

**MONROE COUNTY RESEARCH TO PRACTICE COUNCIL
WHITE PAPER
Creating a Trauma Informed System of Care**

INTRODUCTION:

- **Nationally**, studies estimate that between **3.3 and 10 million children** in the United States witness violence in their own homes each year...
 - In 2009 on **Monroe County**, **7,574** reports were made to Child Protective Agency and **1,700** (22.7%) children were found to be victims of child abuse or neglect...
- Studies show that **50%** of children and youth in child welfare, **60-90%** of youth in juvenile justice and **83-91%** of urban youth experience trauma. (*National Center for Children in Poverty, Strengthening Policies to Support Children, Youth & Families who Experience Trauma, 2007*)
 - Based on the prevalence numbers above, it can be estimated that at least **540** children active in child welfare and **241 to 362** youth involved in Probation in Monroe County have experienced trauma. In addition, it can be estimated that **up to 61,997** children under the age of 19 in the city of Rochester have experienced trauma.
 - Locally, **56** youth under the age of 18 were treated for a stab wound or gunshot wound in 2009. In 2007, **eight** youth in Rochester were the victim of homicide.
 - According to the parental report of life experiences among **children entering Kindergarten** in Rochester City School District (2006-2007), **16%** have witnessed violence in the neighborhood and **11%** have witnessed violence in the home.

It is clear that many of those individuals we support in the child serving system of Monroe County are affected by traumatic events. In order to provide a healthy and safe environment for these children, it is critically important that all partners in the child serving system understand the significant impact that traumatic stress may have on the lives of children and youth and develop the skills necessary to meet our children's needs.

This document has been developed to provide information concerning the role that trauma plays and identifies steps to be taken in order to transform our community's child serving culture to one that is authentically trauma informed.

WHY IS THE CREATION OF A TRAUMA INFORMED CULTURE/SYSTEM IMPORTANT?

Violence and trauma is often at the center of a youth's juvenile justice involvement, school problems, mental health challenges and substance use.

As trauma is pervasive and the impact is deep and life-shaping, it is imperative that a comprehensive, community-wide approach is taken to mobilize efforts to affect lasting culture change. One of the fundamental challenges to treating trauma is that it is often goes unrecognized. When an intentional, trauma informed culture is fully integrated all the way from the policy level through daily practice, the potential for healing emerges.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is a response to a perceived threat to survival or emotional well-being of an individual or large group such as a community or a culture. Trauma leads to adverse brain, bodily and psychological changes that damage self, relational and spiritual development and impair living, learning and working.

Some examples of traumatic events include physical threat and harm, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect, witnessing violence, abandonment and devastating loss.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

We want to achieve a **fundamental shift in thinking and practice** in our community that will result in the creation of a **Trauma Informed Child –Serving System** paradigm shift, where the following beliefs are incorporated into the work of each system partner:

- Trauma is viewed as a core life event around which behavior and subsequent development organizes. Trauma can often begin a complex pattern of actions and reactions with a continuing impact over the course of one's life.
- Symptoms are understood not merely as problems but primarily as attempts to cope and survive.
- The primary goals of prevention and intervention of trauma are growth, empowerment, resilience and life skill development based on individual beliefs and values.

TAKING A SYSTEMS VIEW:

A community that successfully transforms to one that is trauma informed requires all systems to embrace a trauma informed culture as well as to use trauma informed interventions in providing services and supports. The information below offers an overview of a trauma-informed culture and is followed by specific examples of trauma-informed practices in a variety of systems that touch our Monroe County children.

What is a Trauma Informed Culture/System?

The core principles of a Trauma Informed System of Care include:

- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety;
- **Trustworthiness:** Making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries;
- **Choice:** Prioritizing developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically relevant choice and control for youth and families;
- **Collaboration:** Sharing power between professionals, youth and families;
- **Empowerment:** Prioritizing child, youth, family empowerment and skill building;
- Being sensitized to the characteristics of an individual experiencing trauma and, at a minimum, **do no additional harm**.

Examples of Trauma Informed System Practices

Trauma Informed Behavioral Health Treatment

In behavioral health, trauma informed services are those that are designed to acknowledge the impact of violence and trauma on people's lives and the importance of addressing trauma in treatment. Behavioral health trauma treatment principles include:

- Individuals who have experienced trauma in their lives must be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of treatment services
- Treatment providers must understand the dynamics and impact of trauma on people's lives and provide culturally sensitive evidence based Trauma Informed Treatment models

Trauma Informed Child Welfare System

Increasing the knowledge and building skills among caseworkers and other child welfare personnel are critical to identifying and providing early intervention for children traumatized by maltreatment. A Child Welfare System that is trauma informed includes the following attributes:

- Maximizes the child's sense of safety by supporting and promoting positive and stable relationships in the life of the child
- Use assessment tools to better understand the traumatic experiences
- Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child's behavior, development and relationships.

Trauma Informed Juvenile Justice System

Studies show that most youth in detention settings have significant histories of trauma; exposures which can continue following entry in to the juvenile justice settings such as arrest, detention and processing. Exposure to verbal and physical aggression can exacerbate fears or traumatic symptoms. A juvenile justice system that is trauma informed should:

- Undertake systemic efforts to assess posttraumatic stress and psychological trauma among detainees.
- Implement trauma-focused interventions for youth
- Protect juveniles from victimization while detainees

Trauma Informed School

A Trauma Informed School operates on the principle that “***you cannot teach the mind until you reach the heart***”. In a trauma informed school, all school personnel...

- Are trained and respond to behavior with an understanding of the origin of traumatized behavior and skills to handle out of control students' violent and self-destructive behaviors.
- Maintain high expectations for students in order to convey the message that someone believes that they are capable and worthy.
- Create a climate of safety, both physical and emotional, for their students through predictable routines, planned transitions, opportunities to make choices, identified “safe places” and safety plans (as needed).

Trauma Informed Health Care System

Increasing awareness within the health care system is very important because many children are regularly seen by their pediatrician or health care provider. In addition, traumatic stress reactions may develop to pain, serious illness and medical procedures. A health care system that is trauma informed has the following attributes:

- Incorporates an understanding of traumatic stress in encounters with children
- Minimize the potential for trauma during medical care
- Provide screening to identify children and families in distress or at risk

Trauma Informed Law Enforcement /First Responder System

Children exposed to domestic violence may experience traumatic stress in response to event they perceive to be dangerous or threatening. A few simple actions at the scene of a domestic violence call can positively impact the lives of countless children, families and communities.

Officers should know:

- All children who witness domestic violence are affected by it. However each child reacts in a different way.
- Children living with domestic violence often have complicated feelings about their parents and often worry that they are responsible for the violence in their homes
- There are simple things a police offer can do to reduce the impact of domestic violence on small children. As an example, modifying information gathering while in the presence of a child can make a difference and reduce trauma.

CALL TO ACTION:

A comprehensive community framework to respond to traumatic events that includes violence prevention, crisis response and recovery.

Given the number of youth and adults exposed to violence and trauma in our community, it imperative that community leaders coordinate efforts to both reduce the incidence of traumatic events and to mitigate the impact of adverse consequences when traumatic events do occur. Much like communities across the country which have developed comprehensive plans in order to be prepared to respond and recover from manmade or natural disasters, this level of coordination of community resources is necessary for welfare of the members of our community.

Support for a trauma-informed system of care must come from the top down and the bottom-up.

All agencies and organizations that touch the lives of our children will commit to: educating their staff in trauma-informed practices, review all policies and procedures with a trauma lens- and make changes where needed, and work together in building strategic partnerships that embrace the principles of trauma-informed practices.

Strategies:

Provide community leader education on trauma. Include leadership in the child-serving systems

- Bring child-serving systems leadership together to:
 - Identify changes needed in our community to create a trauma-informed culture
 - Build strategic partnerships needed to support change in culture and practice

Increase public awareness and knowledge

- Increase awareness and provide education to school personnel and parents/caregivers and community members through training supported by the Safe Schools/Healthy Students.
- Utilize resources through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to disseminate information to key stakeholders, partners, and general public.
- Develop messengers (youth and families) who can speak to the impact of trauma in their own lives and the importance of trauma informed systems and supports to facilitate recovery.

Facilitate changes in practice

- Monitor outcomes from the TIC transformation pilot with consultants Roger Falloot and Lori Beyer, from Community Connections, Washington, DC with four pilot sites (JADE, RSCD School #17, Family Court and Rochester Psychiatric Center adolescent inpatient unit and Smith Rd. Community Residence).
- Expand pilot through train-the-trainer programs to all aspects of the local system
 - Provide trauma-focused education and skill building for all staff (front line, support, management and administration)
 - Each system partner will review service practices and administrative policies in conjunction with the core principles of a trauma informed culture and develop an implementation plan for TIC practice changes
- Invest in Data collection
 - Develop community indicators which will be monitored over time

Resources needed to implement and sustain practice change:

- Trainers through ACCESS, JADE, NCTSN, and SSHS who can assist all agencies to be develop trauma-informed practice;
- Development of provider and community level trauma-informed coaching to support the integration of deep level practice change.
- Identification of Trauma Informed Champions in each system to develop, foster, and maintain culture change

Creating a Trauma Informed System of Care

Sources:

- **Helping Traumatized Children Learn...** Massachusetts Advocates for Children
- **Trauma Informed Treatment in Behavioral Health Settings...** Ohio Legal Rights Service
- **Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care...** Roger Fallott
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network service Systems Brief: **Creating Trauma-Informed Child-Serving Systems**
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network service Systems Brief: **Creating a Trauma-Informed Law Enforcement System**