

NEWSLETTER

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SouthDakotaDSS



Book Review

A PLACE CALLED HOME BY DAVID AMBROZ



David Ambroz's memoir, *A Place Called Home*, offers a heartfelt and eye-opening look into a childhood shaped by instability, resilience, and the foster care system. His story doesn't shy away from the difficult realities many youth in care experience—but it also highlights the life-changing impact that a safe home, consistent support, and compassionate adults can have.

For foster parents, child welfare staff, and community partners, this book is a powerful reminder that even small moments such as showing patience, listening without judgment, and offering a stable routine can become meaningful turning points in a young person's life. Ambroz's journey underscores why the work you do matters and how deeply it can ripple outward.

A Place Called Home is not just a memoir—it's an invitation to look closely at the impact of caring adults, and a reminder that each safe, supportive home truly has the power to change a life.

Reflection Questions

- What parts of David's story remind you of the challenges, and strengths, you see in the youth you support?
- Were there moments in the book that made you think differently about the ways children cope with trauma or change?
- How does Ambroz's experience reinforce the importance of connection, consistency, and community in the foster care system?

HOW MIGHT FOSTERING A CHILD IMPACT MY OWN CHILDREN IN THE HOME?

There are definitely both positives and negatives to fostering when you have your own kids in the home. It isn't easy. We've had to shift our kids around, share rooms, change our daily routines, and make sacrifices as a family. Fostering impacts everyone in the home, and I think it's important to be honest about that. But for our family, it has absolutely been worth it.

I've watched it impact my kids in some of the most amazing ways. They've learned to love people from all different walks of life and understand that not everyone comes from the same circumstances they do. They've learned compassion, grace, and how to love people right where they are. It can be hard and messy, but I wouldn't trade what it has taught our family and the privilege we've had of loving so many kids along the way.

Alesha Limbo, DSS Foster Parent

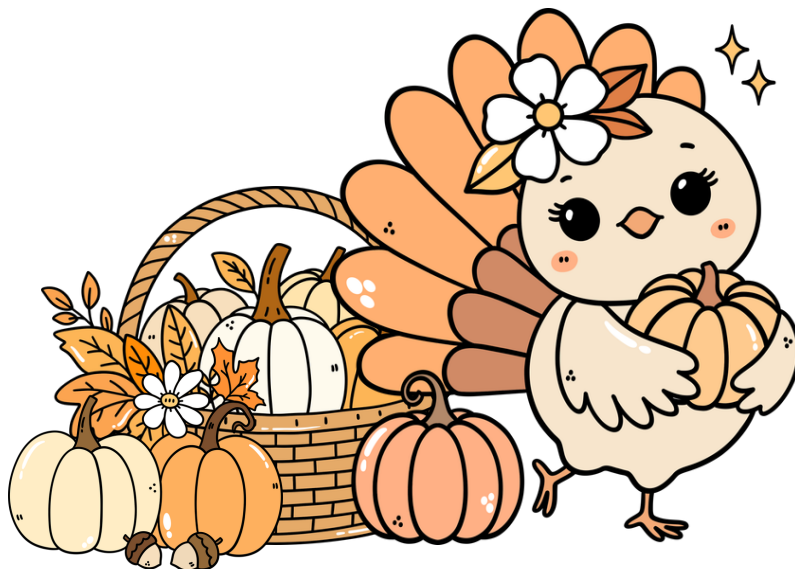


GROWING A STRONGER SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR FAMILIES & CHILDREN

South Dakota is taking an important step to strengthen the professionals who support children and families throughout their permanency journey. Through its partnership with the National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services, the Department of Social Services is expanding access to permanency- and adoption-competent training for child welfare staff, mental health providers, supervisors, and school-based professionals. This effort reflects a core belief: children and families thrive when the people supporting them understand trauma, loss, identity, attachment, and the many experiences that shape a child's long-term well-being.

South Dakota was recently selected as one of the National Center's technical assistance (TA) sites, allowing the state to receive added support as more providers participate in the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI). As therapists complete this training, families will be able to identify adoption-competent providers through the [NTI Directory of Trained Professionals](#).

This work represents an important step toward building a stronger, statewide network of trained professionals who can offer informed, compassionate support to foster, adoptive, guardianship, and kinship families. As training continues to grow, families can expect more providers equipped to understand their unique journeys and needs.



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF STRONGER FAMILIES TOGETHER

A year of listening, learning, and planning to strengthen SFT for the years ahead

The South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS), Division of Child Protection Services (CPS), has engaged Sage Project Consultants, LLC to provide planning and implementation support for Stronger Families Together (SFT) over the next year.

This work will take a close look at how SFT operates today and help chart a clear, data-informed path for its future, with input from the people who know SFT best: foster families, placement agencies, child welfare staff, and tribal partners.



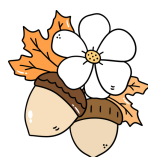
What Sage Will Be Doing

Beginning in September 2026, Sage's team will work alongside DSS/CPS and the SFT advisory body to:

- Review the SFT advisory structure and gather feedback from current participants on what is working well and where there may be opportunities for improvement.
- Develop recommendations to strengthen communication, advisory engagement, and the group's charter and structure moving forward.
- Assess foster care recruitment and retention resources, including direct feedback from foster families, to identify gaps and opportunities.
- Develop a three-year strategic plan for SFT based on the findings and shaped in partnership with a strategic planning task force.
- Create an implementation plan with clear timelines, responsibilities, and milestones to help move the strategic plan into action

Timeline at a Glance

The data-gathering and planning phase will take place from September 2026 through May 2027, with each phase building on the last.



The work will begin with a review of the advisory structure and recommendations for strengthening it, followed by an assessment of recruitment and retention resources by the end of 2026. A draft three-year strategic plan will be developed in early 2027, followed by a finalized implementation plan. The remaining months will focus on supporting DSS and stakeholders as the plan gets underway.



We Want to Hear From You

This work is grounded in community feedback as well as data.

Foster families, agency staff, and tribal program partners may be invited to participate throughout the process through surveys, one-on-one interviews, or small-group conversations.

Your perspective on recruitment, retention, support, and the overall foster care experience is important to shaping recommendations that reflect what families and providers need.

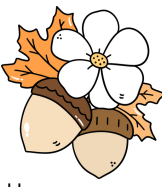
Watch future SFT newsletters and communications from DSS for opportunities to share your voice. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out to your DSS contact with questions.

Looking Ahead

Sage Project Consultants is a South Dakota-based consulting firm with a long-standing working relationship with DSS, including previous work supporting statewide behavioral health and crisis response initiatives.

We are glad to bring that experience to Stronger Families Together and look forward to working alongside foster families, child welfare professionals, tribal partners, placement agencies, and other SFT stakeholders as we shape the next chapter of SFT together.

CULTURE. CONNECTION & BELONGING: HELPING NATIVE CHILDREN STAY CONNECTED TO WHO THEY ARE



South Dakota (SD) is home to nine American Indian reservations that make up the Great Sioux Nation, or Oceti Sakowin. Oceti Sakowin is the traditional name for the people collectively referred to as the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota. Each Tribe is a sovereign nation with its own government, traditions, and history, while remaining connected through shared history and heritage.

In SD, American Indian children make up a significant percentage of children in foster care or available for adoption. For these children, staying connected to their family, Tribe, and community can be an important part of preserving their identity, culture, and sense of belonging.

Culture is more than traditions—it is part of a child's story and helps shape their understanding of who they are and where they come from. Maintaining connections with family, Tribe, and community can provide children with a strong foundation, a sense of pride in their heritage, and meaningful relationships that can last throughout their lives.

How Foster Families Can Support Cultural Connections



Foster and adoptive families who welcome Native children into their homes can play an important role in supporting these connections. Families can participate in cultural traditions, attend powwows and community events, learn about the child's Tribe and heritage, and support relationships with family and Tribal community members.

These experiences send an important message to children: Your culture matters. Your family matters. You matter.

Supporting a child's cultural connections can help build trust, strengthen relationships, and promote a child's confidence and sense of

identity. It also reflects the principles of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which recognizes the importance of maintaining children's connections to their family, Tribe, and culture.

Experience Culture Together

One of the most meaningful ways families can support a child's cultural connection is by experiencing culture together.

Powwows offer families an opportunity to experience Indigenous singing, dancing, art, food, and community firsthand. The 38th Annual Black Hills Powwow will take place October 9–11, 2026, at The Monument in Rapid City. The three-day event will feature singers and dancers from across the nation, along with hand games, golf and archery tournaments, an Indigenous fashion and art show, a wellness symposium, cross-country, a Lakota Language Bowl, an annual powwow, and Knowledge Bowl.

Learn more about the [Lakota Nation Invitational](#).

Find Cultural Events Throughout South Dakota

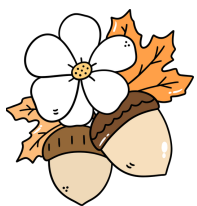
Families can find powwow dates and other Indigenous cultural events through the [South Dakota Pow Wow Calendar](#), local community calendars, Tribal government websites and social media pages, or by contacting a local Urban Indian Health center.

Helping Children Know They Belong

For children in foster care, connection matters. When foster and adoptive families make an effort to learn about and participate in a child's culture and community, they help reinforce that a child's heritage is something to be valued, respected, and celebrated.

Supporting culture doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it begins with something as simple as showing up, being curious, and being willing to learn.





FIVE SIBLINGS. ONE HOPE: A FAMILY TO GROW TOGETHER

Neela, Dre-Sean, Mario, Joy, and Nina are five siblings with unique personalities, interests, and plenty of love to share. They are looking for a family who can help them continue to grow, build lasting memories, and strengthen their relationships with one another.



Neela, 12, is creative and independent and enjoys baking, cooking, crafts, and making jewelry. Dre-Sean, 10, is outgoing, energetic, curious, and loves sports and making people laugh. Mario, 8, is inquisitive and caring and enjoys singing, video games, and Power Rangers. Joy, 5, is sweet and gentle, loves being read to and riding her bike, and has a terrific laugh. Nina, 5, is outgoing, funny, smart, and articulate and loves reading, riding her bike, and going on outings.

While each child has their own interests and personality, their sibling relationships are an important part of their lives. They would benefit from a family who can celebrate each child for who they are while helping them maintain and grow those connections.

Could Your Family Be Their Next Chapter?



Learn more about Neela, Dre-Sean, Joy, Nina, and Mario—including their individual personalities, interests, and what they are looking for in a family—through the I Belong Project.

[View Their Full Profiles on South Dakota Kids Belong.](#)



TRAINING CORNER

The Department of Social Services, along with Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment (CPCM) is excited to provide ongoing training opportunities for licensed foster parents and kinship providers. Participants can choose to watch pre-recorded trainings or join live monthly webinar sessions via Zoom. All trainings are available through the Foster Care learning management platform and qualify toward the six hours of training required for annual licensure renewal.

Upcoming Sessions:

October 7th, 12:30 – 1:30 pm CT

Responding to Children in Crisis: This theme highlights some of the difficulties children who have experienced trauma, separation or loss can have in regulating themselves. The theme reviews the different phases of crisis and provide parents who are fostering or adopting with strategies to proactively prevent a crisis from occurring. This theme reviews ways to keep the children safe when they are having a crisis and strategies that can help to de-escalate the situation.

Trainer: Marlys Big Eagle, CPCM

November 4th, 12:30 – 1:30 pm CT

How Children Qualify for Special Education Services: Participants will understand the difference between a medical diagnosis and eligibility for special education under IDEA. Participants will understand the process schools follow to determine eligibility for special education.

Trainer: Dr. Carla Miller and Darla Schieffer, SD Parent Connection

December 2nd, 12:30 – 1:30 pm CT

ICWA and Cultural Planning for Foster Care & Adoption: Explain on the importance of either keeping or developing tribal identity and the realities of ICWA that sets it apart from Non-ICWA cases. Foster parents coming into the system need to understand how ICWA fits into the process so there is a clear understanding of potential outcomes in following this federal law. The importance of values and how that relates to statistics among the Native American population.

Trainer: Joseph Ashley, SD Department of Social Services – Division of Child Projection Services

Registration information for all upcoming sessions:
<https://learn.sdcpcm.com/calendar/>.

For questions or technical assistance, contact
FosterCare@usd.edu.



MY FAMILY. MY HERITAGE.

= MY STORY. =



PLACES THAT ARE PART OF ME

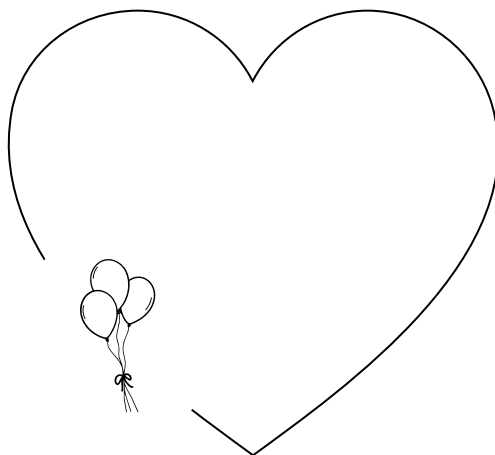
Where are you or your family from? Write the names of places that are important to you.

My Family

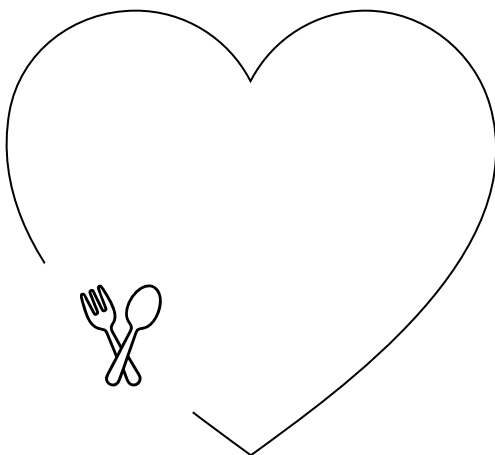
Draw a picture of your family here. These are the people who love and support you.

OUR TRADITIONS & SPECIAL THINGS

Every family has traditions, celebrations, foods, stories, and special things that make them unique. Draw or write about some of yours!



Celebrations



Favorite Foods



Stories We Share
