



# *Celebrating* **Carissa O'Dell**

**(Cherokee Nation/Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma)**

## **Please welcome our new Tribal Outreach Coordinator Carissa O'Dell!**

Carissa, an MSW student at the University of Oklahoma, is completing her practicum with The Center for Tribal Social Work at OU Tulsa and will be graduating in May 2023. In addition to the work she's doing at the Center for Tribal Social Work, Carissa will be bringing her expertise to help with NCWWI student and alumni outreach initiatives.

Carissa has always had the desire to work with Native children and families. After obtaining her bachelor's degree in psychology Carissa was a counselor for at-risk teenagers for two years. In 2018 or There, she found an opportunity at Muscogee (Creek) Nation with their family preservation program. Carissa quickly fell in love with helping Indigenous families and children and knew this is where she was meant to be. Carissa was promoted to the Supervisory role after starting her master's degree in 2020 and has served Indian child welfare for 4 1/2 years.

Carissa is most proud of the connections made throughout her school and work careers, as well as the connections made within NCWWI. These connections helped her to come out of her comfort zone and find her voice. Carissa has helped to grow and train new child welfare workers, advocate for herself and her colleagues, and participated in exciting opportunities, such as co-emceeing the Child Welfare Recognition Event in 2022. Carissa has also faced many challenging situations throughout her career, but she continues to demonstrate her resiliency with all of the amazing work she is doing while maintaining a 3.9 GPA in graduate school.

Seeing the face of the children and families she helps is what motivates her to keep going. "They have to have someone to look out for them, and being a part of that village motivates me to increase my knowledge and skills, and continues to push me forward; to help preserve families". Carissa recommends learning as much as you can about all programs and resources available in your area to best serve those in your community. She also emphasizes the importance of being transparent, being willing to be vulnerable, and communicating your own needs. "Get out of your comfort zone! Be resilient! We can do anything!"

*School is Never Out For the Pro*