



Workforce Warriors: Evaluation Report

Prepared for: Future Skills Centre

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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

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Overview:

Project: Leadership Development for Indigenous Communities

Duration: March 2021 - March 2023

Population: Indigenous Peoples (Primary); Women, people from rural, remote, and northern communities, people living in official language minority communities, people with disabilities, people with essential skills gaps and/or without a post-secondary education (Secondary)

Industry Sectors: Economic development (Information and cultural industries, construction, mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, education, arts and healthcare)

Region(s): Pan-Canada, with a primary focus on Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Ontario (note organic growth of relationships and prevailing needs of partner communities saw Workforce Warriors expand into two other provinces than originally proposed. It is important to note, however, that relationship building activities have just recently resulted in a developing Indigenous skill-to-work project in collaboration with Clear Seas and the Ocean Supercluster in British Columbia. Workforce Warriors is also in discussions with our partner, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, to collaborate on the expansion of our programming into Saskatchewan.

The project aims to . . .

- Develop a National Indigenous Leadership Program to build future leaders & leadership capacity within community
 - Develop a collaborative national network of Indigenous youth and leaders.
 - Enhance Indigenous personal philosophy of leadership by developing understanding of self and others
- Strengthen knowledge of local culture/language and Indigenous contribution to building capacity in their communities
- Increase employment and certification attainment for Indigenous Peoples in Canada
 - Increase public and mainstream industry's understanding of, and respect for, the Indigenous contribution in the Canadian workforce

Beginning / Past: Where the Project started

#Spirit: the team began the project with a strong emphasis on spirit and meeting community needs.
#Relationships: the team set out to build relationships with the communities built on the Indigenous values and culture, specific to each community.
#Process: Planning came from a place of community strengths and understanding of Indigenous-led approaches

Workforce Warriors (WW) began with the founder Karen recognizing that the projects being undertaken around her were not being led by Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous Peoples. Karen then partnered with Chief /Keptin Roger Augustine, and expert in Indigenous Rights

Advocacy. WW was born from a need to empower Indigenous Peoples across Canada to reconnect, reclaim identity and strengthen connection to ancestors.

WW understands that it is essential for Indigenous communities to have leaders who understand that relationships and partnerships are key to building vibrant communities and enterprises. The program aims to empower Indigenous Peoples and communities across Canada through working towards wellness, sustainability, executing skill-to-work projects, and other career opportunities, and, developing a national Indigenous leadership program that is tied to industry and career development.

The project set out to accomplish this in five phases:

1. **Data Collection:** conduct a survey of needs
2. **Analysis:** survey results/literature review
3. **Program Development**
4. **Implementation:** programming
5. **Evaluation**

From the onset, the WW team quickly learned that their process for surveying did not meet the needs of Indigenous communities. They learned, like many of the FSC-funded Indigenous projects that in order to have traction and succeed, Workforce Warriors needed to start with building relationships within the Indigenous territories they wanted to work with. The team determined that they needed to build relationships with leadership, Elders and families. This was a very organic process that allowed the team to get to know their communities and for community to know and understand Workforce Warrior's work, intentions and purpose. The WW teams' greatest lessons learned during the first few months of the project was that relationship building takes time and cannot be rushed, and that it is critical to have Elders to guide programming and our practices. The team attributes this wisdom and knowledge as invaluable to their success.

Experiences / Present: Program Impacts and Barriers/Gaps

#Spirit: the team is flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of each community, there is time built into the processes for reflection from a place of spirit.

#Relationships: the team has built relationships with the communities that are grounded in connection and Indigenous-led methods. Relationships are supportive and reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing that are specific to the communities.

#Process: Planning continues to be done from a place of community strengths, opportunities and sovereignty.

Impacts:

Over the past two years, WW has been successful in building critical relationships among Elders, Knowledge Keepers across Canada, relevant local, national and place-based organizations and mentors to build capacity and engage in knowledge transfer. The WW

programming has helped Indigenous individuals and communities build self-confidence, improve their overall quality of life and strengthen connections to language and culture.

In 2022-2023, WW enrolled three (3) new organizations in New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador, 22 training sessions and two (2) new project partnerships.

In its first year in 2021-22, WW was successful in enrolling 13 organizations, 3 partners, enrolling 154 participants, implementing renewable energy/electrical trades training with 30 participants.

The project has also been successful in implementing:

- Specific music programming for children in kindergarten to grade 5, guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who are integral to the programming
 - Gifting several sets of drums to strengthen music programming, and to build 12-inch hand drums in communities.
- Youth programming for those aged 15-30. Where Elders engage in mentorship.
- Connections between Elders and Seniors

“We adjusted right down to the micro-cosmic level of the individual – we saw one child was slipping away, so we studied him and adjusted his focus into his interests and changed the focus to horticultural, and ended up engaging the entire family, as the mother too was interested in horticulture and was able to deepen and strengthen her relationship with her son, and thank the program endlessly for this blessing and gift she had never imagined to see her son so proud and engaged in a topic of intense interest.”

“I love what the Elders bring to the table and they really did have the answers to guide us forward, the Aunties and Grandmothers watched the children to be and they decided what each of the children would be, like a negotiator and seamstress. This is the point that leads our work to see a person’s strengths and to help them take an Indigenized approach.”

Barriers/Gaps:

- Survey planning and development took longer than expected, as the team struggled with the colonial methods, the proposed survey was implemented in non-Indigenous way that didn’t work; extreme survey fatigue and lack of trust were also factors.
- The team found that communities struggled to define, and conceptualize leadership within the program.

Key Learnings:

- **The importance of establishing a solid foundation of trust** with Indigenous community partners.
 - The team found that building relationships took far more time than they expected. But stressed the importance of upholding the notion of “nothing

about us, without us” through working collaboratively and listening to community wants and needs

- These relationships also support the team in ensuring the program is relevant and sustainable within the communities served.
- **Be flexible and adaptable**, pivoting to meet individual and community needs. Understanding that there is not a cookie cutter approach to the programming, and it should be adjusted to each community as they define.

“We have a commitment to these communities and to see the project thru and to keep our word to them and recognize the respect we hold for the communities.”

Transition: Primary Data Collection

#Spirit: the team built in, and took time to, reflect on the process from a place of spirit.
#Relationships: relationships were supportive; with open two-way lines of communication between the project team, partners and communities.
#Process: processes were evaluated using Indigenous values and community sovereignty in whatever that looked like for each community.

The WW team found they needed to transition from the original survey approach, as it was a non-Indigenous approach that did not work for the communities and only served to erode trust. The team recognized they needed a different path, one that helped to build relationships and trust, while providing communities the opportunity to led the work, and in turn foster their leadership skills. Workforce Warriors then morphed the plan into something that was more Indigenous-led.

Future State: Next Steps

#Spirit: Team members are culturally competent and inclusive. These values are reflected into the work they do. They are enthusiastic and have confidence that they can do what they set out to.
#Relationships: the team continues to build relationships with existing and new community partners
#Process: Planning continues to be done from a place of community strengths, opportunities and sovereignty.

Workforce Warriors will continue their work. The team intends to continue to build connections capacity and advocate for the needs of Indigenous communities across Canada; acting as a bridge to enable outsiders to understand what is happening in the communities.

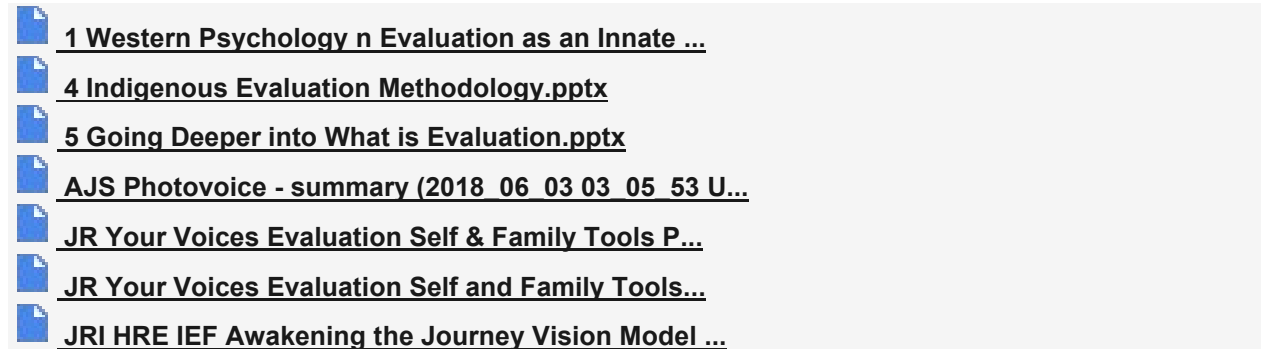
Specifically, Workforce Warriors is planning to

- offer 12-week course in the fall of 2023 in WIL to Succeed in the territory of Indian Head First Nation and Qalipu First Nation Territory
 - Foster connections and sustained wellness, exploration of intended path
 - Build the Community of Practice for Indigenous Leadership and Excellence with 20 new Mi'kmaq youth leaders/participants, who will go on to inspire other youth to be their best

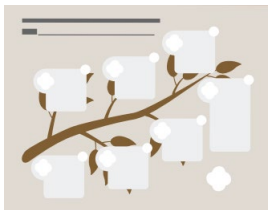
- Employ newly certified youth with signing incentives in Electrical/Green Sector for local employers.
- Continue to expand the Music and Visual Arts programming
- Continue to expand the Elders program and collaborate with Grenfell Campus – Memorial University to work with them to bring elders, knowledge keepers and community together for teachings and ceremony
- Continue to build bridges and seek Indigenous talent Canada-wide
- Continue to work with non-Indigenous partners to Indigenize how we do business, all governments, sectors/industries

Appendix A: Documents Provided to Organizations

Data Collection Tools to review:



1. The Waawiyeyaa storytelling tool which participants the opportunity to share their stories on a linear path through the past/present/transition and future states



2. The Medicine Wheel tool which gives participants the opportunity to share their reflections wholistically through the lens of spirit, mind and body

