

Trauma-Informed Youth Justice: The Kenora Rainy River Trauma-Informed Agency Protocol

WHAT IS THE SYSTEM CHALLENGE?

We know from research that there is a dramatic link between traumatic experiences and poor health and well-being, including physical and mental health issues and behavioural problems.¹ Higher rates of trauma exposure and the resulting negative outcomes are seen in youth justice populations compared to the general population.² Yet, not all services and sectors that support youth justice clients are sufficiently equipped with the tools and resources required to provide trauma-informed care.

With the support of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Provincial System Support Program (PSSP), the Kenora Rainy River Youth Justice Service Collaborative identified a lack of service provider awareness of trauma experienced by justice-involved youth and the need for a trauma-informed approach as a priority system concern. They also focused on First Nation, Inuit and Métis youth to ensure a culturally competent approach to their intervention. The ultimate goal: build a trauma-informed youth justice system.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

Trauma-informed practices can improve clients' daily functioning and decrease use of hospital and crisis intervention services.³ A trauma-informed youth justice system allows service providers to develop and use common trauma-informed processes, practices, and policies. It leads to improved identification of trauma and appropriate referrals to mental health and substance use services, and reduces the risk that youth will be unintentionally re-traumatized by service providers.⁴

MORE ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

The Kenora Rainy River Youth Justice Service Collaborative developed an evidence-informed intervention that involves:

Building capacity among service providers to better understand the impacts of trauma and learn ways to most effectively interact with youth and families.

Screening justice-involved youth for mental health and substance use issues using the GAIN-SS (Global Appraisal of Individual Needs – Short Screener).

A [Youth Justice and Mental Health System Navigation Map](#) to help service providers make appropriate referrals and assist youth and their families navigate the local system.

These components are integrated into a **Trauma-Informed Agency Protocol** that is being used to build a trauma-informed system across the Kenora and Rainy River districts.

The Kenora Rainy River Trauma-Informed Agency Protocol

IMPLEMENTATION

As of January 2017, almost 20 agencies in the Kenora area have committed to implementing the **Trauma-Informed Agency Protocol** and the accompanying trauma-informed agency self-evaluation. Seventeen agencies are currently implementing the **GAIN-SS** screening tool. Agencies and service providers across diverse sectors and services are also using the **Youth Justice Mental Health System Navigation Map**, developed in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association - Kenora Branch.



Capacity-building sessions have been held to build widespread understanding of trauma and healing from an Indigenous perspective and to help service providers learn how to interact with youth and families in a culturally competent way. A trauma-informed policy workshop was held to help agency leaders understand how policies can support a trauma-informed approach to service provision. Together, these efforts are helping to build system-wide capacity to implement trauma-informed practices and better support youth and families.

OUTCOMES

Close to 560 system stakeholders from Kenora and Rainy River have attended capacity-building training sessions. Evaluations show that:

- **92.1%** of participants agree that trauma-informed practice is useful for their clients, and
- **97.4%** agree that trauma-informed practice is useful for themselves and agency staff.

How do we work together if we don't learn together.

— Colin Wacase, Elder

Evaluation of the different components of the intervention is ongoing. Participating agencies will meet annually to evaluate the progress of protocol implementation and gauge agency commitment to the trauma-informed protocol.

[The Healing Trauma from a First Nations Lens workshop] was an amazing learning experience. It should be required for all people. I have learned so much and am able to reflect on my own belief systems and how they affect my outlook and practice.

— Workshop participant

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3. Kexelman, D. (2015). *Trauma-informed Practice*. Retrieved January 04, 2017, from <http://cathykezelman.com/category/trauma-informed-care-and-practice/>
4. Miller, N. A., & Najavits, L. M. (2012, March 30). *Creating Trauma-Informed Correctional Care: A Balance of Goals and Environment*. Retrieved January 04, 2017, from <http://www.socioaffectiveneuroscipsychol.net/index.php/ejpt/article/view/17246>

in the Kenora and Rainy River districts

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