

You could be a Native foster parent

by George Charles
for the Tundra Times

The idea of Spirit Days — Saturday and Sunday at the University of Alaska Anchorage — brings to mind an opportunity for choice; for another beginning, knowing as our ancestors have that we are all healers and that we need only to ask that only good spirits guide us.

It is on a day like this that we all remember that we are hunters, warriors, gathers, caretakers, decision makers, storytellers, helpers, healers and preservers of the traditions.

It was not by choice that some of us have lost part of our heritage. But it is by choice that we reclaim our heritage. Let us extend that choice to all our children. Let us make sure that no more children lose their heritage, their culture, their roots.

Let's protect our greatest resource, our children, the next generation. Let's give all our children a chance to

gain confidence, self-esteem and pride in themselves and their heritage.

Currently, a great need exists for Native foster homes in Anchorage. The majority of Native children being placed in foster care, either for short or long-term care, are placed in non-Native homes or in group environments.

Even though a non-Native home can be a lifesaver for a Native child, the cultural shock can cause additional trauma to these children. And while these non-Native homes are good homes, our children are losing part of their culture, their roots, their identity and their heritage.

Native foster homes are virtually non-existent for a number of reasons. Many people are not aware of how great the need is. A reluctance to become involved with a government entity exists, along with concerns regarding cost and space.

Misconceptions about the re-

quirements to become a foster parent prevail as well. Many people believe a foster parent must be married. Single people, however, also can qualify.

Our future depends on our children. Let's make sure they get to keep their culture, heritage and roots. Let's help them to be healthy, functional and productive human beings.

Let us do more than just enjoy this day as we all celebrate Spirit Days. Let us do more than just think about how

great we are as Native people.

Let us truly commit ourselves to real action, to truly thinking about taking care of our own children.

Our elders before us have taught us to be responsible and that we take care of our own because we know our own people best. Our future depends on you. Be an Alaska Native or American Indian foster parent.

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