

INDIAN NEWS NOTES

Swimmer Discusses Solutions for Indian Child Welfare Problems:

In an interview with the newsletter *Linkages*, Interior Assistant Secretary Ross Swimmer commented on Indian child welfare issues. In answer to a question about the incompatibility of state systems and Indian people in child welfare matters, Swimmer said: "Many state welfare departments throughout the country display a general lack of understanding for Indian families. The problem is nationwide and indeed is much more serious in some geographical areas than it is in Oklahoma. It is particularly severe in states where there is not a major Indian population. The solution is, I believe, for tribes to develop working relations at the local level with state personnel. A primary tribal intent from these relations should be to develop means by which tribal people may utilize state child welfare funds

and staff to a greater extent. Tribes must remember that they do not have to do everything separately just because they are Indian. Separateness in terms of child welfare programs is a last resort. To meet their child welfare objectives, tribes need to get states on board and educate them concerning Indian families and their needs so that state personnel will feel a commitment to actively take part in the process of working for Indian child welfare. In the future, it will be a BIA priority to support education efforts aimed at the state level. Such efforts will, I believe, pay off in that it will help us to expand our resources. If we can successfully enlist the help of the states, we will not be confined to just our own resources. In addition, funds which in the past we have had to expend for direct intervention efforts in confrontations with state may be diverted to more productive efforts for the welfare of Indian children."