

A CHILD WELFARE AGENCY THERAPIST'S PERSPECTIVE; OUTCOMES OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING AND SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR RESIDENTIAL GROUP CARE WORKERS IN A TIME OF TRANSITION AND TURMOIL

Alexandra Paiva, BSc. (Hons.) Psych, GDRD M.Ed. (Counselling)
Brandon University
Brandon, Canada

BACKGROUND

Structural/Systemic Factors Impacting Trauma-Informed Care (TIC):

- Unmanageable workloads
- Challenging youth
- Understaffed/underfunded
- Unsupportive or abusive environments
- High staff turnover
- Drive through trainings

Individual Factors Impacting TIC:

- Residential Care Workers' (RCW) history of ACEs, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, burnout
- Physical assaults/threats from youth/family
- Emotion/stress regulation, attachment styles, rejection sensitivity



Paradoxically...relational proximity to the children in their care also puts RCWs at risk of harmful impacts associated with secondary exposure to adverse experiences – feeding the cycle of workforce instability. (Brend & Sprang, 2020, p.156)

DESIGN/METHODS

Type of Study: Program implementation & evaluation

Sample: 20 RCWs from 3 group care units in Manitoba

Program Activities/Services: 2-day TIC training, co-developed and co-delivered by agency therapist & researcher (October 2020).

- Based on *Attachment, Self-Regulation, Competency* (ARC) model; brain development principles; resilience and self-care (personal and professional strategies)
- 8 x 2-hour follow-up consultation sessions (November 2020 - June 2021).

ANALYSIS

Focus groups with leadership (n=4); RCWs (n=6); N-Vivo software

FINDINGS

Agency therapist played an integral role in supporting the utility of the training program and increasing the potential for positive outcomes for trauma impacted children and RCW's alike.

- Therapist proximity and familiarity with RCW's and youth used to develop a training program format specifically dedicated to unique and specific needs.
- Facilitating a safe and consistent space for workers to adopt TIC provisions.
- Supporting collaboration between leadership, the researcher and RCWs, to ensure a focus on staff wellness through personal, professional, and organizational strategies, thus reducing stigma around mental health.
- Promoting training sustainability (model and knowledge).

CONCLUSION

The unique experience and role of the agency therapist is quintessential to enhancing sustainable TIC training, support, and knowledge, promoting resilience for RCWs, and improving care for youth.