

**Training for Excellence in Child Welfare Practice
in Rural Oregon and Alaska**

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I. Executive Summary

Child Welfare promises the same outcomes of safety, permanence, and well-being for children and families involved in child welfare regardless of whether they live in a rural or urban setting. However the way in which those outcomes are achieved are distinct in rural areas. A small community setting provides a unique set of resources and challenges to families, child welfare workers, and trainers. Therefore, both practice and training pathways may take a different shape.

In fall, 2003, the Child Welfare Partnership at Portland State University (PSU) received one of six discretionary grants from the Children's Bureau to develop and deliver training to rural child welfare practitioners. PSU's proposal focused on training for rural and tribal child welfare workers, foster parents, and community partners in select Oregon and Alaska sites. The Oregon Department of Human Services (Children, Adults and Families) training program and Indian Child Welfare Liaison and the Family & Youth Services Training Academy at the University of Alaska at Anchorage worked closely with the CWP to conduct a needs assessment, create a plan and develop a range of curricula to train and empower rural and tribal child welfare workers and community partners on the unique aspects of their work.

The initial needs assessment consisting of focus groups with over 600 informants and a review of Child and Family Service Review outcomes and other relevant documents. In reviewing the reams of material collected, the Advisory Group identified the need to address both training content and training methods in order to improve rural and tribal child welfare practice. Recommended activities were clustered in four key activity areas:

- A. Stand-alone Training Institutes for Rural and Tribal practitioners;
- B. Distance Delivery Strategies;
- C. Tribal collaboration on culturally-based trainings; and
- D. Infusion/dissemination of rural content into existing trainings

A. Stand Alone Training: The needs assessment identified a desire for rural and tribal practitioners to meet together and learn with one another in an environment that focused on their unique training needs. In response to this need, the flagship training of the project, a 2-3 day institute called "In Celebration of Rural and Tribal Practice" was developed and offered five times, to a total of 133 participants from tribal, village, and rural (state) child

welfare settings. The institute was designed to address the unique resources and pathways of rural and tribal child welfare practice. While safety, permanence and well-being outcomes organized the training days, specific competencies to realize those outcomes included: cultural competence, relationship building, balancing multiple roles, developing natural and indigenous resources, and self-care. Evaluation results were initially positive, and increased over time as the training model was refined. Sample modules used in this training have been posted on the Rural Training Grant website. Both Oregon and Alaska hope to offer this training at least once per biennium with state dollars after the end of the grant, but funding is uncertain.

- B. Distance Delivery Strategies: The needs assessment indicated that classroom training would not be a sustainable way to meet all the advanced training needs of rural practitioners. Travel over long distances to training is expensive and time-consuming. Smaller rural offices cannot afford to have positions uncovered for the length of time it takes for staff to make the round trip and to attend a centrally-located training. In response to this need, the project experimented with a wide range of distance delivery strategies including a for-credit undergraduate course in rural social work, in-service (synchronous) web trainings and an asynchronous training course on ICWA. During the project 443 people participated in various distance offerings. Curricula for these trainings are available, and most will continue to be offered after grant funding ends. The project found that web-based or web-supported training is best-received when supported with a hands-on coach or instructor and supervisory support. Providing relational support—such as a coach, a technical consultant, or a local site convener – increases participation and completion. Lack of reliable web-access in rural areas poses a barrier to web-based training. Training is most accessible when offered via the simplest technology possible, including P.O.T. (plain old telephone).
- C. Collaborative Tribal Offerings: Tribal child welfare training must be informed by and owned by the cultural knowledge of tribal practitioners. Through this grant, the Child Welfare Partnership developed an effective training collaboration with the nine Oregon Tribes and state ICWA manager. Grant funds were offered to support training needs identified by the state Indian Child Welfare Liaison and the nine federally-recognized tribes in Oregon, as well as training needs identified by the Alaska Village Chief’s Association and their state ICWA partners.

- D. Infusion of rural and tribal content into existing child welfare training offerings: Rural participants in the needs assessment pointed to a distinct urban bias in standard training offerings. Because trainings tend to be held in urban or mid-sized towns, and a majority of trainers and participants are from these settings, the unique needs of the rural or tribal child welfare worker can get overlooked. The project increased awareness among CORE trainers of the importance of creating space in training to discuss rural issues. In addition the project developed a variety of materials useful to infuse rural content options into training, including:
- Video clips with voices of rural practitioners addressing the project themes.
 - Short papers (“Rural Expressions”) to be used in training.
 - A case-study book for ready-to-use case examples to add rural flavor.

These materials are available on the website, and have been used in CORE Training. The Video clips have been made available to child welfare for use in realistic job previews for recruiting rural practitioners most likely to stay.

Project Findings

The most important finding of this project was that relationship is the foundation from which rural and tribal child welfare work must begin. A capacity to enter the rural, tribal, or village setting with respect and to balance the many roles one plays in a rural setting is central to realizing the best outcomes for children and their families. While outcomes are the same across practice settings, the culture of practice is deeply informed by – and distinct by virtue of – rural or tribal culture. This culture of relationship infused every aspect of the project from planning, to advisory committees, to training design and delivery, to sustainability planning. Though attending to relationship and to learning across cultures is time-consuming, the outcome in terms of participant learning is deeper. We hope that this will translate into better outcomes for children who are served by our training participants in the years to come.

II. Introduction and Overview – Full Report

In the fall of 2003, the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funded six national demonstration projects to develop and deliver child welfare training for rural practitioners. The Child Welfare Partnership at Portland State University received one of these grants to develop and deliver training to rural and tribal child welfare workers, foster parents, and community partners in select Oregon and Alaska sites. Portland State University (PSU) through the Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services partnered with the Oregon Department of Human Services, Children, Adults and Families, and the Family & Youth Services Training Academy at the University of Alaska at Anchorage to create a plan and curricula to train rural and tribal child welfare workers and community partners on the unique aspects of the work.

A. Overview of the Community, Population, Host Organization, and Problem

Oregon – Rural and Tribal Sites

Approximately half of Oregon’s 36 counties host rural populations with population densities between 0.75 to 20 persons per square mile. Eleven of these have the designation of “frontier county.” Of the six initial pilot sites located in Oregon, five had populations ranging from 1,800 to 3,000, were located at least 120 miles from any larger city, and at least 250 miles from the Portland metropolitan area. Counties were progressively added over the course of the project culminating to 24 rural Oregon child welfare offices reached by the grant.

Child welfare offices serving these areas consisted of five to 10 staff. These offices provided services to some of the largest, and most sparsely populated areas of the state. One office provided services to two counties covering 20,000 square miles. Caseworkers travel long distances by car to reach families, and offices are typically small and staffed with workers who do ‘a little bit of everything.’ It is hard to recruit workers for these offices, and local knowledge is valued and valuable. Advanced education and training is hard to find in the local area.

The sixth Oregon site selected was the Child Welfare Office of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs located on a 644,000 acre reservation with an enrolled membership of about 4,300. Over the course of implementing the project additional sites were added to include a total of 24 rural Oregon counties and each of the nine federally recognized tribes located in Oregon.

Yukon Kuskokwim Region of Alaska

Almost one third of Alaska's child welfare staff serve rural communities. The Alaskan project site was the Yukon Kuskokwim (Y-K) Delta region, based in Bethel and includes 58 villages on the delta. Bethel has a population of about 6,500 people, of whom one-half are Alaska Native. Staff are located not only in Bethel but also out stationed in small satellite offices located in seven surrounding towns and villages. Collaboration with the University of Alaska at Anchorage aided the project in designing and delivering training to these sites.

The Y-K region is composed of a complex network of rivers, lakes, sloughs and ponds that have shaped and reshaped a soft sand and silt landscape, spanning roughly 85,000 square miles, or approximately as large as the state of Oregon. Due to permafrost and the remoteness of the area, homes in many villages lack sufficient infrastructure for regular water and sewer services. The region is accessible by plane, boat or snow machine – depending on the season. There are no roads connecting the villages and Bethel. Villages typically have populations of 100 to 500 individuals who are primarily members of the Yup'ik Tribe and traditional Yup'ik practices and language remain predominant. Subsistence activities and commercial fishing are major contributors to residents' livelihoods. Other equipment and goods must be shipped in by plane or barge. Before going out on protective services calls, workers must obtain travel approval and make bush plane reservations; weather conditions often determine when flights can be made. Similar arrangements must be made to meet with families and children on caseloads or to arrange visitation. Most villages have a tribal representative who serves as the ICWA worker. One trip to training in Anchorage can cost as much as \$1500 per worker, and few have had the opportunity to gain social work or other relevant degree based training.

Organization that runs the project

The project was coordinated by a project specific team based at the Child Welfare Partnership, Oregon's child welfare training and research program located at the state's only School of Social Work. Founded in 1993, the Child Welfare Partnership has a long track record of delivering core and advanced training to caseworkers, care-givers, and managers for child welfare. Over 250 social workers have graduated from the state's child welfare education (IV-E stipend program) designed to strengthen the practice skills of child welfare staff and leaders. Research from the Partnership has contributed to best practice knowledge in the areas of family

decision making, permanency, natural supports, culturally based and collaborative case planning, and permanency.

Problem the project seeks to address.

The project sought to develop training content and delivery methods to improve the practice skills of rural, village and tribal child welfare practitioners.

B. Overview of Program Model

At the beginning of the project a steering committee was formed. The committee consisted of representatives from both Oregon and Alaska, including: training directors, child welfare managers, supervisors, and staff, and ICWA managers. The purpose of the steering committee was to provide guidance to project staff in meeting project goals, and where appropriate to serve as hosts, designers, and trainers for training programs. A list of steering committee members is attached.

During Year 1 the Oregon Department of Human Services (Children, Adults and Families) training program and Indian Child Welfare Liaison and the Family & Youth Services Training Academy at the University of Alaska at Anchorage worked closely with the CWP to conduct a needs assessment, create a plan and develop a range of curricula to train and empower rural and tribal child welfare workers and their community partners to fulfill the promise of child welfare in their unique practice setting.

The initial needs assessment consisting of focus groups with over 600 informants and a review of Child and Family Service Review outcomes and other relevant documents. In reviewing the reams of material collected, the Advisory Group identified the need to address both training content, and training methods in order to improve rural and tribal child welfare practice. Recommended activities were clustered in four key activity areas:

- Stand-alone Training Institutes for Rural and Tribal practitioners;
- Distance Delivery Strategies;
- Tribal collaboration on culturally-based trainings; and
- Infusion/dissemination of rural content into existing trainings

Though a formal logic model was not developed for this project, the following simple model captures the program logic succinctly:

Input:

Rural and tribal workers selected for cultural skill and experience

Intervention:

- Provided training with the “right” content – that is, content that:
 - o Builds on core practice skills related to safety, permanence, well being
 - o Recognizes and honors rural and tribal culture
 - o Pays special attention to rural practice pathways that require
 - Relationship-building – entering the community respectfully, collaborating well with others over the long term.
 - Resources – development of natural and indigenous resources
 - Roles – dealing professionally with holding multiple roles in the same community
- Packed in training delivered in the “right” way:
 - o Developed collaboratively with ownership by rural or tribal stakeholders
 - o Allowing time for relationship building and peer learning in classroom, or
 - o Using distance methods suited to low-tech, high relationship environments
 - o Calling on trainers with rural and cultural backgrounds

Outcomes: Will result in

- *proximate, controllable outcome:* Rural and tribal staff trained with cultural competence and child welfare skills who can
- *Distal outcome, too many intervening variables to measure:* realize good outcomes for rural children and families .

III. Project Implementation/Process Evaluation

A. Stand Alone Training

1. Programs and Products Delivered.

The stand-alone training developed and offered by the project grew out of intensive needs assessment conducted at the beginning of the grant period. Each of the six Oregon pilot sites and Bethel, Alaska were included in the assessment. Child welfare workers, supervisors and managers as well as a variety of community partners were asked about their training needs, what rural/tribal child welfare work was like for them, and what makes a successful rural/tribal child welfare worker (competencies).

The information collected was analyzed reviewed by the project staff and steering committee. Through this process, key learning objectives for training were identified as well as a variety of strategies and approaches for delivery of training. One delivery strategy was to develop a stand-alone training Institute “In Celebration of Rural and Tribal Practice” to be offered annually. Key themes identified included: cultural competency in the rural and tribal community; relationships and boundaries; social and community context, informal and indigenous resources; and surviving and thriving. The purpose of the training was stated as follows.

The Institute recognizes and honors the uniqueness of rural and tribal child welfare practice and will address creative ways to meet the challenges by using the strengths that exist in communities. The Institute will provide opportunities to interact with and learn from others who share a commitment to rural and tribal child welfare practice.

In each of the five Institute trainings, there was a combination of state and tribal child welfare staff in the training and participants were housed at the training site.

Initially the training was 3.5 days but was shortened to 2.5 days based on feedback from participants and trainers. This reduced the amount and types of material that could be covered in the training. The initial curriculum elements were organized into five general areas: (a) cultural competency in the rural and tribal community; (b) unique dynamics, strengths and challenges of rural child welfare practice; (c) engaging families; (d) supporting colleagues and ourselves; and (e) celebrating our work. Guest trainers attended each of the sessions and added training on cultural competency, alcohol and drug addiction, secondary traumatic stress, and engagement.

2. Process Evaluation Findings

Each institute had a carefully designed evaluation component designed to ascertain knowledge gained and utilized from trainings. Evaluations were completed at the end of each day, immediately following the training, and 30-45 days after the training. Findings were used to adapt the training content and delivery and target to specific themes as we progressed. Outcome evaluation findings are contained in Section IV of this report.

A total of 133 rural and tribal child welfare workers from Oregon and Alaska participated in the Institutes. This surpassed the original goal of training at least 20 child welfare workers per year (totaling 100 participants) through stand alone training. The 2005 and 2006 trainings included participants from both states. In 2007 the training was provided in Bethel, Alaska for the project sites there. The Institute was offered in Oregon in 2008. While the full Institute training was not offered in Alaska in 2008, portions of the trainings were conducted at the Alaska ICWA conference the same year. Table 1 presents the number of participants.

Table 1. Number of institute participants

Training Year	Location	Number of Participants
2005	Bend, OR	22
2006	Bend, OR	30
2007	Bethel, AK	30
2007	Bend, OR	24
2008	Bend, OR	27
TOTAL		133

Follow up surveys were conducted with participants three months after the trainings to assess the extent to which the knowledge gained in the training had been utilized by participants in their work. The networking and connections that were sparked at the training were reported by respondents to have carried forward three months later. Workers described that the training helped them feel less isolation and stress as a result of these connections. Respondents also reported using the stress relief and self care techniques discussed in the training. Another key transfer of training that was carried forward was cultural awareness and the importance of identity. Several participants have, since the training, implemented or revived practices that help

children in foster care preserve their identity and culture. Examples include, taking pictures of the children, producing life books, and receiving and giving foster parents more information related to the child's culture. There was agreement among participants that the training was very well done, that they learned a lot, and would recommend that others attend.

3. Lessons Learned

- *Focus on Relationship and learning, be flexible with content. Do not rush to cover material just because it is in the notebook. Allow participants to explore concepts and teach one another.*

A major area of learning came from the attempt to fit too much content into the curriculum without regard for the relational learning style of rural and tribal participants. We found that process and relationship building were key to having trainees gain skills, and insights to improve their community practice in small communities. Sharing expertise and learning from each other became a focus of the training. One trainee remarked "this was the first time my skills have been recognized and honored." Each time the training was offered, we reduced content, increased time for processes such as dialogue and learning circles, and evaluation results increased.

- *Be ready with multiple learning activities that you can choose between at the training so that you can keep time flexible and have activities fit the specific group you are training.*

No canned curriculum seemed to work. Each time materials and activities available were adapted to the specific group of participants based on feedback we had received earlier and at the training itself. For the Alaska training, we worked closely with our Alaska partners to adapt the training to meet their specific needs and learning styles. As a result, our final product is a collection of useful training modules, not one whole curriculum.

- *When scheduling class-room based training for rural participants, allow plenty of time for recruitment, involve both supervisors and managers, send many reminders and follow up.*

Due to the small number of staff in rural offices, attendance is always at risk. Any type of crisis, including staff illness, staff vacancies, family issues, staff vacation schedules, a large family of children coming in to care, etc. could make it difficult for an office to allow staff to participate in training. Some offices found it difficult to spare staff for the three days of training and up to two days of travel time involved. Recruiting from Tribes was also very

challenging as they have few staff and there were challenges filling their vacant positions. Commitments were not made until the last minute. Staff from both state and tribal offices would schedule, then later drop out or simply not show up. Considerable effort was needed to insure that the training slots were filled in a timely fashion and remained filled. Training notices needed to go out several months in advance of the event and then follow up recruitment was needed. The Project manager sent many emails, made many calls, sent confirmation letter, reminders for all four Oregon sessions to insure attendance.

- *Carefully plan and prepare for diversity of culture and learning style in trainings that will include both State and Tribal Staff.*

It was important to affirm the value of the participant's diverse skills, knowledge and experiences, both formal and informal as well as to add new knowledge and skills. The training was designed to maximize learning and relationship building among diverse participants – for workers from rural state child welfare offices to learn from tribal child welfare workers and vice versa. We found that a minimum of one third of the participants from tribal settings provided an environment to empower tribal voice and participation. We did a lot of small group work in the training mixed participants in the groups. It was important to do a number of activities related to cultural competency early in the training, to increase participant awareness and self-reflection on different learning styles, cultural norms, and educational backgrounds. Pacing and approach were very important as well as comfort levels with intimacy and self-disclosure. Activities such as the talking circle were valuable in creating a formal space for each participant to share.

B. Distance Delivery

1. Programs and Products Delivered

Oregon is a large state with two thirds of its area designated as rural or frontier counties. Travel to the state capitol and the location of the Child Welfare Partnership Training Offices can be in excess of 350 miles one way. Often rural workers have to be away from their office for several days to attend one or two day training. Holding training out in many of the rural and remote areas is often not feasible as offices often have only 3 to 7 staff and do not have coverage to attend training even if it were in their own back yard. Through the needs assessment it was determined that expanding the distance delivery capability and accessibility would be one

strategy that would eliminate travel time but allow rural staff to access training and interact with trainers and colleagues across the state. We used two types of technology to expand our distance delivery capability, NetLink and WebCT.

Prior to the grant a limited number of NetLink (synchronous) training opportunities were available to the field. Through the grant, the number and variety of NetLink trainings were expanded, the training became more sophisticated and interactive, trainers increased their skill using NetLink, and increased the number of rural and tribal workers comfortable using the technology. Tribal partners were provided needed equipment (e.g., headsets) and individualized technical support. An email targeted to rural participants advertised each NetLink training.

NetLink trainings were offered one or two times a month and new topics were developed in response to feedback from the field and from our State Child Welfare Office. Examples of the variety of topics included: Transitioning Children with Sensitivity; Promoting Permanency: The importance of 30 day face-to-face visits; Guardianship as a Permanency Choice; Confidentiality; Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) Training; Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD); and Secondary Traumatic Stress. Because many participants were from rural areas, there were more opportunities for discussion of rural approaches to best practice. One NetLink, “Collaboration that Enhances Outcomes for Native American Children,” State and Tribal Collaboration was developed for the project’s goal of increasing collaboration between state and tribal workers.

The second distance delivery activity involved the development and delivery of three one undergraduate credit classes, which could be taken individually, or as a series through WEB - CT. These rural social service courses included: Current Issues, Community Strengths, and Policy Issues. The classes were developed and taught by a Child Welfare Manager at one of the pilot sites who was also an active steering committee member. The classes were offered through Portland State University (PSU) Extended Studies and were open to any student. The project covered tuition and provided the text to any rural state or tribal child welfare worker. This class was in demand and was generally full. The instructor received very high marks from her students and had a number of activities in the course that required students to develop skills and apply knowledge.

The project also purchased access to the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)’s training on ICWA for any interested rural participant as well as for Oregon Indian Child Welfare Liaisons. Results of this are described in “C” – ICW training.

2. Process Evaluation Findings

Over the course of the grant, a total of 443 rural and tribal participants joined some form of distance delivery. The number of participants in each type of distance training is in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of participants by distance training type

Distance Delivery Type	Number of Participants
NetLink	375
NICWA On-Line	35
WebCT	33
TOTAL	443

The on-line survey tool, Survey Monkey, was used to evaluate the NetLink trainings. Of the 375 rural and tribal participants, 169 (45%) completed the evaluation of the training. All of the respondents reported that they gained knowledge in the targeted learning objectives of the NetLink trainings.

3. Lessons Learned

- Match available and preferred technology in target communities to training delivery.*

In remote areas such as Bethel Alaska, broad band access is not available, and even dial up is sporadic and too slow for most web-based training approaches and to down load training materials. The phone may be the best distance delivery tool available. Even in Oregon where teleconferencing and web technologies are available, not all workers, particularly those in tribal settings, were comfortable using it. Our own technology system was sometimes difficult to access or did not work in some areas. We learned that marketing was helpful, technical assistance needed to be provided, sometimes on site, and it was important to get enough local people (including the supervisor) familiar with the training to make it easy to get help if the training hit a technological snag. We now believe we have momentum to keep expanding our offerings and our audience.
- The importance of interactive distance delivery.*

Our core finding on relationship applies to distance training too. The development of interactive and engaging distance delivery training takes planning and skill and the ability to

make use of the learning tools on NetLink by the trainer. Not only is this important to keep participants actively engaged in the training but it also is in alignment with the highly relational nature of rural and tribal practice. Topics must be high interest and applicability and trainers must prepare differently than they would for a face-to-face training. Many folks need on site coaching when they initially access the system for training and someone should be available by phone to answer questions from the host site. One approach that worked well was to convene local people in a rural site (for example, rural foster parents) and have them learn together, fostering a sense of community at the downlink site, while serving multiple areas.

- *Prioritize training slots for project participants.*

Keep courses open to all students but have priority enrollment for those involved in the project. This expands the number of times you can offer the class, develops a pool of students who may someday have an interest in social work in a rural community, and creates a positive collaboration within the University. It develops a foundation for a rural training opportunity that can continue after the grant is gone.

C. Tribal Collaboration

1. Programs and Products Delivered

One of the four original project goals was to “develop strategies and skills to build and/or enhance effective training relationships with tribes, villages and other diverse groups in rural areas of Oregon and Alaska.” This focus permeated each training activity and became stronger over the five years of the grant. It was strengthened by a solid partnership between the state ICWA Manager and the grant’s project manager. Out of this partnership developed a coordinated and collaborative training plan for Tribal child welfare workers. The project manager for the grant was invited to quarterly ICWA advisory meetings, became part of the planning committee for the Annual ICWA Conference and Pre-Conference Training, and served on a workgroup to adapt and implement the Indian Tribal CPS Safety Intervention training developed by the National Resource Center on Child Maltreatment.

Tribal participation in the Rural and Tribal Training Institute “In Celebration of Rural Practice” was a major influence in the development and format of the Institute. The

numbers of tribal staff completing the Partnership's new worker training also increased during this time.

The "Indian Tribal CPS Safety Intervention: Safety Assessment, Analysis and Planning" workshops were developed by the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services. The project coordinator and State ICWA manager pooled resources to bring these trainings to the grant pilot sites Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. After these pilot trainings it was determined that the training should be offered to all grant tribal sites in Oregon and Alaska but that the curriculum needed adaptation. An advisory committee consisting of two tribal representatives and the project coordinator convened to adapt the curriculum in collaboration with a consultant from the National Center. In February 2007 the changes were finalized and a train-the-trainer session was completed. The project hosted the training in Portland and brought our four Alaska Partners (Steering Committee Members) to join the group.

Initially the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) on-line training seemed very promising as an effective training tool. The materials were professionally developed by tribal leaders in curriculum development and the costs were very reasonable. The training was promoted for all state ICWA liaisons and all tribal child welfare workers in order to provide them with a common understanding. The project purchased 50 slots at first with plans to purchase more. The training was offered at no charge and marketed to ICWA workers across Oregon and the tribes. Unfortunately, there were many challenges encountered with the training. First, recruiting workers to register for the training was difficult and many who did sign up never took the class. Some workers started the class but did not complete the final test and as a result did not get a certificate. A complicated log-in process appeared to be a barrier to engaging the training which may have played a role in the low participation rate.

Support for planning in implementing the annual Oregon ICWA conference was an important project activity. The project manager served on all the planning committee, assisted with funding, made presentations and facilitated sessions at each of the four Oregon ICWA conferences held during the term of the project. The project often played a key role in the Pre Conference Training Activity, which served 60 to 100 participants in an applied learning setting as well as assisting with the conference. Providing fiscal and other

support in meeting the goals of the tribal child welfare leadership was important in building a collaborative relationship. Attending planning in person whenever possible and through conference calls at other times was critical. Throughout the project, the Project Manager took the role of support and service of goals set by tribal and state Indian Child Welfare specialists, rather than “university as expert”. This contributed to the formation of a strong relationship and excellent training evaluations.

The Alaska ICWA Conference, held in February of 2008, was also a very important project activity. This was the first Regional ICWA Conference in the Y-K Delta (Bethel and surrounding 56 Villages) that had been held in 10 years. It was attended by 112 individuals; the majority of which were Alaskan native villagers. The project manager served on the planning committee through numerous conference calls and emails. The project provided for hosting and for a native consultant and sent the project manager and a trainer to assist with presentations and the facilitation of a major training activity during the conference. This training activity involved small regional groups of participants building and illustrating a strategy to keep children safe in their home communities. The conference also involved having 39 village ICWA workers attend a court House Hearing one afternoon, hosted by the Rural Training Grant. The conference was done in English and in Yupik with translation machines available for all. Again, powerful training outcomes were the result of ownership of the training goals and agenda by tribal and state stakeholders, with the Project Manager taking an attitude of service, support and resource-provider.

2. Process Evaluation Findings

There were 440 participants across the four Tribally-focused trainings offered over the course of the project. Table 3 presents the number of participants by training. Outcome evaluation findings for the Tribal Safety Assessment training are included in Section IV of this report.

Table 3. Number of participants by Tribal-focused training

Distance Delivery Type	Number of Participants
ICWA Pre-Conference	328
NICWA On-Line	35
NetLink: Improving Outcomes for Native American Children	19
Tribal Safety Assessment Training	58
TOTAL	440

3. Lessons Learned

- *The Importance of Developing a Working Relationship with Tribes.*

In several areas across Oregon, tribes have developed collaborative working relationships with their local ICWA workers but often there are staff changes and new ICWA workers are often assigned without regard to their cultural competency with regard to Native populations or their interest and ability to develop a long-term collaborative relationship. New staff who are not Native American need comprehensive training on cultural competence, including ICW, and should take a humble, learning attitude.

- *Building a sense of mutual respect and trust is essential.*

Key to this is the ability to listen, listen, listen and look for ways you can support the work of the tribes. Follow their lead and do not try to push your own agenda or find what you think might be the ‘better’ way. Building consensus was very important to all decision-making done in Quarterly Meetings and Conference Planning.

- *Develop training content and delivery to meet the needs of both tribal and non-tribal child welfare workers.*

Relationship and trust building are essential in order to create a safe, interactive environment for traditional tribal folks. It is best to keep the group small – 20 would be ideal. While we do not want to over-generalize, there tend to be differences in learning styles which need to be taken into account in developing and delivering training. Tribal participants do not always feel comfortable speaking out in a mixed group, often speak softly, and like to have more time to process information, listen respectfully to the full comment of each speaker, and to prepare to speak. One of the first activities in the Rural Institute was a full morning devoted

to a talking circle, allowing time for participants to introduce themselves in some detail. This was done by pulling all chairs into a large circle and by asking folks to share an item that was important to them. This took two to three hours for a group of 25 trainees. This was an extremely important activity as it began the creation of relationships in the larger group and facilitated the implementation of small group activities. Every voice was heard.

As with most adult learners, there is a strong need to have the training involve actual work with concepts to connect them to application in their work. The groups enjoyed activities that involved creating posters, drawing maps or pictures, writing poems, or finding way creative ways to convey information. Case studies and small work groups facilitated communication and application.

Devoting significant time to meaningful introductions of both staff and trainers was of critical importance to the success of the training. Mixing tribal and non-tribal folks in the work groups and keeping group size small, encouraged everyone to feel safer and to participate. Structuring many activities that allowed for both verbal and non-verbal expression kept everyone engaged. Having icebreakers at the beginning of each day encouraged relationship building.

- *Attend ICWA advisory meetings.*

Attending ICWA Quarterly Advisory Meetings was an important aspect of developing a working relationship with the state ICWA Manager and with the Tribal Child Welfare Leadership. Meetings always began with a prayer and this was followed with individual tribal reports. State staff who managed budget and compliance issues gave updates, major issues were discussed and the Rural Training Grant Project Manager had an opportunity to give a report, talk about training opportunities and otherwise interact. Quarterlies were hosted in different parts of the state, but when they were held in the Salem area, the Rural Training Grant often hosted in the Child Welfare Partnership's building. The role taken by the Program Manager and Staff was to be a good listener and to find ways to support, but not lead in the meetings. We looked for opportunities where a small amount of resource or a bit of staff time can help move the tribes agenda forward.

D. Infusion and Dissemination of Rural Content to Existing and Ongoing Training

Due to the difficulty of obtaining funding for new activities, low cost or no cost strategies were employed to sustain the work of the project past the grant period. In an attempt to provide value beyond the project end date, we implemented the following strategies, many of which are also available on the project website www..

- *Case studies.* A specific set of Rural and Tribal Case Studies was developed and used in the Rural Training Institute. They include discussion questions. One study concerns a Native American (ICWA) case; one is set in a timber community and one in a farming community. These case studies are available to our training staff for use in CORE and other training and are posted on our web site so that they can be adapted and used in other states. The case studies were developed by steering committee members at one of our meetings using a facilitator and laptop computers to allow for a similar format. Using the rural experience of our steering committee members allow us to construct case studies that were reality based and included the unique challenges experience in rural communities. It also made the committee involved and engaged in the project. Using a format that was loaded on the laptops facilitated moving through the key elements we wanted included in the products. The committee broke in to small groups and really seemed to enjoy this process, displayed high energy, and creativity.
- *In Celebration of Rural Practice Video.* Photographs of the communities targeted by the grant were combined with stock photographs and set to music to develop a short movie created using Flash software. The movie was shown at the Rural Training Institutes and at several project presentations. Two versions were created, an Alaska version using Alaskan music and pictures and an Oregon version with country western music and Oregon Tribe focus. Both versions are posted on the project website. The Alaska version of the movie is shown in state training for new child welfare workers. Several Oregon offices also have copies to use in staff meetings. The Northern California Child Welfare Training Office requested and received a copy to use in trainings for rural workers. This product was produced by our staff and was a learning experience for us. It is not fancy, but folks like it because it shows real people and places with which they are familiar. They can recognize photos they submitted or may be in and buildings and sites in their own communities. The steering committee members helped select the music that

would be used. The music is lively, familiar and upbeat so it makes a great addition to training right after lunch to bring folks together and provide a format for a positive discussion of the unique challenges and rewards of rural practice. It is titled “In Celebration of Rural Practice”.

- *Rural and Tribal specific Video and Audio Clips.* During the final months of the project a series of video and audio clips of Steering Committee members talking about rural and tribal practice issues were created. The clips are available for use in distance delivery and classroom trainings. Topics covered include: entering the small community; multiple roles and relationships; ethical challenges; professional boundaries; resources; supervision; bias toward families; and state-tribal collaboration. Clips are available on DVD's and are posted on the project website. This was another way to recognize the expertise and commitment of our steering committee members and to provide resources that could provide a rural and tribal perspective.
- *Best Practice Brochures.* A series of best practice brochures were created in tandem with the video and audio clips to align with the topics. These short papers were also a product of steering committee work. The committee reviewed materials provided by the project and drafted the key concepts for each of the papers. The brochures are posted on the project website and can be downloaded and used as handouts in training or in realistic job preview activities.
- *Bi-Annual Newsletter.* A newsletter, “The Rural Express,” named by the steering committee, was published twice a year and contained articles and announcements of project activities, tips, and comments from child welfare workers in rural and tribal communities. Initially each of our pilot sites was able to select an icon to represent their geographic area and these icons were used in all issues of the newsletter, on the website, and on training materials. This was another way to keep the steering committee involved and interested in the project and its' activities and provided visual interest and continuity on printed materials.
- *Other Dissemination Activities.* We had several opportunities to make presentations at state and National Meetings and Conferences. In addition to presenting at the Children's Bureau Meetings/Conferences and our annual Oregon ICWA Conferences 2004-2007, project staff presented at the following; 2005 NW Child Welfare Trainer's Conference,

2006 National Pathways to Adulthood Conference – Rural Teen Connections: Multiple Relationships in Small communities; 2007 16th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect – “Multiple Relationships within Tribes and Small Communities” and two presentations at the 33rd National Rural Social Work Conference. We incorporated audiovisual materials, talking circles and other interactive learning strategies in our presentations and found that these were well received. The project will be one of four rural training grantees to present on a national conference call in February, 2009, sponsored by the National Resource Center on Organizational Improvement in Child Welfare.

IV. Project Outcomes

The annual Institute and Tribal Safety Assessment trainings were targeted for more in-depth evaluation. Outcome findings from the evaluation of these trainings are included in this section.

A. Institute

Each institute had a carefully designed evaluation component designed to ascertain knowledge gained and utilized from trainings. Evaluations were completed at the end of each day, immediately following the training, and 30-45 days after the training. Findings were used to adapt the training content and delivery and target to specific themes as we progressed.

A total of 133 rural and tribal child welfare workers from Oregon and Alaska participated in the Institutes. This surpassed the original goal of training at least 20 child welfare workers per year (totaling 100 participants) through stand alone training.

Table 4 summarizes overall evaluation data from four of the five Institutes. This data was not collected at the initial 2005 training. The Institute consistently received positive feedback from participants across all categories evaluated. The trainers’ competence and clarity in presenting the curriculum had the strongest ratings, with more than 60% of participants rating the trainers as ‘excellent’ in those two categories. More than 86% of respondents rated the overall training as a ‘4’ or ‘5’, on a scale of 1-5.

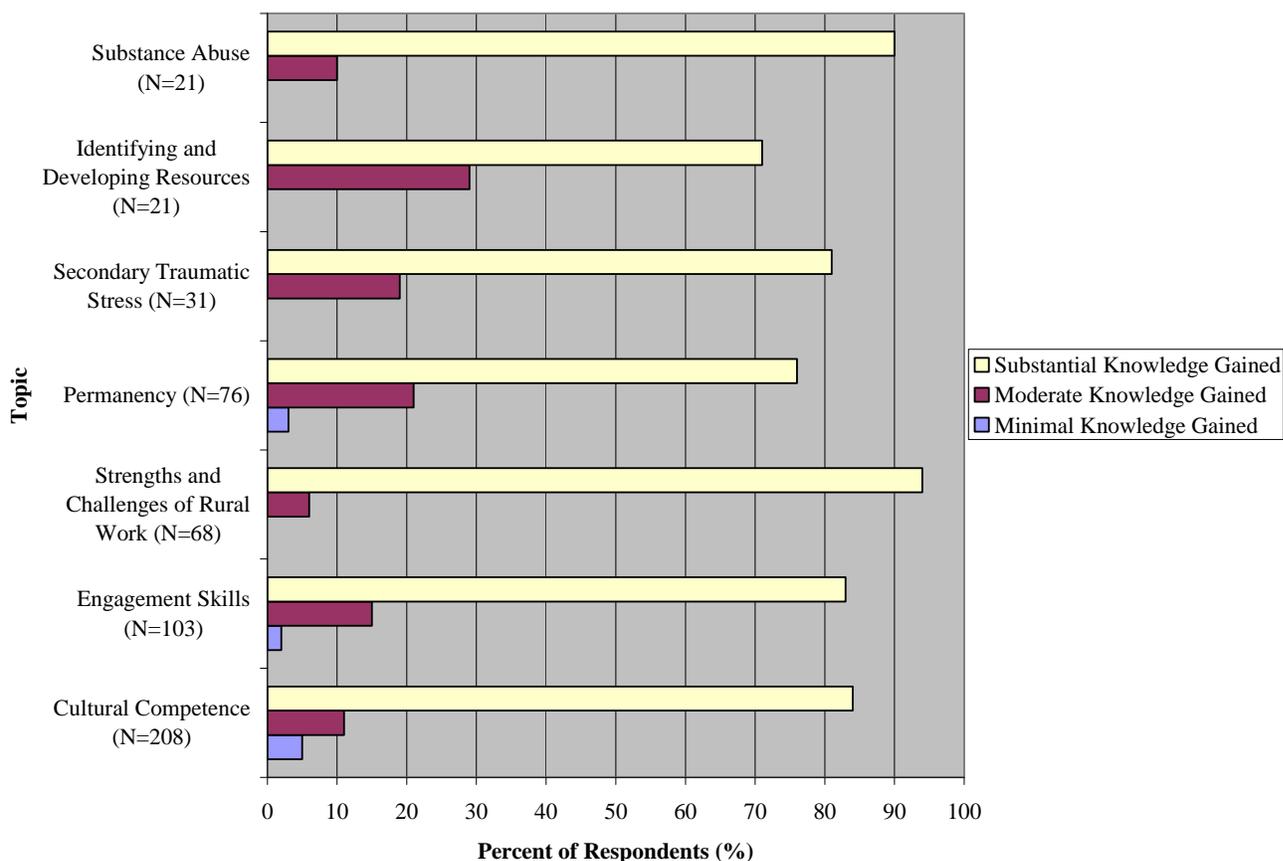
Table 4. 2006-2008 Institute Overall Evaluation Summary*

	Poor (1)	(2)	Average (3)	(4)	Excellent (5)
Overall Rating of the training (N=73)	0.0%	0.0%	13.7%	39.7%	46.6%
Quality of the handouts (N=73)	0.0%	0.0%	13.7%	34.2%	52.1%
Usefulness of materials (N=70)	0.0%	0.0%	17.1%	31.4%	51.4%
Balance among lectures, group Discussion, & activities (N=73)	1.4%	1.4%	9.6%	32.9%	54.8%
Clarity of the training (N=74)	1.4%	1.4%	16.2%	29.7%	51.4%
Trainers' competence of the material presented (N=72)	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	25.0%	63.9%
Trainers' ability to effectively communicate material (N=73)	0.0%	2.7%	6.8%	27.4%	63.0%
Facility (N=74)	1.4%	1.4%	13.5%	21.6%	62.2%
Training Pace (N=74)	0.0%	6.8%	14.9%	33.8%	44.6%
Training environment (N=74)	1.4%	1.4%	13.5%	27.0%	56.8%

*Note. Table includes 2006, 2007 and 2008 trainings in Oregon and 2007 training in Alaska. Previous Institute evaluations did not include this data.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the knowledge gained across Institute topics trained in years 2006, 2007 and 2008. The learning objectives for each Institute were customized to the trainers' expertise and training need and therefore varied from year to year. Training topic themes were identified and learning objectives were organized by these topics. Topic themes included: cultural competence; engagement skills; strengths and challenges of rural work; permanency; secondary traumatic stress; identifying and developing resources; and substance abuse. Training participants self-assessed their learning based on the learning objectives set forth. They rated their learning on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most complete learning of that objective. Scale ratings were grouped into the following three categories to reflect the knowledge gained by participants in each topic area: ratings of 4 or 5 = substantial knowledge gained; rating of 3 = moderate knowledge gained; and ratings of 1 or 2 = minimal or no knowledge gained.

Figure 1. Participant knowledge gained by Institute topic.



Follow up surveys were conducted with participants three months after the trainings to assess the extent to which the knowledge gained in the training had been utilized by participants in their work. The networking and connections that were sparked at the training were reported by respondents to have carried forward three months later. Workers described that the training helped them feel less isolation and stress as a result of these connections. Respondents also reported using the stress relief and self care techniques discussed in the training.

B. Tribal Safety Assessment Training

The Tribal Safety Assessment training was carefully evaluated. Methods included evaluation of individual sessions and the overall training by participants and a reflective pre/post evaluation of participants self assessed knowledge in each of the content areas trained. Overall, trainees provided positive feedback about the training. They described the training materials as helpful and easy to follow and liked the facilitator and activities. Some of the participants stated that they would need help from a co-trainer to feel competent to provide this training to others.

Results from the reflective pre/post assessment showed that participants gained knowledge in each of the content areas trained. The overall effect was significant for all but two content areas ($p < 0.05$): 1) worker-caregiver interaction necessary for making judgments about sufficiency of a safety plan and 2) know how to determine if a child is safe. Both of these areas were also the highest rated by participants in knowledge prior to the training. Table 5 presents the results of the reflective pre/post assessment for the overall training objectives.

Table 5. Reflective Assessment of Participant Knowledge Gained

Overall Training Objectives	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE
Employ safety assessment criteria	3.6	4.3	+0.7*
Identify differences between maltreatment, risk, and safety	3.6	4.2	+0.6*
Describe essential safety concepts	3.7	4.3	+0.6*
Demonstrate effective safety planning	3.7	4.3	+0.6*

* $p < 0.05$

V. Conclusions

Through a multi-pronged training approach over five years this project made relevant and empowering training available to many hundreds of rural and tribal child welfare practitioners. The project will have continued impact in their learning and improved competence in working with children and families. Project products such as the web-based undergraduate course on rural social work, the tribal risk and safety assessment, specified NetLink trainings, and tribal/rural case studies and videos have been absorbed by standing training programs in Alaska and Oregon. Both Alaska and Oregon training programs formed stronger relationships with rural and tribal child welfare. The Bethel Office formed stronger relationships with the local Village Chiefs Association.

It is perhaps in these relationships we find one of the most valuable outcomes of the project, as well as one of the most important findings. Relationship is the foundation on which rural and tribal child welfare work and training must stand. The capacity to enter the rural, tribal, or village setting with respect, a sense of respect for the multiple cultures at play (child welfare, rural, tribal) and the ability to hold and balance many roles in a rural setting are each essential to realizing the best outcomes for children and their families.

Attention to relationship infused every aspect of this project as well, from formation and conduct of advisory committees, to training design and delivery, to sustainability planning.

Though attending to relationship and to learning across cultures takes time, the outcome in terms of participant learning and sustainability will be deeper when such time is allowed. We believe that our relationships with project partners have allowed us to gain valuable insights into the unique aspects of rural and tribal practice.

VI. Implications and Recommendations

As we gained experience developing and delivering training to our colleagues in rural and tribal practice, we are reminded of the following:

- Relationships are key to getting things done. Taking time to develop relationships in the training event models how rural and tribal workers get things done in their communities. Take time in training to develop those relationships and to create a sense of community.
- Respect for others, regardless of differences, is essential. In the rural or tribal community, the child welfare staff work with everyone. It is not possible to hide in a crowd or choose from many resources or relationships to get work done.
- Training needs to be both active and interactive, between participants and trainers and between participants and colleagues.
- When entering a rural community (or training activity), the worker or trainer must meet people where they are, and accept people's strengths and differing approaches.
- Training timelines must be flexible. Training which offers opportunities for open space formation empowers participants to share expertise on topics of importance to them.
- A canned curriculum is not effective. Using a basic outline, the trainer must be prepared to retool for each group and make further changes in both content and timelines during delivery. It may be more important to take a side trip, extend an activity, eliminate content, or otherwise take cues from the participants as the agenda unfolds.
- Rural and tribal child welfare staff and their community resources may have varied levels of formal and informal training but there are always family experts, cultural experts and life experts available if one looks. It is crucial to identify, empower and acknowledge all levels of available resources.
- The trainers must be credible with valid and significant rural and tribal experience in order to be effective.

- An important role in training is to value and validate the resources participants and their communities have and to help participants recognize their expertise and share it. It is essential to operate from strengths, not a deficits model.
- Rural child welfare work has both similarities and differences with urban child welfare work. Retention is improved with a focus on hiring people who are a good match, and by providing the right training, and developing the right skill set and supports for workers while on the job.