



# WORKIN' WITH TRADITION

Soft Skills Curriculum for Native American Job Seekers

# Presentation Overview

**Issues:** High unemployment; lack of skilled, qualified workers  
Prejudices, low self-esteem resulting to low retention

**Intervention:** Work-preparedness training that is designed to respond to prejudices, culture and identity issues

**Implementation:** Use a recognized, working model and develop it to respond to barriers facing NA workers

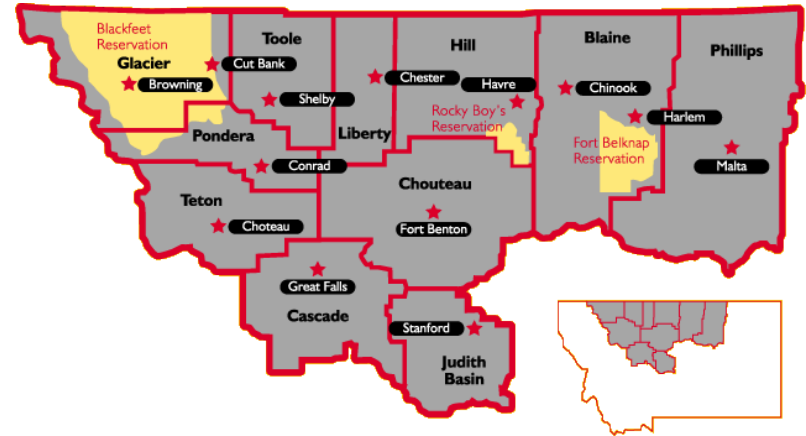
**Accomplishments:** Appropriate, culturally-sensitive soft-skills strategies for workforce training

**Lessons Learned:** Multi-stakeholder participation and engagement

**Application:** Process for developing curriculum; Access to training

# Northcentral Montana

- Micro-industries and employment in bordering towns, communities
- Young, available labor force coming mostly from Native American reservations
- Unemployment in reservations up to 70% (BIA, 2007)
- Low median per capita income (*Blackfeet \$9,751; Fort Belknap \$8,150; Rocky Boy \$7,326; Montana \$17,151, Census 2010*)



# Northcentral Montana

Common employer issues:

- High unemployment in area but unable to hire skilled, qualified workers
- Entry-level workers mostly lack skills, are unreliable, lack communication skills and have unrealistic expectations
- Very low retention, high turnover resulting in costly recruitment and training



# Northcentral Montana

Common Native American worker issues:

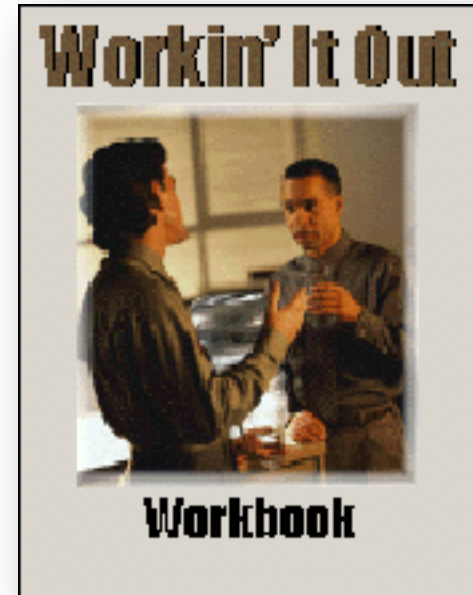
- Employer expectations are not clear
- Time management
- Difficulty communicating personal problems that may affect work
- Prejudices, discriminatory treatment
- Employers do not understand beliefs, culture, values, practices, etc.
- Longevity, big-picture thinking



# Workin' It Out

## Soft Skills Training Program

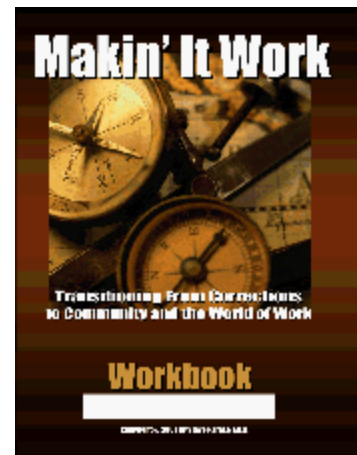
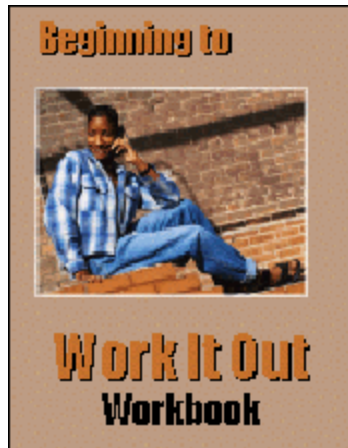
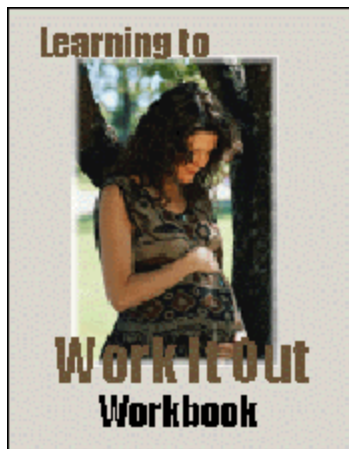
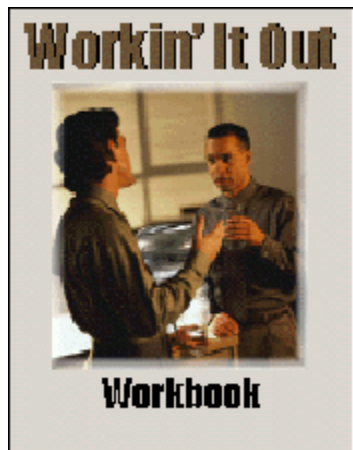
- Cognitive-behavioral program series developed by Dr. Steve Parese through the Denver Workforce Initiative with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Nationally recognized and has been used by over 16,000 participants since 1997
- Training made available through Montana's job service centers since 2004
- Opportunity Link (OL) coordinates WIO program with over 20 Northcentral Montana education & workforce development partners since 2006





ISSUE • INTERVENTION • IMPLEMENTATION • ACCOMPLISHMENTS • LESSONS LEARNED • APPLICATION

# Workin' It Out Series



**“Workin’ It Out** introduces young people to employers’ expectations of professionalism, dependability, and courtesy.

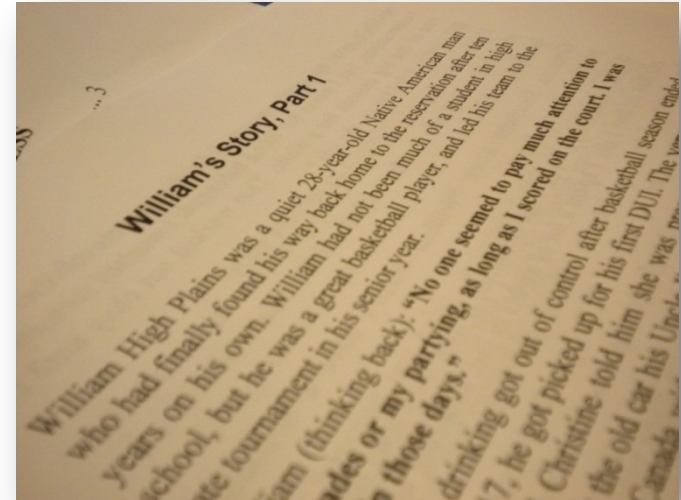
Young Native American workers may encounter racism, and they may be intimidated entering unfamiliar communities and worksites. We are trying to help them deal with new situations, which might be very different from their previous experiences.”

- Elaine Top Sky, Director, Chippewa Cree Tribe TANF

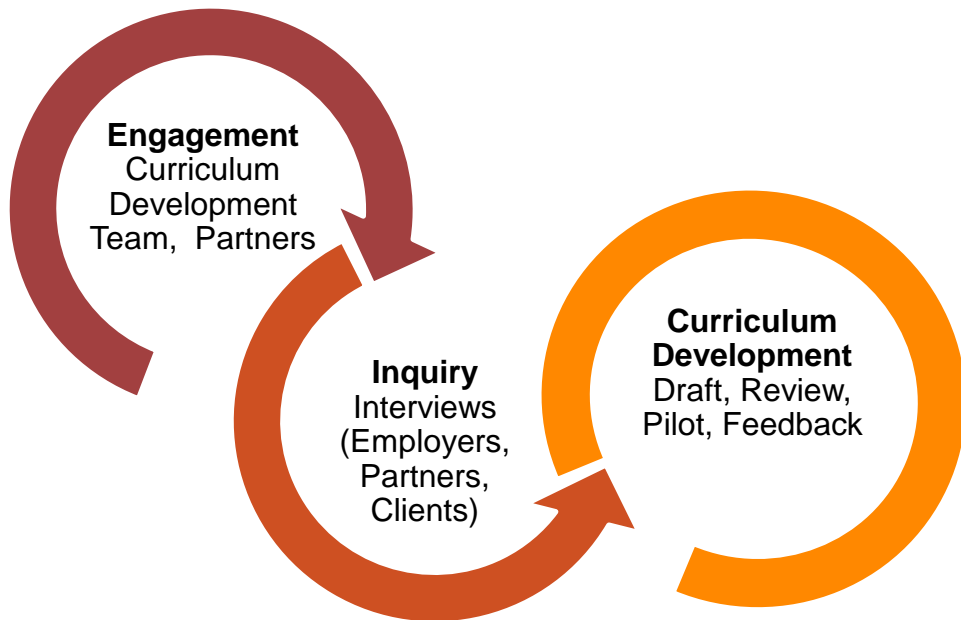


# A New Curriculum

- Responds to issues not already addressed and yet builds on the strength of the WIO program series
- Acknowledges racial and/or cultural challenges in the work place
- Relevant and appropriate to entry-level workers in the region

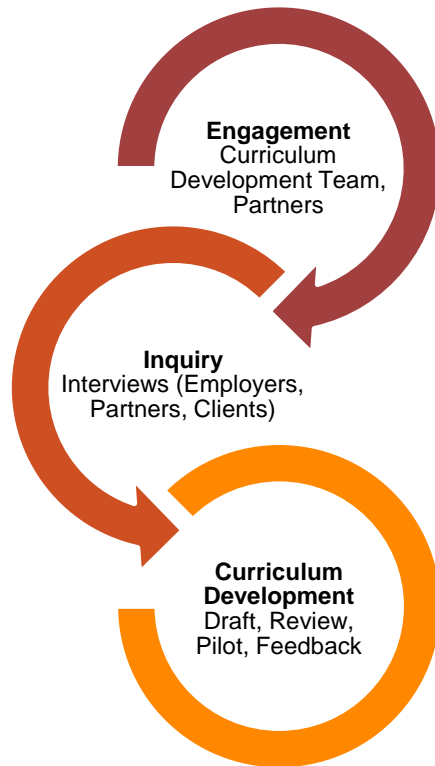


# Development Process



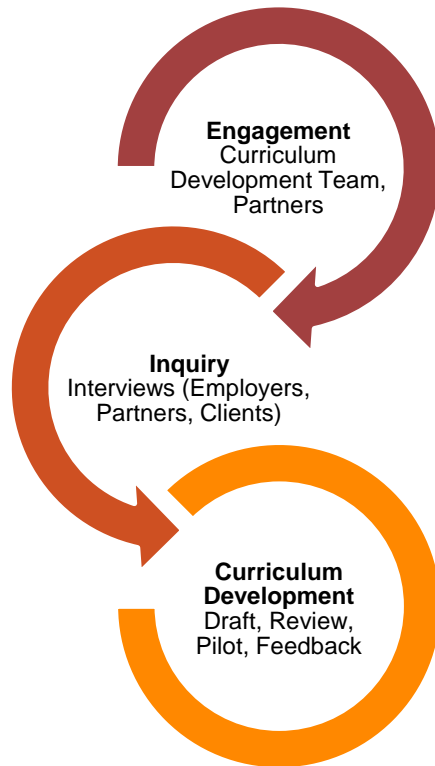
# Engaging the Team

- Opportunity Link, Inc. (*regional prosperity building non-profit agency*)
- Fort Belknap Indian Community 477 Program (*employment & training program*)
- Chippewa Cree Tribe TANF Program
- Stone Child College (*tribal college*)
- Blackfeet Tribe Manpower Program
- Opportunities, Inc. (*community action agency*)
- Human Resources Development Council, Adult Basic Literacy Education, Havre (*community action agency*)



# Partner & Client Interviews

- Hill County Electric (*area employer*)
- Triangle Communications (*regional employer*)
- Havre Job Service (*job placement & training agency*)
- Tribal Employment Rights Offices (TERO) (*employment preference program*)
- Human Resource Development Council, Employment & Training Programs
- Chippewa Cree Tribe Child Support Enforcement Program
- Tribal Elders and cultural offices
- Program clients, case managers and administrators



# Developing the Curriculum

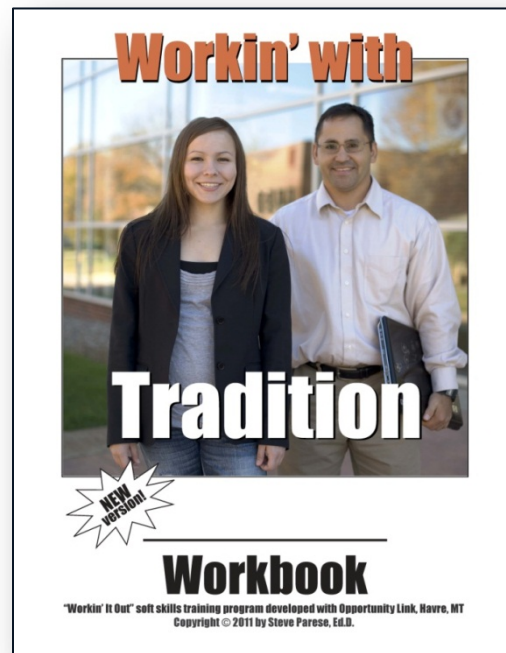


WWT post-pilot training team meeting, Havre , July 2010



# Workin' with Tradition

- Launched WWT facilitator training in Northcentral Montana in April 2011 and statewide in September 2011
- 26 certified facilitators in MT, 2 in WA, representatives from 8 tribal nations, and 131 workshop participants
- Endorsed and supported by the MT Department of Commerce's State Tribal Economic Development Commission
- Successfully integrated and used by the following:  
YouthBuild Northcentral Montana program, Stone Child College, SK Job Corps, Fort Belknap 477 Program, Chippewa Cree Tribe TANF and WIA Programs, Human Resource Development Council (Havre, Great Falls and Billings) to a total of 100+ clients/participants





# Workin' with Tradition

“Change is hard and happens slowly. [WIO] mirrored values they already know. They said it was the first time in their education where these relationships were acknowledged. The curriculum and classroom created a “safe” learning environment, different from others.”

- WWT facilitator, 2010



Summer WIA Program, Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, 2011

## Workin' with Tradition

“I could tell by the sidebar conversations that students were getting more into the stories. They talked about who the characters reminded them of. When I asked them to read scenarios out loud *[role play]*, they were all willing to participate. They could relate to the characters, unlike the ‘Type A’ urban personalities *[in WIO]*. It led to improved reading, critical thinking, time management, hierarchical organization, and other GED skills scores. It was almost magical!”

-WWT facilitator and GED instructor for YouthBuild Northcentral MT, 2010



YouthBuild Northcentral MT, 2011

# Workin' with Tradition

“The impact on students was great in our first class. There was humor that came out and generally a feeling that at last (there was) something we can understand and written for the Indian people’s viewpoint.”

- WWT facilitator, 2010



WWT pilot training, July 2010

# Key Lessons

1. Responsiveness to community and partner needs
2. Engage stakeholders and give clearly defined roles and responsibilities
3. Ensure broad representation in every step of the process
4. Build on models that work in the region (*“Don’t fix what’s working”*)
5. Careful listening and responsiveness (*continuous assessment and feedback*)
6. *“Never lose sight of the goal”*
7. Ensure that players are credited and opportunities are shared

# Using Workin' with Tradition

1. Participate in a WWT training (only offered in MT and WA at present)
2. Train to become a certified facilitator
3. Coordinate a WWT facilitator training in your region, State
  - WWT Training-of-Trainers (schedule to be determined)
  - Contact: Barbara Stiffarm, Opportunity Link  
[www.workinwithtradition.com](http://www.workinwithtradition.com)  
Steve Parese, Workin' It Out  
[www.workinitout.com](http://www.workinitout.com)

## Lesson 5

# Home vs. Work Beliefs



Pearl of  
WISDOM

*"I walk in and out of many worlds."*

- Jay Harjo, Creek/Cherokee



# William's Story, Part 5

Let's read along with the story.

“A few weeks later, William started his new job working security at the casino.”



## Questions after reading:

1. *What are William's beliefs about how he should act when his friends came in?*
2. *What is Star's perspective about how he should have acted?*
3. *Have you ever found yourself torn between personal and professional obligations?*



# Questions?

## More Information?

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Workin' with Tradition

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