



# Wellbriety!

*The Wellbriety Movement's Online Magazine*

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## The Inter-Tribal Wellness Center of Sheridan, Wyoming Makes History

Receives the First-Ever Certification as a  
*Wellbriety Treatment Center*



ITWC staff, and Don Coyhis, hold the Wellbriety Treatment Center certificate after the Certification Ceremony.

*Left to right:* Ben Armentrout—Clinical Supervisor, Roy Shamblen—Wellbriety Mentor, Kristin Yellow Robe—Wellbriety Mentor, Don, Cheryl Littlebird—Wellbriety Mentor, Myron Littlebird—Director, George Littlehead—Maintenance Supervisor



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## **Wellbriety Treatment Center Certification**

**White Bison , Inc. is proud to recognize the**

**Inter-Tribal Wellness Center**

**of Sheridan, Wyoming**

**They are the first Treatment Center to accomplish  
the criteria for designation as**

**Wellbriety Treatment Center #001**

**This designation is in effect from May 19, 2011- May 18, 2012**

**To accomplish this Certification, the Inter-Tribal Wellness Center has demonstrated  
the following criteria:**

- Employs at least one Native American national/state certified alcohol counselor
- Provides access to one Native American Elder to advise and to conduct ceremonies
- Employs sober staff working with Native Americans clients
- Trained by White Bison to conduct trainings on Principles of the Wellbriety Movement, The Medicine Wheel and 12 Steps, Warrior Down, and other Wellbriety Trainings
- Has engaged White Bison to review processes, policies and procedures to ensure that Wellbriety criteria are met and to identify steps to correct any deficiency
- Has demonstrated that staff working with Native Americans have demonstrated appropriate knowledge of Native American culture and values
- Has incorporated Native traditional healing practices into treatment programs (smudging, pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, naming ceremony, healing ceremony, as appropriate for cultural needs)
- Has identified Wellbriety books and training resources that are used in programs for Native Americans and which are provided to Native clients as personal copies
- Has agreed to document client progress and satisfaction (# of Native participants treated and still sober in follow up at 6mo and 1 year; consumer satisfaction surveys from Native Americans).
- Has acknowledged that the Certification is to be renewed yearly

*Don Coyhis*

*Don L. Coyhis, President and Founder, White Bison, Inc.*

*May, 18, 2011*



# The Inter-Tribal Wellness Center

becomes Certified as  
the very first *Wellbriety Treatment Center*

Tears welled up in the eyes of the director of the Inter-Tribal Wellness Center as he read aloud the Wellbriety Treatment Center Certificate, signed by Don Coyhis, during the Certification Ceremony on May 19, 2011.

They were tears of joy after six years of struggle and hard work giving birth to this Native American addictions treatment center located in beautiful country about ten miles north of Sheridan, Wyoming.

That Friday morning the Inter-Tribal Wellness Center (ITWC) became the very first Wellbriety Treatment Center to be certified in North America.

“I’ve been working on getting to this point for 6 years,” said Myron Littlebird, Director of the ITWC. “I went to many reservations in the process. I am very grateful to Don for helping us get this started. Clinical Supervisor Ben Armentrout and I have been talking about this dream for a long time—having a Native American treatment center for Native people because we are different.”

### The Ceremony

The Certification Ceremony began when the Sacred 100 Eagle Feather Hoop was carried in by several men currently in residence at the treatment center, and Don Coyhis. The room became quiet as each

participant watched the Hoop enter and placed on its stand at the eastern part of the Circle of residents, staff, visitors and a tribal Elder. Don Coyhis, President and Founder of White Bison, Inc. moved around the circle and smudged everyone with burning sage and did a very special blessing for Director Myron Littlebird who was standing with his hands out facing the east.

“It was awesome!” Don said later. “It started with a prayer circle. People prayed for their loved ones back home and for the people. There were eleven residents present. I did a presentation about the Wellbriety Movement, and specifically about how a Wellbriety Treatment Center fits into the scheme of things for the healing of our people. I talked about returning to the Circle, and starting a Circle when they get back home if there isn’t already one. Gary Neumann with the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council was there. He runs the Rocky Mountain Access to Recovery (ATR) grant. When it was done, the residents talked to the staff about their experience at the treatment center. The women were trilling. It was very, very touching. It’s one of those experiences where you’ll remember everything that was said, everybody’s smile, for a long time. Indian Country has been waiting for this to happen for a long, long time.”

Staff member and recovery and Wellbriety mentor Cheryl Littlebird also remembers the power of the



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clients as personal copies;

9. Has agreed to document client progress and satisfaction (number of Native participants treated and still sober in follow up at 6 months and 1 year; consumer satisfaction surveys from Native Americans); and,
10. Has acknowledged that the Certification is to be renewed yearly.

In a follow up letter after Certification Day, Access to Recovery project manager Gary Neumann added another five considerations about the meaning to the ITWC of being a certified Wellbriety Treatment Center. These are:

1. The treatment center will be recommended as a site that provides cultural and spiritual support for Native Americans in need of alcohol or drug treatment services;
2. Staff working with Native American clients will receive culturally oriented training and support systems to enrich treatment approaches;
3. White Bison staff and resources will be available to provide consulting and additional training and resources to support treatment staff in addressing the needs of Native American clients;
4. Evaluation assistance can be provided to monitor recovery progress of Native American clients; and,
5. Once the announcement of ITWC Certification is made by White Bison, referrals will increase from Native American communities across the nation.

To be a Certified Wellbriety Treatment Center benefits both Native American clients (residents), as well as the treatment center itself. It benefits client-residents because the entire recovery approach takes place in the Native cultural terms that a resident grew up with and which makes the most sense in his or her world. And Certification benefits the Treatment Center because it expands possibilities for referrals to come from tribal communities from all over Turtle Island. This is true because the Wellbriety approach pioneered by White Bison, Inc. since the late 1980's has become a widely respected healing curriculum far and wide.

### **A Native American Treatment Center**

There are really two great parts to this story of what happened at the ITWC on May 19, 2011. The first is Wellbriety Certification, but the second is the existence of an addictions treatment center that is culturally friendly to Native people in the first place: An Indian treatment center. There aren't too many of these anywhere in North America.

The Intertribal Wellness Center began operation in April, 2010 on the site of the old Thunder Child Treatment Center which had closed its doors some two years earlier. It is located on a section of beautiful rural land (about 640 acres) traversed by the Tongue River, which rises in the Big Horn mountains of Wyoming and flows northward into the Yellowstone River in Montana. The land is home to deer, elk, bear, eagles, hawks, turkey and pheasants, just to name a few of the other residents. Why would a Native person trying to get a start on their recovery journey come here?

“I think if they want to get back to being an Indian again, if they want to get away from the madhouse

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of whatever kind of cycle that has gone on with them with alcohol and drugs, if they want a shot at turning their life back around, I think this would be a good place to get it started,” says Clinical Supervisor Ben Armentrout.

Director Myron Littlebird reinforces this. “The main focus for people in treatment here is who they are as a Native person. We offer Native spirituality, culture, the land, and we can tie it back into their lives when they get back home.”

White Bison founder Don Coyhis agrees. “I think that when they go there, two things happen. It increases their odds of recovery because of the cultural base. The other is that when they come home they will be prepared to start a group in their home community,” he says.

Staff member Cheryl Littlebird tells a similar story. “We have a young man from up north in Montana who was hesitant to come here,” she reveals. “He did not want to come here, he did not want to be here. But as soon as he walked in the doors he said the scent of the cedar ceremony that was being done just brought him back down to earth. He said he felt real safe coming in the doors and told himself, ‘This is the place I need to be to get help for myself.’ He realized he needed help but the fear was so intense in him. He was afraid of going to a location he thought would be dominated by

mainstream people and a mainstream treatment approach. He didn’t realize that there was all Native staff here. All the residents are Native. He was introduced to everybody and his fears started going away. He said that night he slept really good.”



Staff Member and recovery and Wellbriety mentor Kristin Yellow Robe has heard the same thing. “We were doing a prayer last week and a woman from Northern Arapahoe was talking about the residents we already had who went back home. She said she’s been trying to get into this program for a while now. Her words were: *I saw the people coming back from this program and they seemed strong. And I wanted that.*”

### **The Program**

A typical day for residents starts with a prayer circle before breakfast. Each person is smudged with sage or cedar and is allowed to pray and give thanks to Creator to start the day. Then some residents move into breakfast preparation while the rest begin their housekeeping chores. This is their home and they learn to take care of it in the safe setting of the Center. After breakfast, residents take a half hour, one mile wellness walk from the Center down to the entrance road and back. Being out on the land is a part of the program harmonizing with Native cultural and spiritual ways true for most Native people.

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Next in the day comes two hours of Wellbriety group process. In this Circle, residents delve deeply into the Medicine Wheel way of working the 12 Steps taught from both White Bison videos and from the Wellbriety book The Red Road to Wellbriety: In the Native American Way. The group ends with prayer and a break for lunch. Each person is assigned a day to cook breakfast, lunch and dinner. Residents mentor each other with the cooking and kitchen skills needed to keep their companions eating well throughout a whole stay.



Sacred 100 Eagle Feather Hoop and a portion of the Circle

After lunch there is another mile-long wellness walk and another two-hour Wellbriety group process Circle to continue working the Steps in an Indian way. After dinner there are different activities, depending on the day. One optional possibility is an AA meeting in town. There is a group talking circle one evening, and an unresolved grief circle on another. Some cultural activities include participation in sweat lodge on Wednesdays and Saturdays, or outings to the Wyoming Medicine Wheel sacred site at appropriate times in conjunction with working the Medicine Wheel and the 12 Steps program.

Residents are also responsible for gathering firewood for the sweats, and picking sage, sweetgrass or cedar in season. It's even possible to

find an eagle feather during walks or while gathering. Residents can also attend church services in town or even take part in Native American Church ceremonies with special arrangements.

During the first two weeks, each new resident does a life story that sets the tone for the rest of the time.

Kristin Yellow Robe explains that Elders are a regular part of life at ITWC. "Elder speakers from the Northern Cheyenne or Crow Nations are a

regular part of the program too," she explains. "Our residents are from many different tribal nations and they can call their Elders to come in. Whenever our residents need a prayer or a blessing, or whatever their tribal ways are, we can call their Elders in to come and support them so that they make that spiritual connection with their Elders. If they've been out on the street and haven't had that connection for a while they can be welcomed back into the Circle that way too."

### **Our Prayer for You**

The ITWC specializes in a nurturing, loving and caring approach to treatment, coupled with a program based in Native culture, and a land and spirituality-based, Wellbriety-certified program. There is something for women and for men at the Center. Cheryl Littlebird sums it up:

“As a mother and grandmother, I, for myself, know that every person, male or female, needs to be nurtured by voice tone, handshake, welcoming, comforting when they are tearful, and being especially sensitive to what’s going on in a male heart and spirit. Being truly present for them and walking them through their anger, being patient when they are trying to sort out, nurturing when they are tearful. Cheering them with your heart and without any judgment. Being sure they are honoring their feelings because they are gifts from the Creator. You are honoring yourself by allowing yourself to feel your pain, your sorrow, and your tears because after you walk through it, then the joy of being well and being sober is the most beautiful gift ever. And you will take back to your home the blessings you have received from the Inter Tribal-Wellness Center and the staff here, telling you, *You have every right to be sober and well on your journey.* And that’s our prayer for you.”

Richard Simonelli, Editor  
Wellbriety Online Magazine



Tipis and the Tongue River on the Inter-Tribal Wellness Center Land. The annual Alumni Wellbriety Campout is held at this location.



A view of the main building at the Inter-Tribal Wellness Center

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## MAKE CONTACT

**The Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council** is the parent organization for the Inter-Tribal Wellness Center. Executive Director Gordon Belcourt is the catalyst and force behind the Council's purchase and support of the ITWC. Visit [www.mtwytlc.org/tlc-programs/inter-tribal-wellness-center.html](http://www.mtwytlc.org/tlc-programs/inter-tribal-wellness-center.html) to learn more about the ITWC, and [www.mtwytlc.org/](http://www.mtwytlc.org/) for more information about the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council.

The Inter-Tribal Wellness Center offers 30, 60, or 90 day treatment periods for residents. Since the Center opened in the spring of 2010, 62 people have passed through the program and the number continues to grow. Residents who may benefit from a fully Native approach to treatment can be referred from any facility in the U.S. All it takes is a phone call to Clinical Supervisor Ben Armentrout at 307-750-2537, or e mail at [grandpatwo87@hotmail.com](mailto:grandpatwo87@hotmail.com) for more information and to get things started for a particular individual.

Does this story spark your interest about having your own community treatment center become Wellbriety-certified so that it may serve Native people better and draw on a wider referral base? For more information contact the White Bison, Inc., office by calling 877-871-1495, or e mail at [info@whitebison.org](mailto:info@whitebison.org). Also check the White Bison website, [www.whitebison.org](http://www.whitebison.org) to see how your Center may become Wellbriety certified.