

Childhood Trauma and Its Impact upon Community Wellness

September 2013 Report: Executive Summary

An examination of national, state and local data led the Barre District Office of the Vermont Department of Health to recognize childhood trauma as a determinant of health with profound impacts upon community well-being. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of this issue in our region, a team in our office conducted 20 structured interviews with a multi-disciplinary group of community stakeholders.

These interviews reinforced our initial findings, giving voice to the significance of childhood trauma as an important public health issue and illuminating the readiness that exists in our community to address this issue. Stakeholders also revealed strengths that we might build upon and gaps that we might seek to overcome as we begin to examine potential strategies. The following domains, themes, and representative quotes emerged from our analysis of the interview data.

Data

Strength

Theme: Some data exist.

Quote: "There is some [data] from DCF, there is some from CIS."

Gaps

Themes: Awareness of data sources is low. Data that exist are not readily available and do not meet our needs.

Quote: "I don't really know who is collecting data specifically about childhood trauma... [F]or grants and funding, everyone has to keep track of that, but I'm not sure if anyone is compiling it for the whole community."

Education and Training

Strengths

Themes: More educational opportunities are now available to providers. Training is on-going in some provider systems.

Quote: "I feel like there has been more education around [childhood trauma] in the last 10 years or so."

Gaps

Themes: Awareness in the community at large about trauma and the services available is low. More widespread education is needed. There is a need for more trauma-informed providers and more ongoing education across all disciplines.

Quote: "Because of a lack of comprehension of what an impact of a trauma might be, people have ... misinterpreted a problematic behavior that is being exhibited by a child."

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Programs and Services

Strengths

Theme: There are many programs and services in place, ranging from enrichment opportunities for youth to specialized treatment for trauma survivors.

Quote: "... [There's] a lot being done around intervention; there's a crisis and people get involved."

Gaps

Themes: More preventive services and programs that enhance protective factors are needed.

We are not doing enough to identify affected individuals early and assess their needs thoroughly. There are many barriers to obtaining services. There is a need for more comprehensive treatment and more treatment options for people who have experienced trauma. Some agencies do not meet the needs of people in their system with a trauma history.

Quote: "If the pebble goes into the pond and that is the point at which the child is traumatized, then there is a whole ripple effect. What are we spending dealing with these ripples way out there, when we could be corralling money to address the pebble going into the pond."

Policy and Law

Strength

Themes: Policies and laws exist to protect children and survivors of trauma. There are some policies and laws that require providers to be educated about trauma.

Quote: "There are...laws about bullying, there are laws about stalking, a lot of laws about DV that we're aware of that involve families, not children in particular. But there's a legal age of consent, and other things like that."

Gaps

Theme: Interviewees differed in their opinion about the value of policy and law changes.

Quote 1: "Sometimes I think we need a lot less policy, and more or less just do the right thing."

Quote 2: "There aren't enough policies and laws and things in place."

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Capacity

Strengths

Themes: The professional community has training, experience and dedication to work with survivors of childhood trauma. The general public's attitudes regarding treatment of children have shifted. Multidisciplinary teams are forming to address trauma in a comprehensive way. Several innovative programs have been awarded grants.

Quote: "There [are] a lot of intertwined agencies working together to address this issue."

Gaps

Themes: There are more people who need services than there are services available. Funding is decreasing and effective programs are being cut. Coordination of services could be improved. There are contributing factors that get in the way of addressing childhood trauma adequately.

Quote: "[T]he demand is increasing but the funding to provide what they need has gone away, so it doesn't make sense at all."

Using this information as a guide, it is now time for our community to act. Engagement of key stakeholders will be essential to the success of any strategy. A focus upon childhood trauma has the potential to unite diverse partners toward reaching a common goal: improving the well-being of our community.