



# Agindaso Abinoji-yag

*"He/she reads or counts children"*

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By Sadie Hart, Policy and Advocacy Director

ICWA Compliance Newsletter Q4 2024

## Representing Youth: Children's Law Center

Children's Law Center was founded in 1995 with the mission to promote the legal rights and well-being of children and youth. CLC's staff and volunteers provide direct representation of children and youth, primarily in the child welfare system, and advocate for changes in systems that affect their lives. Staff and volunteers represented over 500 neglected and abused children and youth in 2023 alone. To learn more about the organizations we interviewed Executive Director Susan Dioury.

"CLC was established through the efforts of attorneys, social workers, youth workers, judges, teachers, pediatricians, and other child advocates in Minnesota. The interdisciplinary group recognized the need in Minnesota to create an organization focused on increasing the impact and effectiveness of legal advocacy for vulnerable foster care children. As the only organization of our kind in Minnesota, our unique work engages local and regional attorneys to counsel and represent our clients for the duration of their time in care. In addition, our team advocates for systemic changes and improvements that serve at-risk and foster care youth as well as develop educational materials to help others and vulnerable youth understand their rights and resources available to them. Our vision is to improve the lives and futures of abused, neglected, at-risk, and foster care youth by helping to stabilize their lives."

Susan explained that "CLC's representation program is unique because of its use of staff attorneys, volunteer attorneys and its youth resource manager in a multidisciplinary approach. The same lawyer represents the client for all proceedings, which allows the client to develop a trusting relationship with his/her/their lawyer over time. CLC's attorneys are committed to representing clients for the life of the case to ensure continuity for CLC's clients."



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"This commitment is extremely valuable and useful when working with youth who have experienced multiple disruptions in their young lives. When a youth experiences a change of placements, foster parents, judges, therapists, county case workers, guardians ad litem and/or schools, it is imperative that the youth has an adult whom they know and trust to advocate for them and ensure that their legal rights are upheld."

Minnesota state law gives children ages 10 and older the right to be represented by a court-appointed attorney. McKenna's Law, passed in 2017, requires the court to appoint counsel to represent a child 10 or older who is removed from home and placed in foster care. Youth can waive their right to be represented by a lawyer but only after they have an opportunity to talk to a lawyer. "As soon as CLC receives a court appointment order to represent a client, it requests the client's file and current contact information and then sets up an initial client meeting."



## Representing Youth: Children's Law Center (Continued from page 1)

"As part of its multidisciplinary approach, this initial client meeting is in-person with a CLC staff attorney or our youth resource manager unless the client resides out of state. At this initial meeting, CLC explains its role and the youth's rights. After meeting with the youth and learning about the client's expressed wishes and legal needs, an appropriate attorney is identified and assigned to represent the youth."

These youth face significant challenges. Susan elaborated that "the disruption of their healthy growth due to trauma and abuse is a common barrier for our clients. Because of their abuse, neglect, and trauma, our clients sometimes don't think beyond their immediate survival. We work with our young clients to help them learn how to research their options and we train our volunteer attorneys to give clients ideas and encouragement to look at their futures outside of foster care. We believe effective advocacy helps stabilize and improve safety outcomes for these vulnerable youth. Unfortunately, sibling separation is another common barrier for our clients, and we consistently advocate for sibling placement and contact."

For American Indian youth, CLC often sees "delays in obtaining culturally specific therapeutic services and supports for our American Indian clients for their specific trauma as well as their historical trauma. Additionally, we often see delays in finding ICWA placement options for our clients when relative placement is unavailable."

Susan shared two examples of positive outcomes for American Indian youth the organization represented. "CLC represented an American Indian youth who came into child protection based on allegations against his grandmother who was his legal custodian. CLC worked with the Tribe to eventually return the youth to his biological mother. Our client was extremely happy to return to his mother's care and CLC was grateful for the Tribe's collaboration to return the youth to his mother's care."

"In another case, CLC represented a sibling set of sisters who were placed in a non-ICWA pre-adoptive home. The sisters were comfortable in the home but missed their Tribal connections and biological family on the Oglala Sioux Reservation. The agency supported the adoption by the non-ICWA family and the CLC attorney informed the court and the parties of the children's strong desire to not be adopted by their current foster parents and to be placed with their biological family. CLC worked with the Guardian ad Litem to support the children's request to have relatives explored. Relative options were identified, the children's Tribe intervened, and the children were able to return home."

In addition to legal representation CLC helps youth identify available resources and empower them to become strong advocates for themselves. "We regularly provide guidance for our older clients as they navigate the process of accessing services, scheduling appointments, exploring post-secondary schooling options, completing insurance and other necessary paperwork so that our older Extended Foster Care clients have access to medical, dental, and therapeutic services, and educational opportunities. We also work with our younger as well as teen clients to participate in culturally relevant programs, transitioning to adulthood programming and extracurricular activities."



*Children's Law Center staff.*

CLC has trained over 1,000 volunteer attorneys and represented over 8,000 abused and neglected children. "CLC provides extensive consultation to its volunteers, it tracks and monitors their cases, and it provides guidance regarding best practices, legal strategies, and court procedure."



## Representing Youth: Children's Law Center (Continued from page 2)

"CLC's youth resource manager also works with clients and their attorneys to provide insight and assistance on a variety of issues and possible resources." "Together, this team helps young people understand their options, empowers them to voice their opinions, and provides them with advocates to explain their options as they navigate the child protection system. In CLC's experience, the most effective reunification and permanency efforts are youth-driven and involving youth in the decisions regarding their lives helps them feel more invested in these plans."

"One of the distinctive features of having volunteer attorneys represent youth is the individualized attention and care they provide. These attorneys bring a strong sense of dedication and enthusiasm to their roles, recognizing the significant influence they can have on a young person's life. They work diligently to establish trusting relationships with their clients, ensuring that the youth feel valued and supported throughout the legal journey."

*"One of the distinctive features of having volunteer attorneys represent youth is the individualized attention and care they provide."*

"Volunteer attorneys also contribute a variety of expertise," Susan stated.

"With diverse legal backgrounds, they bring a rich array of knowledge and skills to the table. Additionally, volunteer attorneys can act as influential role models and mentors for the youth they serve. This mentorship can have a profound effect, fostering confidence and inspiring hope for the future."

This relationship can continue even after a court case ends. Susan shared that "it is common for youth to continue seeking guidance and support from their attorneys as they navigate various life challenges. They often request assistance in obtaining essential documentation and connecting with the services to which they are entitled. Several of our clients reach out regularly to provide updates on their accomplishments and progress toward their goals. Recently a previous client reached out to inform us that they had received their Masters in Social Work and has started working as a Clinical Social Worker."

Miigwech, Pidamayaye, Pilamayaye, Pinigigi (thank you) to Susan and CLC for answering our questions representing our youth in foster care!

## ICWA Meet and Greet

In November the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors Family Preservation Committee hosted its annual ICWA Meet and Greet. This Committee works as a liaison between the community and government agencies and addresses family preservation issues relating to American Indian families. The Meet and Greet, held at the Minneapolis American Indian Center, was for child welfare professionals to learn more about American Indian and child welfare organizations in the metro area and network with other professionals. Over 180 people attended.



*Laura Newton was honored at the ICWA Meet and Greet in November. Pictured with Minneapolis American Indian Center staff.*

Judge Bruce Manning was honored with a blanket in recognition of his nine years as a Hennepin County ICWA Court Judge. Laura Newton, Minneapolis American Indian Center Family Services Director, was also honored for her 25 years of service to American Indian families, including at the Minneapolis American Indian Center for the past 20 years.

## About the Quarter 4 Data

Data was collected from October 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024. This data was collected by the court monitor at hearings, talking to the parties involved, and reading case files. This data reflects hearings the court monitor attended 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 4. The chart includes the Tribes involved, the number of hearings that occurred, and the number of times the Tribe attended hearings. This data reflects hearings the court monitor attended and does not include all Ramsey County ICWA hearings.

TRIBE	NUMBER OF HEARINGS	TRIBE PRESENT
Bois Forte Band of Chippewa	1	1
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	1	1
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	7	7
Lower Sioux Indian Community	2	2
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	1	1
Red Lake Nation	6	5
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	1	1
Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate	1	1
Spirit Lake Tribe	1	1
White Earth Nation	7	7
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska	4	4
Unknown/Tribe Not Identified	15	-

## Court Updates

This newsletter includes positive observations from ICWA hearings as well as highlights that demonstrate the great work happening in Ramsey County.

**Observation:** The Tribal representative noted the great active efforts and wraparound services provided to the family and thanked the whole team for their work.

**Observation:** The children enjoyed a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese.

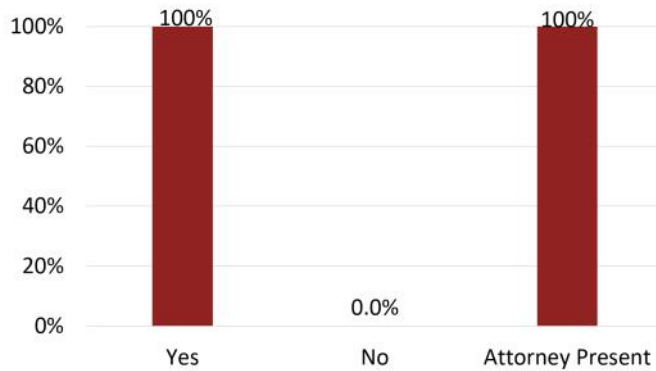
**Observation:** At the last hearing of an educational neglect case the mother thanked everyone for the help she and her daughter received.

**Observation:** The Guardian ad Litem noted the children's incredible skills advocating for their needs and that they are happy in their new permanent home.

**Observation:** The Tribe was very pleased with the outcome of the case and thanked the agency, Guardian ad Litem, attorneys, and court for all their work to make sure the children were happy.

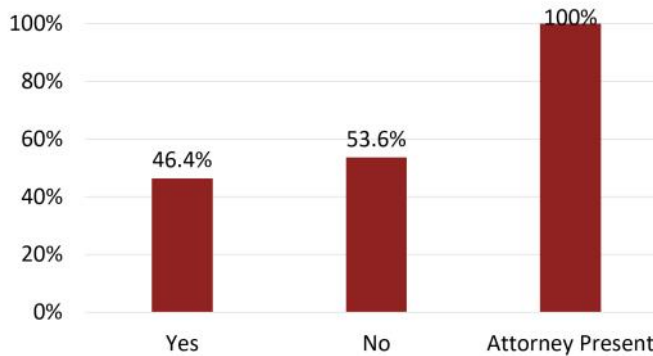
## Does the mother have an attorney?

Yes	35	100.0%
No	0	0.0%
Attorney Present	35	100.0%
Total	35	



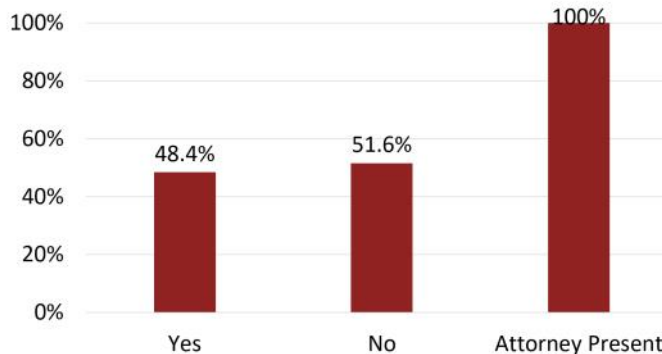
## Does the father have an attorney?

Yes	13	46.4%
No	15	53.6%
Attorney Present	13	100.0%
Total	28	



## Does the Tribe have an attorney?

Yes	15	48.4%
No	16	51.6%
Attorney Present	15	100.0%
Total	31	



## Attorney Representation

In Quarter 4 mothers attended court 54.3% of the time and fathers attended court 32.1% of the time. Mothers had attorneys for 100% of hearings and fathers had attorneys for 46.4% of hearings.

Parents who are unrepresented either do not financially qualify for a court appointed attorney or have not attended a court hearing in order for the judge to make the appointment.

When an attorney was appointed to represent a parent they attended 100% of the hearings for their client, including when their client did not attend the hearing.

When the Tribe was known, Tribal attorneys attended 48.4% of hearings. When an attorney represented a Tribe they appeared at 100% of hearings.

## Contact Information

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