

Williams LifeSkills

Williams LifeSkills, located in Durham, North Carolina, has been providing workshops that are designed to help individuals cope better with problematic situations, improve communication with other people, and increase emphasis on the positive for the last decade. While focus shifts from workshop to workshop, all of the training is applicable to both work and home.

For the first few years of the company's existence, the only services the company offered were workshops delivered to groups of ten or fewer participants over a 12-hour period. When Williams LifeSkills applied for an SBIR Phase 1 grant to produce a video to cover one of the skills taught, its vision was to use the video to create a standardized, protocol-driven product that would insure quality control between workshops. Another goal of the video was to provide participants with a learning tool that could be used individually on an on-going basis at home after having attended a workshop.

The feasibility study funded by Phase I found that participants enjoyed watching the video that had been produced, they could retain its content, and they scored lower on hostility tests after viewing the video. By the completion of Phase I, the company began to envision new uses for the video. Feedback from work-shop participants had always been overwhelmingly positive, but scheduling workshop sessions had always proved to be a stumbling block. Hence the idea was born that in Phase 2, in addition to producing nine more sections of the video, the company would produce a workbook that would augment the video. Individuals then could watch the video on their own, at their own pace, without having to attend a workshop.

With Phase II SBIR funding, Williams LifeSkills is currently testing both psychological characteristics, such as hostility, and physical characteristics, such as blood pressure and levels of a stress hormone, to compare therapies and combinations thereof, such as the workshop alone; the workshop and video; the video alone; and no intervention as a control.

Meanwhile, the company has just commercially produced the Williams LifeSkills Video Series as a stand-alone product. It can be purchased by individuals, corporations, or healthcare organizations. The initial response to the product has been positive. As Barbara Rimer, Director of Cancer Control and Population Sciences at the National Institutes of Health stated, "The Williams LifeSkills program has something for everyone, including people who feel they are doing pretty well in managing anger and negative feelings."

While producing and testing the video, it had become apparent that distribution of the content was critical to the success of the product. Attending training and development trade shows generated a group of organizations interested in adding the Williams LifeSkills Video Series to their existing product line. About a dozen distributors are now featuring the product, which is also available on the Williams Website, www.williamslifeskills.com.