

Trauma Responsive Unit Protects Youth in Custody

Overview: The Probation Department created a 20-bed Trauma Responsive Unit (TRU) in Juvenile Hall to provide evidence-based treatment to youth affected by traumatic experiences.

Challenge: Youth who come into detention frequently have a high incidence of trauma and related symptoms, which may go untreated. We met the challenge of addressing this gap in the continuum of care within our Juvenile Hall through participation in the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform's "Youth in Custody" certificate program at Georgetown University. For our Capstone Project, we consulted with experts in the field of trauma and juvenile justice and developed a plan for introducing a specialized treatment unit within Juvenile Hall.

Innovative Solution: The tension that often exists between meeting the combined goals of safety and security (law enforcement) and rehabilitation (treatment) within an institutional setting presented a significant challenge for successful implementation. We addressed this by selecting an evidence-based treatment model and intervention (TARGET- Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Treatment, Ford 1999) that utilizes a unified and multidisciplinary team approach for Probation Officers, Treatment Staff, Teachers and Medical Staff. The innovative aspect to this approach is two-fold. First, training all staff dedicated to the unit as one cohesive group, regardless of discipline, increased a shared understanding of the intervention and promoted use of a consistent language to use when working with youth in all environments within the facility. Second, Probation Officers were trained to perform a central role as "skill reinforcers," during routine daily activities in the unit, when youth became triggered by traumatic reminders. Although not providing formal treatment, Probation Officers are essential in providing real life learning opportunities for youth to apply the fundamental skills that they are taught in treatment sessions, and the probation officers are trained and equipped with worksheets and other materials to do this.

Originality: To our knowledge, TRU, which opened in early 2016, is the first unit within a juvenile institutional setting in California that has been dedicated to treating trauma, a highly prevalent experience for justice-involved youth and an underlying mechanism that contributes to increased risk-taking, delinquency and future

adult criminal behavior that often leads to incarceration. TARGET is a brief skills-based Cognitive Behavioral intervention that teaches youth how to recognize triggers and regulate their emotional response and engage problem solving skills instead of reacting impulsively. Providing this proven intervention program within an environment that has been modified for maximum therapeutic benefit (i.e., the unit is furnished and painted to be more home-like and less institutional), delivered by a formally trained multidisciplinary team, and monitored for fidelity to the model through monthly coaching and feedback by the program developers is a significant advance in treatment with in-custody youth.

Cost Effectiveness: The Probation Department allocated \$170,000 for TRU:\$135,000 training and quality assurance; \$45,000 physical environment modifications. By using Probation officers rather than additional contracted staff to support the therapy, the program is cost effective.

Results: Data regarding behavioral outcomes for youth indicate that TRU eliminated assaults, violent incidents, sexual misconduct and suicidal behavior in comparison to other similarly sized male housing units, with zero such incidents in the TRU unit in March-May 2016, compared to 18 and 19 in similar units during the same time frame. These numbers reflect the positive behavioral and emotional effects of the treatment, and the Probation Department plans to evaluate the potential to expand the program within its institutions.

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