Workforce Development Through Sustainable Construction
2017 Initiative Report
Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation’s 10-month Workforce Development Program is an opportunity for Oglala Lakota youth ages 18-26 to gain knowledge in sustainable construction while also continuing their education. Now in its 3rd year, the program serves 10-15 young people in each cohort, offering intensive case management services and on-site, hands-on instruction in building trades. Participants receive a biweekly stipend in addition to their multifaceted trainings.

“I was lost before I came here — doing odd jobs just to live, to get by. This is more stable financially. This year, I accomplished being a better person. I look forward to coming to work, being with my coworkers, and being a part of this positive change here on our reservation. I love my job.”

Marie Kills Warrior
Assistant Construction Trainer & former Workforce Development Program Participant

During the first three cohorts the program has served over 3 dozen young people who have completed numerous projects, including a solar paneled outdoor classroom, poultry house, and a pole barn with office spaces. They also nearly finished with our first 7 single family homes. Participants have learned that energy efficiency isn’t just about coping with climate change but that it also a more viable economic strategy for creating long term community wealth.
Our Model

There are four building blocks to the program:

**Construction Theory & Practice**
On the job training prepares participants for employment in construction fields. Participants receive classroom training on essential skills like construction safety, and work alongside local experts in the field with over 40 years of combined experience.

**Continuing Education**
All participants are required to advance beyond their current level of education upon entering the program. Whether completing their GED or taking college courses, students have daily hours dedicated to education & financial support available for specific needs.

**Social-Emotional Development**
A nurturing work environment with 160 hours of programming focused on healthy coping mechanisms, stress management, emotional relief, & mind/body awareness. Culture & spirituality help build participants’ capacity for handling stress & healing from trauma.

**Soft Skills Development**
To set them up for success, participants are required to complete a nationally recognized, Native specific job-readiness curriculum. They also create resumes & learn to manage their income by completing classes focused on financial literacy, credit scores, & budgeting.

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**Results**

A program that:

- Recognizes participants as whole people.
- Builds their individual capacity.
- Builds their capacity as contributing members of the wider community.
- Sets up participants for greater long term success in whichever field they pursue.
- Increases local access to skilled workers.
- Helps create healthy individuals who can create healthy home lives.
**Workin’ with Traditions**
Nationally recognized, Native based job readiness training.

**Financial Independence**
Financial education surrounding budgeting, credit management, and savings habits.

**Native H.O.P.E.**
Strengths-based training that incorporates culture, spirituality, humor.

**Goal Setting**

**Workplace Safety**
Essential safety courses teach responsibility on-site & proper procedure as a crew member.

**First Aid Training**
Courses in first aid help participants be prepared.

**Equine Therapy**
Participants learn to build trust in themselves and the horse they are partnered with through interaction.

**Home Construction**
As part of their construction education, participants get hands-on learning experience by helping build the Single Family Homes in our Regenerative Community.

**Additional Safety Training**
OSHA 10/30 training continues participant knowledge of on-site expectations.

**Community Service**
Local building projects in the community creates wider local impact while skill building.

**Personal Awareness**
Trauma sensitive yoga training & talk therapy help participants understand their mind & body relationship, ways to cope with stress, and how to create healthy habits.

**Job Placement**
Resume building & job searching help participants transition to their next opportunity.
“I joined the program because carpentry is not a well-known trade on the rez and because I’m always trying to learn new things. I’ve learned quite a bit — reading a tape, how to use a saw. There’s always more to it than you think. We’ve done different trainings, like lifestyle skills. It shows you who you are to yourself, opens your eyes up to new things. If you want to learn, this is the best place to start.”

Our Workforce Development Program has grown immensely, with over 70 applicants to this year’s cohort. Every year we see greater success with program retention, participant satisfaction, and partnerships for job placement & higher education. We have seen the young women and men in this program become empowered to take charge of their futures, create career pathways, and learn how they can be a part of long-term change in our communities.

For more information on our Workforce Development Program, contact Matthew Kull at 605-455-2700 or Matt@thundervalley.org. You can also find more information on our website, www.thundervalley.org.