



**City of Gainesville
Clerk of the Commission
Office of the City Commission**

PO Box 490, Station 19
Gainesville, FL 32627-0490
200 E. University Avenue
P: (352) 334-5015
F: (352) 334-2036

City of Gainesville Policy Program Preliminary Research & Analysis

TOPIC: Trauma Informed Community Approach to Gun Violence Prevention
PREPARED BY: Morgan Spicer, Research and Prototyping Fellow
DATE: November 6, 2019
REQUESTED BY: Mayor Poe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A trauma informed community refers to an awareness and comprehension of the root causes of trauma within a community. A dedication to this vision expresses a commitment to understand, educate, and provide resources to foster a safe and healthy environment where children and families can grow and develop. **This includes identifying schools, social service agencies, businesses, clergy, health care providers, and safety and government offices who are committed to assist in the healing of trauma, and directing these institutions to resources which can help achieve these goals.**

Trauma informed approaches represent a shift in thinking from the idea that those who have experienced trauma are “sick” and should be separated from society to the idea that they are “injured” and in need of healing. This shift is made possible by recognizing the ways that individuals, families, and communities are experiencing the effects of trauma, and helping to empower those individuals and communities to look at and address the root causes of the crises they face.

To establish a trauma informed community will likely require the passing of a resolution and/or memorandum on the part of the Gainesville City Commission, declaring the city’s intent to become a trauma informed community, **and additionally may require the creation of a steering committee or local organization** whose role is to streamline and promote trauma informed approaches. The City of Tarpon Springs has undergone similar efforts, and their experiences are detailed below.

The creation of a trauma informed community requires an interdisciplinary and community based approach, and will necessitate significant collaboration on the parts of community members, law

enforcement, city officials, and non-profit organizations. **The declaration of intent behind a trauma informed approach, however, can prompt innovative solutions and programs from all areas of the community in an effort to help individuals heal from past traumas.**

HISTORY/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Why Trauma is Important

Currently, many debates regarding violence in the United States revolve around mental illness, however recent initiatives have argued that the true root cause of pressing issues in our society, including gun violence, poverty and homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse is trauma. These initiatives define trauma as an external threat that overwhelms a person's coping resources which can result in physical, psychological, and emotional distress. They further identify trauma as unique to each individual, but have found that certain groups, namely women and children, people with disabilities, and individuals who are in poverty or are homeless, are uniquely vulnerable to trauma.

Statistics similarly show that trauma is directly related to many systematic problems society is facing. These statistics include the fact that:

- Men and boys of color are disproportionately affected by violence, trauma, and high rates of poverty and incarceration
- 80% of people in psychiatric hospitals have experienced physical or sexual abuse
- 66% of people in substance abuse treatment report childhood abuse or neglect
- 90% of women with alcoholism were sexually abused or suffered severe violence as a child.
- Exposure to childhood trauma is linked to psychotic experiences
- 95% of women and 89% of men entering jail diversion programs have experienced physical or sexual abuse.
- A study of women inmates at a maximum security prison found that they had experienced physical and sexual abuse throughout their youth and adulthood.¹

Studies additionally show that an individual can become retraumatized by services, supervision, and management policies that ignore or dismiss the role of trauma, which indicates that policies and programs must be constructed with existing trauma in mind.

Trauma Informed Care

Trauma informed care incorporates three elements: 1) realizing the prevalence of trauma; 2) recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved with a given program, organization, or system; and 3) responding by putting this knowledge into practice. A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing;

¹ https://www.madinamerica.com/2014/04/trauma-truly-address-roots-violence-suffering-society/#_edn8

recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.²

Trauma informed care can be used in many fields, such as in healthcare. In this instance, trauma informed care includes providing health professionals with the resources necessary to properly identify individuals with a history of exposure to trauma, in order to ensure that those individuals are provided with the access to resources they need for a successful future. When traumatic stress symptoms and other disorders related to trauma go unaddressed and untreated, individuals are under greater risk for relapse of psychological symptoms, substance abuse, and worse outcomes. Further, behavioral health problems such as substance use and mental disorders are more difficult to treat if trauma related symptoms aren't identified and treated first.³

Recent initiatives, however, have emphasized that trauma informed care can be useful in instances other than healthcare, including law enforcement, education, juvenile justice, welfare, housing, and business. A trauma informed approach can help address the root cause of issues communities face, such as homelessness, gun violence, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Tarpon Springs, Florida

Tarpon Springs, Florida, was the first example of a trauma informed community, and remains a leader in trauma informed actions and policies on the city level. In 2010, several leaders in the City of Tarpon Springs prompted the creation of the organization Peace4Tarpon, a non-profit, grassroots initiative which uses a trauma informed lens to seek the root causes of challenges rather than addressing symptoms.⁴ **Members of the Tarpon Springs City Council met with the Tarpon Springs Police Chief and City Manager to come up with a group of people who they thought would be interested in participating in this organization.** These individuals included representatives from local churches, the school district, the library, St. Petersburg Community College, and the Juvenile Welfare Board. Additionally, members included the Police Chief, Mayor, City Manager, directors of community health centers and the housing authority, the Pinellas County Sheriff Department's ex-offender program, and community members.

The members of this organization created a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which was ultimately presented to and passed by the Tarpon Springs City Council, officially declaring the city's intent to become a trauma informed community. This memorandum was passed in 2011, and declared that Tarpon Springs' mission is to provide everyone in the community with information on the causes and consequences of trauma, public and provider education, resource assistance and advocacy for appropriate prevention and intervention services.

² <https://www.madinamerica.com/2014/04/trauma-truly-address-roots-violence-suffering-society/>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207188/>

⁴ <https://www.peace4tarpon.org/>

City of Gainesville Policy Program Preliminary Research & Analysis
Trauma Informed Community Approach to Gun Violence Prevention

The Memorandum of Understanding explicitly recognizes the correlation between the experience of trauma and resulting behavioral and health problems, and the detrimental effects of trauma to individuals and society. Thus, the City expressed a commitment to address the causes and consequences of trauma through a coordinated comprehensive community effort, and a desire for Tarpon Springs to be a trauma informed community that cares for its citizens by providing trauma information, education, prevention, resources, and assistance.

To move forward in these goals, the MOU established a steering committee to design and oversee the community response to trauma. This committee, whose membership largely overlapped with members of the Peace4Tarpon initiative, is chaired by a Tarpon Springs official, and includes a Social Marketing Committee, a Provider Education Committee, a Resource Development Committee, and a Community Action Committee.⁵

Since the passing of the MOU, the City of Tarpon Springs has seen significant results from this initiative. **One significant improvement has come from the local housing authority.** First, the housing authority has created and implemented trainings for staff throughout the year which teach trauma informed care, and encourage staff to see residents as people instead of problems. This includes understanding why certain residents have difficulty following the rules or norms established by the housing authority, rather than simply imposing punishments for not following rules. The housing authority has additionally created a community center, which hosts after school programs to help engage children while their parents are working. This center additionally hosts a “Cops ‘n Kids” program, where an officer is assigned full-time to the center to help encourage healthy interactions between children and law enforcement. The housing authority also established a partnership with Suncoast Center to provide counseling for children who participate in these programs, in addition to providing free or low cost counseling to residents of the housing authority. Finally, the housing authority partners with SPC, the local community college, to provide tutoring for the children in the program.

Additionally, the local elementary school, Tarpon Springs Elementary, has created several programs in response to the MOU. Most of the children who attend this school have family incomes close to the federal poverty level, and the school began its trauma informed approach by asking students and families what they needed. The school established programs based on the responses they received, and the school now has a uniform bank program, a meals and weekend snacks program, transportation to school events, regular hearing and eye exams, and the provision of free eyeglasses to students. The school district has additionally implemented trauma informed care trainings for teachers.⁶

Peace4Tarpon has also put together lists of resources for individuals in need, such as food banks, child care, and education and employment opportunities that are available in the city. The city government has implemented their own campaign to encourage city officials and employees to volunteer and donate regularly to these initiatives.⁷

⁵ https://acestoohigh.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/2pgmemorandum_of_understanding.pdf

⁶ <https://acestoohigh.com/2014/09/17/tarponsprings/>

⁷ <https://www.peace4tarpon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Resource-Guide-2018.pdf>

City of Gainesville Policy Program Preliminary Research & Analysis
Trauma Informed Community Approach to Gun Violence Prevention

Ultimately, the City of Tarpon Springs utilized the system of trauma informed care to make concrete improvements to the lives of their citizens. The Pinellas Ex-Offender Re-Entry Coalition used the CDC's Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire to discover that the overwhelming majority of people in its substance-abuse, batterers-intervention and sex-offender groups had suffered severe trauma. The coalition counselors changed their program, with the result that ex-offenders felt more optimistic and that they had more tools to turn their lives around. Additionally, in response to the city's initiative, the Pinellas County Department of Health has worked to facilitate trauma informed care trainings at all of their health care facilities.

To date, Tarpon Springs has not received any grants for the trauma informed community initiative, and has instead relied on community donations and resources to implement any programs.

Tarpon Springs' initiative shows the ways in which city officials and community members can come together to encourage innovative ways of helping individuals in the community. In the City of Gainesville, a push for a trauma informed community can prompt health care providers, law enforcement, education facilities, and social service providers to reorient the way they view people and problems, leading to a healthier and more cohesive community.

PRELIMINARY COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Cost

- Significant collaboration/resource devotion
- Some community members may not see the need for the program

Benefit

- Healthier community
- Helps to reduce gun violence, homelessness, poverty, etc.

PRELIMINARY AND ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

- National Center for Trauma Informed Care
- Peace4Tarpon
- Peaceful Paths
- Meridian
- Local high schools
- GRACE Marketplace
- Gainesville Housing Authority
- Gainesville Police Department
- Alachua County Sheriff's Department
- University of Florida
- Santa Fe College
- Alachua County Libraries

RECOMMENDED POINTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH/DISCUSSION

- Role of City of Gainesville?
 - Organizer? Provision of resources?
- Choosing what individuals to lead the program
- Passing a memorandum? Establishing an organization/steering committee?