

Dear <XXXnameXXX>,

The other day I was talking with my little friend, Olivia, about eagle feathers. She asked me why they were so special, and I told her that in our Native American culture when people have earned the right to wear an eagle feather they are honored for being strong and following their beliefs and making the world a better place for others.

To our people the eagle feather is sacred and a symbol of honor and esteem to both the giver and receiver.

You are receiving this letter because the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) needs your help to ensure that children of Native American families – like Olivia – will grow up healthy and productive instead of struggling just to survive as their elders have been doing for centuries.

As a Native American, and also as a father, I understand that tribal traditions and family heritage play such powerful roles in the upbringing of Indian children.

Olivia is one of the fortunate ones. She knows the love of her parents, the guidance of her extended tribal family, the comfort of a stable home, food and clothing, the happiness that comes with the freedom of being a child.

Sadly, throughout our country today, many Native American children and their families are still fighting a battle for survival...and often, the children are the ones who suffer the most. On Indian reservations and communities, poverty, unemployment, alcoholism and lack of education place native children in the dangerous crossfire of legal red tape.

That is why NARF is so proud to co-author the Practical Guide to the Indian Child Welfare Act.

This guide is so important to Native American youth because it will help:

- Foster compliance of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA);
- Educate tribal courts, tribal attorneys, and tribal social services staff involved in state court child custody proceedings;
- Improve the delivery of tribal child protection services;
- Increase the ability of tribal judicial court systems to exercise their federal rights;
- Secure cross-recognition of judgments, final orders, and laws between tribal, state, and federal justice systems.

Tribes are now working to fully regain control of their destiny and that of their children, and NARF is here to encourage their success.

The Guide will facilitate the security, identity and hope for a better future for Native American children who are in jeopardy from being separated from their families and the only life they know.

The ICWA was created in 1978 by the federal government in order to re-establish tribal authority over the adoption of Native American children. The goal of the act was to strengthen and preserve Native American families and culture and keep Native American children with their tribal families whenever possible.

Whenever an American Indian child is removed from his or her family, active efforts must be made for the child to be placed with extended family, a tribal member, or in an Indian foster home, in that order.

Before the ICWA was passed, a very high percentage of Indian families were broken up because nontribal agencies removed children from their homes. State officials did not understand or accept Indian culture and attempted to assimilate the children into mainstream society, moving them from reservations into cities.

Here at NARF, we believe that ALL Native American children have the right to grow up with family members who love them in a safe environment, free from abuse, neglect, and the damaging effects of poverty.

We believe that ALL Native American children have the right to learn their tribe's language, practice their tribe's traditional religion, and carry on their tribe's cultural heritage and work.

I invite you to join with us as an active advocate for Native American rights. As a first step to this "call to action," please visit our website at [www.narf.org](http://www.narf.org) and register to become a part of our E-action network. This will help us educate the public about Indian rights legislation and issues.

With you by our side, Indian children will be protected by the Indian Child Welfare Act and enjoy the simple wonders of the living earth that is so much a part of their heritage.

Sincerely,

John E. Echohawk  
Executive Director