



## THE HARVARD PROJECT ON AMERICAN INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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John F. Kennedy School of Government • Harvard University

### HONORING NATIONS: 2006 HONOREE

#### **The Hopi Child Care Program The Hopi Tribe**

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*The Hopi Child Care Program facilitates parents' access to high quality child care when demands of work or educational pursuits require them to be away from home. Understanding the importance of early childhood development coupled with the need for culturally appropriate care, Hopi citizens now have the ability to better provide for their families. The Program gives parents the security of knowing their children are safe, while providing affordable and accessible channels to ensure their wellbeing. As the Hopi Tribe affirms, "Children are our greatest resource. How they are treated as young children impacts the future of the Hopi Tribe."*

The combination of changing family dynamics and the challenges parents face when simultaneously juggling family responsibilities while pursuing employment or higher education brought child care needs to the attention of the Hopi tribal government. Located in the northeast corner of Arizona, the Hopi Tribe is an isolated community and reservation. Traditionally, child care has been an important part of Hopi community life, and care providers have long included parents, extended family, and other community members. In recent years, however, the Tribe has seen an increasing number of single parent households, families with both parents working, and young single parents either in school or wanting to pursue higher education. Extended family and community members helped where they could, but the demand was becoming too great. The Hopi Tribe responded by creating the Hopi Child Care Program.

Dependable, culturally appropriate, and affordable child care is a growing need in both Indian Country and the United States as more and more single parents and parents from two-parent families strive to earn livelihoods and/ or improve their skills through education. The challenge this presents is often exacerbated in rural areas where there are few daycare options close to home and most employment opportunities require long commutes. In Indian Country, daycare facilities available off-reservation rarely provide culturally grounded care traditionally present in Native communities.

The Hopi Tribe recognized that in order to support the nation's growing work force, it would need to provide a way to take care of its youngest citizens in a professional, culturally appropriate manner so that adult citizens could maintain jobs and pursue educational opportunities while still being deeply involved in raising their children. By creating a child care program that is institutionally and programmatically based in Hopi culture, is inclusive of the entire community, is able to create strong partnerships to expand employee development,

and exceeds federal and state regulatory standards, the Tribe has been able to provide a critical service to the Hopi workforce, Hopi parents, and Hopi children.

In 1993, the Tribe created the Hopi Child Care Program (HCCP) to bring professional, safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate child care to the reservation. In setting HCCP into motion, the Tribe provided the HCCP administrator with the flexibility to create a specialized and targeted program. Primary services are focused on working families, parents attending school, and participants in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. In its first year, the Program offered in-home care for 114 children from birth to age five. Many of the in-home providers are extended family or clan members, continuing and strengthening the Hopi practice of raising children in a close knit social environment. The success of the program soon stimulated further demand and, in 2001, facilities were secured near the tribal government offices to build a day care center to augment the in-home services of HCCP. As the program matured, more children were returning year after year and HCCP sought to introduce Hopi culture into daily lessons. Now, children are taught to identify indigenous plants on nature walks, as well as the uses of the plants. Children in the program often pick Hopi tea and bring it back for staff and their families. Children now also conduct their lessons in both English and Hopi. In addition, the HCCP curriculum teaches children about key elements of Hopi life and society, and HCCP participants learn about the clans, traditional clothing, feast days, music, and other skills appropriate for their age and development level. The emphasis on Hopi language and culture is helping to develop not only a new generation of fluent Hopi speakers and community members, but also serves to reconnect less proficient parents and family members with the Hopi language. Parents report that their children teach them Hopi vocabulary around the house, and that the practice of nightly reading in Hopi and in English is helping the parents learn more of the language.

Parental involvement is important in child care services since Hopi culture is traditionally taught at home. The Program recently created a Parent Support Team to facilitate communications between parents and the program. Participating parents are required to sign contracts and adhere to certain responsibilities. Likewise, the Program commits to providing high quality care. If performance expectations are not met, the Parent Support Team is called upon to give guidance and solutions. This model provides a formal system for parent and family interaction with the Program, allowing for exchanges of guidance and feedback.

Another important aspect of the Program is the rigorous qualifications that must be met and maintained by in-home providers and staff. The program currently has 56 in-home care providers and requires training or certification in first aid, CPR, nutrition, food handling, child development, health and safety, communicable diseases, and recognizing negligence and abuse. Caregiver homes are provided with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, first aid kits, fire extinguishers, curriculum, and toys.

HCCP continuously invests in training to increase and enhance the professional knowledge of its management team and teaching staff. In partnership with the Early Childhood Development division of a local community college, HCCP provides the staff with ongoing professional development courses tailored to meet programmatic needs. The Program also encourages and supports employees in obtaining certification and enrolling in 2- and 4-year degree programs in education. One family home provider has gone on to obtain the only nationally certified Family Child Care Child Development Associate credential within the local county.

In every regard, HCCP meets or exceeds federal and state standards. For example, to be eligible for federal block grants, parents are entitled to unlimited access to their children and

service providers during normal business hours or whenever the child is under care. Going beyond unlimited access, HCCP incorporates parents into daily activities such as lunches and walks. Locating the HCCP facility near the tribal administrative offices facilitates child drop-off and pick-up and allows tribal employees to sustain both their employment and their strong family involvement in child care.

The Hopi Child Care Program is an example of how strong sovereign nations can promote the wellbeing of all their citizens, even the very youngest. By allowing adult citizens to have the opportunity to feel comfortable placing their children in child care, it is strengthening the nation's workforce and encouraging and promoting future educational opportunities for its citizens. The Hopi Tribe is also strengthening its future by providing cultural education to its youngest citizens in a safe environment. Finally the Hopi cultural values in and approaches to child care are strengthened because families and the community participate in HCCP, and the children in the program carry knowledge of Hopi language and culture back into their homes to the benefit of the entire family, community, and nation.

#### Lessons:

- Trusted, comprehensive child care has a dual benefit for Native communities: tribal children receive culturally appropriate care and the workforce is strengthened through employees' confidence in the way their family care needs are addressed.
- By providing education, training, and certification for in-home child care providers, Native nations can increase the reach, flexibility, and cultural competence of their child care systems and increase employment opportunities for citizens.
- By finding ways to release the creative potential of program developers, tribal governments gain innovative, locally tailored programs that advance sovereignty, build inter-governmental partnerships, and best meet citizen needs.

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