



Agindaso Abinoji-yag

"He/she reads or counts children"

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ICWA Compliance Newsletter Q4 2023

Women's Advocates: Walking with Victim-Survivors to Break the Cycle

Domestic violence impacts many families involved in the child protection system and is a common contributing factor to child maltreatment reports. Access to domestic violence prevention, education, and shelter programs can greatly impact the health and safety of families at risk of or involved with child protection, especially as systems continue to emphasize prevention services. To learn more about available domestic violence services in the Twin Cities we interviewed staff from Women's Advocates.

Executive Director Holly Henning shared some of the organization's history. "Women's Advocates started as a collective in 1972, after no fault divorce became legal in Minnesota. It was essentially a group of feminists who set up a legal hotline and they wanted to really help women learn how to access divorce services. And what they were finding out was that the calls that they were receiving were from women in really scary, abusive, violent relationships and that they needed to get out. They started taking survivors into their own homes and then realized that this model was not sustainable. It was very grassroots, and it was very creative."

In 1974 the organization opened the first domestic violence shelter in the nation and expanded their services to include housing stability and outreach. Each year Women's Advocates serves approximately 150 victim-survivors and their children to find safety in their 24/7 emergency shelter. Ten percent of residents identify as American Indian or Alaska Native.



Women's Advocates opened as a collective-based nonprofit in 1972, working out of founding volunteers' homes.

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Roxy Walker, Manager of Shelter Advocacy, noted that a victim-survivor's first contact with Women's Advocates is often through the crisis line, which receives over 500 calls each year. "Safety planning is a big piece of the chat because we have victims-survivors who are not ready to leave relationships or not able to leave at that time because sometimes they have children. Sometimes it means that they don't have employment because the abuser has caused them not to have employment and they don't have a plan in place as far as leaving because the abuser knows their every move. So it's mainly about safety planning: 'How do I stay in this abusive situation and be as safe as possible? How do I stay and keep my children safe?' It's a lot of safety planning and referrals for orders of protection. There's a lot of mental health calls and chemical disorder resources are needed. Our crisis line and our chats cover a vast majority of all the things that victim-survivors need."

Women's Advocates (Continued from page 1)

"And even homelessness is covered because we get calls from people experiencing homelessness who are not necessarily in domestic violence situations but also need safety planning for whatever reason, because sometimes they're on the street and they need to know how to stay safe on the street or how to avoid certain situations or certain individuals."

The crisis line collaborates with Day One, a program that provides help and resources for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and general crime. Roxy explained that "Day One is the database for everything shelter and domestic violence shelter in Minnesota. The victim-survivor calls Day One and they will look at a whole list of shelters and see who may have available space. It is designed to make it as easy as possible for callers to have shelter space during that first call if possible. That's why it's called Day One; we find safety and security the first day. Without Day One we wouldn't be able to go in and look at all of these shelters that have available space and someone is calling us and saying, 'I need to get out of the situation, I have three children - do you guys have space?' If we don't have space, we can go into Day One and we can look and see what shelters have available space."



The Shelter can house up to 15 adults and 35 children.

The Shelter can house up to 15 adults and 35 children, including family rooms and single space rooms. In addition to basic shelter, victim-survivors have the option to work with advocates to help with a variety of needs, including locating legal services, employment, chemical and mental health services, and getting children back in school.

"We are also very hands on with the children when they come into Shelter," Roxy continued. "We try to have it where there's a toy there to help them, because sometimes they're just overwhelmed. There's a new place and they don't see their favorite things that they see at home. So we try to ease some of that anxiety and that stress when children come in to make it easier for

mom to calm herself so she can sort the process of taking care of the necessary things that have to be done in Shelter."

Holly added that "our children's program is focused on two generation healing. So not only treating the mom or the caregiver who's experienced domestic violence, but also the child has witnessed and also experienced domestic violence. Even if the child wasn't hit by the abuser, just watching it and experiencing it that way, there's the same PTSD and the same effects. So really ensuring that we're providing that holistic wraparound circle not only to the women in Shelter, but the kids, too, and that's an area that we're continuously trying to grow on." Children's advocates help with childcare, transportation, basic needs, and enrolling students in school if they need to transfer because of an order of protection. "They have child and parenting groups, they do art and music groups with the kids, they have a specific curriculum and they're working to expand that. We recognize that a lot of moms already have their own childhood trauma and when they're trying to play or do things with their kids they're getting triggered from their own stuff."

Shelter advocates work with families involved in child protection. "Our relationship with child protection is that we're always learning," Roxy shared. "We're constantly learning because things change so much and situations are different. With child protection, we may have a situation in the Shelter, because we are a crisis shelter, so we have situations where we can get on the phone and call and say, 'hey, I need to just run this by you' without giving so much information. And we have great support from child protection services. They don't judge. They don't say, 'OK, you probably should've noticed that kind of thing.' They kind of walk us through it and they help us a lot. We really do depend on them and as well as Ramsey County Adult Mental Health and Children's Mental Health. We depend on the crisis team and we can call and run situations by them and they know Women's Advocates. We just love having those resources in place for us because we don't claim to know it all. We can't do it all. It's so important to have those community partners to help us through it all."

Women's Advocates (Continued from page 2)

Women's Advocates also offers a 24-month Housing Stability Program for residents transitioning out of Shelter as well as community members. The program offers support to secure and maintain long-term housing, including facilitating the housing search process, eviction prevention, and rental supports.

Stephanie Plaster, Director of Housing Stability Services, indicated that "a huge part is that we know that affordable housing is few and far between and that rent and minimum wage have not kept pace with each other. We do have some folks who are coming in with debts, unlawful detainers, evictions, and a lot of that is you enter into a rental agreement with two people, you and your partner. If one of them leaves, a lot of us aren't able to pick up that second half of rent and you get behind and you become evicted, or the victim-survivor leaves and they're still on the lease and they're still on the hook for that rent. A lot of it is financial-based debt and then also removing those barriers before somebody can be accepted into housing. We also have 90 days if they are coming from Shelter, so housing takes a long time, especially if we're talking about going through the Coordinated Entry system. We have to start working on housing on day one in order for it to have gone through the process of you being able to have something set up by the end of those 90 days."

Roxy added that "people come out of Shelter and when getting housing there is so much discrimination. And not just against a race per say, but even against domestic violence victims because there are victim-blamers who want to say, 'OK, how did you get in that situation? Why didn't you leave? Why didn't you do this?' And it's so unfortunate that there is so much of that even in this day and time that people will not actually give survivors or victims a second chance a lot of times. The discrimination that goes along with that and inequalities, especially marginalizing people of color. There are just so many stigmas around people who are victims or people who are coming from shelter, or people who are homeless. There are barriers with their mental health. We've seen people who can't go into traditional housing because of their mental health."

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"We are still figuring out how we can continue to serve the folks in the Shelter and also take folks from community," Stephanie explained. "We don't want them to need to get behind on rent and become homeless in order to be eligible for services when we could prevent some of that. The folks that we work with in the community and from Shelter have their own story, and the way that they've gotten there, but the folks in the community that already are unhoused, they could be staying at a different shelter."

"Regardless of if they're in shelter or if they're homeless in the community – this is a phenomenon that I see all the time: Where they are housed and all of the stuff that they've been running from just slams forward. We have people who move into housing and just break down. I've seen it so many times where people have maintained a job the entire time that they were experiencing homelessness, they move into housing, and they lose their job. It's counterintuitive to what somebody might think. And it's because they're dealing with all of the things that they've never dealt with because they were dealing with getting through the day."

Women's Advocates focuses on preventing domestic violence through community education and outreach. Alex McDougall, Community Education and Outreach Manager, shared that "we do pop-up advocacy twice a week at Rondo Library and Dorothy Day. Each location holds its different populations of folks that we're seeing. We've been able to do more relationship building with community members and are able to have consistent conversations with consistent people. Right now it's more like pop-up education. Half the time we are providing resources and referrals and connecting people with different things that they need to get their needs met, but a lot of it is more education-rooted."

The program also offers 10-week online survivor support groups for women only and open gender. "It covers different things like how you view yourself, how do you reintegrate relationships, whether they're new or old relationships that were discontinued based on the situation that you were in. I think that the relationships that you see in a peer support lens is seriously amazing and I've seen so many people connecting in ways that I'm pretty sure they're probably connecting outside of group."

Women's Advocates (Continued from page 3)

"And they've been able to finally talk about the things that they've experienced with folks who understand it and that eliminates so much of the shame and the anxiety."

The Education and Outreach team plans to start a school-based prevention program in 2024. "We are talking about how can we get into schools and how can we start integrating these conversations in classes, talking about relationships, sex, and consent, and trying to figure out how to get that out there. But it's also hard because where is the limit with how much we can do? We were in talks with American Indian Magnet School to do something and I think it's really beautiful how they've been able to identify the issues and the gaps with what they're able to provide and respond to as far as those issues go." Training opportunities include classes on domestic violence, safety planning, and supporting children through abuse related trauma (<https://www.wadvocates.org/our-services/violence-prevention-education>).

Women's Advocates established a Survivor Advisory Council in 2021 to ensure survivor voices guide the organization. The council consists of past residents and program participants who work with administration to develop and improve services and policies. Holly noted that "survivor voice is the most important because they are the ones who are accessing services. We're still developing it, but in our last meeting they started throwing together ideas for our work plan for this year."

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"Our Survivor Advisory Council had very specific goals around chemical health support and now we're going to be able to hire a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC) in Shelter so that we can really help with some of those needs and ensuring that there's a balance of chemical health and recovery, but also understanding harm reduction and having access to help them if they need medicated treatment or connection to other treatments. The workplans the Survivor Advisory Council set have been projects or programs that we've implemented within the organization and seen as a priority that we get this done."

The Survivor Advisory Council also brought about Women's Advocates' new Safe Harbor program. "We were aware of the intersections of the overlap," Holly shared. "But when we actually started digging in, 90% of victims of human trafficking have also experienced domestic violence. We knew it was high, but we didn't know it was that high until we started digging into it. This was another recommendation from our Survivor Advisory Council to start providing supportive services for women who have experienced human trafficking and exploitation because they were recognizing that a lot of the younger women that they were in connection with in shelter settings and in community were involved in that after having experienced domestic violence."

Stephanie added that "what's really great about Safe Harbor is that we can work with folks who have disclosed sexual exploitation or trafficking or folks who are at risk. And we know that if you've experienced domestic violence, then you are at a very elevated risk for trafficking and exploitation. It's a lot of safety planning and figuring out how folks can get their needs met in other ways. We know that it is an unfortunately common occurrence where if you don't have enough money you know how to make money and it might be a situation that somebody wants to get out of. So what are the ways that we can meet your basic needs so that you don't need to engage in survival sex? A lot of those resources come from our rental assistance program, applying for benefits with the county, looking up food shelves, and figuring out how we can get them connected to things that would then help them mitigate the need for extra money to be spent."

The Survivor Advisory Council also identified the need for a foster pet program. "One of their recommendations was us creating a way for pets to stay with a caregiver or finding an alternative so that giving up a pet or leaving a pet wouldn't become a barrier to shelter," Holly explained.

"We were actually doing that for free for a while; we just started developing all of these community partnerships and running around talking to people about it. We also have other partnerships with local fostering and vet programs, such as The Bond Between, Four Winds Connections, The Ahnung Way, and Community Animal Care, that provide free veterinarian care, food, resources if the animal needs to get spayed or neutered, if the animal needs surgery or treatment, and even training."

Women's Advocates (Continued from page 4)

Women's Advocates' services are vital for protecting families at risk of or experiencing domestic violence, including those involved in the child protection system. Miigwech, Pidamayaye, Pilamayaye, Pinigigi (thank you) to Holly, Roxy, Stephanie, and Alex for answering our questions and we look forward to seeing Women's Advocates continue to grow!

ICWA Meet and Greet

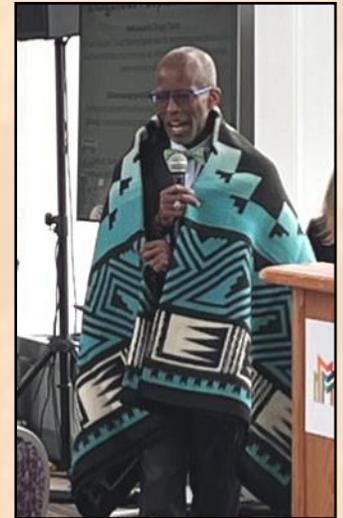
In November the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors Family Preservation Subcommittee hosted its annual ICWA Meet and Greet. The event, held at Metro State University, was for child welfare professionals to learn more about American Indian organizations in the metro area and network with other professionals. Over 180 people attended. Judge Stephen Smith, who previously presided over the ICWA Court in the Second Judicial District, was honored with a blanket for his contributions to Indian child welfare. The Meet and Greet was followed by a Continuing Education Unit (CEU) and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credit:

ICWA and MIFPA Best Practices in Minnesota District Courts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWXdTWC6liE>

Best Practices for Working with Native Families and Urban Native Agencies:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6joF_ChUIWE



Judge Stephen Smith

Building Capacity for Partnering Training

"Building Capacity for Partnering: How to Engage Native Families with Tribal Practices" is an upcoming multi-disciplinary training event offered through the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors' Family Preservation Subcommittee, the Tribal Training and Certification Partnership, and the Metro State University Social Work Multicultural Title IV-E Program. The training will be on Thursday, March 14th, from 9 am to 2 pm at Metro State University.

The training is offered to cultivate community engagement and cultural partnership between social workers, social work students, attorneys, and Tribal Nation Liaisons. Participants will spend time together learning about cultural perspectives, Tribal sovereignty, the importance of relationship building, active efforts provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act, and how culture impacts the practice of law. Participants will also gain insight about working collaboratively with Tribal Nations and community organizations serving Indigenous families.

Registration and more details here: <https://building-capacity.eventbrite.com/>

New ICWA/MIFPA Third-Party Custody Rule

A new rule for third-party custody cases involving Indian children went into effect on January 15, 2024. The new rule focuses on four main parts. The "petition" section provides that every petition shall contain a statement as to whether the child is an Indian child. The "court inquiry" section provides that the court has an obligation to inquire as to whether the participant knows that the child is an Indian child. The "orders and decrees" section requires that every order or decree must contain a finding that the Indian Child Welfare Act and Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act either do or do not apply. The "public access" section ensures public access to certain third-party custody proceeding records.

Previously there was minimal information about ICWA and MIFPA's protections in third-party custody proceedings involving Indian children, contributing to a lack of compliance. The updated rule will help practitioners and families understand the laws and ensure that Indian children are protected. Miigwech to the Minnesota Supreme Court Advisory Committee on General Rules of Practice for your work on making these changes!

About the Quarter 4 Data

Data was collected from October 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023. 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	5	4
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	8	8
Lower Sioux Indian Community	4	2
Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin	1	1
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	2	2
Oglala Sioux Tribe	1	1
Red Lake Nation	7	4
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	1	1
Spirit Lake Nation	4	3
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	2	2
White Earth Nation	5	4
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska	1	0
Unknown/Tribe Not Identified	14	-

Court Updates

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

Observation: A school social worker praised the efforts of the youth's attorney Kathi Peterson to meet with the youth frequently, including at the youth's school.

Observation: Social worker Bryan Krinkie attended a birthday party for the youth and brought presents and smudge kits.

Observation: Tribal social worker Kim Benjamin thanked social worker Kurt Marsh for the work he has done to ensure the child's relative provider has the supports she needs to provide a permanent placement for the child.

Observation: The young adult in extended foster care recently obtained employment at a restaurant and will be applying for Augsburg University.

Observation: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa tribal social worker Linda Tibbets-Barto shared how cohesive the team is in working together to find a permanency option for the children, including contacting the tribe before making any decisions.

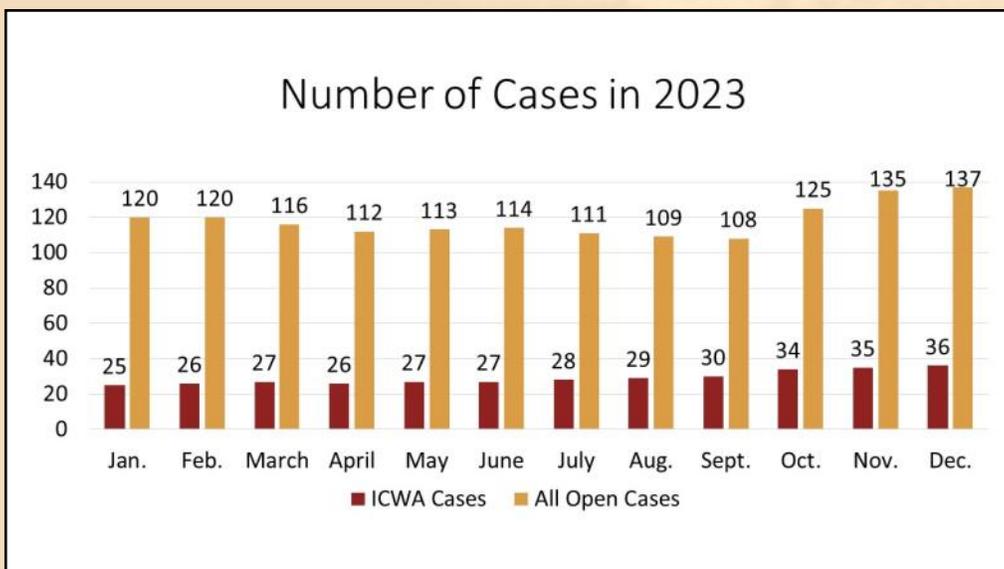
Observation: The Guardian ad Litem noted that the child's new kin foster parents are a permanency option and that they have welcomed him into their home and showered him with love and attention.

Observation: The mother thanked the parties for their work throughout the court process and shared that she has received the supports she needs to care for her child.

Children's Justice Initiative Data

The Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) is a collaboration between the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services. In the Second Judicial District justice partners include judicial officers, court administrators, attorneys, tribal representatives, and other stakeholders. The group meets regularly to discuss and improve issues within the system with a goal to operate "through the eyes of the child" to achieve child safety, permanency, and well-being.

The following data is courtesy of the Second Judicial District's Children's Justice Initiative. Cases are identified as ICWA if there is a current judicial ICWA determination order on the case. All children on an ICWA case are considered ICWA. The information provided includes data from 2021 that is not shown in the graphs.



Cases

From January to December 2023 there was an increase of open ICWA cases from 25 to 36. Total open cases increased from 120 to 137.

In December 2023 26.3% of cases were ICWA, increasing from 16.7% of cases in December 2021. The total number of cases during this time decreased from 221 to 137.

Children in Out of Home Placement

From December 2021 to December 2023 the number of ICWA children in out of home placement decreased from 72 to 60.

During the same time frame the number of all children in out of home placement decreased from 264 to 225. The percentage of ICWA children remained consistent from 27.3% to 26.7%.

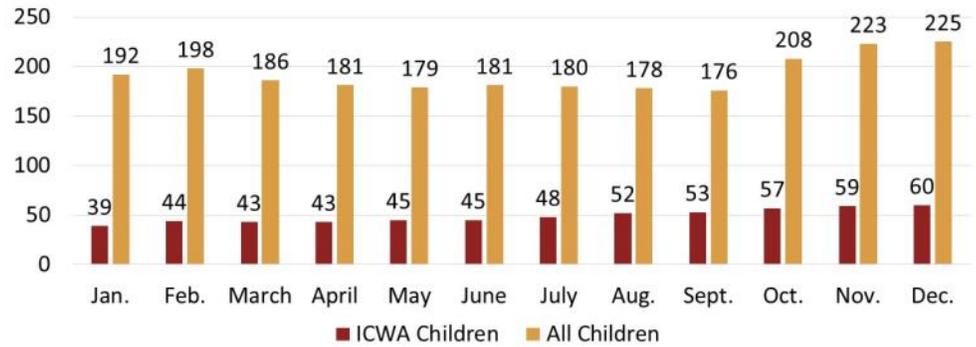
In December 2023 48 ICWA children were in out of home placement for less than 335 days, an increase from 28 children in January 2023. The number of days for the same time frame for all children also increased from 142 to 183.

From January 2023 to December 2023 the average length of out of home placements for all children decreased from 410 days to 335 days (see next page). For ICWA children the average length decreased from 510 days to 411 days.

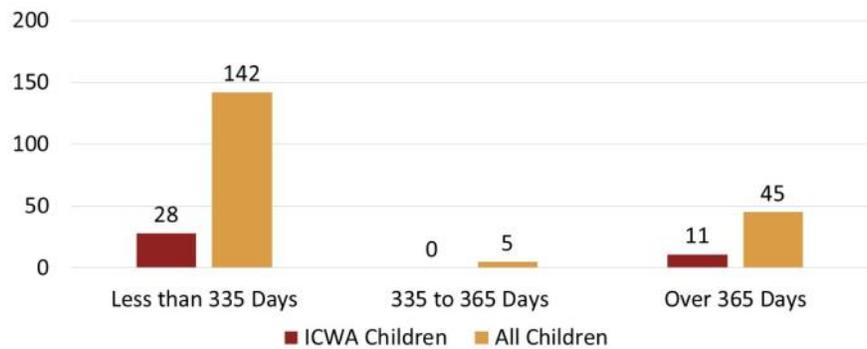
This is also an improvement from December 2021 when the average length of out of home placements for all children was 449 days. The average length for ICWA children was 425 days.

This overall decrease reflects the concerted efforts of justice partners in the Second Judicial District to address cases involving children who have been in out of home placement the longest.

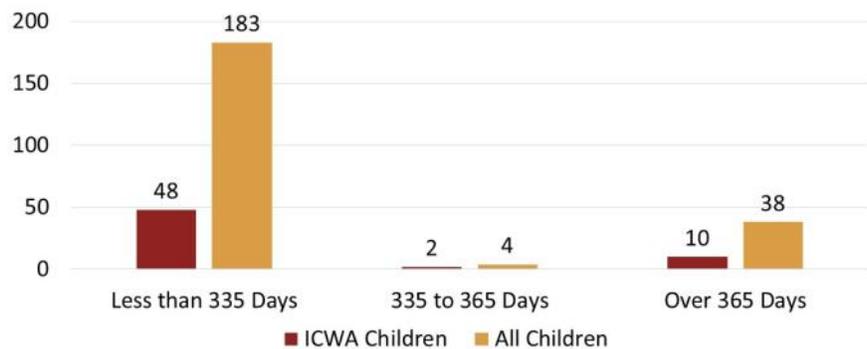
Number of Children in Out of Home Placement in 2023



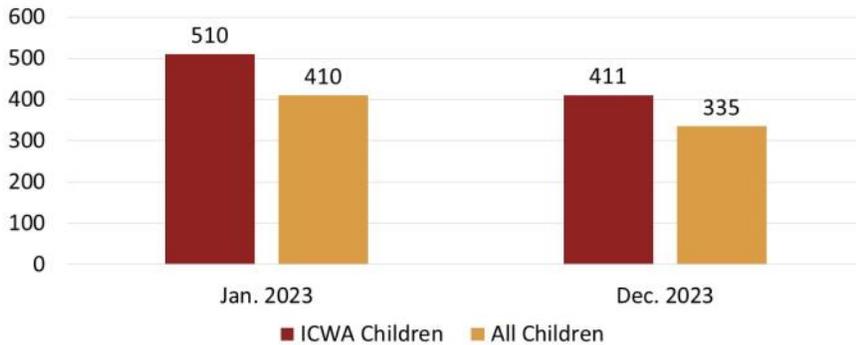
Length of Out of Home Placement: Jan. 2023



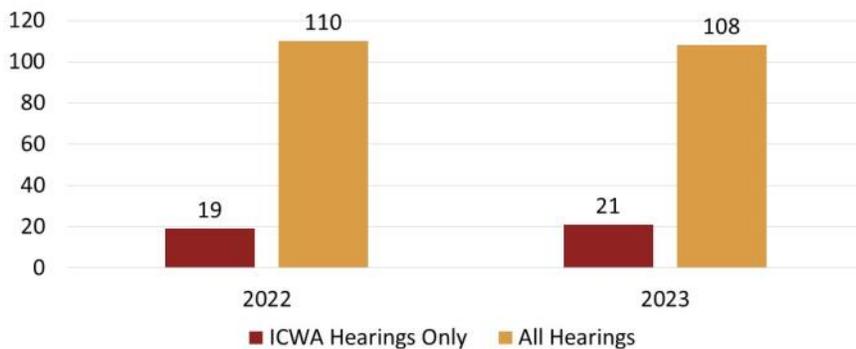
Length of Out of Home Placement: Dec. 2023



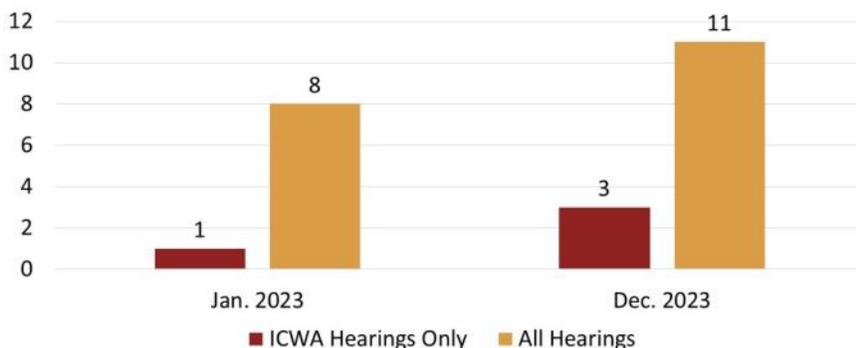
Average Number of Out of Home Placement Days



Total Number of Emergency Protective Care Hearings Held



Emergency Protective Care Hearings Held



Emergency Protective Care Hearings

The number of emergency protective care hearings between 2022 and 2023 decreased slightly from 110 to 108.

In 2022 17.2% of all emergency protective care hearings were ICWA, increasing to 19.4% in 2023.

ICWA emergency protective care hearings include hearings where Native American ancestry has been identified but tribal membership has not confirmed.

In January 2023 there was 1 ICWA emergency protective care hearing and in December 2023 there were 3.

This is a decrease from December 2021 when there were 15 emergency protective care hearings, including 4 ICWA hearings.

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