



Northwest Indian Treatment Center

D3WXbiPalil



About the Center

The Squaxin Island Tribe's Northwest Indian Treatment Center (NWITC) is a 33-bed residential treatment facility that serves American Indians with chronic substance abuse and relapse patterns related to unresolved grief and complex trauma. Located on 2.5 acres in Elma, WA, NWITC is licensed by the Department of Health and accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The Center has a success rate of nearly 80% and has been recognized by tribes across the nation as one of the best residential programs in the country.

Using approaches grounded in evidence, experience and a deep understanding of culture, we treat trauma first—this unique approach of addressing historical, systematic, and individual trauma is the center of NWITC's strength and success. Using culturally adapted best practices, the NWITC provides clinical, cultural, and support services to clients during the 45-day treatment program, intensive recovery support with alumni after treatment, and recovery coach programming in tribal communities.

Welcomed, envisioned and collaboratively implemented by tribal leaders who felt the urgent need for such a facility, the NWITC was developed to serve tribal people who have addictions and unresolved grief and trauma in a calming location and supportive environment that is centered on tribal people and culture. At the heart of the NWITC development was immersive, culturally-based treatment and intensive content to address the roots of client trauma to help clients reconnect to their identities as Native people and move toward stability and wellness.

Our Approach to Treatment

NWITC's approach to treatment is designed around components that 26 years of experience has shown to sustain recovery, a satisfying lifestyle, and prepare alumni to become leaders in Indian Country. NWITC engaged a consultant, Kaufmann and Associates, for an extensive review of our unique model of treatment to arrive at a cost-based rate to support this model. The rate includes treatment elements responsive to intense and/or prolonged trauma, generational trauma in the presence of substance abuse.

Treatment engages a combination of substance use disorder professionals, mental health counselors, DBT skill-building and the services rendered by a



psychiatric nurse practitioner as well as intensive post treatment support and intervention. All are powerful parts of treatment that help stabilize individuals in the program. Grounding and integrating these approaches in culture and bringing trauma to the forefront has shown to maximize their impact, as seen in NWITC's success rate. Our program is a minimum of 45 days because that is the period of time our team has seen is necessary to develop trust sufficient for intensive work related to trauma and the building of life skills.

The NWITC has outstanding measures of success based on a variety of evaluation criteria, and the heart of this consistent success is anchoring the work in culture and relationship. A program that addresses mental health, substance use disorder, spirituality, cultural connection, emotional wellness, life skills, self-confidence, and personal and community support resources is the whole-person centered, culturally-integrated service that tribes in the region envisioned and continue to support.

| Sustaining Recovery from Within

By integrating and culturally adapting evidence-based practices to the cultural context of those we treat, we are able to support remarkable transformation in the lives of our alumni. However, adapting evidence-based practices to the cultural context presents new challenges, necessitating processes involving other tribal and American Indian leaders.

Centering trauma in the treatment of substance use disorder requires a unique environment in which employees are supported and the building of strong teams that value the input of all employees. Training of all employees to achieve an internally consistent environment is critical. Employees, carefully chosen, must demonstrate radical ethics and emotional capacity for the engagement of trauma. All of these elements must be in place in order for patients to build a new life based on who they were born to be.

All NWITC staff are equally integrated into the treatment programming, resulting in an operating structure that is functionally horizontal, and embraces interdependence and relationship building as key values. Openness and transparency, skill sharing, cross-training and are integral to the success of a staffing plan where each employee is a valued member of the treatment program; intensive training for staff around trauma helps staff to truly serve clients as they address the roots of the issues they face.

Clients who graduate from the NWITC have consistently self-reported sobriety and/or reduced use rates at about 80% for the year after treatment (over double the average rate of residential treatment in the US). Success is also measured by daily life function improvements: whether alumni are able support themselves financially and logistically (housing, food access, bill payment, clothing, childcare, legal), whether they have new criminal changes, and perhaps most significantly how integrated they are in cultural activities and community life (for example, in 2019, clients accessed cultural events and activities 1,637 times after graduating from treatment). These and a variety of other measurements of success are possible due to the intensive nature of the treatment and post-



treatment services and the power of relationships the NWITC maintains with and alumni and referral resources in clients' home communities.

◆ **Navigating complex systems.**

NWITC has taken initiative and demonstrated leadership when navigating the complex dynamics involving government entities, other tribes and Indian organizations as well as relevant federal issues. Some of these complex systems require dedicated time and require coordination with decision makers. Navigation of these systems determines the funding, accessibility and continued survival of tribal health care systems like NWITC.

The NWITC was planned and developed by and for Native leaders and Native community members over 25 years ago to create a home that would support tribal people facing cycles of substance use and relapse connected to unresolved trauma and grief. Many of the issues NWITC clients face can be easily be tied to historical and generational trauma; part of the healing process then requires that tribes boldly assert the use of modalities that work for tribal people, and acknowledge, accept and address the legacies that have led to today, and empower creativity and cultural adaptation to move forward. We tell patients that as people who have been there and back, they are tomorrow's leaders; they are who Indian Country needs now.

NWITC is tribally owned and operated for the benefit of Northwest tribes. Its long term success is in part due to participating with other tribes to strengthen tribal influence on state government and state departments and divisions, as well as the Center for Medicaid/Medicare Services. By building powerful partnerships that are targeted and persistent, the bar has been raised regarding how these governments interface with all tribes. It is important for organizations like D3WXbi Palil to consistently have a place at the table where decisions about regulations and law are applied to tribes, particularly in the area of health care.

◆ **Centering trauma in the approach.**

The foundation of NWITC's approach is to address the underlying conditions of individuals struggling with substance use disorder. Trauma is individual, but there are also variations of historic trauma among tribes. It is critical to understand these differences. It is essential to understand the underlying dynamics and their presentation. Patients have often given up on themselves and must be helped to establish a self-understanding that can sustain life changes. NWITC alumni have become tribal leaders by engaging in this process. Every element of treatment depends on the ongoing relationships built by the people involved; as such, investing in NWITC staff has been critical, from identifying the right candidates, investing in intensive all-staff training to promoting wellness and self-care. The level of complex trauma requires impeccable boundaries and skilled, compassionate staff; training tribal members as interns continues to result in appropriate long-term staff.

◆ **Treating individual trauma.**

Personalized treatment programs are informed by patients' lived experiences. An understanding of an individual's cultural context at a hyper-detailed level is needed to effectively uncover and address the layers of trauma the individual



and their ancestors' have experienced. NWITC has developed deep expertise in this area, while connecting treatment to the cultural experiences of Native people. Part of the success of the treatment program is its inherent intensity, with some clients accessing counseling staff multiple times per day if necessary, and the intensity of the cultural offerings, and ongoing relationships with tribes and tribal services have improved client access to and navigation of appropriate tribal services after treatment. The NWITC's focus on addressing complex trauma is centered on supporting Native people with substance use disorder and chronic relapse issues to remember, relearn and return to their true identities-- who they were born to be.

◆ **Building relationships.**

Building relationships and developing allies across tribal treatment entities is critical to develop an integrated continuum of care. If an individual is experiencing a condition that is outside of NWITC's expertise, the individual can be referred, knowing that a trusted support network exists beyond the Center's walls. It's equally important that a level of intimacy and support exists across the internal team to ensure employees are equipped to deliver proper care and can create an atmosphere that makes space for healing and emotional growth.

The intensive NWITC treatment and post-treatment programming has built a powerful network of relationships with tribes and tribal referral services: relationships that are critical to the NWITC's and clients' successes. Building relationships with tribes on the service delivery level and executive levels has allowed the NWITC to closely monitor, anticipate, and successfully evolve with the changing health care reimbursement and how that impacts revenue potential. Part of this work involves identifying each state's Medicaid-State Plan and how it incorporates Tribes and Urban Indian Organizations, and examining how other states are working with CMS to achieve a reimbursement rate that reflects the resource it takes to do this work.

Issues of sustainability are not only financial: reputation is key and relationships must have continual attention. Outcome measures must have a strong satisfaction component, both as to referents, tribes, patients and employees. Outcomes are gathered frequently at regular intervals and reviewed by management. Concerns receive follow up and correction. Referents receive frequent feedback about patients during their stay at residential treatment.

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The success of the NWITC center on the recurring themes of ongoing consistent working relationships with tribal staff and tribal leaders, for feedback and referrals, and culturally adapted curriculum. Historically, the NWITC has had positive evaluation and surveys based on consistency, clear processes and roles. After collaborative development of process, only anomalies need to be



addressed, and the core services can be consistently maintained, which absolutely contributes to our success. We also adapt recovery support services that are adapted to each tribes' preferences and resources, and their identified needs.

◆ **Recovery Support.**


Patients are in awe at times that, upon program completion, they aren't just given a certificate and sent on their way--the support they had for the duration of their stay continues in the post-treatment period. Many of the native men and women that walk through our doors have no support at home, and have no idea what resources are even available. This is a continuing working relationship to help establish safe housing, transportation, educational, work, medical, and mental health resources.

NWITC has a powerful Recovery Support Team that serves alumni after treatment. D3WXbi Palil has provided recovery support services since 2010, and has since expanded and adapted recovery support services to respond to changing needs, tribal response and changing opportunities. The Recovery Support Team staff members provide an intake of each patient separate from the clinical intake/assessment to establish patient needs for supports in the post-treatment period, which may include transitional housing, transportation, employment, managing complex legal requirements for transition between areas and sometimes states, child protective service plans, regular check-ins and the willingness to provide crises intervention when necessary. This aspect of Recovery Support continues for at least a year regardless of whether the patient successfully completed or not. It also means understanding and being prepared to navigate the context the individual will be returning to, including gang violence and domestic violence.

An effective treatment approach needs to pro-actively support alumni every step of the way. Supportive networks identified during the client treatment period help reduce risk of retraumatization and relapse after treatment by removing the barriers to wellness. Clients often need additional supportive counseling and substance use disorder services after treatment, and also often need transitional housing options and other wrap-around services including crime victim services, food assistance, rental assistance, transportation support, domestic violence advocacy services, child care, clothing and other basic needs, as well as tangible ongoing peer support from community members who understand their challenges.

| **Grounded in Culture**

The NWITC was given the spiritual name "D3WXbi Palil" meaning "Returning from the Dark, Deep Waters to the Light." Everything at the NWITC starts with culture, and culture is integrated into every element of service the NWITC provides. At every step of treatment, clients are offered tools to help reclaim connectivity to themselves, their identities, their communities, and their cultures; mindfulness, presence, prayer, song, drumming, traditional food and medicine, and a spirit of reciprocity and belonging are integrated to the daily rhythms of



treatment at the NWITC. Our atmosphere is one of healing mind, body and soul.

Cultural leaders are imbedded in the schedule: a healer from Oregon, a drum teacher, two different cedar weavers, people who teach beading, storytellers, sweatlodge leaders, Shaker Church ceremonies, longhouse ceremonies, etc. Each day begins with patients drumming the “house song,” related to the first light behind the hills. At all breaks, drums (some of which patients make) are available to client.

We have a powerful herbal medicine program. The Native Foods and Medicines Program engages patients in traditional medicine making, including cultivation, harvesting, and processing. A book, created by NWITC with its partners, is given to each patient. This book, Native Plants and Medicines/Skills for Resilience, integrates medicine making with Skill Building. Patients are taught to make medicines from wild-crafted plants, ones we order, or those grown on the grounds in the medicine garden. There is a herbal pharmacy on site, with teas and in-house created capsules for common ailments or health support. This program is networked with tribal gardeners throughout the Northwest. Connections with the plant people is pivotal in the healing journeys for many clients as they reclaim their identities.

| Location



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