

Project Hope

Donovan Antelope

The children of the Northern Arapaho tribe have another resource that has to look after their well-being while they are under the protection of the Northern Arapaho Child Protection Services.

Project Hope is a program that was initiated by the Northern Arapaho Business Council in the wake of the Marcella Hope Yellowbear tragedy. Laura Lee C'hair is the Child Advocate (CA) for the Northern Arapaho tribe and currently the sole worker in the Project Hope program. The CA works with the Northern Arapaho CPS, non-profit groups, social workers, and other tribal programs that provide services for child welfare and well-being.

The CA is currently working with these different programs and developing memorandums of understanding (MOU's) to create a network of services for victims of child abuse. The MOU's also enable the programs to work with each other and not overstep their boundaries with one another. The programs would work with one another to develop or improve current services for children on the reservation.

The goal of the CA is to make sure the well-being of the reservation children is being met. They also serve as a mediator between parties and remain completely neutral. The CA doesn't take sides but tries to help the parties involved come to an agreement. The CA also serves as facilitator between the parties to build trust and ensure that the strictest levels of confidentiality are maintained. She will also work with parents and family members to encourage a sense of responsibility and self-empowerment.

The CA will look out for the well-being of children in foster care by tracking the case progress and maintaining accurate and comprehensive documentation. In suspected child abuse cases, the CA will investigate the complaints of alleged child abuse to determine if CPS intervention is warranted. When a minor child is placed into foster care in either public or private institutions or residences, the CA will review those facilities and procedures to ensure that the child's welfare will be met.

Should the system fail, the CA will call for change and promote fair responsible treatment and practices. They will also hold the systems accountable should they fail the children and the CA will hold herself responsible as well. The CA will also recommend changes in tribal policies including systems providing juvenile services, victim services, foster care or treatment to children.

To help Project Hope become more effective, the CA will be reaching out to the community and tribal programs that provide family-based services or work with child and family welfare. The CA will also be recruiting elders and community members to provide mentoring services. She will also be raising public awareness of short-term and long-term effects of child physical and sexual abuse.

Although child safety is the CA's primary goal, Laura will also try to provide services to elders and other adult tribal members, even if it's only a shoulder to cry on. She will encourage emotional healing by allowing anyone to open up to her about their experiences with foster care and boarding school placement. Many people know that being placed in foster homes or being put into boarding school is a traumatic experience. Sometimes, talking about those experiences can help a person lift that emotional weight off their shoulders and help them heal and move on.

The safety and well-being of the Northern Arapaho children has always been a priority, and having Project Hope in place to provide the additional protection of our children is appreciated and welcome. Our children need to be looked after and protected. Without them there is no future for the tribe.