

## Igniting the Power Within

Jurisdiction: Manitoba

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Level: Transitions

Theme: Transitions and Linkages

### Description of Practice:

A dynamic partnership of First Nations and Metis organizations and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training was formed in 2004 to answer a growing need in Aboriginal communities throughout Manitoba. After initial discussions about the need for Essential Skills and PLAR information and training for local first-point-of-contact advisors and counsellors, the partnership became a Steering Committee, which created a vision and response called *Igniting the Power Within* (Levels I to IV) certification training.

The first event, Level I, familiarized Aboriginal community advisors/ counsellors with the concepts and applications inherent in Essential Skills and PLAR. Building on this, Level II focussed on the PLAR-related practice of building portfolios.

At each event, the Steering Committee also took the opportunity to approach the communities respectfully and in a consultative manner to get direct feedback on their choices and priorities. In this way, information becomes available to further refine the resources and training required to establish and sustain PLAR and Essential Skills at the community level.

### Background:

All individuals require effective literacy skills, Essential Skills and an effective means of documenting and communicating as the foundation for achieving and maintaining success in education and training programs and the workplace. Literacy skill levels for Aboriginal populations are typically lower than the provincial and national averages. Although many have a variety of Essential Skills already present, an inability to document them in recognizable formats is a barrier to achieving personal, educational and employment-related goals.

At the same time, the desirable strategy of having programs within communities, run by communities and sustained at that level has been highly problematic in Manitoba for many years. The time had come to support the development, implementation and sustainability of Essential Skills and PLAR-related practices within Aboriginal communities.

### Development:

Over the course of 18 months, the Steering Committee conceived and planned events that were reflective and respectful of the groups being asked to participate. (As an example, instruction was delivered to attendees using the Aboriginal tradition of oral storytelling and theatre.) An Admin Group then further refined and put the plans into practice, inviting 250 grassroots community advisors/ counsellors to a two-day training event that resulted in a certificate of Level 1 achievement, potentially impacting thousands of Aboriginal clients throughout Manitoba.

A youth theatre group from the Manitoba Theatre for Young People's Aboriginal Program introduced the concept and benefits of Essential Skills through a play, followed by an interactive session with participants. (This group is highly regarded in Manitoba and annually takes on topics of high relevance to Aboriginal communities. The Steering Committee also felt it had the added benefit of educating the actors about these concepts.) In addition, a number of highly regarded Aboriginal education experts spoke on the topics of PLAR and Essential Skills and told of their successes with these areas in their communities and areas of practice. An evening was dedicated to networking and

the sharing of information and the singer/songwriter Susan Aglukark told her own inspiring personal literacy story and shared how this affected her ability to participate in the music industry. Part of each day was dedicated to getting feedback about next steps and the anticipated supports required. The remainder of the time was dedicated to interactive and reflective exercises. Participants left with a variety of resources and strategies to support immediate action within their communities. The entire event was recorded by a professional camera crew, and was edited and put on a DVD for subsequent distribution.

Level II was refined and expanded to focus entirely on building portfolios as a result of the clear need expressed by participants at Level I, which was to learn to build portfolios which are specific to Aboriginal communities. Attendance was limited to those who had attended the previous event. Using the same type of oral tradition and interactive exercise approach used for Level 1, the vision was to develop an understanding of what a portfolio is, its benefits, and why a client/learner should do one. At the end of the day, participants had been introduced to the basics of identifying clients suitable for a portfolio, coaching others to identify their knowledge, skills and gifts, and helping others to set good goals.

#### Evidence:

The intent of Level I was to make plain the Essential Skills and PLAR concepts in a meaningful interchange with frontline contact staff involved with Manitoba's Aboriginal communities as community advisors and counsellors in the fields of education and employment. For Level II, the intent was to ground participants in the concepts and processes required to assist clients in understanding the purpose and practice of building a portfolio.

Indicators of success are found in:

- subsequent requests for repeat delivery from members and leaders of communities throughout Manitoba; and
- event evaluations which show that each level provided valuable information, that competencies were achieved, and that methods were perceived as respectful and inclusive.

#### Adaptability:

Igniting the Power Within provides access to needed training for Aboriginal front-line workers working in both rural and urban communities that are grounded in the principles of respect and consultation. Adaptation or original creation of training materials with relevant Aboriginal context and educational integrity has been critical to acceptance by participants, Elders, community leaders and initiative partners. Also key has been production standards for communication and training materials that convey an appropriate sense of worth and relevance to participants.

#### Further information:

<http://www.ignitingthepowerwithin.ca>

Contact Sandi Howell ([showell@gov.mb.ca](mailto:showell@gov.mb.ca) or 204.945-1682) for a copy of the Igniting the Power Within DVD and additional educational resources on CD.