



Phyllis Bigpond, a member of the Yuchi Tribe of Oklahoma, was the founding Executive Director of the Denver Indian Family Resource Center (DIFRC), an agency dedicated to meeting the diverse and emerging needs of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and families in the Denver area. She was known nationally for her 40 years of community service and advocacy of AI/AN families. During her two year battle with lymphoma of the brain, she maintained her duties at DIFRC until July of 2009.

Phyllis Bigpond made such significant contributions to the community that former Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper established a "Phyllis Bigpond Day." He said, "Phyllis has devoted her life to improving the lives of American Indian families and children," noting that DIFRC's services and the overall success of the Indian Child Welfare Act programs in the Denver area were directly related to Bigpond's advocacy and hard work.

Bigpond also oversaw a DIFRC survey/study of the Denver metro area's nearly 30,000 AI/AN residents representing more than 60 tribal nations. Named Keeping the Circle Whole, the study focused on mental health needs in the Indian community.

Before moving to Denver in 2000, Bigpond was the former executive director at Phoenix Indian Center and also a former clinical assistant professor at Arizona State University. She had been a field officer for Save the Children and a coordinator and program development director of the Intertribal Council of Arizona. She was a consultant for Columbia University and for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity. Her Master of Social Work was from Washington University.

Her awards include the Outstanding Native American Leader from the Association of American Indian Social Work, Sewanee Hunt Leadership Award from the Denver Foundation, Distinguished Alumni Award from Washington University's George Warren Brown School of Social Work and the 2008 Martin Luther King Jr. Peace Award from Metropolitan State College of Denver.

She has also received awards from the Family Resource Center Association, the National Organization of Black Elected Legislators, Native American Recognition Days, and the Arizona State University School of Social Work.

Her lasting legacy at DIFRC, which she founded in early 2000, is a child welfare agency dedicated to meeting the diverse and emerging needs of Indian children and families in the Denver metropolitan area. They assist families to prevent involvement with the child welfare system and to support and advocate for families already involved. A variety of services are offered to build upon the strengths of AI/AN families, including parenting classes, mental health counseling, and youth programming. DIFRC works with families and other agencies to help promote responsible healing by restoring balance, nurturing pride and recognizing the extended family and community.

[Additional information can be found in this article.](#)