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Navajo Division for Children & Family Services receives approval from the Bureau of Indian Affairs for historic 477 Plan

Window Rock, Arizona - On October 10th, 2024, the Navajo Nation Division for Children & Family Services (DCFS), formally the Division of Social Services, received official notification from the Bureau of Indian Affairs' approval of their "DCFS 477 Plan."

Public Law 102-477 is voluntary for Tribes and is intended to demonstrate how Indian Tribal governments can integrate employment, training, and related services to improve the effectiveness of those services, to reduce joblessness in Indian communities, and to serve Tribally determined goals consistent with the policies of self-determination.

"This DCFS team effort in developing the 477 Plan began in the beginning of the year which involved many collaborative meetings with BIA Workforce Development Specialist, Rae Belle Smeaton Whitcomb of the Curyung Tribe," states Mary Descheeny-Reyna, senior staff with the DCFS Executive Office. "DCFS was fully transparent in communicating helpful information and developments through hosting public information sessions."

The process included multiple information meetings with the Navajo Nation Office of the President & Vice President and Chief of Staff, the 25th Navajo Nation Council, the Navajo Nation Division Directors, the Navajo Health, Education & Human Services Committee, the Navajo Department of Justice, and the Division staff.

On June 13, 2024, the DCFS received an unprecedented approval of the 477 Plan passing three oversights in one day, beginning with the Health, Education and Human Services Committee and followed by the Naa'bik'iyati' Committee, and finally ending with a Special Navajo Nation Council Session. Final approval received a unanimous vote to submit the 53-page 477 Plan to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for its 90-day review period.

"This is one of the changes the Navajo people voted for in January 2022," states Thomas Cody, Executive Director of the Division for Children & Family Services. "We are making changes to make it our own and easier to spend the funds. The Navajo Nation can now truly develop programs that reflect the needs of the people."

The division staff have work diligently to meet the requirements for approval from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and their hard work, time and dedication in becoming the first 477 Program within the Navajo Nation government is commendable. More information on the next steps will be provided soon and on our website at www.nndss.org.

What does the 477 Plan approval mean for the Division of Children & Family Services?

- One Plan, One Budget, One Report. Reduces administrative time and costs by consolidating multiple funding, streamline reporting requests to result in more time and effort in job placement and case management.
- DCFS will collaborate and coordinate services more effectively. No duplication of services. No siloing of programs.
- DCFS will have the ability to cross train staff. This will provide the opportunity to expand program services to address unmet client needs.
- Improved and unifying client services: Increased number of clients served, and improved outcomes for clients; Creates a one-stop shop for our members by limiting barriers that they go through.
- Better utilization of program staff: Counseling staff can now serve clients based on client needs, not based on where the money for their salaries originates. Line staff can also focus on providing services to all clients who need them.
- A single intake system: With only one file for each client, eliminating the need for multiple files for the same person.
- Tribal plans can follow tribal, rather than federal priorities: Public Law 102-477 aims to empower each participating tribe to set their own goals for services.
- No more returning funds: DCFS keeps funds until they are fully expended.
- Earned Interest on lump sum drawdowns. Interest earned is reinvested to provide additional services under the plan. (i.e., rent, transportation)

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