

Founded in 1911 as the National Federation of Settlements, United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) has always put families first, continuing settlement houses' historic role as family centers to low-income neighborhoods. Today, UNCA supports 150 member organizations and 700 centers, improving and deepening the resources and services nearly a million family members take advantage of each year. "Family strengthening is an UNCA tradition," says President Ian B. Bautista. "Settlement houses have always been there for parents who seek economic self-sufficiency and brighter futures for their children. Over the years, the fabric may have changed but the thread of our work continues to restore families and communities."



MINNESOTA INDIAN WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

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Award-winning Program: Family Services
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CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

HERITAGE AND HOPE

In the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota, American Indian families fight long odds to find economic stability and long-term success despite centuries of disenfranchisement of their people. Since 1985, they have had a partner in the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC), which supports them with needed services in ways that affirm the strengths of their heritage.

MIWRC is the only member of the United Neighborhood Centers of America that specifically serves American Indians. As such, MIWRC has developed unique expertise in helping American Indian parents succeed as it helps them overcome crippling rates of poverty, chemical dependency, juvenile delinquency and school failure. "Data show that culturally specific social services are more effective and more comfortable for these women and their families," says Executive Director Suzanne Koeplinger. "We understand the circumstances of growing up on a reservation, and we've designed programs by listening to parents and elders."



COURAGE IS SO IMPORTANT TO THESE
MOTHERS' SUCCESS. WE DON'T DO THE WORK
FOR THEM. WE GUIDE THEM TO RESOURCES. THEY
FIND STRENGTH IN THEMSELVES AND THEN PASS
IT ON TO THEIR CHILDREN.

—Suzanne Koeplinger, Executive Director, Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center

AMAZING RESILIENCE

MIWRC starts families on the road to a better life with a careful assessment of their strengths and needs. Counseling or therapy may be a family's next step, or MIWRC's Family Services Program may begin home visits to help mothers with life and parenting skills. Mothers can also enroll in MIWRC classes, where they find the support of other parents as together they learn skills to improve their chances as parents and family providers.

A new curriculum and toolkit, Native American Parenting Traditions Revisited, guides MIWRC staff in building on a powerful culture as they nurture families. In Cherish the Children Learning Center, for instance, parents know their children will gain cultural awareness as an integral part of day care and preschool programs that set them on a path to achievement.

That same respect for American Indian heritage pervades Access and Healing Journey, two programs that support mothers in breaking even chronic chemical dependency. "Fetal alcohol syndrome is hugely underreported in our community," says Koeplinger. "And it devastates two generations at once."

"The past is so difficult for these mothers to face, but it's where their strength lies and where they can find success and pride," Koeplinger continues. "The families we work with have amazing resilience. They find ways to rebuild their own lives and give their children a future."

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA), the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize UNCA member organizations with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.