




Article

The Tribally Adapted National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC): Impact on Foster and Adoptive Parent Preparedness to Foster American Indian Children from the Southwest Region of the United States

Angelique G. Day ^{1,*} , Carson Ball ¹, Norma Hernandez ², Katie Baudhuin ², Becky Carino ² and Becky Main ³

¹ School of Social Work, University of Washington, 4101 15th Ave NE, Seattle, WA 98105, USA; cball22@uw.edu

² Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, 10005 E. Osborn Road, Scottsdale, AZ 85256, USA

³ Spaulding for Children, 16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120, Southfield, MI 48075, USA; beckymain@rnmain.com

* Correspondence: dayangel@uw.edu

Abstract

Foster parents working with children who are American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN) face challenges to provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant care for the children in their care. The Tribally Adapted National Training and Development Curriculum is a state-of-the-art training program designed to prepare foster parents to effectively parent AIAN children exposed to trauma and to provide these families with ongoing skill development necessary to understand and promote healthy child development. The current study describes the results of two focus groups (N = 11) that occurred in person in the social services office of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community in May of 2022. Findings describe the experiences of participants that completed the tribal NTDC training and how the training impacted their readiness and experience to foster in comparison with parents of AIAN foster children who received the training-as-usual training protocol (Foster Parent College (FPC)) provided by the State child welfare authority.

Keywords: foster parenting; pre-licensure training; Indian child welfare

1. Introduction and Background

Despite ongoing reform efforts, American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) children continue to be disproportionately placed in the United States foster care system. According to the latest Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Report (AFCARS) report released by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) AIAN children make up 3% of all children currently enrolled in foster care ([Children's Bureau 2024](#)). This remains a significant overrepresentation in out-of-home placements relative to the estimated 0.8–1% AIAN portion of the total U.S. child population. Likewise in the state of Arizona, where the current study takes place, foster care placement rates of AIAN children are estimated to be 9.6% as compared to 5.4% AIAN children and youth who reside in the state in general ([Casey Family Programs et al. 2020](#); [Child Welfare Statistics n.d.](#)).

In addition to experiencing a greater number of out-of-home placements, AIAN children face lower rates of reunification, and more placement moves (i.e., placement instability) as compared to their White peers ([Children's Bureau et al. 2018](#); [Landers et al.](#)



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2025). Placement instability is generally defined as several changes in residency and/or caregivers for a child following entry into care (Garcia et al. 2015; Maguire et al. 2024) and is a known predictor of negative developmental outcomes (Day 2025).

Another concern is the rate at which AIAN children are placed in homes outside of the child's culture of origin. Despite the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and its mandates that cases involving an Indian child demonstrate efforts to place an Indian child with a member of their extended family, non-related member of their tribe or with another Indian family first, AFCARS data indicate that 37.4% of American Indian children in out-of-home care are living with non-American Indian caregivers (Casey Family Programs et al. 2020). This could have serious implications for AIAN children as clinical evidence points toward same-race/ethnicity placements improving placement stability for children (LaBrenz et al. 2022). At any rate, a sustained connection to cultural identities is critical for Indigenous child and youth wellbeing (Absolon and Willett 2005; Anderson 2000; Carriere 2007; Carriere and Richardson 2009, 2013; Hart 2007; Sinclair 2007; Thomas 2005). The identification of relatives and providing sufficient resources, like financial support and training, can better ensure the stability of the placement (Francis et al. 2023). More research is needed to examine the stability of placement into kinship care and reunification efforts for American Indian children (Francis et al. 2023).

ICWA was implemented because of the multitude of historic injustices that have compounded the trauma experienced by American Indians and Alaskan Natives; to relieve the considerable suffering caused by placements in boarding schools (1819 to the 1970) and the federally funded Indian Adoption Project (1958–1967). These two government sanctioned projects resulting in significant loss of land, community members, and culture for AIAN people (Day 2025; Francis et al. 2023). Despite this history of trauma, AIANs have endured. There is a need for the development of culturally relevant, effective, trauma-informed interventions for AIAN children and youth (Bailey et al. 2019).

Significant gaps exist in the data on tribal experiences with the current child welfare system and outcomes related to out-of-home placement due to historical reporting limitations and underrepresentation in AFCARS datasets (Maguire-Jack et al. 2019). Specifically, tribes with exclusive jurisdiction of their child welfare cases are not required to report their data in AFCARS. Tribes have sovereignty rights related to both tribal child welfare program development and the data they collect as part of their own continuous quality improvement. The Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) is a direct title IV-E tribe and has exclusive jurisdiction of tribal citizens who come to the attention of the child welfare authority. Specifically, they license and train their own foster parents and make decisions regarding placement preferences for tribal citizens in out-of-home care settings. The current study sheds light on the efficacy of an evidence-based, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed foster parent licensure training curricular intervention that seeks to alleviate placement disruption, support cultural identity development, and provides targeted support to foster parents caring for SRPMIC children who have experienced trauma.

1.1. Trauma-Informed Foster Parent Training

Historically, foster, kinship, and adoptive parent training has focused on basic caregiving competencies with limited emphasis on understanding the impacts of trauma, loss, and attachment disruptions experienced by children in care (Price et al. 2009; Nash and Flynn 2016). However, the recent literature has emphasized the need to focus on trauma-informed care for resource parents. For instance, recent thematic analysis found that resource parents reported a better understanding of their child's trauma reactions after enrollment in a trauma-informed parenting program (Zak et al. 2024). This understanding was associated with improved parenting skills and reflective practices through a grounded

consideration of the child's underlying needs. Although foundational knowledge supports are essential prior to child placement, they must also be implemented in conjunction with trauma-informed in-service supports as children continue to develop in care (Stenason and Romano 2022). While these preliminary studies have contributed to the understanding of the benefits of prior-to-care and ongoing trauma-informed trainings, most evaluations to date have utilized small cohorts and were not longitudinal, thus limiting conclusions around sustained impacts on child outcomes (Zak et al. 2024; Bunting et al. 2019).

In contrast to these previous studies, the current study utilizes NTDC, a free, state-of-the-art, open-access training program that is designed to equip both prospective caregivers as well as those who are already looking after children with the necessary skills to fully serve children and youth placed in their care. It was developed with the understanding that federal and state governments should make trauma-informed, culturally relevant resources and training available to foster parents and kinship caregivers with the goal of promoting placement stability and overall quality of life improvements for children and youth experiencing foster care. The focus on resource sharing and caregiver skill-building allows foster parents and/or kinship caregivers to provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant care. NTDC is made up of three key curriculum components for foster and adoptive parents as a strategy to build trauma-informed skills. These three components are Self-Assessment (Fowler et al. 2024, 2025b; Salazar et al. 2020), Classroom-Based Training (Fowler et al. 2025a; Salazar et al. 2024), and Right Time Training (Fowler et al. 2023; Lin et al. 2021).

NTDC contains 19 classroom-based themes that were determined to be essential for foster parents and two online themes. Themes are the individual topical content areas that constitute segments of the comprehensive child welfare training and development curriculum. They can be compared to modules in a training manual or chapters in a book. Each theme is its own independent training on a specific topical area, and themes can be taught in any order the trainer desires. Each theme runs approximately one to two hours in length (range 55 min to 105 min). Two of the classroom-based trainings—(1) Expanding Your Parenting Paradigm and (2) Overview of the child welfare System—are online self-paced trainings that participants can take outside of the face-to-face or virtual live classroom.

NTDC represents an approach that integrates a more intentional focus on a trauma-informed practice model with more comprehensive preparation for prospective parents. Originally piloted across eight jurisdictions, including state, county, territorial, and tribal sites, NTDC is designed to support caregivers in understanding trauma, developmental processes, and the relational needs of children who have experienced compound adversities. Early foundational work, focusing on caregiver usability, demonstrated that NTDC materials were perceived as accessible and relevant by participants, laying the groundwork for subsequent evaluations (Salazar et al. 2020). In addition, caregiver training, online and in person, were found to promote the development of supportive caregiver networks, in turn improving parenting competency and skills (Fowler et al. 2023).

Several peer-reviewed studies have been published that have evaluated the impact of NTDC on caregiver preparedness and trauma-informed skill development (Fowler et al. 2025b; Salazar et al. 2023, 2024). Implementation of NTDC among foster parents was found to be associated with an increase in the perception of preparation and overall confidence in the usability of trauma-informed parenting practices (Salazar et al. 2024). Similarly, research confirms that general foster parent training resulting in a trusted, confident resource parent both enfranchises and supports youth in healing from the trauma of loss in diverse circumstances (Salazar et al. 2023). This body of literature demonstrates enhanced self-efficacy among foster parents following exposure to the curriculum. Complementing these findings, the online Right Time modules within the NTDC framework also showed

improved resource parenting outcomes (Fowler et al. 2023). These gains were identified in relation to access to timely resources while also highlighting a variability in engagement and integration of learning into practice.

NTDC training was also examined in relation to three key child welfare outcomes: placement stability, permanency, and placement continuity (Fowler et al. 2024). This examination yielded results that showed positive associations between caregiver training participation, reduced disruptions of service, and improving permanency outcomes. This finding is critical given the longstanding evidence that insufficient caregiver preparedness contributes to placement instability and increased transitions for youth experiencing foster care (Lanigan and Burlison 2017; Fisher et al. 2011; Maguire et al. 2024). However, the study aggregated foster youth outcomes across diverse racial populations and has not disaggregated specifically by Indigenous status. This limits insights into the specific needs and experiences of AIAN children and how their respective foster parents were prepared to address them. Few studies examine how access to curricula and training might be specifically tailored to the needs of the tribal child welfare system (Day 2025). The current study builds on this knowledge base by describing the efficacy of the NTDC as it was adapted for use in AIAN communities.

1.2. Cultural Adaptations of Foster Parent Training

The need to grow the number of culturally grounded practices in foster care has been validated in peer-reviewed research (Day et al. 2020). Studies involving long-term placement permanence have found that caregiver sensitivity, cultural competence, and relationship formation are central to stable placements (Day et al. 2018; Day 2025). These studies highlight the need for not just trauma-informed content in the curriculum, but cultural responsiveness and identity support as well, two supports historically overlooked in foster parent curricula that has been adopted for use across the United States.

This confirmation of the importance of culturally grounded practices is particularly vital for Indigenous families whose children are disproportionately removed from their communities and by extension, more at risk of losing cultural connections. Waters et al. (2025) described the need for co-development of trauma-informed and culturally grounded parenting support programs within tribal communities. Specifically, the study found that Indigenous stakeholders prioritize cultural identity, community connection, and healing practices alongside trauma competence. The study also documented resource parents' roles in affirming Indigenous children's cultural identities, proving that culturally responsive caregiving is a key determinant in the wellbeing of Indigenous youth and is a necessary element for implementation into tribal welfare frameworks (Waters et al. 2025).

A systematic review of effective parenting interventions that have been implemented in AIAN communities identified critical caregiving competencies and emphasized the need to integrate tribal cultural knowledge and identity-affirming practices (Day et al. 2021). This integration would further support placement stability and the wellbeing of AIAN youth experiencing foster care. Cultural competency has special importance when the child's cultural identity construction is balanced between the cultural practices of their caregiver and the child's community of origin (Quinn et al. 2025).

1.3. Current Study

Foster parents working with children who are American Indian face challenges to provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant care for the children in their care. Foster parents working with children who are American Indian face challenges to provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant care for the children in their care. These challenges include maintaining the cultural,

family, and tribal connections of Indigenous children and the unpreparedness of caregivers for the complexities of foster care, including navigating cultural identity and trauma-related behaviors (Salazar et al. 2024; Francis et al. 2023). The Tribally Adapted National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) is a state-of-the-art training program designed to prepare foster parents to effectively parent American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN) children exposed to historical and intergenerational trauma and to provide these families with ongoing skill development needed to understand and promote healthy child development. Two AIAN senior scholars and experts in Indian Child Welfare and tribal child welfare workforce practice were contracted with as consultants to develop the AIAN tribal adapted NTDC. They were assisted by a content committee comprising 16 nationally known American Indian Alaska Native tribal child welfare experts representing all 10 of the federal Children’s Bureau regions to ensure the curriculum included content and activities that were relevant to tribes located across the United States. Several members of the content committee have professional state and tribal child welfare experience in the areas of case management, clinical consultation, program administration, training, education, and academic research. The committee also included parents who are fostering, tribal elders, and professionals with lived experience in the child welfare system.

This paper describes the results of two focus groups that occurred in person in the social services office of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community in May of 2022. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experience of the participants that completed the tribal NTDC training and how the training impacted their preparedness to foster in comparison with parents of AIAN foster children who received the training-as-usual training protocol (Foster Parent College (FPC)) offered by the State of Arizona child welfare system. NTDC is not a tribal adaptation of the FPC. FPC has not been adapted for specific use in AIAN communities. The FPC is a general foster parent education platform with no tribal-specific development. With the aid of the AIAN content committee two unique classroom themes were developed for NTDC use that do not exist in FPC. These two themes are Cultural Connections and Building Belonging. Both themes purposefully center tribal cultural identity in ways that go beyond FPC’s general diversity content. Additionally, the FPC is asynchronous while the NTDC is completed live with trainers (either in person or on zoom) with additional training content available asynchronously to learners outside the live classroom setting. A side-by-side comparison of these two curriculums is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of FPC and NTDC.

| | Foster Parent College | NTDC |
|--|---|--|
| Target Audience | Caregivers seeking to enhance their parenting skills for children with special needs or trauma-related backgrounds, as well as agencies looking to provide mandated training. | Families who are fostering and/or adopting children through the public child welfare system as well as those adopting through an intercountry or private domestic process. |
| Includes Information Specifically designed for AI/AN | X | ✓ |
| Includes Information Specifically designed for Kinship Families | X | ✓ |
| Total Hours of Classroom time | 29 | 27 |
| Content is Competency-based | ✓ | ✓ |
| Self-assessment for participants | ✓ | ✓ |
| Scripted trainer notes for classroom sessions | ✓ | ✓ |

Table 1. Cont.

| | Foster Parent College | NTDC |
|---|--|--|
| Uses experiential activities | X | ✓ |
| Uses videos | ✓ | ✓ |
| Pre/Post test for each module | X | ✓ |
| Pre-work and/or homework required | ✓ | X |
| Flexible delivery options (modules in any order, etc.) | X | Yes, themes can be organized in any order and delivered individually or in groupings. |
| Virtual adaptations to support full virtual or hybrid delivery | ✓ | ✓ |
| Additional training content available to learners outside classroom | X | ✓ |
| Participant manual available | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spanish translation for trainer materials | ✓ | X |
| Spanish translation for participant materials | ✓ | X |
| Spanish captioned videos | ✓ | X |
| Year of Last Revision | 2020 | 2025 |
| Trainer Preparation | Trainers familiarize themselves with FPC's research-based courses, which cover topics like child development, trauma, and birth family relationships. | Trainer preparation designed by jurisdiction. Video-based instruction for trainers available for each theme. Spaulding for Children, the curriculum developer is also available to provide train the trainer technical assistance. |
| Tools to support delivery with fidelity | ✓ | ✓ |
| Cost for Curriculum | \$105 for pre-service training clusters (7 units) | \$0 for access to the curriculum and materials; there is a fee to participate in the train the trainer only. |
| California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse Rating | Promising research evidence (scientific rating of '3') with high relevance to the child welfare system. | Promising research evidence (scientific rating of '3') with high relevance to the child welfare system. |
| Key Takeaways for Parents | Understands behavior as communication Implements nurturing (rather than punitive) discipline Fosters stability Manages the unique emotional needs of children | Trauma-Informed Parenting Understands the impact of trauma on the developing brain Right Time Training accessed on-demand to provide targeted support Builds secure attachments prioritizing connection over control Builds personal resilience to avoid caregiver burn-out Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection Utilizes lived experience and expert advice Fosters an environment for families to build a support system with other classroom participants Provides access to free online information and resources needed to continue building skills once they have a child in their home |

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

Participants were recruited by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community’s tribal child welfare agency. This participating tribe oversaw approximately 74 child welfare cases in 2022. Additionally, the tribe oversaw approximately 23 licensed non-relative foster parents and 30 relative caregivers who provide care for these children during that time period. Eleven of the total 27 non-relative foster parents who participated in foster parent pre-licensure training during the observation period (January 2021–May 2022) participated in two focus groups, one for recipients of the NTDC training (N = 4/13) and one for recipients of FPC (N = 7/14). Each of the 11 foster parents represents a unique household placement. All but one of the participants (who was in the NTDC group) had at least one child citizen from the SRPMIC placed with them at the time the focus groups were held. Some of the 11 foster parents were interested in fostering with a desire to promote a permanency goal (reunification, adoption, guardianship). However, there was not enough time during the study’s observation period for the foster parents to not only complete licensure but also experience a permanency hearing that would make reunification, adoption, or guardianship an option. That process usually would take a year after initial placement occurs. This is why there are no adoptive parents in the sample. Focus groups were scheduled for approximately 6 months after foster parents and/or kinship caregivers completed pre-licensure training. Specific demographics for focus group participants are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Table (N = 11).

| Intervention Condition | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-------|-----------|-----------|--------|--------|
| | # | % | | | | |
| (FPC) ¹ | 7 | 63.0% | | | | |
| NTDC | 4 | 36.0% | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| | # | % | Control # | Control % | NTDC # | NTDC % |
| Male | 3 | 27.0% | 2 | 28.6% | 1 | 25% |
| Female | 8 | 72.0% | 5 | 71.4% | 3 | 75% |
| Race/Ethnicity ² | | | | | | |
| AI/AN | 5 | 45.5% | 4 | 57.1% | 1 | 25% |
| White | 4 | 36.4% | 1 | 14.3% | 3 | 75% |
| Black | 3 | 27.3% | 3 | 42.9% | 0 | 0 |
| Latino | 2 | 18.2% | 1 | 14.2% | 1 | 25% |
| Two or more races | 3 | 27.3% | 2 | 26.6% | 1 | 25% |
| Kin care foster parent | | | | | | |
| No | 9 | 81.8% | 5 | 71.4% | 4 | 100% |
| Both yes and no | 2 | 18.2% | 2 | 28.6% | 0 | 0 |
| # children currently placed | | | | | | |
| 0 | 1 | 9.1% | 0 | 0% | 1 | 25% |
| 1 | 6 | 54.5% | 3 | 42.9% | 3 | 75% |
| 4 | 4 | 36.4% | 4 | 57.1% | 0 | 0% |

Table 2. Cont.

| Caring for child with physical health concern | | | | | | |
|---|---|-------|---|-------|---|------|
| Yes | 3 | 27.3% | 3 | 42.9% | 0 | 0% |
| No | 8 | 72.7% | 4 | 57.1% | 4 | 100% |

¹ It should be noted that Foster Parent College is also the required training for foster parents for the state of Arizona. Foster Parent College (FPC) provides research-based, interactive online training for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents, as well as child welfare professionals. It offers 24/7 access to over 29 self-paced, trauma-informed courses, covering topics like behavior management, child development, and safety. FPC courses are designed to strengthen family care, meet licensing requirements, and are recognized by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (Pacifci et al. 2005). Information about FPC is available in Table 1. ² Race/ethnicity numbers add up to more than 100% to allow for full expression of racial and ethnic identity to be collected.

2.2. Procedures

Study participants were recruited through personal invitation through their assigned tribal child welfare case workers. Participants received a \$50 gift card for compensation of their time, dinner, and childcare during the focus groups to ensure families would be able to participate. Informed consent was attained orally rather than written, at the request of the tribe. Each participant received a copy of the informed consent script that was read aloud immediately before the focus group commenced. The consent script contained contact information for the focus group facilitators, and they were encouraged to follow up with additional questions or concerns related to the study. The two focus groups that were conducted lasted approximately 90 min each. The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analyzed with the assistance of DeDoose, a secure cloud-based application for organizing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (SocioCultural Research Consultants 2026). This study was approved as “human subjects research, not engaged” by the University of Washington human subjects research office, deferring to the tribe to determine approval. The study was reviewed and approved by tribal council.

2.3. Analysis

Focus group data were coded for themes using a thematic analytic process (Naeem et al. 2023). Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify and report the most repeated patterns in a dataset. These themes can then be interpreted for their inherent meaning based on an understanding of the participants keywords (Liebenberg et al. 2020). Themes, highlighted using selected quotes, identified in both the control and intervention focus groups were cross analyzed to identify similarities and differences between each group’s training experiences. Finally, coding was conducted to capture suggestions for future modifications of the training from the NTDC focus group participants.

3. Findings

The 11 foster parents who participated in the focus groups identified several major themes that characterize the experiences they had with the training content and how they utilized the training materials with children placed with them. They also offered suggestions for how the training could be improved in the future. Each of the seven major themes are depicted in Table 3 and discussed below.

Table 3. Themes and Occurrences by Treatment Group.

| Content Code | FPC ¹ | NTDC ² | Example Quotes |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Theme 1: Trauma | | | |
| Historical/Tribal | --- | 3 | (NTDC) The NTDC, I think it’s more holistic to our people and to what the needs are, especially encompassing the generational trauma. |
| Personal (Foster Parent) | 5 | 7 | (FPC) I grew up in foster care from two to 18. So even just, I lived it. And a lot of the videos that I clicked on it also brings up memories, things you don’t think about. And you’re just like, I remember that or even drop offs. And I was like, foster home, number 10. I remember that drop off. (NTDC) And I think that going through it with more examples and more discussion of it really brings it home to where you start to look a little deeper into yourself too. I think that was a big thing for me. A lot of things were like, “Oh, that didn’t bother me.” And I was like, “That was fine. That’s just normal.” And it’s like, no, no, no. That really wasn’t very normal, and that probably did mess me up in a way. And the fact that I don’t notice it is probably a problem. |
| Child Trauma | --- | 4 | (NTDC) But if you really understand the reasons behind, it will break your heart. There’s reasons. Behaviors are communication. And I liked how the curriculum explained that it’s a form of communication. Children, their brains haven’t developed enough to really . . . they don’t have those words to be able to explain. |
| Biological Parent | --- | 4 | (NTDC) Because we’re all just people, we all have things that we’ve gone through, things that we do, we all make mistakes. Some people’s mistakes are horrible and have consequences for children that didn’t expect that. But a lot of the times, its trauma has come down, and they just need help learning new routines, new parenting techniques, new coping mechanisms. |
| Vicarious Trauma | --- | 8 | (NTDC) But in your heart, you’re thinking, Oh my God, I can’t do this. I’m just going to bawl. I’m just going to start crying, and I can’t do this. There’s so many things that I don’t know if anything could really prepare you for that. |
| Theme 2: Sharing Stories | | | |
| Sharing Generally | --- | 4 | (NTDC) And it was really nice going through the class and just having the discussion time. And the stories are really what makes everyone, I feel, get on the same page. |
| Avoiding Isolation | 1 (reported feeling isolated) | 2 | (FPC) “Because what do you do when the door closes? And everybody goes away, what do you do?” And I said, “Well, we be parents. We adapt. We know how to adapt.” And he said, “Yeah, but this is different. There should be a process.” (NTDC) Right, someone who is there in a different spot than you. And it feels good to be able to kind of lay your cards out on the table, somebody else lays theirs. And when you see theirs and they see yours, it’s a mutual comfort that you can get. Not only that you’re not the only one, but more than likely, both of you, and they, will succeed and get to the other side of whatever is going on. |
| Coping (w/System) | --- | 2 | (NTDC) Yeah, you tell your licensing worker, you tell the police if you have to file an investigation or whatever. But there’s a lot of things that you just can’t say to your friends and family. You can’t tell them, “Look, we’re going through some stuff right now.” And then they’re going to want to know, “Well, what?” And it’s like, “I can’t say anything.” There’s just nothing I can say. |
| Coping (Vicarious Trauma) | --- | 2 | (NTDC) Well, I know that it was included, but maybe touch on that maybe a little bit more, about how important it is for foster parents to have other foster parents to be able to talk to. There was a point with us where I ended up having to hold our little five-year-old’s hand while she’s going through her forensic investigation. That, nothing can prepare you for. |

Table 3. Cont.

| Content Code | FPC ¹ | NTDC ² | Example Quotes |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Theme 3: Understanding Case Process | | | |
| Support the Tribe | --- | 4 | (NTDC) I have space in my house, and I can do this, so I want to do my best to make sure that they stay and maintain community affiliation, ingrained in the community. |
| Reunification | --- | 5 | (NTDC) But you know, you kind of get the feeling, or people have said that they kind of look maybe at first for a little while for kinship or someone in their family that will take them. And then they just kind of stop, because they find you, and then it's over. And so, I think the importance of family and reunification helped motivate me more. I think we learned that through the training. |
| Enhanced understanding | 2 | 6 | (FPC) I learned a lot of things that people just don't really, they don't tell you. And you won't know, there's no way that we would've learned. Nobody would've just explained things to us. We definitely learned some insights with behaviors. What the first drop off would look like, things like that. (NTDC) But I learned so much, like he was saying, I learned so much from Katie about just different ways, different systems as far as the court system goes, and different things about the positions of the JAL. And just, I guess, the reunification process, and how that looks as far as guardianship scenarios and things like that, which was just really, truly inspiring. |
| Co-parenting with bioparents | (Lack of info) ³ | 8 | (FPC) And one of the things that a lot of parents that were foster parents outside of the community, a lot of the parents, they have some type of resentment. And a lot of times they don't make eye contact. So, you're there to drop the child off. They don't like to make contact. They have a sense, a feeling, that you're passing judgment on them. (NTDC). And so, I feel like the curriculum really prepared, it definitely had a good focus on working with the family. And so, we were very excited about that potential of being able to help the family, to be able to potentially do reunification. |
| Theme 4: Neuroscience/Child Development | | | |
| Brain and Trauma | - | 3 | (NTDC) The 1990s was the decade of the brain. There was a lot of brain work that was done in the '90s. Really a lot of information was brought out in the '90s about trauma, about how to parent children with trauma. And because of that, if you consider, us as parents now, when we were raised, it was a completely different time, completely different approach to parenting. So, bringing that aspect in, of knowing about trauma and really bringing that in with the professionals and having resources of the different types of books that are out there has been really helpful and enlightening for me specifically |
| Age-specific material | - | 2 | (NTDC) So that, in the training kind of going through the ages and stages and kind of what to expect with each age group, I think maybe I would've liked to spend a little more time on those characteristics of the age groups. Not necessarily like newborn. I mean, maybe I shouldn't say that. You know what kind of newborns and infants need |
| Social media | - | 2 | (NTDC) But actually, the training kind of pointed something out that I shouldn't have needed the training to point out. But social media is, I don't do it, I'm not a fan, and so just for my personal . . . I get the use for businesses and all things like that. But for me, I choose not to put my life out like that. And thinking about having a child who was old enough to have a phone and dealing with all of that stuff wasn't the best choice for me my first go round |

Table 3. Cont.

| Content Code | FPC ¹ | NTDC ² | Example Quotes |
|---|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Theme 4: Neuroscience/Child Development | | | |
| Chronological/Developmental age | --- | 2 | (NTDC) And that was one of the things too, thinking back on the curriculum that I was really pleased about, that they talked about the developmental stages of the children. You could have a 16-year-old that's in an eight-year-old developmental stage. And what does that look like? How do you parent a child who doesn't have the tools all in their belt for being 16? And I thought that was really excellent, honestly. That part is so important, because a lot of people think, "Oh, parenting, okay. I can just kind of parent every kid the same." And then, "No, no." |
| Theme 5: Application of Training Activities Post Placement | | | |
| Frontloading | - | 2 | (NTDC) Hmm. I think front loading. I think I'd known that that could be an effective technique, but it's a bit different if you're doing it with your friends' kids who you see for a couple hours each week than having a kid in your home. And I do try to use that quite a bit. I'm not a big fan of discipline in general. Rules, yes. But focusing on the positives, and just kind of not . . . So, I think the front loading reinforced. Talking about that reinforced that for me. And it worked. I said, "Hey, we got to leave the park in five minutes." And then she was like, "Can you set a timer?" I'm like "Sure, sure." Right. |
| Check-ins | - | 3 | (NTDC) And doing the check-in every time, and each time we met, to kind of say how we feel. And I think I became more honest with it, as you know. At first, I'm like, "Oh, everything's great." And then towards the end, it was like, "I'm actually feeling pretty overwhelmed. This is going on, and this is going on." |
| Scaling | - | 1 | (NTDC) And then allowing my children to do that as well, and asking him, "How are you feeling today? On this little scale, how do you feel?" And asking him to identify some of those emotions and things, and not just brushing over it. I think that's really important. We have powerful dialogue. |
| Emotional ColorWheel | - | 3 | (NTDC) And having that check in time has been a really good reminder, because I actually printed that color wheel out and put it on my fridge. And I did that with the kids, and so I started talking with them about, "Hi, how are you feeling today?" And kind of checking in with myself each morning. "Ugh, I woke up, I don't really feel real great, I got congestion," or whatever the thing is, "I didn't sleep real well," or whatever. "Okay. I need to be a little more graceful for my kids or a little bit more understanding on my own self. If I don't get everything done that I have planned to do today, it's going to be all right." |
| Theme 6: Application of Training Resources Post Placement | | | |
| Printables/Binder/Handouts | 3 | 3 | (FPC) It's like, okay, click on this and view printables. Not everybody is a reader, but when you're in the situation that you're in, you'll do what you need to do to find out, okay, this happened with Johnny and Susie. So now how do I handle this? So, then me personally, I knew to reference back to those printables or those notes that they would tack on at the end of the recordings or whatever you want to call them, the lessons. (NTDC) Our family was able to have a binder initially of everything printed out. For me, that was very helpful. I could write on it; I can make notes on the papers. And it was just basically everything that was in the slides and everything on the paper. So, I could go back and look back and forth, and it helped me for the pre-work too, to kind of think, "Okay, what are we going to be doing ahead of time? What have we done?" And just kind of refresher real quick, kind of just push in through those . . . so that helped me personally. But like I said, I have to have multiple of . . . I need everything to get it drummed into my head. |

Table 3. Cont.

| Content Code | FPC ¹ | NTDC ² | Example Quotes |
|---|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Theme 7: Use of Online Learning Platforms as an Education Tool for Foster Parent Preparation | | | |
| Flexibility (like) | - | 1 | (NTDC) I think the Zoom platform was really nice, because you could get to it. You were in your own home, so you didn't have a childcare issue, if you needed it. |
| Gotten More in person | - | 4 | (NTDC) I'm going to give the unpopular opinion. I did also very much like the Zoom for its convenience. I think I personally would've gotten more out of it in person |
| Self-Paced | 2 | - | (FPC) . . . which enabled us to be able to go, "oh, hey, we can put the kids to bed early tonight. We can get on and do the virtual training." It was at our time discretion. And we could do it in bite size chunks where we did a class on one night and then the other night, we did another class. So, it was way more user friendly for us than trying to make sure we were at a certain building or doing some kind of training. |

¹ FPC = Control. ² NTDC = Intervention.

3.1. Theme 1: Trauma

Trauma was a multi-pronged topic mentioned throughout the entire focus group in various ways. Among the different types of traumas that were mentioned were historical trauma, personal trauma and triggers, trauma and children's communication, trauma and birth parents, and vicarious trauma of supporting the children and youths in their care. Understanding tribal history was linked by some participants to understanding the tribal community's experience of historical trauma. Its broad inclusion in training was mentioned frequently as a positive in the curriculum. Some of the participants found connections to trauma in their own childhoods through the training. Participants commented that as they learned about trauma and processed their own, they not only thought through ways to parent differently, but also had more patience for the children in their care. Learning that noisy and challenging behaviors in children are frequently a way of communicating about their trauma helped caregivers be more patient with them. Some participants also found that exploring their own trauma as a part of going through the NTDC training helped them to find grace in working with the birth parents.

Sympathy for birth parents, however, did not stop participants from being triggered by anger at birth parents. One participant described being very defensive when the case worker called and told her to get to a parental visit that was going badly. Part of this may be due to the trauma that the participants hear from the children themselves. Many commented on how foster care itself is traumatic due to the disclosure of adverse experiences by the children in their care. One participant commented on how it is important to stay centered in the midst of it all. This is especially true when children begin to trust their foster parents and self-disclose.

3.2. Theme 2: Sharing Stories as Part of the Training Experience

While vicarious trauma did not come up specifically in relationship to the training, it did come up in relationship to the class format. While most of the participants appreciated the didactic Zoom format (more below), what participants found the most helpful about having class meetings was the ability to be present with each other and share their experiences as foster parents. This need for community and connection with others was especially important as parents worked through their own experiences of vicarious trauma with the youths under their care. The need for community is particularly important because of case confidentiality. While recognizing they still cannot share details with other foster parents, at minimum there is a sense of shared experience. Shared stories and support

communication as formed in discussions during class can also keep foster parents from giving up. It was for this reason that sharing stories was built into the training curriculum at each step. As the trainers themselves were experienced foster parents, the addition of their own stories involved the participants in a healing communal dialogue.

3.3. Theme 3: Understanding the Case Process

Many of the parents commented that before the training they did not understand how the foster care system worked—of if they had done state care, how the tribal system was different. The family reunification-focused part of the programming was a major motivation for many of the participants. However, some participants commented that how co-parenting was presented had set expectations that were too high—not so much in actual ability for birth parents to engage, but in their desire to engage at all. Participants felt let down by not being able to work with birth parents when they wanted to and feeling unprepared both for a lack of co-parenting and for combative bioparents in part by the one-sided nature of the curriculum. While participants were generally motivated by the centering of the birth family in the training, overall, they wished for a bit more reality in relationship to all outcome possibilities.

3.4. Theme 4: The Neuroscience of Child Development

Participants generally commented on how much they appreciated the incorporation of videos on trauma and brain development in the training curriculum—especially when reflecting on their own childhoods. While some of the participants wished there had been more age-specific material, there was some content they found particularly helpful even if they were not parenting a child at that stage of development yet. This was particularly true for social media. The developmental stages curriculum did shape how some participants felt about having children at certain life stages. But in addition, the curriculum also helped participants think differently about age, particularly the difference between chronological age (number of years since birth) versus developmental age (actual age at which the youth is functioning). Understanding the difference between developmental and chronological age, especially as it relates to trauma, helped participants know better how to cope with the children's behaviors.

3.5. Theme 5: Application of Training Activities Post Placement

The three activities from the NTDC in anticipating behavioral challenges or connecting with children in their care were frontloading, *scaling*, and the *color wheel*. Frontloading, used to warn children who struggle with transitions that a change is coming, was found by some parents to be highly effective. But in general, the techniques that garnered the most evidence of use were techniques to check in on the mental and emotional status of members of the household—both children and adults. The color wheel provides another way to accomplish this kind of check-in and helps strengthen children's emotional vocabulary. Completing these check-ins also served the purpose of helping the caregivers themselves know when they had reached their own limits and needed to take breaks or realize they were not allowing the children to have down time themselves. One parent commented on how the check-in process helped them to slow down and think about how their activities and connection were “creating childhood” for the children in their care.

3.6. Theme 6: Application of Training Resources That Were Distributed During Training Post Placement

Participants commented that they appreciated how material could be learned in various ways—handouts, videos, in-class discussions. While few, if any, of the participants noted using the materials outside of class, they appreciated having the binder which could

be used at any time. One challenge, however, was that the website did not allow easy or straightforward access to the Right Time videos—in fact, participants were not sure what those videos were until prompted by a video discussion care of a Two-Spirit youth in care. Participants commented that access through an app or a podcast would be a better way to access those videos. Overwhelmingly, the idea of an app with access to videos, in addition to a daily or weekly push of encouragement and shorts tidbits of knowledge or emotional support, were suggested as elements for future consideration to improve curriculum use.

3.7. Theme 7: Use of Online Learning Platforms as an Education Tool for Foster Parent Preparation

Many of the participants commented that they appreciated the flexibility that the zoom learning environment provided. While acknowledging the flexibility of Zoom, one member did comment that they would have preferred to meet in person. While most were happy with the Zoom format, they did comment that it might have been easier to be supportive of one another if they had more opportunities to meet in person.

4. Discussion

NTDC is the first free and open access foster parent training curriculum that has been specifically adapted for use in tribal nations. Prior to the development of NTDC, tribes had the onus of doing their own specific adaptations of mainstream curriculums. With asynchronous curriculums, tribal adaptations can become particularly problematic as many tribes do not have the ability or technology to redesign videos and online content for their specific use. Overall, feedback about the NTDC was positive, with participants appreciating a distinctive training approach centered in tribal communities and their values. In general, participants exposed to NTDC spoke much more openly about the motivation to engage in fostering with reunification as the final goal, which was rarely mentioned by participants in the training-as-usual group (FPC). Also, participants trained in NTDC spoke much more freely about trauma and understanding its role and presence in working with the children in their care (including developmental age and readiness), skills learned in how to successfully partner with birth parents in the parenting journey, and reported having a greater awareness and understanding of their own responses to the children and to their own prior experiences of both parenting and being parented and how those experience might have influenced how they cared for the children they were fostering. The utilization of AI/AN tribal trainers as experts to deliver training in tribal child welfare settings and their ability to tell SRMPIC specific stories as part of the training was also highlighted as a strength. Participants identified these adaptations as better able to account for being prepared to address the culturally specific needs of AIAN children being placed in their homes as well as being able to be more sensitive to recognizing the impacts of intergenerational trauma in parenting practices. While both sets of participants learned much that was useful in their journey in becoming licensed foster parents, the NTDC group demonstrated a deeper ability to incorporate much of the training content into their everyday lives as foster parents of AIAN children and frequently began answering questions that were a part of the interview guide protocol even before being asked about these topics. Whether this qualitative difference was due to either the Zoom-mediated classroom pedagogical space that allowed for personal engagement or the actual content itself is unclear. However, the pedagogical space, however mediated (live or via Zoom), should be considered an important part of the learning process and the ongoing health and vitality of foster parents. These skills were not observed among families trained in the asynchronous curriculum offered by FPC.

4.1. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Additional research is needed to assess the long-term impact of the NTDC on placement stability, permanency, and wellbeing of children and youth who have been placed in non-relative foster and/or kinship homes who participated in the NTDC as compared to those who were trained in Foster Parent College. Although the content committee was regionally diverse and represented tribes from across the United States, the content committee still only represents 16 out of the more than 500 tribal nations that exist throughout the United States. It is important to note that tribal customs and practices differ significantly from tribe to tribe and that additional curricular adaptations would be needed to ensure NTDC remains relevant for all tribes who might be interested in implementing the training in their respective communities. Current results may be strengthened if there were additional opportunities to implement NTDC in other tribal communities across the United States. SRPMIC did not use the tribally adapted NTDC to train kinship foster parents because of the differences in policy guidance for training and licensing kinship families. Additional research is needed to determine if the NTDC has the same impact on preparedness of kinship families as it does for non-relative foster parents. Moreover, because NTDC is offered live and FPC is offered asynchronously, additional research is needed to understand the impact of relationship building (including with trainers and peer-based learning) in foster parent preparedness and confidence to parent. Finally, the focus group approach employed in the current study allowed for a rich qualitative analysis of the experiences in foster parent preparedness among a sample in the SW region of the United States; however, the small sample size of the two focus groups (N = 11) is another limitation which restricts the ability to extend these findings to a broader population of AIAN foster parents.

4.2. Policy Implications

NTDC is a training that states and tribes that train and license foster parents who care for AIAN children can draw down Title IV-E dollars for federal reimbursement. These dollars are entitlement dollars guaranteed through the Social Security Act. Tribes that do not have direct Title IV-E access to federal training dollars can include these resources as part of their tribal–state agreements. Tribes with active tribal–state agreements can receive Title IV-E monies as passthrough dollars from the states in which they are domiciled. Non-IV-E direct Tribes whose lands cross multiple states would need to enter into tribal–state agreements with each state they are domiciled in to have full access to federal resources to serve their citizens.

5. Conclusions

The current study provides a first look at the impact of a culturally adapted, national foster parent pre-service licensing training curriculum developed and tested for use by a tribal nation located in the southwest corner of the United States. Foster parents hold a pivotal role regarding the outcomes of children placed in their care. Therefore, they must be prepared with the most up-to-date, comprehensive and culturally relevant training and educational programs to care for children who have complex needs and often are also experiencing intergenerational histories of trauma. The outcomes for children and youth who identify as American Indian not only affect them as individuals but also impact the preservation and success of their tribal communities at large. Preparing foster parents who are American Indian to care for children who identify as American Indian allows children to maintain connections to their tribal communities. In this way, they can have an opportunity to learn about their culture and can be better prepared to take leadership roles to support the continuity of their tribal nation into the future.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was approved as “human subjects research, not engaged” by the University of Washington human subjects research office (TUDY00006416), deferring to the tribe to determine approval. The study was reviewed and approved by tribal council.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was attained orally rather than written, at the request of the tribe. Each participant received a copy of the informed consent script that was read aloud immediately before the focus group commenced. The consent script contained contact information for the focus group facilitators, and they were encouraged to follow up with additional questions or concerns related to the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data from this study is not available for public use. This data is protected under a tribal data sovereignty agreement.

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