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## Illness forces longtime ICWA advocate to leave program she started

By Carol Berry, Today correspondent  
Story Published: Aug 20, 2009

DENVER — The Denver Indian Family Resource Center was dealt a serious blow in early July when its founding director, Phyllis Bigpond, known nationally for 40 years of community service work, was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor.

Bigpond had surgery in 2008 for a brain tumor, but returned to work and maintained her former pace at DIFRC serving Native children and their families under the Indian Child Welfare Act.

This time, doctors said further surgery would not be an option and Bigpond, of the Yuchi Tribe of Oklahoma, is now living near family members in the Toppenish community, Yakama Indian Reservation, Washington.

Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper proclaimed July 30 Phyllis J. Bigpond Day, noting that she “has devoted her life to improving the lives of American Indian families and children,” and the success of DIFRC and the comprehensive ICWA services in the city and state “are the legacy for which she is hereby honored.”

The proclamation was read at a reception on that day for the National Indian Child Welfare Association where DIFRC employees and Bigpond’s friends and associates gathered to honor her.

The proclamation noted that many organizations valued her “wisdom, generosity, tremendous commitment to the community and selfless devotion to helping people less fortunate in their lives.”

Since Bigpond’s departure, the DIFRC staff, working under two acting directors, is continuing ICWA work and the other programs of the agency.

“But it’s certainly not the same without Phyllis,” said Madonna Rogers, DIFRC office administrator and an acting co-director. “She is just one of a kind — so competent and caring. I can’t tell you how much she will be missed here.”

Recently, Bigpond oversaw a DIFRC survey and study among the Denver metro area’s nearly 30,000 Native residents from more than 60 tribal nations.

Called “Keeping the Circle Whole,” the study focused on mental health needs in the Indian community. It found a gap in culturally sensitive services.

Many of Bigpond’s earlier years of experience in nonprofit human service programs for the urban Indian population were in Arizona.

Before coming to Denver in 2000, she was executive director at Phoenix Indian Center and earlier was a clinical assistant professor at Arizona State University. In Phoenix she was also Arizona field officer for Save the Children and coordinator and program development director of the Intertribal Council of Arizona. She was also a social service representative for the San Carlos, Ariz. Agency.

She was a consultant for Columbia University, and for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity. She received the Master of Social Work from Washington University and an undergraduate degree from Oklahoma State University.

Bigpond is an alumna of the Denver Community Leadership Forum and has received awards including the Outstanding Native American Leader from the Association of American Indian Social Work, Distinguished Alumni Award from Washington University’s George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Sewanee Hunt Leadership Award from the Denver Foundation, and the 2008 Martin Luther King Jr. Peace Award from Metropolitan State College of Denver.

She has also received awards from the Family Resource Center Association, the National Organization of Black Elected Legislators, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science’s Native American resource group, Native American Recognition Days and Arizona State University School of Social Work.

*Article reprinted with permission from Indian Country Today.*



## TRIBAL COMMUNITY LINKAGES

Absentee Shawnee  
 Acoma Pueblo  
 Apache  
 Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes Fort Peck  
 Blackfeet  
 Caddo  
 Canadian Cree  
 Chemehuevi  
 Cherokee Nation  
 Cheyenne River Sioux  
 Cheyenne-Arapaho  
 Chickasaw Nation  
 Chippewa Cree  
 Choctaw of Oklahoma  
 Citizen Band of Potawatomi  
 Cochiti Pueblo  
 Coquille  
 Eastern Band of Cherokee  
 Fort Totten (Spirit Lake Sioux)  
 Gila River  
 Ho Chunk  
 Hopi  
 Hualapai  
 Inuit Alaska Native  
 Kickapoo Nation of Oklahoma  
 Lone Pine Paiute  
 Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina  
 Menominee  
 Mescalero Apache  
 Mississippi Band of Choctaw  
 Mohave  
 Muskogee Creek  
 Nambe Pueblo  
 Navajo  
 Northern Arapaho  
 Northern Cheyenne  
 Northern Ute  
 Oglala Sioux  
 Omaha  
 Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin  
 Onondaga  
 Osage  
 Ponca Tribe of Nebraska  
 Quapaw of Oklahoma  
 Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa  
 Red Lake Chippewa  
 Roseau River Canadian First Nations  
 Rosebud Sioux  
 Salt River Maricopa  
 San Carlos Apache  
 Santee Sioux  
 Santo Domingo Pueblo  
 Sault St. Marie  
 Seminole Nation of Oklahoma  
 Shoshone  
 Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate  
 Southern Paiute  
 Southern Ute Tribe  
 St. Ynez Band of Mission Indians  
 Standing Rock Sioux  
 Taos Pueblo  
 Three Affiliated Tribes  
 Tlingit  
 Tohono O'odham  
 Tonawanda Seneca  
 Turtle Mountain Chippewa  
 Upper Skagit  
 Ute Mountain Ute  
 Washoe  
 Winnebago  
 Yakama  
 Yankton Sioux  
 Yavapai

## Letter from DIFRC

*In past newsletters, this space was devoted to a letter from Denver Indian Family Resource Center's founding Executive Director Phyllis Bigpond. With Phyllis' passing this past September, staff members have come together to provide similar information to you: the community, funders and other interested individuals about important happenings at DIFRC during 2009.*

Dear Friends and Supporters:

Our mission defines our belief that tribal culture forms the foundation upon which Indian families can thrive. Our vision—**generations of healthy, strong American Indian children and families** is reflected in the work we do which is centered on strengthening children and families, and employing active efforts to keep children who have become involved in the child welfare system connected to their families and Native cultures. From January 1 through the end of October 2009, we have served 93 families and 210 children with services including family reunification, family preservation, ICWA advocacy, and truancy and youth in transition. Many of these families also participated in programs offered at DIFRC such as the Strong Fathers Program and Nurturing Parenting Program.

From its inception through the end of October 2009, DIFRC has served 556 families and 1,336 children. We have helped to successfully reunify 356 children who had been removed by social services. These successes continue to mount each year and help to ensure that more and more Indian children grow up in their own homes and surrounded by family members, and thereby have the opportunity to learn about their rich cultural and family heritages.

Indian Child Welfare (ICWA) efforts continue to be the foundation of DIFRC's work. In 2009, the organization held two ICWA trainings in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS). These trainings focused on increasing the skills of county child protection caseworkers so that they might comply with ICWA and work more effectively with American Indian families. DIFRC continues to participate in the Metro Denver Indian Child Welfare Steering Committee. The third annual Convening of this committee is scheduled for early December 2009.

DIFRC sponsored the first annual Father's Day Powwow which celebrated the role of fathers in the lives of Native children as well as highlighted the work of DIFRC's fatherhood group. Later in October, we held our Kinship Powwow, an event that honored kinship and foster care providers who care for Indian children and potential foster Indian parents were recruited.

As 2009 draws to a close, DIFRC has begun work on a major grant received this Fall from Colorado's Statewide Strategic Use Fund. The **Honoring the Tradition of Strong Indian Families** project will formalize DIFRC's culturally-responsive model of family preservation practice with urban American Indians.

DIFRC staff recognizes and appreciates the contributions of funders and individual donors who make our work possible. We were humbled by the generosity of those who recognized Phyllis through donations to DIFRC, both when Phyllis became ill and, then, after her journey to the spirit world. We are dedicated to carrying out the organization's mission and providing continuity of services to the families who reach out to us for help. To read more about our activities, please visit our website at [www.difrc.org](http://www.difrc.org).

~ The Denver Indian Family Resource Center Staff

### Transitions

This year has brought significant staff changes to DIFRC. While programs go on as before, we've had some vacancies to fill due to the departures of Isabelle Medchill, Marsha Whiting, Theresa Halsey, Theresa Bernie Fresquez, Rebecca Novak, and Troy Spang. We wish them well in their new endeavors.

**Teri Wilke** is the newest member of DIFRC, filling the Resource & Referral Specialist position.

**Lily Boyce** joined DIFRC as the Family Advocate in August. She is also a facilitator for the Nurturing Parenting Program.

**Terra Her Many Horses** joined the DIFRC staff in June as Health Advocate.

**Whitney Kizer** joined DIFRC in February as the Project Assistant for the Strong Fathers Program.



## DIFRC SUCCESS & IMPACT

### American Indian Youth Served by DIFRC Youth & Family Advocate

Over 25 American Indian youth have received support and advocacy during the 2008-2009 school year from DIFRC's former Youth & Family Advocate, Troy Spang. The goal of the program was to reduce truancy and prevent further involvement with the juvenile justice system among American Indian students in the Denver Public Schools and the Jefferson County Public Schools. By using a wrap-around process, Troy worked with high school students to identify natural support systems in their lives who will encourage not only school attendance, but re-engagement in the educational system. As a result, many students saw their grades improve. DIFRC also worked with youth who are aging out of the foster care system by providing training in independent living skills and supportive mentors. Troy helped youth identify and connect to their tribe(s). "Tribal connection provides a sense of belonging, identity, and worth," he stated. "It is something that a young person can be proud of."

### Connecting Families to Community Resources

DIFRC provided over 450 American Indian families with resource referrals, short-term service, and referrals to the Clinical team during 2008. Resource referrals made to community programs assisted with housing, food, child care assistance, tribal enrollment, affordable health care, culturally appropriate mental health care, and transportation. In these difficult economic times, vulnerable families are even more at risk. DIFRC is pleased to offer support by connecting families to needed community resources.

Proud Member  
of the  
Family  
Resource  
Center  
Association



## DIFRC Receives New Grant for Family Preservation

DIFRC was awarded a two year grant under the Colorado Department of Human Services' Statewide Strategic Use Fund (SSUF) to address Family Preservation service delivery. The Honoring the Tradition of Strong Indian Families project is headed by Dr. Nancy Lucero and will formalize DIFRC's culturally-responsive model of family preservation practice with urban American Indians.

## Honoring Our Traditions: Strong Fathers

### Strong Fathers Program Hosts Workshop, Father's Day Pow-Wow

As summer is coming to an end, there is much to report from the Strong Fathers program. June was an exciting month—a small series of events focused on Indian Country was held in conjunction with the nation's 100th Anniversary of Father's Day and the program participated in other events around Denver.

#### Cultural Responses to the Modern World

On June 18th-19th, a two-day workshop was held to establish and maintain mindfulness of the declining presence of cultural and traditional life ways in today's American Indian communities and its effects on families. Presenters included staff from the Denver Indian Center, Native American Cancer Research, Carol Iron Rope Herrera, Bessie Smith, and a panel of fathers from the program. The conference was well received, with numerous requests for another.

#### Be There for Your Kids

The Be There for Your Kids Campaign held a fatherhood rally at City Park on June 20th to promote paternal involvement, with guest speakers and performers featured throughout the day. Fatherhood groups from around the state had promotional booths and various family activities. Dancers from the local community along with the Denver Singers drum group kicked off the rally with an exhibition performance.

Thompson Williams, fatherhood coordinator, was also recognized by Be There for Your Kids as June's Featured Father. He got to share his thoughts on fatherhood in an interview that can be found at the website [www.coloradodads.com](http://www.coloradodads.com).

#### Father's Day Pow-Wow

The Strong Fathers program held a pow-wow at Tallbull Memorial Grounds in Daniels Park over the holiday weekend. Many of those dancing were Strong Fathers alumni and their families. The program sponsored a few contests while individuals sponsored specials in honor of loved ones. One participant shared, "It was so fantastic to see all the families healthy, whole, and present."

Native American Cancer Research began pow-wow festivities by hosting a wellness event at the grounds to encourage better health screening and education within the native community.

## Indian Child Welfare

### DIFRC Provides Training on the Indian Child Welfare Act

In collaboration with the Colorado Department of Human Services, Early Intervention Colorado, and the Colorado Commission on Indian Affairs, DIFRC presented a training event for child welfare professionals on February 11th entitled *The Indian Child Welfare Act: Basics and Best Practices*. The training was offered to the community, county caseworkers, judicial staff, and service providers who work with American Indian families. Former Family Advocate Teresa Bernie Fresquez presented on the topic of intergenerational historical trauma. Teri Haymond, Child Welfare Supervisor, spoke about the best practices for achieving family permanency.

### 2008 Indian Child Welfare Convening

The Colorado Department of Human Services and the Casey Family Programs sponsored a series throughout 2008-2009 aimed at increasing cooperation between the agencies that provide child welfare services to American Indian children and families. Formal agreements have been established between several metro area counties and DIFRC, resulting in better collaboration on Indian Child Welfare cases. Participating counties at the December meeting included Denver, Jefferson, Adams, Arapahoe, and Larimer. Representatives from the Southern Ute Tribe and the Pine Ridge Reservation were in attendance also. DIFRC continues to encourage and increase collaboration with counties and tribes to better advocate for children and families.

## Learning to Cook Healthy Meals

In collaboration with Operation Frontline, DIFRC sponsored a series of healthy cooking classes for American Indians from September 3rd—Oct 8th. Similar to the classes that took place during November of last year, the participants learned to adapt recipes such as the 3 Sister's Stew to include additional healthy ingredients. Classes meet weekly for six weeks, with each participant receiving a nutrition and recipe cookbook, free cooking supplies, and free groceries at each class. Terra Her Many Horses, Health Advocate, reported eight graduates from the most recent group. A special thanks to Operation Frontline for partnering on this delicious project! Classes are to resume in January 2010.

## Nurturing Parenting Program

The Nurturing Parenting Program began its fall session on November 3rd.

### National Child Abuse Prevention Month

In February, NPP participants completed baby quilts for an exhibit during April's National Child Abuse Prevention Month. This is an annual wintertime effort at DIFRC, and helps to educate the community about the sacredness of children through creating acts of non-violence to counteract violence against children everywhere. While learning how to make a quilt step-by-step, NPP parents were told the creation story "Grandmother Makes a Quilt for the Creator." This story emphasizes the need to be patient, stay focused on a task to completion, remain positive throughout the process, and to create a quilt of beauty; qualities that mirror the parenting process. Many of the parents did not have hand-sewing experience prior to this project. We admire the NPP parents for creating these quilts, reflecting their commitment to honoring their children through a weave of kindness and love.



## Clinical Updates

During the month of October, 32 families received services:

- 21 were ICWA/family reunification cases
- 11 were family preservation cases
- 4 family reunification cases opened
- 2 cases were closed
- 82 children and youth were served
- 30 families & 77 children will be carried over into November for service
- 9 families and 4 children attended Nurturing Parenting Program
- 5 parents and 7 children participated in the Strong Fathers Program

## Success Story

A mother, Spirit Lake, of four, ages 16, 10, 8, and 6 months, successfully completed her family services plan, reunifying with three of her children while the infant was successfully preserved in the home. As a result of her hard work and determination, her case with Jefferson County was closed.

## Community Outreach

*The Indian Child Welfare Act: Basics and Best Practices* training was held on October 27, 2009, to address Inter-generational Historical Trauma, the need for ICWA, an in-depth coverage of ICWA provisions and offered best practices for achieving permanency when working with American Indian families.

## November 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3 NPP 5-7:30 PM	4 SFP 6-8 PM	5	6 SFP 12-2 PM	7
8	9 KCSG 5-7 PM	10 SDAC NPP 5-7:30 PM	11 SFP 6-8 PM	12	13 SFP 12-2 PM	14
15	16	17 NPP 5-7:30 PM	18 SFP 6-8 PM	19	20 SFP 12-2 PM	21
22	23	24 NPP 5-7:30 PM	25 SFP 6-8 PM	26 HOLIDAY	27 HOLIDAY	28
29	30					

## Program Schedule

### DIFRC Board of Directors Meeting (DBM)

1st Wednesday of the month, 5:00 PM  
DIFRC Small Conference Room

### Healthy Cooking Class (HCC)

Will begin in January 2010, call DIFRC for more information

### Kinship Care Support Group (KCSG)

2nd Monday of the month, 5:00 PM  
DIFRC Large Conference Room

### Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP)

Tuesdays, 5:00 PM  
DIFRC Large & Small Conference Rooms, Family Room

### Service Delivery Advisory Council Meeting (SDAC)

2nd Tuesday of the month, 10:00 AM  
Call 303.871.8035 for location

### Strong Fathers Program (SFP)

Wednesdays, 6:00 PM  
Fridays, 12:00 PM  
DIFRC Large Conference Room

## December 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4 SFP 12-2 PM	5
6	7	8 SDAC NPP 5-7:30 PM	9 DBM SFP 6-8 PM	10	11 SFP 12-2 PM	12
13	14 KCSG 5-7 PM	15	16 SFP 6-8 PM	17	18 SFP 12-2 PM	19
20	21	22	23 SFP 6-8 PM	24	25 HOLIDAY	26
27	28	29	30 SFP 6-8 PM	31		

## January 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 HOLIDAY	2
3	4	5	6 DBM SFP 6-8 PM	7	8 SFP 12-2 PM	9
10	11 KCSG 5-7 PM	12 SDAC NPP 5-7:30 PM	13 SFP 6-8 PM	14	15 SFP 12-2 PM	16
17	18 HOLIDAY	19	20 SFP 6-8 PM	21	22 SFP 12-2 PM	23
24	25	26	27 SFP 6-8 PM	28	29 SFP 12-2 PM	30

***DIFRC wishes to thank and recognize the generous support of the following donors & grantors:***

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## Jewel Marie Little Soldier Echohawk Memorial Fund

*In remembrance of a lovely 19 year-old who fought so hard to overcome the effects of abuse and neglect during her early childhood. Jewel's memorial fund will begin the endowment for DIFRC and its work in early intervention and family preservation.*

**Lynn & Mark Adamson**

**Owanah Anderson**

**Lucille A. Echohawk**

**Shannon Finley**

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Family Resource Center Association

Native American Cancer Research

The O.P. & W.E. Edwards Foundation

Savio House

The Stevenson Family Foundation

Native American Rights Fund

The Colorado Trust

The Denver Foundation

### Help Us Realize Our Dreams



The DIFRC logo is an image of a dream-catcher to symbolize our desire to nurture strong Indian families, so that our children can realize their dreams for tomorrow.

We have short term needs and long range dreams. Together, we can make them become reality.

### PLEDGE FORM

I want to make a difference in the lives of American Indian children and families in Metro Denver.

I would like to contribute \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (a one time donation). Check enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Charge my credit card: Mastercard \_\_\_\_\_ Visa \_\_\_\_\_ AMEX \_\_\_\_\_

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to: DIFRC • 393 S. Harlan St., Ste. 100 • Lakewood, CO 80226  
Gifts can also be submitted online at [www.difrc.org](http://www.difrc.org).

We also ask that you please remember DIFRC in your will, trust life insurance policy or retirement plan. Your support and cooperation are greatly appreciated. We thank you on the behalf of the children and families we serve.



*Honoring the tradition of strong Indian families.*

393 South Harlan Street, Suite 100  
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NEWS ✦ UPDATES ✦ COMMUNITY AWARENESS

## Meet the DIFRC Staff

### **Ruth Abeyta**

Case Worker II

### **Lily Boyce** (*Hunkpapa Lakota*)

Family Advocate

### **Sidney Brown** (*Blackfeet*)

Child & Family Therapist

### **Teri Haymond**

Child Welfare Supervisor

### **Terra Her Many Horses** (*Taos Pueblo/Meskwaki/Ojibwe*)

Health Advocate

### **Carrie Howell** (*Pawnee/Flandreau Santee Sioux*)

Program Coordinator—Nurturing Parenting Program

### **Kim Johnson** (*Seminole/Sac & Fox*)

Social Worker

### **Whitney Kizer** (*Choctaw/Washoe*)

Program Assistant—Promoting Responsible Fatherhood

### **Nancy Lucero** (*Choctaw*)

Project Director

### **Madonna Rogers** (*Hunkpapa Lakota*)

Office Administrator

### **Kelly Roy** (*Leech Lake Ojibwe/Meskwaki*)

Executive Assistant

### **Teri Wilke** (*Chiricahua Apache*)

Resource & Referral Specialist

### **Thompson Williams** (*Caddo/Comanche*)

Program Coordinator—Promoting Responsible Fatherhood

## Vision

Generations of healthy, strong  
American Indian children and families.

## Mission

To strengthen vulnerable American Indian children and families  
through collaborative and culturally responsive services.

## Operating Principles

- ✦ Hold children and families first.
- ✦ Acknowledge, respect, and support traditional Indian family roles.
- ✦ Include children and caregivers, as well as extended family members, in the decision-making process.
- ✦ Support tribal and spiritual values and practices.
- ✦ Operate with respect for people based on who and where they are.
- ✦ Value inclusiveness at all levels.
- ✦ Provide culturally responsive services.
- ✦ Create and utilize innovative approaches to services.
- ✦ Value community and interdependence and recognize that collaboration is key.
- ✦ Celebrate achievement—large and small—and honor growth from mistakes.
- ✦ Strive for the greater good by fostering “giving back” to the community and leadership development.
- ✦ Strive to share and collaborate with other providers around resources.