

Speaker Biographies

Kathy Atkins is a federally recognized member of the Tuscarora Indian Reservation located in upstate New York and a minority business owner with a degree in Business Management. Ms. Atkins has been recognized for her outstanding leadership in Native American communities in her home state of New York, Tennessee, and throughout Indian country. She was with the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs for 16 years as the Tennessee Program Director. She served as Secretary, Vice – Chairman, and Chairman with the National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference. Ms. Atkins is a graduate of Leadership Middle Tennessee and is an Alumni Board member. She was also a Governor appointee to the Middle Tennessee Regional Transportation board and consultant to the New York Six Nation Agricultural Society.

Ms. Atkins has received many honors from the State of Tennessee such as The Native American Eagle Award. She has been featured in the Well Nations magazine and was an award winner at the National Conference for Community Justice. She was also featured as the cover story in the Tennessean Woman magazine, Culture—Nashville's publication on diversity, and in Leadership Excellence from Middle Tennessee State University. Ms. Atkins is a workshop presenter and public speaker regarding Native American issues.

Elizabeth Evans is the Business Services and Access To Recovery Coordinator for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe Behavioral Health Program in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Her responsibilities there include program development and administration. Most recently, Ms. Evans has developed and implemented the Tribe's Access To Recovery initiative, developing a tribal-wide collaboration focused on reducing barriers and connecting people with existing community and cultural resources. This collaboration serves to strengthen and sustain longer term recovery from addiction and mental health issues. Ms. Evans is a member of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and is Eagle Clan. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Michigan and her Master's in Social Work from Grand Valley State University.

Sharon M. Fujii is the Regional Administrator for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Region IX, San Francisco. She is responsible for overseeing the operations and implementation of a broad range of Federal programs that address the needs of children and families, which are administered by States, Tribes, and other grantees in the Region. The Region includes Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Nevada, and the Outer Pacific.

Before assuming her current position in 1991, Ms. Fujii had served since 1987 as Regional Administrator of the Family Support Administration, and since 1981, she was the Regional Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement in Region IX. She was an HEW Fellow assigned to the Regional Director (San Francisco) in 1978. She has also worked in the private sector for a consulting firm and a university, and a non-profit agency in Los Angeles. She has worked or interned with Seattle City government and with State government in Olympia, Washington.

Ms. Fujii received her Bachelor of Art's degree in political science and a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Washington. In 1975, she received a Ph.D. from the Heller School at Brandeis University.

Felicia Gaither is the Director for the Division of Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF) with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA). Dr. Gaither is responsible for the oversight and administration of the Tribal TANF program, providing technical assistance and guidance to Regional Offices, States, and Tribes administering the TANF program throughout the Nation. Previously Dr. Gaither served as the Region VIII-Denver Program Manager in OFA where she was responsible for providing technical assistance and guidance to State and Tribal administrators in Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, South Dakota and North Dakota.

Dr. Gaither has years of experience working in human services. She has served in many capacities working for a variety of organizations at the local, State and Federal levels. Dr. Gaither received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Nebraska, earned a Master's degree in Public Administration from Wichita State University and has earned a Ph.D. in Human Services from Capella University.

Bill Hardy is the director of the Ketchikan Indian Community (KIC) Behavioral Health Department. He has worked for the KIC Tribal Health Clinic for the last 10 years as a medical social worker and member for the KIC Behavioral Health Team within the clinic's Behavioral Health Department. Mr. Hardy has prior experience working with two other Tribal organizations in Alaska. He has lived in Alaska since 1978 and has been a resident of Ketchikan since 1985, working as a social worker in a variety of settings during this time. Mr. Hardy has two grown children and is married to a wonderful and talented wife Anne, who was born and raised in Ketchikan and is a medical bioethicist for the regional hospital.

Vera Hyatt is a member of the Navajo Tribe working with the Navajo Nation Program for Self Reliance (NNPSR) as a Senior Programs and Projects Specialist. Ms. Hyatt has overseen the Customer and Staff Development Section since 2007. She has developed this section from ground up and continues to seek best practices to enhance knowledge, skills, and development for TANF Customers, as well as for NNPSR staff. Ms. Hyatt has worked in the human services field since 1990.

Don Shircel is a Senior Manager and the Director of the Client Development Division of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, an Alaska Regional Native non-profit corporation serving 37 federally-recognized Athabascan Tribes. During Mr. Shircel's 29-year tenure with the Tanana Chiefs Conference he has developed and implemented a wide range of tribally-administered education, employment and training, and social service programs designed to serve small, remote, and isolated Tribal communities located in Alaska's 235,000 square mile, Interior region. Mr. Shircel is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a Master of Science degree in Behavioral Disabilities.

Christina Techico has over fifteen years of experience working on workforce development, social service programs, youth development, and education reform efforts, primarily for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services at the Federal, State, and local levels. Her strengths lie in end-to-end strategic planning, program design, project development, implementation, technical assistance and training, and management. Ms. Techico has experience in managing resources and staff at all levels to accomplish client missions on a wide range of complex projects. Currently, she manages several projects on welfare reform, workforce development, and targeting special populations, such as at-risk youth. She serves as the Project Director for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Information Technology (IT) Initiative which includes the development of the flagship tool, the Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA), a comprehensive, targeted, web-based tool that assists TANF agencies in assessing individuals' readiness for work and identifying potential strengths and barriers in developing pathways to self-sufficiency. Ms. Techico holds a Master of Arts degree in Counseling Education from San Jose State University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Wellesley College.

Dion Wood has worked with ACF programs since 1996, first for the Karuk Tribe and later as Child Care Specialist for the Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center (TriTAC) and the Quality in Linking Together (QUILT) project, both federal technical assistance contracts, the latter focusing on collaboration between ACF's Child Care and Head Start programs. His duties included travel to many different tribes and the facilitation of collaboration based on the unique needs of each tribe. When Mr. Wood returned to his job of administering the CCDF program for the Karuk Tribe, he took the lead in obtaining a TANF grant to benefit tribal members. He later initiated and sponsored a mandatory training program for Karuk Tribal employees with the goal of maximizing the assets of all of the ACF programs—through intra-tribal cooperation—for the Karuk people. Mr. Wood is the Vice-Chair of the National Indian Child Care Association and the Vice-Chair of the Tribal Child Care Association of California. He has received numerous awards in recognition of his leadership, vision, and achievements.