



RED LAKE NATION REPORT TO THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE ON TRIBAL CHILD WELFARE

FY 2024

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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REASONS FOR THE REPORT

In 2024, Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog, Red Lake Nations’s Family and Children’s Services Division continued to implement substantial changes to the organization, staff training, and building practice capacity. Red Lake Nation officially became an American Indian Child Welfare Initiative Tribe in 2021. As part of the agreement, Red Lake Nation retained sovereignty over tribal children and family data, including restricting limited data entry in Social Service Information System (SSIS), reporting, and oversight of how Red Lake Nation data is shared. Below are specific agreement language pertaining to data in the current contract:

12.03 The State agrees not to collect information on Red Lake families without notice and permission of the Red Lake Nation.

12.04 The State agrees not to present information publicly on Red Lake families without notice and permission of the Red Lake Nation.

This year, 2026, Red Lake Nation submits its fourth annual data report directly to the legislature for FY 2024. The report aims to fulfill reporting obligations, provide context to Red Lake Nation’s data, inform about the complexities of tribal child welfare practice, and document progress toward 100% family preservation and intergenerational family wellness.

Upon assuming full jurisdiction of the child welfare system, the Red Lake Nation embarked on a transformative journey through relationship development and a paradigm shift towards a relative approach, one that is grounded in Anishinaabeg values and teachings. In setting that intention Family and Children Services was renamed in Ojibwemowin, Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog “Uplifting Our Relatives.” This initiative fostered institutional capacity through infrastructure development, data collection, staff expansion, realignment, practice model development, and comprehensive training.

Recognizing the distinct nature of Red Lake Nation’s child welfare practice compared to county-based models, the report underscores the pivotal shift centered on family preservation rather than child removal. It emphasizes the interconnectedness between the child, their family, extended family, culture, community, and tribal nation.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY

The Red Lake Tribal Nation diligently monitors the effectiveness of its American Indian Child Welfare Initiative efforts among its tribal citizens. This involves analyzing data within the community’s unique context and adhering to indigenous values and practices. This annual review, which began year one of the initiative (2021) and continues through 2024, serves as a catalyst for program development and outcomes based on organizational transformations and culturally centered approaches. It facilitates the identification of strengths and areas for improvement in practice, enabling the targeted implementation of interventions that promote community well-being and health.

Minnesota Department of Children and Family Services (DCYF) compiles an annual report (encompassing a two-year retrospective) on comprehensive child welfare statistics to document trends within the state of Minnesota. For the current year, we delve into the FY 2024 data of Red Lake. Our objective is to submit a report for FY 2025 shortly after the year’s conclusion to circumvent the challenge of conducting a two-year

retrospective analysis. Notably, the data presented in this report exclusively originated from Red Lake’s tribal child welfare data system.

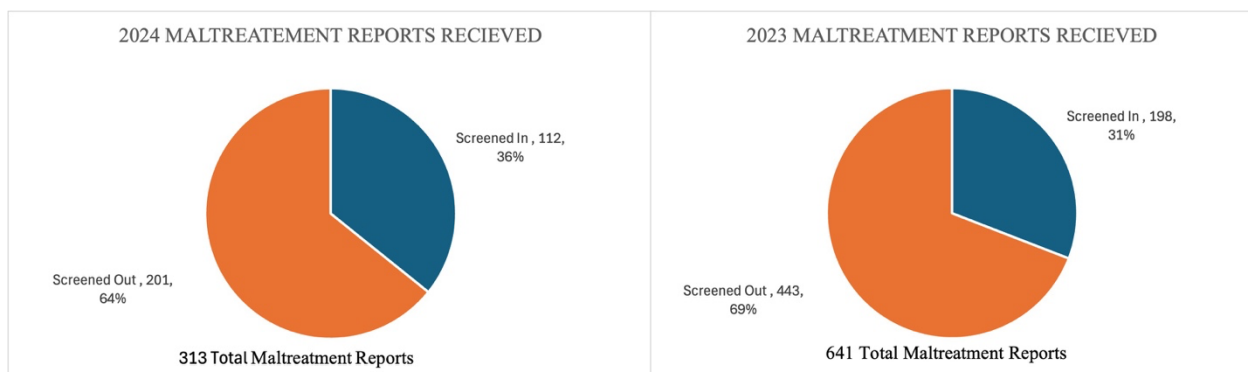
Red Lake Nation developed and implemented its internal tribal child welfare data system through Beraten Software, which was funded and supported by the Minnesota State Legislature through the American Indian Child Welfare Initiative. This process involved extensive planning, phased implementation, staff training, coaching, and quality improvement initiatives. This implementation of a new software system required significant time and investment, which will yield long-term benefits. Red Lake Nation acknowledges the state’s investment that facilitated its full assertion of data sovereignty in child welfare management.

DISCUSSION OF DATA-2024

For the first time, the data provided originates from Red Lake’s internal data system, Beraten. The data presented reflect the six data elements agreed upon in the Red Lake contract with DCYF. While these data provide a limited snapshot of Ombimindwaa outcomes for 2024, they offer valuable insights into the overall trajectory of practice. Ombimindwaa Intake and Response staff began implementing Beraten in 2024, enhancing the accuracy and efficiency of tracking the six data elements.

DATA ELEMENT 1: NUMBER OF CHILD MALTREATMENT REPORTS

As is typical for child welfare programs, Ombimindwaa receives a substantial volume of maltreatment reports annually. These reports originate from various sources, including law enforcement agencies, schools, community members, medical providers, and other system providers. Notably, the number of maltreatment reports decreased in 2024 (313) compared to 2023 (641), as depicted in Figure 1.



The high number of screened-out cases indicates that certain situations do not meet the definition of child maltreatment. Consequently, a greater number of cases can be addressed through voluntary, family preservation services rather than entering the child welfare system. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary screening team considers the impact of poverty on families, particularly in neglect cases. Ombimindwaa’s Screen-out Information and Referral intake decision option often emphasizes the urgency of basic needs for families in these screened-out reports. Consequently, families are offered voluntary services or referred to alternative services.

The intersection of poverty and neglect has been well documented in recent years. Families and children living in poverty are shown to have a greater risk of being reported to child welfare, especially for neglect. The following excerpt comes from the article “System Transformation to Support Child and Family Well-Being: The Central Role of Economic Supports” (Weiner, et. Al., 2021):

Families below the poverty line are three times more likely to be substantiated for child maltreatment (Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2014). Economic disparities and historical systemic disadvantages have fueled disproportionate child welfare system involvement among families of color; Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) families are disproportionately more likely to be poor due to longstanding systemic conditions (Semega et al., 2020). Evidence about the root causes of child maltreatment has been well documented, including poverty-related risk factors such as unemployment, single parenthood, housing instability, earlier childbearing, and lack of childcare. (Escaravage, 2014; Marcal, 2017)

The income status of families is a significant predictor of involvement with the child welfare system (McLaughlin, 2017; Pelton, 2015; Conrad-Hiebner & Byram, 2020; Brooks-Gunn et al., 2013), and county-level poverty rates are associated with foster care placement rates among children of all races. (Wulczyn et al., 2013)

Evidently, any solution to the high disproportionality and inequity prevalent in the child welfare system must address poverty and encompass the provision of tangible and economic support to families rather than child removal, which is the approach taken by Ombimindwaa in the screening of maltreatment reports.

Ombimindwaa practice adheres to the philosophy that children are best provided for within their own family structures, and that the provision of concrete resources can mitigate issues of poverty, thereby reducing parental stress and enabling children to remain safely at home. Ombimindwaa also screens out a significant percentage of its reports by referring families to voluntary services.

In 2022, Minnesota screened out 58.7% of cases, while Beltrami County screened out 49.7%. In 2024, Red Lake screened out 64.2%. Providing voluntary services aligns with the Ombimindwaa practice model, as evidenced by data element 5, the number of new substantiated child victims. Since Ombimindwaa screens only child welfare cases requiring a response and refers a higher percentage to family preservation and voluntary services, the number of new substantiated cases exceeds state and national data.

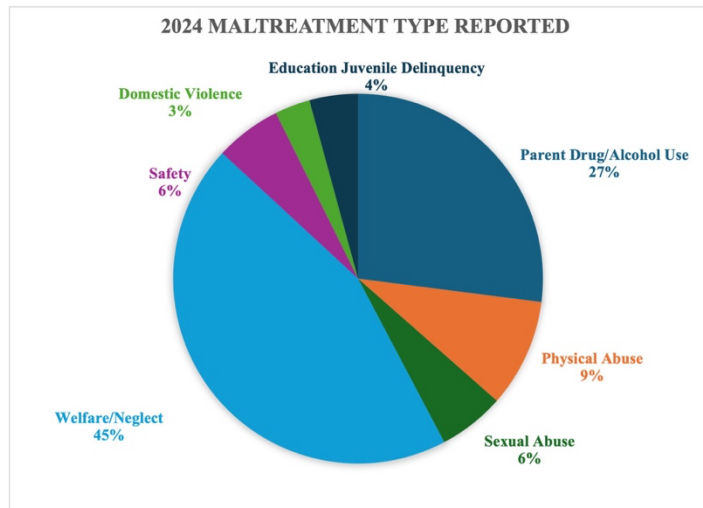
Red Lake is not covered under MN Public Law 280, so there is federal law enforcement, not state law enforcement, within reservation boundaries. Red Lake has its own tribal law enforcement office, and Ombimindwaa coordinates as necessary. Occasionally, the FBI is involved in bringing federal child welfare charges against Red Lake citizens, which are reflected in these numbers.

DATA ELEMENT 2: NUMBER OF CHILD VICTIMS BY MALTREATMENT TYPE

In 2024, the 112 reports screened in by the interdisciplinary screening team fall into a variety of 313 maltreatment types. To comprehend maltreatment type and the reason behind the overall numbers exceeding the total screened-in cases, some cases involve multiple children within the family, and some families have multiple reports for the same concern.

Most of the maltreatment reports, comprising 45% of the total, primarily fall under the category of neglect, as illustrated in Figure 2. This represents a substantial decline compared to the 75% of reports related to neglect cases in 2023.

Ombimindwaa staff may initiate follow-up with mandated reporters after their reports have been screened, particularly for welfare and neglect reports. This practice enables Ombimindwaa staff to propose ways in which the mandated reporter can provide support to the family. However, this change in practice may be resulting in a reduction in the number of welfare and neglect reports received. This will be a crucial data element to monitor in the future to determine whether Red Lake’s model effectively reduces neglect cases.



In 2024, parental drug abuse continued to be the second most prevalent maltreatment type, accounting for 27.8% of screened-in reports, an increase from 11.7% in 2023. While it is premature to draw definitive conclusions about the rise, it is worth noting that the manner in which a worker codes a report can lead to it being categorized under other maltreatment types or requiring voluntary services and/or referral to chemical health and treatment. Additionally, it is possible that more cases of parental drug abuse are being referred to family preservation.

Physical abuse also experienced a slight increase in 2024, rising from 6.2% in 2023 to 9.7%. National data indicates that 16% of individuals are victims of physical abuse, and in Minnesota, the figure is even higher at 23.2%. Again, this discrepancy may be attributed to the discretion of workers in coding or referring these cases to voluntary services.

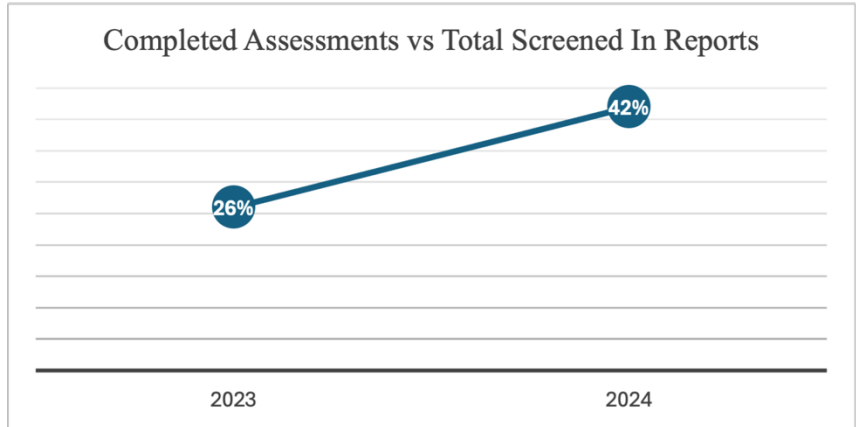
In 2023, sexual abuse accounted for 6.9% of screened-in reports, but in 2024, there were fewer screened-in cases of sexual abuse (5.9%). Nationally, 10% of children are victims of sexual abuse, and in Minnesota, 14.7% are victims of sexual abuse, both higher than Red Lake reports. (Children’s Bureau Maltreatment Report for 2021; Minnesota DHS Legislature Report on Maltreatment, 2021).

DATA ELEMENT 3: NUMBER OF COMPLETED/DOCUMENTED FAMILY INVESTIGATIONS AND FAMILY ASSESSMENTS

In 2024, Family Investigations (48%) in Beraten comprised cases with 72-hour holds that lead to out-of-home placements. The remaining cases (approximately 52%) resulted in referrals to family preservation for family assessment and some cases that were screened in but dropped at ECP hearings. Family Preservation aligns with the Ombimindwaa practice model and considers child(ren)’s risk, family needs, and strengths.

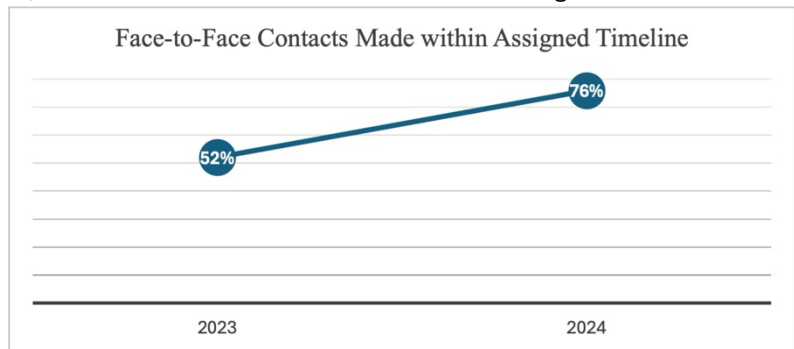
Ombimindwaa is actively developing its Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) capacity and enhancing data tracking through Beraten. In 2024, Ombimindwaa staff demonstrated remarkable improvement, completing

47 family assessments out of the 112 reports received. This significant increase from 26% of having Family Assessments in 2023 to 42% in 2024 (as shown in Figure 3) can be attributed to the implementation of Beraten and the provision of additional training, supervision, and data oversight. These factors collectively contributed to improved documentation rates.

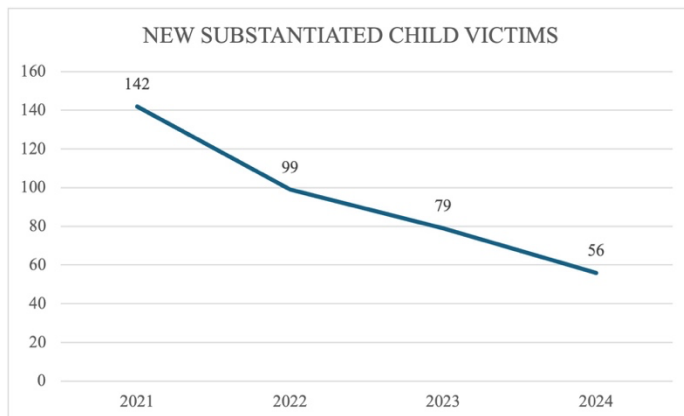


DATA ELEMENT 4: TIMELINESS TO INITIAL FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT WITH ALLEGED VICTIM

Documentation is being improved as a result of a focused effort to increase the number of documents entered into Beraten. Out of the 112 cases screened in, 85 had a face-to-face contact within the assigned timeframe. This is a significant improvement from 52% of cases meeting the assigned timeline in 2023 to 76% in 2024, as shown in Figure 4. Ombimindwaa continues to make progress towards its goal of ensuring that 95-100% of all cases have a face-to-face contact within the assigned timeframe.



DATA ELEMENT 5: NUMBER OF NEW SUBSTANTIATED CHILD VICTIMS



In 2024, there were 68 new child victims substantiated, which represents a 51% decrease in the number of substantiated child victims compared to 2021. This downward trend in the number of substantiated child victims over the years is associated with an increase in the screening decision to 'screen out' referral to Family Preservation. Ombimindwaa practice is working in reducing trauma to families, reducing out-of-home placements, and seeing positive outcomes by shifting resources to early intervention.

DATA ELEMENT 6: NUMBER OF ALLEGED CHILD VICTIMS WHERE THERE IS AN INDICATOR OF A SAFETY THREAT OR NEED FOR SAFETY PLAN, INCLUDING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO RECEIVE IN-HOME CASE MANAGEMENT AS A RESULT AND THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ENTER OUT-OF-HOME CARE AS A RESULT.

In 2024, there were 97 alleged child victims who received in-home case management as a result of a safety threat or need for safety plan. Whereas 68 children entered out-of-home care as a result.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Red Lake Nation and Ombimindwaa embarked on a historical journey in 2021 by asserting sovereignty and full jurisdiction over its tribal child welfare cases. During the initial years of operation, 2021 and 2022, significant progress was made, gaps were identified, and strategies were developed that will be implemented in the future. As part of this effort, in 2026, our agency continues to enhance and refine its services and reporting capacity to fulfill the contractual agreement effectively and provide an accurate representation of practice and outcomes. The full implementation of Beraten across all departments is the goal. Upon completion, there should be an improvement in the consistency of the data available for annual review. Ombimindwaa leadership and staff are committed to continuous growth and making necessary investments in workforce development, training, and organizational capacity to best serve the Red Lake citizens.