



INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

MARCH 2022



SUPPORTING WELLBEING ON THE LAND.

INTERIM INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT MARCH 31, 2022:

PHASES 1-3 OF SWB IMPLEMENTATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Supporting Wellbeing project would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of all the Steering Committee members (listed in Appendix A), and the contributions of the following organizations:

- Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning
- Dehcho First Nations
- Dene Nahjo
- Government of the Northwest Territories
- Hotii ts'eeda
- Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
- MakeWay
- Nature United
- NWT & Nunavut Lotteries
- Rio Tinto
- Sahtu Secretariat
- Tlicho Government

A special thanks is due to the NWT Recreation and Parks Association, which has hosted the project and provided administrative support; and to the Arctic Inspiration Prize for its recent award of \$500,000 to support continued project development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Supporting Wellbeing (SWB) project was initiated in response to an identified need for people who lead on the land (OTL) programs to be equipped with the skills required to support the wellbeing of program participants and deal with mental health challenges that may arise when people are on the land. SWB is guided by a Steering Committee whose members have extensive experience in designing and delivering land-based programming. Working with experts in Indigenous land-based healing and adult education, they have produced a program that is made in the north, grounded in Indigenous knowledge and experience, and designed to be accessible to all NWT communities.

During 2020-2021, an initial training curriculum was developed, and the first group of OTL leaders was trained with the curriculum in March 2021. Subsequently, these program leaders applied their learnings while leading programs over the course of 2021, and in December of 2021, a gathering was convened to assess progress and plan for the future.

This evaluation indicates that program leaders have found the SWB training materials to be effective and useful, and believe that their existing skills have been strengthened, while many have developed new skills through the training. Program leaders indicate that the training has increased their ability to design effective programs, to support people who may be suffering from mental wellness challenges while on the land and help program participants plan for care and access local resources after programs are finished.

The report contains several recommendations for future program development and evaluation.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Indigenous-led land-based programs are offered across Northern Canada with a variety of stated purposes (including for example healing, harvesting, cultural resurgence, leadership development, environmental monitoring), but regardless of the program focus, these programs support a number of interrelated outcomes which contribute to the well-being of people, communities, and the land. The importance of land-based programming as a tool for Indigenous cultural resurgence is increasingly recognized in the North. Supporting Wellbeing (SWB) is an emerging training program that aims to provide tools and resources for people who deliver land-based programming that will better prepare them to mitigate and respond to mental health challenges in remote environments. This training is designed for Northwest Territories (NWT) people who have some level of experience in planning and delivering on-the-land (OTL) programs, but who have little or no formal education in mental health service provision. Learners will be introduced to several topics to consider when planning and delivering trauma-informed OTL programs, including intergenerational trauma, suicide intervention, conflict resolution, and participant aftercare; and provided with tools to use when planning and delivering programs.

Many Indigenous people in the NWT have experienced trauma because of colonization, and it is not uncommon for participants (and staff) to experience mental health challenges while participating in land-based programs. Supporting the well-being of participants, and ensuring that OTL program leaders can nurture their own wellness, are essential components of successful OTL program delivery. Given the prevalence of trauma, OTL leaders should be trained with a trauma-informed lens. A trauma-informed approach will improve the success of OTL leaders navigating mental health challenges with limited access to outside resources. This, in turn, will improve participants’ ability to engage in the full program and strengthen their connection to the land. Overall, SWB will increase the efficacy of OTL programs in the NWT and support individual and community well-being, as well as the resurgence of Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of being.

SWB is an experiential training program which blends clinically researched practices in mental health group work with Indigenous practices and expertise. SWB’s guiding philosophy focuses on relationships – with others, with the land, and with oneself. The design of the training program is based on four pillars:

- Made in the North: The SWB training curriculum is rooted in northern Indigenous experience and expertise.
- Trauma-informed: Given the prevalence of trauma related to inter-generational impacts of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties scoop, and on-going systemic racism, OTL programs are often led by, and attended by, people who have experienced trauma and who may experience trauma responses while on the land.
- Culturally competent: As an act of decolonization, and to promote cultural safety, the training centres Indigenous approaches to preventing, responding to, and healing from trauma, and prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.
- Modular: a modular curriculum allows facilitators to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the group and community accessing the training.

The SWB curriculum involves six modules that can be delivered in various combinations depending on the needs of the group accessing the training and the time available. Training modules cover the following topics:

- Creating community
- Setting up camp for wellbeing
- Intergenerational trauma: moving beyond to resiliency
- Conflict resolution and communication skills
- Suicide prevention and intervention
- Supporting wellbeing when the program ends.

Training is designed to be held on the land wherever possible. Learning participants are provided with a workbook, and daily sessions include readings and a variety of activities focused on one specific module.

PROJECT ADMINISTRATION & STRUCTURE

SWB grew out of a facilitated workshop in 2018 that was hosted by the NWT Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA) and the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, and involved OTL program leaders from a number of NWT regions and organizations. That discussion resulted in the identification of seed funding from a variety of sources, including Rio Tinto, the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, MakeWay, Nature United, Hotii ts’eeda, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and NWT & Nunvut Lotteries. From project inception until the time of this report, the SWB project has been administered by the NWT RPA, under the direction of the volunteer Steering Committee. A list of Steering Committee members at the time of this report is included as Appendix A.

Table 1 outlines the five phases, the initial anticipated timing and current status. The project has encountered some delays due to restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. As the Northwest Territories (NWT) experienced its first outbreak in the summer of 2021, restrictions were re-imposed and many planned OTL programs across the territory were cancelled or delayed. This prevented some of the participants in the pilot training from having the opportunity to test out their newly acquired skills. The impact of this on the evaluation is discussed later in this report.

The Covid-19 outbreak also resulted in a slight delay to the proposed project schedule, as outlined in Table 1.

THEORY OF CHANGE

SWB is grounded in the following theory of change:

If On the Land leaders have the skills to support well-being for participants in their programs, participants will experience physical, mental, and spiritual growth, healing, and well-being.

If there is a network of trained On the Land leaders providing supportive, effective, culturally safe programs to NWT residents, then communities will have the capacity to respond to the mental, physical, and spiritual needs of their residents.

If participants in On the Land programs benefit from safe and effective programs that are culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and informed by Indigenous language, culture, and way of life, then they will build strong and healthy relationships with other participants, with family and community, and with the land.

Table 1: Five Phases of SWB Implementation

PHASE	ACTIVITIES	INITIAL TIME FRAME	CURRENT STATUS
PHASE 1	Establishing Steering Committee	June 2020	Complete
	Request for proposals for curriculum development	August 2020	Complete
	Cirriculum development	September - December 2020	Complete
	Cirriculum adjustments	December 2020 - February 2021	Complete
PHASE 2	Pilot training gathering in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region	March 2021	Complete – training attended by 17 participants (including curriculum developers, Steering Committee members and OTL program leaders)
PHASE 3	●Implementation and mentorship: o OTL Program Leaders deploy the skills learned from SWB training o Host organization provides mentorship	March 2021-January 2022	Phase 3 extends to December 2021
	● Curriculum revisions (based on evaluation of March 2021 pilot training)	September 2021-January 2022	Complete
	● Program review gathering o Participants in March 21 pilot training convene to review their experience in deploying the skills learned, reflect on gaps and barriers, and areas for improvement	September 2021	Postponed until December 2021 Complete
PHASE 4	● Train-the-trainer gathering in Dehcho Region o Previously trained OTL program leaders will be given the skills and tools to deliver SWB training in their regions	March 2022	Postponed to May 2022
PHASE 5	Implementation and mentorship	February - September 2022	Will commence in May 2022
	● Knowledge mobilization and partnership gathering o Reflect on SWB progress to date and map a way forward	September 2022	● Timing to be determined ● On-going

EVALUATION, APPROACH, DESIGN & METHODS

Evaluation Background

In early 2021, the SWB Project Manager developed a draft Evaluation Plan which outlined curriculum goals and short and long-term outcomes proposed for the initiative, and proposed a specific evaluation focus and questions for each of the five project phases. The draft plan also included survey instruments for Phase 2 evaluation, and evaluation matrices which outlined questions, data sources, and details of data collection. The draft Evaluation Plan was submitted to Hotì ts'eeda, an Indigenous health research network, as a case study for the Indigenous Evaluation Community of Practise. This exercise involved review by two evaluators, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, and a group discussion which took place in February 2021.¹ Based on this feedback, the draft was revised. In March 2021, the Project Manager used these tools to deliver surveys during the pilot training, and produced a Pilot Training Evaluation Report which covers Phases 1 and 2 of the Evaluation Framework, and is attached as Appendix A. This initial evaluation product provided guidance for revisions to the SWB curriculum.

At this stage in project implementation, it became clear that the workload associated with evaluation planning and implementation could not be handled off the side of the Project Manager's desk, and an external evaluator was engaged to support the project going forward. As confirmed funding was only available for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the current evaluation contract with the host organization is in place for that time period. Beginning in April 2021, the external evaluator worked with the Project Manager to develop a logic model for the program, and update and produce a streamlined Evaluation Framework to guide the process going forward. These documents are contained as Appendix B.

The logic model short-term and long-term outcomes were subsequently revised to support a funding submission to the Arctic Inspiration Prize. The revised outcomes were considered by the Steering Committee on December 8, 2021, resulting in recommendations for minor edits which are reflected in Table 2. The Program Review Gathering held on December 8-9 with the Steering Committee and OTL Program Leaders focused on gathering data to support Phase 3 of the Evaluation Framework. Participants not only reflected on their experience with the using the SWB training to date, but also worked together to develop a shared evaluation approach to SWB moving forward. Results of that gathering are reflected in later sections of this report.

Because SWB involves several streams of activity, the evaluation focuses on several dimensions of the initiative, including the training curriculum itself, the effectiveness of training delivery, the impact of the training on OTL Program Leaders, the impact of the curriculum on OTL program participants, and the overall impact of the initiative on NWT communities and organizations. The logic model breaks out anticipated outcomes according to these categories, as illustrated below in Table 2.

Table 2: Logic Model Outcomes (Revised December 2021)

	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
For OTL Program Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Increased ability to help program participants feel safe and supported, and support their mental and emotional well-being● Increased ability to respond to people in distress during OTL programs, including suicidal ideation● Increased ability to mitigate risks associated with mental health challenges by implementing trauma-informed and culturally appropriate approaches into OTL programs● Increased confidence in their ability to offer safe and effective programs● Decreased staff stress and burn-out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Increased access to training opportunities for dealing with trauma in OTL programs● Increased access to a network of skilled, supportive colleagues● Enhanced knowledge exchange and sharing of wise practices● Mental health support training for OTL leaders is normalized● Decreased staff turn-over in OTL programs● Build resilience and connection among NWT OTL leaders
For OTL Program Leaders For OTL Program Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Improved quality of experience while attending OTL programs● Increased likelihood of sustained participation in OTL programs● Increased likelihood of experiencing the benefits of OTL programs● Decreased risk of distraction from learning opportunities during OTL programs due to trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● An increased number of OTL programs incorporate skills and resources required to respond to trauma and mental health challenges● Reduction in the number of OTL attendees sent home, medically evacuated or hospitalized, resulting in reduced demand on NWT health system● Increase in the number of residents who exhibit benefits of participation in OTL programs, including inter-generational connection, traditional skills training, connection to land and culture
For Communities and NWT Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Increased ability to deliver safe, effective OTL programming● Increased ability to access funding opportunities for OTL programs based on improved program design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Enhanced ability to deliver safe, effective, culturally appropriate OTL programs● Enhanced wellbeing of community residents due to positive, productive OTL experiences● Enhanced promotion of Indigenous cultural resurgence through OTL programming● Increased capacity of community members to support their wellbeing and others.

¹See <https://nwtspor.ca/about/contact-us> for more information about Hotì ts'eeda and its role in promoting Indigenous evaluation in the NWT.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation approach is grounded in principles of decolonization and co-creation and utilises principles and methods consistent with developmental evaluation and culturally responsive Indigenous evaluation. The SWB Steering Committee is predominantly Indigenous and combines representation from Indigenous organizations from across the NWT with Indigenous and non-Indigenous subject matter expertise. A decolonized evaluation approach is consistent with the SWB’s driving philosophy and design pillars, as outlined above. Decolonized evaluation “centralizes Indigenous knowledge and values, ensures that processes and outcomes are aligned with Indigenous community goals and worldviews, includes active participation and leadership of Indigenous communities and focuses on relevance as defined by Indigenous communities.”² Because SWB blends western and Indigenous knowledges and expertise, the evaluation adopts a co-creation approach. Co-creation involves designing evaluation frameworks and methods, “... in true partnership, drawing on knowledge, values, and research methods from Indigenous and western spheres as needed to arrive at the most appropriate and effective evaluation approach for the specific context of the evaluation.”³

Development evaluation veers from the more traditional concepts of formative and summative evaluation to focus on continuous learning and quality improvement throughout the lifespan of a project. It also brings a strong emphasis on collaboration and capacity building – the evaluator is not seen as the “expert”, but rather, a facilitator who collaborates with the project team to co-create an evaluation that is useful, while building capacity within the project for evaluative thinking.⁴

As noted above, SWB is grounded in recognition of the importance of relationships, and evaluation activities will be informed by the concept of “relational accountability” as described by Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson, which emphasizes the importance of demonstrating respect, reciprocity and responsibility, not only to one another but to land.⁵

To some extent, this Interim Report is a formative evaluation, in that it focuses on improvements to the program during the development phase and contains recommendations for future action. However, the formative content resides within a broader developmental evaluation cycle, as evidenced by actions already taken to build on learnings from the Phase 1-2 evaluation, i.e. revisions to the training curriculum have been initiated based on feedback from surveys administered during the March 2021 pilot training.

The on-going evaluation work associated with SWB is also guided by the Program Evaluation Standards, adopted by the Canadian Evaluation Society in 2012.⁶

² Indigenous Health Service Evaluation: Principles and Guidelines from a Provincial “Three Ribbon” Expert Panel.(2020/o Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation. Vol 34(3),p. 417.
³ DeLancey, Debbie. Indigenous Evaluation in the Northwest Territories: Opportunities and Challenges. (2020). Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation. Vol. 34(3), p. 505.
⁴ Adapted from Patton, Michael Quinn. (2011). Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Evaluation Use. New York. Guilford Press.
⁵ LaFrance,J., Nichols, R. and Kirkhart, K.E. (2012). Culture writes the script: On the centrality of context in indigenous evaluation. In D.J. Rog, J.L. Fitzpatrick & R.F.Conner (Eds), Context: A framework for its influence on evaluation practice. New Directions for Evaluation, 135, 59-74.
⁶The standards can be found here: <https://evaluationcanada.ca/program-evaluation-standards>

Methods

Consistent with the developmental evaluation approach, the evaluation plan outlines evaluation activities associated with each Phase of SWB implementation, providing the opportunity for on-going learning, feedback, and improvement throughout the project. Table 3 summarizes the focus of evaluation activities during each phase:

Table 3: Evaluation focus throughout the SWB life cycle

SWB PHASE	EVALUATION FOCUS	WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?
1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effectiveness of SWB training materialsEffectiveness of training process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">To what extent were the training materials clear and understandableHow effective were the learning activities?What changes would OTL program leaders like to see to the curriculum?
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effectiveness and utility of SWB training in the fieldEffectiveness of mentorshipAchievement of SWB short-term outcomesFuture vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have OTL leaders used the SWB skills, and were they effective?Did the training increase OTL leaders’ knowledge, skills and confidence levels?What barriers or gaps were encountered?Was the mentorship effective?What is our ultimate vision for SWB?
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effectiveness of revised SWB training materialsEffectiveness of train-the-trainer training process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have the revisions to the SWB curriculum addressed the recommendations?To what extent were the train-the-trainer materials clear and understandable?How effective were the learning activities?What changes should be made to the train-the-trainer curriculum?
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effectiveness of the SWB train-the-trainer trainingAchievement of SWB short-term outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have the trained SWB trainers had the opportunity to deliver training to other OTL leaders?Did the training provide the trainers with the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver training to others?What barriers or gaps were encountered?
Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Impact of SWB on OTL program participantsImpact of SWB on OTL program successImpact of SWB on communities	

*The evaluation framework also includes questions about participants’ levels of satisfaction with meeting logistics. A brief survey with questions about facilities, meals, and quality of facilitation is used after each gathering to inform future meeting planning, but those results are not included in this interim evaluation report.

As noted above, the evaluation activities for Phases 1 and 2 were completed and an internal report was produced which summarized survey results related to the effectiveness of each training module, as well as the results of a facilitated sharing circle where participants shared their ideas about how to improve the training content and process. Recommendations for change to SWB contained in that report are attached in Appendix C.

This report focuses on Phase 3, but also draws on the Phases 1-2 data and findings, to assess the effectiveness and impact of the SWB training to date and the extent to which short-term outcomes are being achieved, and to develop recommendations for future project activities, including adjustments to the evaluation framework.

A mixed methods approach was used which combines the quantitative survey design used in the Phases 1-2 evaluation, facilitated discussions held at a Program Review Gathering, and one-on-one interviews. In December 2021, Steering Committee members and OTL program leaders were invited to participate in the Program Review Gathering. The attendees at that session included 17 OTL leaders, including Steering Committee members. 11 had participated in the March 2021 SWB pilot training, and six others did not attend that session but were interested in taking the training. Curriculum development specialists and the external evaluator also attended.

The Program Review Gathering was convened in part to provide an opportunity for pilot training participants to reflect on their use of the SWB skills while delivering OTL programs. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many such programs were cancelled or postponed during the spring, summer and fall of 2021. Only nine OTL leaders had been able to actively participate in delivering OTL programs since the pilot training; thus, Phase 3 evaluation findings are primarily based on the experience of this relatively small target group.

The Steering Committee met for the first one and a half days to deal with administrative items. The next day and a half included the entire group, and was designed to focus on implementation of the SWB to date, and future planning, through facilitated discussions led by an Indigenous facilitator who is also a Steering Committee member. Discussion questions were drawn in part from the evaluation framework, in order to provide data for the evaluation - focusing on whether participants had had the opportunity to use the SWB skills, and if so, on what worked well and what barriers or gaps were encountered. Other agenda items included future planning for evaluation of SWB, as well as visioning on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to inform future implementation. These discussions occurred through a mix of large group sharing circles, and smaller break-out group discussions of specific evaluation questions. The Program Review Gathering agenda is attached as Appendix D, and a highlights report is attached as Appendix E.

Following that gathering, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in one-on-one interviews with the external evaluator to drill down further into their experience with encountering issues related to mental well-being during land-based programs, and specifically their experience using the SWB training in their work. Seven follow-up interviews were conducted. The interview guide is attached as Appendix F.

These methods prioritized Indigenous methods, including participatory and conversational approaches, using stories rather than surveys, and plain language rather than technical jargon.⁷ At the Program Review Gathering, a presentation on Indigenous evaluation by the facilitator set the context by explaining why western academic approaches to evaluation may not resonate with OTL projects, talking about the methodological challenges associated with measuring connection to land, and framing the discussions in an Indigenous ontological context. This presentation validated the knowledge and experience of the Indigenous participants and encouraged them to share their learnings and perceptions with the group.

Recognizing the importance of relationships and reciprocity, the external evaluator did not reach out to OTL leaders to request one-on-one interviews until after the gathering, when her role had been explained to all participants and an opportunity had been provided to establish personal connections.⁸

FINDINGS

The findings outlined here represent an aggregated summary of information collected through the methods outlined above, for two reasons. First, because much of the data collection involved oral discussion and sharing stories in large or small groups, or interviews, there was some variation in how respondents used terminology related to the modules (for example, discussions focusing on Module 3 learnings variously included references to “self-regulation tools”, “grounding exercises”, and “affirmation techniques”). This has required the evaluator to draw inferences and link references from the discussion to the training curriculum; hence it would be challenging to present a quantitative breakdown of the extent to which specific skills were used. The second reason for presenting the data in aggregate is simply that given the small number of participants and respondents, it would not be possible to cite individual responses without jeopardizing the confidentiality of participants in the process. Some information captured on flip charts during the Program Review Gathering has been included because this information is the result of mixed group work and can’t be attributed to any single individual.

Pilot Training

The pilot training evaluation focused on the SWB curriculum content, learning materials and training program delivery. The evaluation was conducted through a survey distributed to all learning participants at the end of each training day, which included five questions focused specifically on that day’s module; and a facilitated group discussion at the end of the training.

The first three questions in the survey asked learners to respond to questions about whether the module was helpful, whether the learning activities were effective, and whether the workbook was helpful. Responses were generally positive, and are summarized in Appendix D.

⁷ Sage Advice: Real-world approaches to program evaluation in northern, remote and Aboriginal communities. Reciprocal Consulting. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5763a7c5893fco7fb7fo3a38/t/577172a9893fco9ddd5517b6/1467052722328/2-Sage-Advice-English.pdf>
⁸ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. Indigenous Approaches to Program Evaluation. 2013.

A fourth question asked participations whether the module reflected best practices of Indigenous approaches to community care and the realities of delivering OTL programs in the NWT, and to explain why or why not. Four modules were rated at 100%, with no changes required. The remaining modules were rated at 72% and 78%, with suggestions for change.

The final question gave learning participants an opportunity to provide suggested changes to the training process, learning activities and learning materials for each module. A facilitated discussion on the final day provided another opportunity for participants to reflect on what worked well, areas for improvement, and gaps in the training materials.

The participant feedback was provided to the curriculum development and adult education consultants and was used to guide revisions to the SWB training curriculum.

Implementation

This section considers the effectiveness and utility of the SWB training curriculum, based on feedback from OTL program leaders who had the opportunity to lead or participate in OTL programs between March and December 2021, and actually had the chance to test out the skills in practice.

Have OTL leaders used the SWB skills, and were they effective? Did the training increase OTL leaders' knowledge, skills, and confidence levels?

Of the 11 practitioners at the Program Review Gathering who took the pilot training, nine had subsequently taken part in OTL programs and were able to draw on the skills acquired during the training. During the gathering, participants were broken into small working groups and asked to discuss which skills had been used, and their experience in using these skills. The results of those discussions, captured in flip charts and verbal reports to the large group, indicated that program leaders had drawn on learnings from all six modules of the SWB curriculum. Specific skills cited that were used included:

- Camp set-up, logistics and pre-planning, safety planning
- Community agreements, group rules around confidentiality and communications
- Colonization timeline, understanding trauma
- Conflict resolution
- Suicide intervention
- De-escalation, meditation, grounding techniques, window of tolerance
- Active listening skills
- Self-care (for staff and participants)
- Aftercare planning, access to local community resources.

Interview results confirmed that most OTL leaders had found an opportunity to use one or more of the SWB skills, and as with the discussions at the gathering, the skills that had been drawn on spanned all six SWB modules. Steering Committee members who were interviewed tended to have previous training and experience in related areas and their comments were often qualified, e.g. stating that the SWB training validated their current skill sets and levels of understanding, or that the training provided them with new approaches or new terminology to enhance existing skill sets. OTL program leaders with less experience and previous training stated that the skills they acquired were new to them and that having this knowledge better equipped them to prepare for and deliver their programs.

What worked well?

Although learnings from all six modules were used by the OTL program leaders, there were certain skills and tools that were highlighted as being particularly effective. Program leaders felt that the suicide intervention training equipped them to talk to participants with suicidal ideation in a supportive way, and offer resources. Most program leaders said that the camp pre-planning, logistics and set-up were particularly helpful; and several mentioned the tools for creating community agreements as being of critical importance. Wellness, self-care and aftercare tools were also flagged as having been effective.

A key take-away from Module 2 for some program leaders was the importance of blending western mental health approaches with cultural preventative factors (e.g. having Elders available, participating in traditional land-based activities) in programming.

Some respondents indicated that although they didn't use the materials on the colonialism timeline, this module was of critical importance because it gave them not only a better understanding of their own and their program participants' histories, but it also gave them insight and understanding into the factors behind the trauma that program participants may have experienced. Some commented that this module gave them the appropriate language to discuss these issues with program participants.

What worked less well, was unclear or may need more development in the curriculum?

When asked about skills that didn't work as well, where training may not have been clear enough, or where there were gaps in the training program leaders cited the following:

- The timeline for colonization in Canada in Module 3 needs more work. Some felt it requires a plain language approach for use with communities. There were some suggestions about information that was missing, e.g. the Berger Inquiry and its impact on NWT communities, and the history of how ceremonial practices were outlawed and how that impacts Indigenous peoples' participation in ceremony today. OTL leaders wanted to see more activities linked to this teaching material.
- It was noted that holding discussions around complex concepts like consent in Module 1 can be challenging, and that more plain language descriptions and guidance for how to navigate these discussions would be useful.

Other suggestions included:

- o The training needs to provide specific guidance for situations where a triggered program participant may raise numerous issues in a sharing circle or one-on-one discussion, to enable the program leader to navigate this situation.
- o Specific instruction on how to handle disclosures of former trauma or abuse would be useful.
- o More in-depth instruction on crisis management would be helpful, and;
- o Guidance on how to handle situations where Elders' direction may differ from the community agreement, or may contradict program values (e.g. traditional gender roles), in a culturally appropriate and respectful way.

Did the training increase OTL leaders’ knowledge, skills, and confidence levels?

As noted above, even highly-trained and experienced Steering Committee members felt that the training enhanced or validated their skills in delivering OTL programs, while OTL program leaders with less experience gave strong indication that the SWB training provided them with increased knowledge, skills, and confidence. Several of the interviewees stated explicitly that they felt confident using the skills in the field, and most indicated that they felt their ability to support program participants had improved. Several respondents indicated that they handled situations of trauma or conflict differently as a result of the training than they would have done in the past, with improved results.

Some interviewees also cited examples of OTL programs where they were invited to participate as resource people but were not the program leaders, and noted that during these events, they were aware of situations where applying the SWB teachings would have been helpful. They noted that they were able to draw on the SWB training to provide advice to program leaders related to camp set-up, community agreements, or suicide intervention.

It was noted that the SWB training could be particularly helpful for non-Indigenous program leaders, providing advice and insight into how to set up a program in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way when working with Indigenous organizations and communities.

What barriers or problems were encountered?

The Phase 1-2 evaluation report identified recommendations for changes to the SWB curriculum that have been addressed, and which will be presented to learning participants in May 2022 at the pilot facilitator session.

Several program leaders noted that while the SWB curriculum and tools are helpful, it is difficult to access a reference binder when on the land, and that it would be helpful to have more accessible tools – e.g. checklists or cue cards, which can easily be taken to programs.

Consistent with feedback from the Phase 1-2 evaluation, several respondents indicated that videos of the training scenarios would be extremely helpful during the actual training sessions. Some noted that it was tiring to be asked to participate in role plays, and that learning might be enhanced if these case studies could be on video.

Mentorship

The SWB project design envisioned providing opportunities for mentorship after the March 2021 pilot training session. During the March 2021 training, participants were asked about the most effective way to do this and it was agreed that monthly teleconference or Zoom calls would be an effective mechanism to provide OTL program leaders with an opportunity for continuous learning, sharing of their experiences using the SWB skills, and reflection on their handling of situations in the field. The evaluation framework focuses on whether mentorship activities supported OTL leaders in using the SWB skills, and specifically asks whether OTL leaders took advantage of the mentorship opportunities provided and whether they found them helpful.

One mentorship call was scheduled by the Project Manager, in June 2022, but due to competing priorities and scheduling conflicts, only one training participant was available. Efforts to schedule future calls fell through due to scheduling difficulty, exacerbated by the fact that many OTL programs are delivered during the summer.

Both during the program review gathering discussions, and in interviews, OTL program leaders repeatedly emphasized that there is a need for on-going mentorship and support, while recognizing the challenges in finding effective ways to accomplish this. A major theme that emerged repeatedly during the December 2021 gathering was the need for a more formal network of OTL program leaders to be established in the NWT. Ideas proposed included annual gatherings and a learning hub with access to shared resources. It was clear that participants felt the professional development benefits of creating connection, sharing stories and on-going learning are a critical success factor in building capacity to deliver effective and supportive OTL programs, and that advancing this is a critical component of the SWB mandate.

In addition to teleconferences, other suggestions were brought forward for on-going mentorship activities, for example:

- Zoom meetings or other videoconference platforms scheduled on a regular basis.
- Creating an on-call support network of OTL program leaders who can be available for advice and/or reflection on short notice.
- Creating support networks in communities, including Elders, who can play a similar role.

Future Vision

The evaluation framework includes developing a future vision for the SWB as a key focus of the Program Review Gathering, with questions addressing the ultimate vision, and the actions and resources needed to achieve the vision. These questions were tackled by the Steering Committee during its administrative meeting, and were also addressed at the broader gathering through the SWOT exercise. A number of themes and specific suggestions emerged:

- **Need for a supportive network of OTL program leaders:** The discussion under “Mentorship” earlier in this section flags the strong focus on developing a network of OTL program leaders in the NWT. This clearly forms a key component of the shared future vision for SWB.
- **Concern about the ownership and administration of the SWB initiative:** SWB’s design is grounded in a philosophy that blends clinically researched practices in mental health work with Indigenous practices and expertise. The training centres Indigenous approaches to healing and well-being, and prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing. Some participants raised a concern about ownership of the Indigenous knowledge that is being generated to inform the SWB curriculum, and specifically, concern that this knowledge is held within a non-Indigenous organization, i.e. the NWT Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA). It was further noted that, since the NWTRPA is a government funded organization, this creates a perception that Indigenous knowledge related to SWB is being appropriated by a government agency. Given the historical relationship between Indigenous people and government, the risk that this will create a lack of trust in SWB was flagged as a threat during the SWOT analysis, leading to further discussion during the wrap-up about other options for administrative hosting of the initiative.

● **Formalization of governance for SWB:** Concurrent with the concerns about ownership was recognition of the need to formalize the governance structure for the initiative. This could include, for example, developing a Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee, and addressing administrative issues including compensation for Steering Committee members who are not engaging as part of a paid position.

● **Potential for certification or accreditation for OTL leaders who have completed the SWB training:** Steering Committee members feel that being able to offer some formal certification upon completion of SWB training would not only be an incentive for program leaders, but would also help to provide standards for delivery of OTL programs across the NWT. A related issue is the need for guidelines about who is qualified to deliver the SWB training, which is of particular importance given the long-term outcome that envisions increased training opportunities for OTL program leaders.

● **Sustainability:** To date, SWB has been developed and implemented with short-term funding contributions provided by a number of supportive organizations. If the future vision is to be achieved, longer-term funding sources will need to be identified. This includes developing a financial and administrative structure for SWB delivery, that addresses issues like copyright, cost of training delivery, etc.

On-going Evaluation Work

Consistent with the philosophical orientation of a developmental and co-created evaluation approach, the Program Review Gathering agenda included exploring participants’ thoughts on future evaluation questions, indicators, and methods. A summary of suggested indicators and evaluation questions was generated, which is included in Appendix F, the report on the gathering. Participants placed a strong emphasis on using evaluation for continuous improvement, not only at the SWB level but also for their individual programs. Several participants stressed the importance of a strengths-based approach.

The discussion focused on the importance of embracing Indigenous ways of knowing and balancing these with western methods. Suggestions included exploring ways to make evaluation less of a burden on SWB participants by making it fun, and using engaging methods like Photovoice as opposed to standard approaches like surveys.

Evaluation questions proposed by the group included:

- Do SWB learning participants feel increased comfort and confidence to run OTL programs?
- Do SWB learning participants feel increased comfort and confidence managing groups and interpersonal dynamics?
- Do SWB learning participants feel they have grown personally, specifically with respect to sense of self, cultural identity, and connection to place?
- Do communities feel that access to OTL programming has increased due to SWB?
- Has SWB normalized conversation around these difficult topics?

The SWOT analysis yielded further insight into what participants saw as opportunities for the evaluation approach, including:

- The importance of creating an evaluation framework that can be used into the future;
- Incorporating Indigenous and western ways of knowing into evaluation work, and
- Sharing information and learnings with funders and partners.

Some interest was also expressed in developing simple evaluation tools that community-based OTL programs can use to implement evaluative thinking and continuous quality improvement in their own programs.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This interim evaluation draws on rich data derived from surveys, facilitated discussions and interviews with a relatively small group of OTL program leaders to reach conclusions and provide recommendations. From a western evaluation perspective, although the target group size is small, the triangulation of three data sources provides assurance of the validity of findings.

The findings indicate that the SWB training curriculum is effective, and that learners were able draw on the skills covered in the curriculum and apply them in the field. There is consensus among those who participated in the evaluation that information in all six SWB modules is valuable, and training participants drew on learnings and skills from all six when applying their learnings during OTL program delivery. Almost OTL leaders who had the opportunity to deploy their SWB learnings indicated that their skills and confidence in delivering programming had increased, as had their ability to support participants in OTL programs. Some indicated that their ability to provide advice and/or referrals to aftercare resources had also increased. In short, the evaluation findings confirm that SWB is achieving its short-term outcomes in the OTL Program leader category, including:

- Increased ability to help program participants feel safe and supported, and support their mental and emotional well-being.
- Increased ability to respond to people in distress during OTL programs, including suicidal ideation.
- Increased ability to mitigate risks associated with mental health challenges by implementing trauma-informed and culturally appropriate approaches into OTL programs.
- Increased confidence in their ability to offer safe and effective programs.
- Decreased staff stress and burn-out.

SWB faces a number of challenges in achieving its goal of evolving from a short-term initiative into a more fully developed, sustainable and on-going program. Further work is needed to refine the future vision for the project, ensure project sustainability, and develop a long-term outcome evaluation framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SWB Administration

- 1. Work towards transitioning away from the current host institution and exploring administrative options that will support program independence and sustainability into the future:** Given the concerns that have been raised about on-going ownership of Indigenous knowledge and the future issues related to ownership and copyright of SWB materials that will flow from these concerns, the SWB Steering Committee should continue to explore options for identifying a host organization or administrative platform that will enable the project to evolve and grow while maintaining decision-making autonomy and control over intellectual property.
- 2. Formalize the SWB governance structure:** Steering Committee members have identified the need for a Terms of Reference which clearly outlines roles and expectations, and addresses issues such as how to deal with situations of conflict or potential conflict. There is also a need to determine compensation mechanisms for Steering Committee members who are not participating as part of their paid employment. Consideration should also be given to clarifying the role of the Project Manager, including accountability mechanisms to the Steering Committee.
- 3. Explore avenues for SWB sustainability:** The recent announcement of the Arctic Inspiration Prize funding positions SWB to continue its growth and development in the near future. The Project Manager and Steering Committee should take advantage of this opportunity to develop a more permanent and sustainable SWB delivery model and seek long-term partnerships to ensure the project can continue past the AIP injection of funds. This might include considering whether there will be fees charged for delivering SWB training, and expanding offering SWB training to other territories in the future.

SWB Program Design and Delivery

- 4. Continue to revise and improve the SWB curriculum based on participant feedback:** The continuous quality improvement approach that has been embedded in SWB since the beginning of the project should be considered a permanent feature of program design. Training participants and program leaders using the SWB skills should be given an opportunity to provide feedback on a regular basis to ensure the curriculum is relevant and responsive.
- 5. Explore opportunities for SWB to become accredited and offer a certificate to training participants:** Providing evidence of course completion could help to normalize the expectation that individuals leading land-based programming will have the skills and training required to support participant well-being. It could also provide an incentive for program leaders to take the training as part of their on-going professional development.

Mentorship and Support

- 6. Develop and implement a variety of opportunities to provide on-going mentorship and support to OTL program leaders:** In spite of the challenges encountered in scheduling mentorship opportunities during the previous year, the evaluation findings clearly indicate that there is a perceived need for mentorship and support opportunities to be made available. SWB should continue to test and evaluate different approaches.
- 7. Develop a more formalized network of OTL leaders in the NWT:** The desire for OTL program leaders to have access to a professional network of colleagues across the NWT was clearly expressed during the Program Review Gathering, and should be considered an integral part of SWB mentorship opportunities. Consideration should be given to establishing a resource hub as part of this broader initiative.

Evaluation

- 8. Update the Evaluation Framework to focus on longer-term outcomes and reflect input from the Program Review Gathering:** The current Evaluation Framework was intended to focus on Phases 1-5 of the initiative. Now that SWB is entering Phases 4 and 5, it is timely to develop an updated framework that is focused on outcomes, including impacts on OTL program participants and more broadly on communities. Learnings from the Program Review Gathering, including suggestions for evaluation approaches, methods and questions, should be incorporated.



Jasmine Plummer holding a muskrat at the pilot SWB training



Group photo by Anneka Westergreen



Sarah Rogers skinning a muskrat



Group photo by Anneka Westergreen

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