the Cherokee word for friend. Animals are often able to bring out

the best in each of us and teach us about love and friendship, especially in trying times.

4C also collaborates with Cherokee Nation's Spider Gallery to provide art therapy for children wishing to learn more about Cherokee art forms. We have learned that art therapy is particularly beneficial. It has given many kids a new way to express their feelings and share emotions that are difficult to articulate. For children wanting to learn a specific art medium, such as bow-making or basket-weaving, 4C leaders connect them with a Cherokee National Treasure. This one-on-one opportunity with a cultural expert is a unique mentoring time and is done in person or sometimes via FaceTime, and has proven to be truly effective.

Recently, through ICW staff efforts, the children planted a small garden with heirloom seeds received from the Cherokee Nation Seed Bank, which is teaching them how to care for and grow those fruits and vegetables.

One of the best things I can say about our dedicated ICW staff is that they always, without hesitation, put the children first. That means they are constantly thinking of creative and unique ways to serve the youth. It is critical for these children to feel love and connection to the tribe.

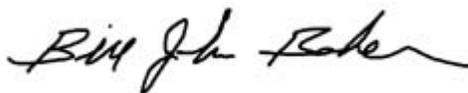
The federal Indian Child Welfare Act requires us to do everything we can to try and reunite a family. That is an important mission for all of us as Cherokees and we are doing the most we can so that biological parents have every opportunity to reunite with these children.

At the end of the day, we hope 4C better instills in them what it is to be Cherokee, so they become stronger individuals. It is an essential building block in helping young minds as they overcome extreme traumas and experiences.

About 25 children currently in tribal custody and involved in 4C and Cherokee Nation's ICW department is working with 1,550 youth who are in need of a safe foster home. Please visit cherokeekids.org to learn more about how you can open your home and your heart to help a Cherokee child.

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