



**Statewide Strategy for Reentry in Indian Country  
Warrior Down – Reentry Coaches**

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## Abstract:

Wellbriety for Prisons, Inc. is a Native American owned 501c3 non profit (Idaho based) corporation. The **purpose** of this project is to provide a Native American approach to reentry, relapse and recidivism prevention to assist men and women reentering the community/society from probation and parole systems and long term treatment. The services and training programs are **designed and delivered by peers** in the Native American recovery/reentry community. The Warrior Down Reentry started as a pilot project that began in 2005 and spread to 12 new sites across 5 states with a success rate above 80% for Relapse and Recidivism. **The target population** includes Native American men and women (over the age of 18) released to probation and parole and from long term treatment. Non-native men and women who want to pursue a Native American approach to recovery are also welcome to participate. **The goals for this project** include the following infrastructure, programs and services for men and women reentering the community from probation and parole and treatment systems: **(1)** Offer contracted State wide or Organizational Native American approach to reentry services that are peer designed and peer delivered; **(2)** Establish the Warrior Down Reentry Coaching program Center/Group in as many communities as we can by providing training and materials using a Native American approach and guidelines and networking with other established sites; **(3)** Reduce recidivism and relapse rates by at least 80% for participants in the program; **(4)** Assist participants to develop social skills, life skills, and leadership skills; **(5)** Create a community based, system-wide culturally relevant network to support recovery, wellness and Reentry; and **(6)** Expand Wellbriety for Prisons Inc. evaluation with quantitative and qualitative data to become an evidence based program. The Warrior Down—Reentry program consists of four parts: Orientation (including recruitment); Reentry & Transition Support (high maintenance for the first 90 days); mentoring opportunities (leadership development; available after 90 days); Maintenance and Continued Involvement. Participants develop a needs assessment, individual Wellbriety Plan with the help of peers; participate in the daily or weekly circle meetings including: Medicine Wheel and 12 Steps and Fathers of Tradition. Family members are encouraged to participate in the Al-anon circle meetings and the family support groups. Participants will learn to facilitate these programs and learn how to provide recovery/re-entry support coaching services as Warrior Down Team members, which will enable them to mentor others returning to the community from probation or parole.

## **Statement of Need**

It is well documented that Native American and Alaskan Native people experience the highest levels of mortality related to alcohol and substance abuse (May, 1982; 1986; May & Dizmag 1974). In relation to the general population, mortality among Native Americans is 10.5 times higher for ages 25-34 and 6.5 times as great for ages 35-44 (IHS, 1995). Native Americans make up 4.1 million Americans, 0.6% of the population (U.S. Census, 2002). The DASIS Report noted that for American Indians/Alaska Natives admitted to treatment, alcohol was the “leading substance of abuse...ranging from 47% in large central metro areas to 76% in non-metro areas without cities” (2003, p.1). The rate of relapse for Native Americans is also significantly higher, up to 86% within two years of treatment (Hassin, 1996). Recidivism among Native Americans released from prison is also high. Perry (2004, p. viii) reports that within 3 years of release from a state prison in 1994, an estimated 3 in 5 Native Americans were arrested for a new crime — a felony or a serious misdemeanor. These high rates are “the outcome of a number of factors, including socio-economic issues, limited aftercare support, and an inability to see an alternative option to a lifestyle that supported their habitual behavior” (Hassin, 1996, p. 2). Such factors severely hamper the recovery and reentry efforts of Native Americans. While the focus of the project is on the needs of Native Americans reentering the community, it is anticipated that members of non-Native cultures will also choose to participate in the Native American cultural referral resources and support programs offered through the Wellbriety for Prisons reentry project. During the first year following release, individuals are most prone to discouragement, anxiety, re-offending and relapsing; this is a critical period requiring close supervision and structured support (Langan & Levin, 2002). Haney (2001, p. 5-8) describes the institutionalization process that takes place when a person enters the prison environment: (1) increasing dependence on the structure provided by the institution; (2) a need for hyper-vigilance (i.e. personal safety), interpersonal distrust and suspicion; (3) psychological distancing, alienation and emotional over-control; (4) social withdrawal and isolation; (5) incorporation of the exploitive norms of the prison culture; (6) diminished sense of self-worth and personal values; and (7) post traumatic stress reactions to prison experiences. These characteristics point to the significant readjustment and de-institutionalization process individuals reentering the community must make.

## **Program Description;**

Warrior Down is the cry used to signify that a warrior has been wounded or incapacitated in some way and needs help. The Warrior Down program creates the response team that provides the support and finds the resources to assist Native American men and women who are reentering the community through the probation and parole system. This is a peer to peer program that is designed to provide recovery, relapse prevention, recidivism prevention support and community referrals for individuals who are reentering the community. The Warrior Down—Reentry process consists of four phases: Orientation (outreach & recruitment), recovery and transition support (“intensive” support the first 90 days), mentoring (opportunity for leadership development, after 90 days), and maintenance and continued involvement (after 90 days). The Warrior Down-Reentry

project is a strength based, Native American approach to recovery, wellness, relapse and recidivism prevention. Just as recovery is not just staying sober, reentry is not just getting out of prison. It is a way of experiencing life through new eyes, new thoughts, and a new spirit. Re-establishing one's life following incarceration requires a family and community effort. Without the emotional and social support of a family and community, many who try to return to healthy, productive lives find themselves frustrated by the need for job, training, education, housing, transportation, mental health care or medical support, social services, spiritual and cultural support or connections with others who value sobriety and healthy life ways. Cultural and spiritual support is critical in the recovery and reentry journey for Native Americans. In a report commissioned by the Montana Department of Corrections, individual recidivism was connected to the lack of adequate support systems and a continuum of care following release (Hollist, et al, 2004). The Warrior Down—Reentry project provides this system of informational, instrumental, emotional, cultural and affiliate support. Along with an intense recovery commitment.

### **Expected Outcomes.**

- Development of skills, knowledge and values that support recovery and prevent relapse
- Referrals to instrumental and informational resources that support reentry, recovery, relapse prevention and assist in the development of a meaningful life within the community and with family members.
- Knowledge of how to avoid relapse and recidivism
- Social support networks to encourage recovery journey
- Connection to cultural and spiritual practices to support healing
- Development of healthy identity
- Participation in culturally appropriate 12 Step meetings
- Development of a Wellbriety Life Plan that sets goals for education, employment, family reunification, healthy relationships, cultural connections, civic responsibilities and many other personal development goals.
- Development of meaningful and supportive relationships
- Providing of a structured environment to help ease the person into making their own decisions
- The Warrior Down-Reentry centers provide a series of structure, supervised activities and group sessions that help the individual make the transition to a new life outside the prison
- Support in meeting the challenges of finding housing, acquiring official documentations, finding employment, learning new skills, making healthy friendships and reuniting with family, can help to alleviate the anxiety and fear associated with this transition process
- Informal social control provide peer support for following the recovery journey
- The Warrior Down Team Members can provide a network of support, referrals, resources and encouragement at critical times in the recovery/reentry process
- For individuals reentering the community from prison through probation and parole, the support system provided by the Warrior Down-Reentry program complements the support provided by the Department Corrections Probation and Parole community supervision and out patient treatment.

- The opportunity to receive peer support also helps the individuals returning to the community to redefine their identities as Native Americans, to develop healthy, supportive relationships with others who are experiencing the same issues they are, and the opportunity to have those who have walked the path already, show them where the resources are to get their lives in order. Instrumental, informational, emotional and affiliative support provided by peers can greatly enhance the opportunity for successful transition to community life.

### **Justification of the Warrior Down Native American Reentry Program**

For many Native American people, the return to their communities also means a recovery of traditional values and re-integration into their culture. Kearney described both addiction and recovery as “psychological and social processes involving shifts in symbolic meaning and consequent shifts in action and interaction over time” (1998, p. 496). Warrior Down covers more than just alcoholism or drug abuse. It expands recovery to the “whole” person and the “whole life.” Warrior Down, recovery is community and socially based; that is, it is integrally related to traditional spiritual practices, cultural activities, and relationships (Cheadle, et al, 1995; Weaver, 2002). Thus, while it is customary to think of the Recovery Community only as those people recovering from alcohol and substance abuse, Warrior Down includes those recovering from domestic violence, parental alcoholism, grief from suicide and death, the legacy of boarding schools and the alienation of city life. Arthur H (1988, Preface) explains that unfinished grieving and separation from parents during childhood or teenage years brings about difficulties with alcohol and drugs; this he says is an attempt to escape the pain of the very deep emotional hurts experienced by the individual. Thus, not only do Native Americans reentering the community and participating in the recovery journey need instrumental and informational support, but they also need the specific emotional, spiritual, affiliative and cultural support that is found within the Warrior Down & Native American traditions and ceremonies. There are a number of reasons that culturally relevant treatment and recovery support services are implemented in the Warrior Down program: (1) It is not customary within traditional Native American communities to diagnose illnesses by assigning labels, such as alcoholic or schizophrenic (Garrett and Myers 1996; Garrett and Pichette 2001; Lowery 1998; Manson, et al, 1984; O’Neill 1992-92; O’Neill & Mitchell 1996; Sanchez-Way & Johnson, 2000; Wing, Crowe & Thompson 1995). Within the health belief systems of Native peoples, the person is simply described as being in need of healing (Lowery, 1998; Wallston & Wallston, 1978). Western strategies for treating substance abuse (and mental health) appear fragmented and disconnected from the Native perspective (i.e. treatment is separate from prevention). An example is the mainstream preference of treating the individual separately from the family or the community (Jones-Saumty, et al, 1983; LaFromboise, et al 1990; Mail, 1980; Trimble & Hayes, 1984; Wing, et al, 1995). (2) Many of the treatment approaches—and other health education efforts-- are based upon changing behaviors. From the Native American perspective, the lack of wellness, especially that brought about by substance abuse and alcoholism is a spiritual issue. Lowery (1998) and Napoleon (1991) explain that alcoholism is precipitated by a “crisis of the spirit.” It must be treated using spiritual approaches (Garrett, 1990; May, 1977; Miller, 1998; Weaver, 1998; 2002; White, 2000). Warrior Down’s Healing processes might include talking

circles, healing circles and traditional ceremonies. Ceremonial activities have a distinctly spiritual focus, and the incorporation of intergenerational activities that include both elders and children in the healing process are essential for the well-being of men and women in Native communities. In addition, many Native Americans are uncomfortable with the culture and values of the AA program (Smith, et al, 2000; White Bison, 2002). (3) Traditionally, in Native Communities, the person in need of healing, family members and the community are treated together. Having this take place within the context of traditional community ceremonial practices, creates a healing process that not only addresses the individual's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual healing needs, but also helps to reaffirm the norms, beliefs, and traditions of that community as well (Kaplan & Johnson, 1964; Katz & Rolde, 1981; LaFromboise, 1988). Close family and tribal relationships, social networks, and even nature, are essential for healing for Native Americans in recovery (Brucker & Perry, 1998; Sutton & Broken Nose, 1996; Richardson, 1981; Wise & Miller, 1983). Newhouse and Chapman (1996) emphasize the use of culturally relevant spiritual practices in any transformation efforts in Native communities. (4) For Native Americans in recovery there are additional issues that impact the success of recovery: cultural and identity issues (Allen, 1986; Dana, 2000; Hernandez-Avila, 1996), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), grieving issues (H 1988), and the challenges of living in two worlds (Crozier-Hogle & Wilson, 1997). In the Warrior Down program, each of these issues plays a role in the recovery and wellness of Native Americans living in an returning to urban/metropolitan environments. LaFromboise and Trimble described the social connection this way: "When problems arise in Indian communities, they become not only problems of the individuals but problems of the community. The family, kin, and friends coalesce into an interlocking network to observe the individual, find comprehensible reasons for the individual's behavior, draw the individual out of isolation, and integrate the individual back into the social life of the group" (1990, p. 629). . For the Warrior Down program, recovery is not an "individually oriented" process. It requires the interaction with others: with family, with elders, with people seeking the same goals and experiencing the same challenges. People learn from one another and the mutual support that they receive in groups where others share the same goals and cultural experiences can significantly enhance the recovery experience (Kessler, et al, 1997). Warrior Down—Reentry is a social response that helps to mobilize the peer community to provide the intensive instrumental, informational, emotional, cultural and affiliative support that is necessary to help reentering individuals experience a sense of connectedness that will bring healing to their lives. Elevating the issues to a social level helps to alleviate the stigma, the negative perceptions about individuals reentering the community, people in recovery and about the value of letting others know that recovery works.

**To inquire how to implement this strategy in your State, Tribe or Organization  
or to make donations For these continued efforts please contact**

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