



Performance-*based*
Standards



Implementing Trauma-Informed Principles and
Practices: What Staff, Youth and Families Say

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PbS Learning Institute, Inc.
639 Granite Street, Suite 112
Braintree, MA 02184
<http://pbstandards.org>



PbS and Trauma-Informed Care

Performance-based Standards (PbS) is a data-driven improvement model grounded in research that holds juvenile justice agencies, facilities and residential care providers to the highest standards for operations, programs and services. PbS was launched 20 years ago by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), US Department of Justice, to address the safety, health and quality of life issues reported in the 1994 Conditions of Confinement Study. Over time, PbS has established national standards to guide operations and uniform performance outcome measures to continuously, accurately and comprehensively monitor daily practices and cultures within youth facilities.

The influence of PbS' improvement model is being used increasingly not only to manage facilities on a daily basis and improve outcomes for youths but also to bring existing facility practices and approaches into alignment with the most recent research on adolescent development. Numerous studies over the past 20 years have shown that most youths involved in the juvenile justice system have been exposed to violence and experience high rates of trauma and post-traumatic stress. The estimates of youths who experience some degree of trauma range from 75 percent to 93 percent and show that incarcerated girls have a greater likelihood of exposure and higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than boys, (NCTSN, *Recommendations from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Addressing Trauma in Juvenile Justice and Residential Facilities*). Research from the human development field demonstrates that traumatic experiences frequently interfere with healthy child development and can affect a child's emotional management and response to stress long after the initial exposure (McEwen, 2008; Perry, 2008; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).

Additionally, youths' behavioral responses to trauma are often similar to the delinquent behaviors seen in youths who become known to juvenile justice, therefore, are under-identified as post-traumatic symptoms (Adams, 2010).

In juvenile justice residential settings, trauma can affect youths' ability to interact positively with peers and staff and to respond to rehabilitative programming (NCTSN). The Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence (2012) takes this research into account and recommends focusing on making trauma-informed screening, assessment and care standard operating practices for juvenile justice programs and services and taking measures to avoid traumatizing (and re-traumatizing) youths.

In 2014, in collaboration with the Maine Department of Corrections, Division of Juvenile Services and funded by a grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



(SAMHSA), PbS took the first step to implement the Task Force recommendations by adding 10 questions to its Youth Climate Survey that ask youths about their experiences and perceptions of trauma-informed practices. The survey is administered twice a year to an average of about 4,000 youths across the country. The first results were published in the 2014 PbS Issue Brief entitled: *First Step to Integrate Trauma-Informed Care: Ask Youths*. Additionally, PbS added trauma-informed care (TIC) questions to its surveys of staff and families.

Due to the extensive amount of information agencies and facilities wanted to know from staff about the effectiveness of TIC trainings, implementation and practices, PbS developed a Staff Supplemental Trauma Survey in 2015. Unlike the biannual Staff and Youth Surveys, PbS facilities voluntarily administer the survey, which can be at any time during the year. These tend to be facilities that have begun to implement, or prioritized trauma informed philosophy and practice, and many have included it as part of the biannual PbS survey process. Throughout 2017, PbS received 683 supplemental staff surveys from 21 facilities in five states. PbS also collected 4,879 Youth Climate Surveys and 1,200 Family Surveys in October 2017 as part of the biannual PbS survey process. PbS shares the results in this issue brief to offer an exploratory look into how facilities and programs across the country provide TIC by integrating trauma-informed approaches into their policies and procedures through the lens of youth, staff and family perceptions.

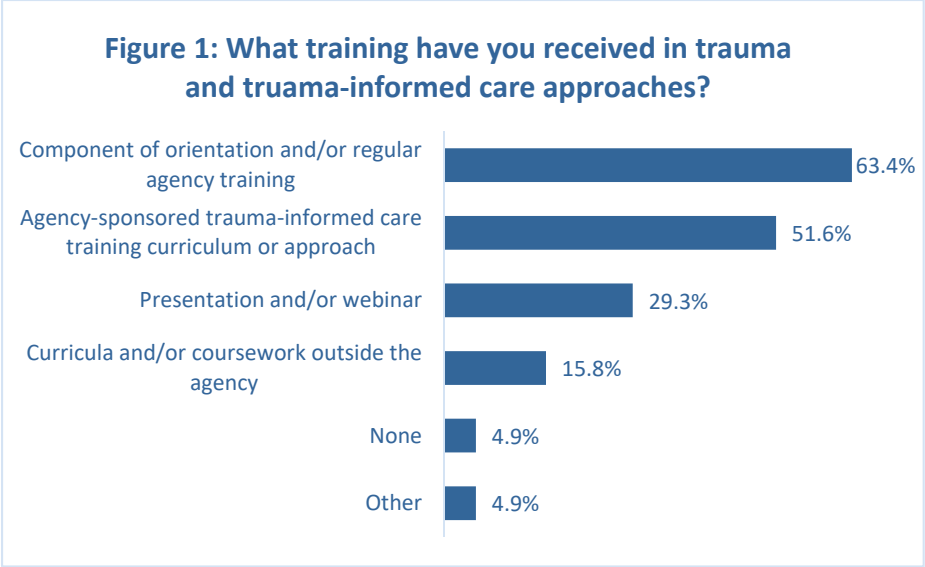
Staff Responses

PbS' supplemental staff survey asks staff members about their perceptions of the implementation of trauma-informed practices at facilities. Direct care staff are in a position to have the most impact on youths' experiences while in custody and are key to implementing and utilizing TIC policies and procedures, and contributing to youths' positive adolescent development. PbS asks staff about the agency's TIC mission, policies and procedures and how well the practices are carried out by staff.

In 2017, most staff (69.8%) said that the mission and/or vision of TIC is extremely or very well-integrated with how they interact with youths. Slightly fewer (61.4%) said that the policies and procedures around trauma and TIC are extremely or very well implemented. Almost all staff (91.6%) reported that trauma-informed practices are followed by staff at the programs sometimes or most of the time. Most staff (82.6%) said the training was somewhat or very effective in creating sensitivity to the issues related to trauma and 76.7% said it was somewhat or very effective in creating sensitivity to different cultures.



Staff responses also show extensive use of TIC practices when responding to youths’ misbehavior. Nearly all staff (95.2%) reported that they sometimes or most of the time use coping and de-escalation techniques prior to restrictive holds or confinement. Similarly, almost all staff (93.4%) reported that listening techniques were employed with youths sometimes or most of the time and 88.8% reported that safety plans, crisis plans and/or calm down plans are developed for youths pro-actively sometimes or most of the time.



Youth and Family Responses

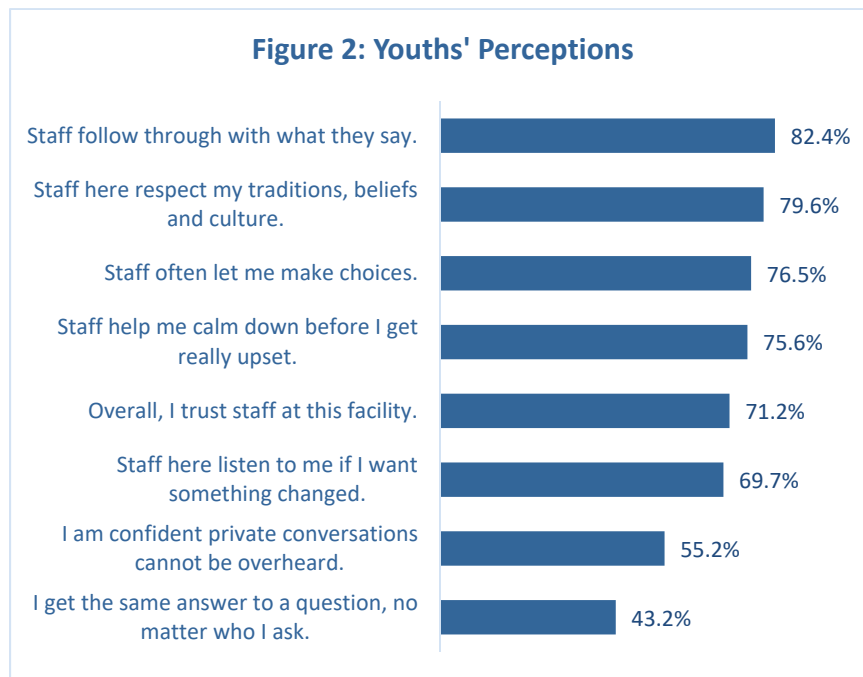
Results from the Youth Climate Survey in October 2017, which is part of the PbS biannual survey process, support many of the staff responses regarding TIC. Most youths in all PbS (79.6%) reported that staff respect their traditions, beliefs and culture. More than three-quarters of youths reported that staff use force only when they need to, and 75.6% of youths reported that staff help them to calm down before they get really upset (sometimes/yes).

The PbS surveys also asked youths to describe some direct experiences that trauma experts identified as indicators of the level of TIC in a facility. More than half of the youths surveyed (55%) reported that someone from the facility explained to them what trauma is and why it mattered, an increase from 46% in April 2014, when youths were first asked this question. The questions asked of youths and responses from October 2017 are in Figure 2: Youths’ Perceptions. Facilities have struggled most since 2014 with ensuring youths feel they get consistent answers to their questions, with 43% reporting they got the same answer no matter who they ask. A majority of youths (53.7%) reported that someone from the facility had asked them if any bad or upsetting things had ever happened to them, about the same percentage as in April 2014. Most response rates have remained steady over time.



Looking at staff responses in the staff supplemental surveys to provide some context to the youths' perceptions, the vast majority of staff (92.9%) reported they explained to youths what is going to happen and gave them the chance to ask questions before engaging in potentially traumatizing procedures. Most staff (91.8%) also reported providing youths with the opportunity to make choices in their day-to-day routines, engaging with family members about their child's progress and confirming support networks post-release.

Figure 2: Youths' Perceptions



Because research has made it clear that engaging and partnering with family members about trauma and its effects is key to achieving better outcomes for youths (Sherman et al., 1998, diZerega et al., 2011), PbS asks families about their experiences with facility staff and TIC in the biannual Family Survey. In October 2017, 42.6% of families reported that someone from the facility talked to them about what trauma is and why it matters and 49.8% of families reported that someone from the

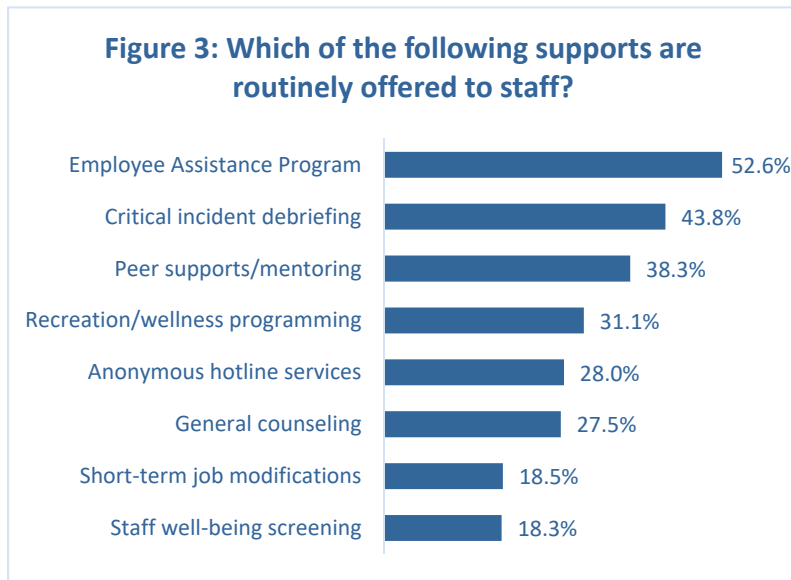
facility asked them if any bad or upsetting things have ever happened to their child. This suggests that staff members are speaking with family about trauma and there is more work to do to better educate and support families exposed to trauma and traumatic stress.

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Research has shined light on the potentially harmful effects of working with victims of trauma or individuals experiencing traumatic stress, called secondary traumatic stress. This is defined as when staff develop compassion fatigue or work-related PTSD as a result of exposure to youths' traumatic experiences and traumatic stress reactions. Research shows some 30% or more of juvenile justice professionals experience some form of PTSD (Branson, 2017). This can negatively impact staff wellness, job satisfaction, treatment of youth, level of absenteeism and staff turnover rates along with staffing



shortages and contribute to a toxic work environment. With this knowledge, PbS asks staff several questions on the supplemental staff survey to help better understand their experiences and resources



made available to them. In 2017, more than three-quarters of staff (78.2%) reported that staff complaints are responded to promptly sometimes or most of the time and 71.2% reported that they receive praise and recognition for doing a good job sometimes or most of the time. A majority of staff (61.6%) reported that they are asked their opinion about procedures sometimes or most of the time. The most common support routinely offered to staff are Employee Assistance Programs, which 52.6%

reported as available. The data showed that Employee Assistance Programs, critical incident debriefing and peer supports/mentoring are being promoted in facilities, but more work could be done in offering more diverse and preventative staff supports, such as short-term job modifications and staff well-being screenings. These supports are important because in addition to providing staff training, facilities can promote staff wellness and combat the negative effects of secondary trauma by building organizational support through promoting opportunities for open discussion of staff stress, emphasizing debriefing protocols following incidents and making available appropriate referrals. Staff survey results can provide a helpful ‘table for discussion’ of some of these issues.

Next Steps

As PbS and facilities work together to implement and measure trauma-informed care principles, policies and practices across juvenile justice programs, the staff supplemental survey responses provide a valuable look into the field’s progress as a whole. As noted above, in many facilities TIC policies and practices are well-implemented by staff. The results from PbS’ Staff Supplemental Trauma Survey, combined with the TIC-related youth survey questions, are crucial in identifying and understanding advances the field is making. They are also an important tool and benchmark towards helping all facilities and programs collect and use this information to align their mission, policies and practices with the tenets of trauma-informed care.



PbS Issue Brief Series

PbS is committed to treating all youths in custody as one of our own and providing national standards, outcome measures, a quality assurance process, expert coaching, training and technical assistance to all facilities and leaders to help implement research-based and developmentally-appropriate best practices. For more information or to join, please visit: <http://pbstandards.org>.

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