



# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: Citizen Potawatomi Nation

Determined to “design what works for *us*,”<sup>1</sup> in 1996 CPN took full ownership of the federally funded workforce education, training, and related programs serving its citizens and other local Native people. By creating a 477 plan, it merged these once-siloed programs into a single, *tribal* approach that holistically assesses the needs of each 477 participant and their family and empowers them to achieve self-sufficiency through a seamless, integrated system of “hand-up”(versus “handout”) supports.<sup>2</sup> Utilizing a single intake system that creates an ease of access to culturally relevant services, CPN’s 477 program is reducing “dependency on public assistance programs and reducing the effects of poverty on the Tribal Service Area population” by familiarizing Native workers and future workers with rewarding careers in various fields and preparing them to successfully pursue those careers.<sup>3</sup> Whereas prior to 477 CPN had to turn some people away because of the eligibility and funding restrictions of the individual federal programs it administered, today its self-determined approach flexibly leverages dollars to provide customized services to each 477 participant based on their particular challenges and career aspirations. Other benefits include reduced administrative costs (which frees up more dollars for direct services), the increased effectiveness of those services, reduced joblessness among 477 participants, and an enhanced ability to create jobs – in part through a partnership with CPN’s CDFI to help participants become small business owners.<sup>4</sup> Through cooperative agreements with four neighboring Tribal Nations, CPN has expanded its 477-based services to eligible Native people across six Oklahoma counties.<sup>5</sup> “Pushing the integration envelope,”<sup>6</sup> in recent years CPN added to its 477 program federal funds from LIHEAP, CSBG, Safe and Stable Families, and Reentry and Diversionary, (which helps former felons reintegrate into the workforce and has produced a recidivism rate under two percent to date).<sup>7</sup> As CPN explains, moving its people towards self-sufficiency starts with “understanding your own tribe’s distinct needs [and] the needs of your people, which is something that a federal, uniform approach to workforce development can’t possibly account for.”<sup>8</sup>

**CONNECT:** Margaret Zientek, Workforce and Social Services Director, Citizen Potawatomi Nation,  
[Mzientek@potawatomi.org](mailto:Mzientek@potawatomi.org)

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[CPN News: Workforce and Social Services Sets Clients on Road to Success](#)

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[CPN News: CPN Workforce & Social Services Tribal Re-entry Program Teaches Self-Sufficiency](#)

[Margaret Zientek: Workforce Development: Citizen Potawatomi Nation](#) (video)

[Sovereignty in Action: Margaret Zientek](#) (video)

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Zientek, “Workforce Development: Citizen Potawatomi Nation,” Presentation, NCAI Annual Convention, Phoenix, Arizona, October 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUc1Bz-dbo8&list=PLBjQrzrj0lyshzCqxlBiNXY4L2PgtKZlY&index=6>, accessed October 2, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Carol Clay-Levi, Former Workforce and Social Services Director, Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN) (Citizen Potawatomi Nation, “Workforce and Social Services sets clients on road to success,” July 3, 2018 (<https://www.potawatomi.org/blog/2018/07/03/14795-2/>, accessed October 2, 2024)); CPN, *Citizen Potawatomi Nation P.L. 102-477 Plan (FY 2020-22)*, July 2019, p. 29; Margaret Zientek, Workforce and Social Services Director, CPN, Conversation with NCAI, June 21, 2024. According to current CPN Workforce and Social Services Director Margaret Zientek, “Our goal is to help people have the tools to be self-sufficient. If that means to help them move from homelessness to being able to maintain some sort of income and whether that’s a job or whether that’s recognizing that they had perhaps an undiagnosed medical condition and they should be on disability, we take each one individually and we try to give them the tools and then ability to be self-sufficient and contributing to the overall workforce” (Margaret Zientek, “Sovereignty in Action: Margaret Zientek,” Interview with NCAI, October 12, 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMW0Cxy4lBo&list=PLBjQrzrj0lyshzCqxlBiNXY4L2PgtKZlY&index=14>, accessed September 30, 2024)). These tools typically include a customized suite of “Supportive Services” for each participant that helps them overcome specific obstacles standing in their way of completing education or training, getting a job, and thriving in that job. These include work clothing, tools, and equipment; childcare; transportation assistance; emergency aid; energy assistance; job relocation assistance; and “limited health and legal services where necessary” (CPN, *Citizen Potawatomi Nation P.L. 102-477 Plan (FY 2020-22)*, July 2019, p. 35).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7. CPN’s “one-stop shop” with its single intake system means participants “are not required to seek services [from] different program locations. The counselors identify the need and provide the resource needed usually within the department or by direct referral” (Ibid., pp. 10 and 48).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9. According to CPN, “A radical reduction in federal paperwork has made way for better utilization of program staff and a more uniform treatment of clients. Due to the reduction in the paperwork, counselors have more time to devote to addressing their clients’ needs” (Ibid., p. 10). As Zientek explains the small business development partnership with the Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation, “With our 477 we’ve created a revolving loan program. It’s legal, it’s approved, it’s in our plan and we actually said, ‘You know, we’re not the experts for administering this. Our CDFI is an expert at a loan program.’ So we put that under their authority” (Margaret Zientek, “Sovereignty in Action: Margaret Zientek,” Interview with NCAI, October 12, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> CPN, *Workforce & Social Service Program Overview*, 2021 ([https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded\\_file/1331/NPS/2562452/WSS\\_Overview\\_2021.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/1331/NPS/2562452/WSS_Overview_2021.pdf), accessed October 2, 2024). The cooperative agreements are with the Sac & Fox Nation, the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma, the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma, and the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma (Margaret Zientek, Conversation with NCAI, June 21, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Zientek, Conversation with NCAI, June 21, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Citizen Potawatomi Nation, “CPN Workforce & Social Services Tribal Re-entry Program teaches self-sufficiency,” December 13, 2019 (<https://www.potawatomi.org/blog/2019/12/13/cpn-workforce-social-services-tribal-re-entry-program-teaches-self-sufficiency/>, accessed October 2, 2024); Zientek, *Correspondence with NCAI, January 20, 2025*. As CPN explains, LIHEAP “helps keep families safe and healthy by helping with home energy bills, energy crises, and with education to help households reduce or better manage their utility needs...Incorporating LIHEA services within the Nation’s 477 Plan reduces unnecessary burden on both the participant (only one application not multiple) and on the Nation” (CPN, *Citizen Potawatomi Nation P.L. 102-477 Plan (FY 2020-22)*, July 2019, pp. 35-36). Meanwhile, integrating the Mno Bmadzejak Reentry and Diversionary (CTAS Purpose Area 3) funds into the 477 Program has enabled CPN to deploy legal aid lawyers to assist 477 participants “with expungements, sentence reductions, consolidation of fines, custody issues, guardianship paperwork, among other common legal matters that impede self-sufficiency and block pathways or access to job training and skill development programs” (Ibid., p. 40). Safe and Stable Families is an HHS Title IV-B program.

<sup>8</sup> Zientek, “Sovereignty in Action (Interview with NCAI),” Phoenix, Arizona, October 12, 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMW0Cxy4lBo>, accessed October 9, 2024).