

Whatcom Communities Addressing ACEs & Adopting Trauma Informed Approaches

8/10/17

Whatcom County Health Department

This is a high-level overview of the work that is being done in Whatcom County to reduce the likelihood of people experiencing ACEs and mitigating the impact on those who have experienced trauma. Whatcom County leaders and organizers have been working to address the impact of ACEs since the early 2000s and this is a small sample of all the work that is happening in our communities.

Community Organizations & Agencies

Many agencies and organizations in our community offer programs that reduce the likelihood of trauma occurring in people's lives and build protective factors (Ex: Triple P, Strengthening Families, and Nurse-Family Partnership). Several also deliver programs and services that mitigate or reduce the impact of trauma. This occurs through specific programming and trainings or ensuring that services provided are trauma-informed (Ex: Mental Health Court, conflict resolution workshops, and social justice trainings)

Public Schools

Compassionate Schools Model and Trauma-Informed Approaches

- Changes in school suspension policies
- Restorative justice practices
- Staff self-care practices

Evidence-Based Programming (Social & Emotional Learning)

- Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports
- PAX Good Behavior Game
- Second Step

Trainings

- ACEs/Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC)

Community Coalitions/Groups (ACEs/Resiliency Team, Whatcom Prevention Coalition, Ferndale Community Coalition, Columbia Valley Community Connections Group)

- Community Forums with principal investigators of the ACE Study
- Annual Resiliency Summit
- Trainings
 - The Power of Connection: What Research on ACEs, Neurobiology, and Resilience Tells Us
 - Neuroscience, Epigenetics, ACEs, & Resiliency (NEAR)
 - ACEs & Trauma-Informed Approaches
 - ACEs & Trauma-Informed Approaches Train the Trainer
- Agency/Organization Trainings
 - Bellingham Police Department
 - Juvenile Probation and Detention Staff & Guardian in Litem
 - Planned Parenthood
 - Schools

Grant Supported Work

- Prevention & Primary Care Integration Pilot Grant – bridging prevention and primary care to address ACEs
- APPI Evaluation (ACEs Public-Private Initiative) – conducted an evaluation to study the effectiveness of community-based approaches for preventing and mitigating ACEs.
- Mobilizing Action for Resilient Communities (MARC) – building a culture of health by translating the science of ACEs into practices and policies that foster resilience.

Whatcom County Health Board

In October of 2013, the Whatcom County Health Board passed a resolution that Call for Compassionate Community Approaches to Public Health Services. This resolution states that the “The Health Board will work with Health Department staff to ensure that “compassionate approaches” are built into all public health related services and contracts including human services programs and; The Health Board will seek opportunities to increase awareness and promote the concept of a “compassionate” or “trauma sensitive” approach, and to integrate this paradigm into the broadest possible range of all public health, education and human services in our county.”

Trauma-Informed Approaches

Many agencies and organizations are reviewing internal policies and procedures to ensure operations and practices are trauma-informed. The following Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration framework is assisting this work:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization."

A trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of service setting or organization and is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or treatments that are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing. A trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures.

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

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