Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness through Trauma-Sensitive Schools

ICPH Beyond Housing Conference: January 16, 2020
Presenters

- Arija Linauts, Senior Program Manager, NYS-TEACHS (New York State – Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students)

- Cindie Lembo, Social Worker, Highlands Middle School, White Plains City School District
Who is in the room?

Raise your hand if...

- If you live in New York.
- If you work in a school.
- If you are a social worker or other mental-health professional.
- If you are a McKinney-Vento liaison.
- If you are NOT a liaison, but work with students in temporary housing in another capacity.
- If you are new(ish) to the subject of trauma-sensitivity and trauma-sensitive schools.
Provide a brief introduction to trauma-sensitivity and an overview of New York State’s Trauma-Sensitive Schools Grant program.

Highlight the successes from White Plains CSD in creating a trauma-sensitive school, including specifics on effective programs and activities.

Provide resources and next-steps to those who are interested in creating a trauma-sensitive school (or program, agency, organization, office, etc.) in their local district.
CONSIDER THIS:

Alex is 8 years old and loves school. However, he has a difficult time playing with peers and sometimes “explodes” into a destructive rage in class.

Alex’s father was recently incarcerated and as a result, his mother couldn’t afford rent and they were evicted.

They moved in with a friend and Alex is sharing a bedroom with 3 other children.

In the temporary housing arrangement, Alex is exposed to drug use and threatening language. He is unable to sleep because of the noise and often goes to school with less than 5 hours of sleep.
Impact on Learning

STRESS & TRAUMA

Competition for energy and attention

Less available to learn and potentially more behavior challenges
What is happening beneath the surface?

- Increased adrenaline (hormones)
- Faster heart-beat
- Higher blood pressure
- Sleep disturbances
- Weakened immune system

Healthy Nervous System

Elevated

Resting

Flooded

Traumatized Nervous System

NYS-TEACHS - (800) 388-2014
What can this look like in school?

- Seemingly common/non-threatening actions at school may be interpreted as a “threat” to someone whose nervous system is on “high alert” because of chronic stress or trauma.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Social/Emotional</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loud noises</strong> (students talking all at once, fire alarm, recess bell, a teacher yelling)</td>
<td>Threat of “calling mom” or “calling dad”</td>
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<td><strong>Touch</strong> (unexpected hand on the shoulder, a game with physical contact)</td>
<td><strong>Change of schedule/plans</strong> (not knowing the daily routine, not being aware of a fire drill, new students or students who have suddenly left, substitute teacher)</td>
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<td><strong>Sensory overload</strong> (bright fluorescent gym lights, walls full of posters/art, navigating dismissal)</td>
<td><strong>Being asked questions</strong> (may be see as intrusive or an act of power/authority)</td>
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<td><strong>Isolation</strong> (being sent out to the hallway, singled out by a teacher or peers)</td>
<td><strong>Observing conflict</strong> (peer fights, power struggle b/w teacher and a student, disagreement b/w a parent and principal)</td>
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Addressing the Impact of Trauma through Sensitivity

Trauma Therapy

- Licensed clinical mental health professional
- Intervention occurs in a therapist/counselor’s office, usually in 1:1 or small group sessions
- Focus is on treating the symptoms of trauma (e.g. depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, etc.)

Vs.

Trauma Sensitivity

- Trauma-sensitivity means thinking and responding differently to a student’s reactions and behaviors
- It involves asking “what happened to you?” rather than “what is wrong with you?”
- Trauma-sensitive practices can be used by everyone in any setting. You do not need to be a mental-health professional.
1. A safe and supportive environment
2. Secure attachment to a nurturing adult
3. An opportunity to strengthen non-cognitive skills

Stress and trauma can make a student feel overwhelmed, unsafe, and unavailable to learn.

But, if the student has access to 3 key supports...

...then he/she will feel safer, more resilient, and more available to learn.

STRESS & TRAUMA

SCHOOL SUCCESS

NYS-TEACHS - (800) 388-2014
Grant funding is available to LEAs (School Districts, Charter Schools, and BOCES) through a competitive grant process administered by NYSED.

To be eligible to apply, LEAs must have a 3-year average of at least 100 students in temporary housing.

Applications are available every 3 years.

Applicants LEA’s may use grant funds to provide programs and activities that support the school success of students experiencing homelessness.
Creation of the McKinney-Vento “Enhanced Grant for Trauma-Sensitive Schools”

☆ NYSED reserved a portion of the McKinney-Vento Grant funds ($200K per year for 3 years) for the “Enhanced Grant for Trauma-Sensitive Schools” (10 districts/LEAs at $20K each per year)

☆ In order to be eligible to apply for the Enhanced Grant for Trauma-Sensitive Schools, districts had to first be awarded the Baseline McKinney-Vento Grant.

“The purpose of the Enhanced Grant for Trauma-Sensitive Schools is to ensure that students in temporary housing can “succeed in school” by addressing their unique learning needs resulting from stress and trauma. For maximum impact, experts recommend a school-wide approach to trauma-sensitivity that addresses the negative effects of chronic stress or trauma through a focus on school climate. For the Enhanced Grant, an LEA can choose to focus on one school or several. Partnering with the chosen school(s)’s leader and/or the district’s superintendent is required.”
Overview of 2016-2019 Trauma-Sensitive Schools Grantees

- 10 Enhanced Grantees for Trauma-Sensitive Schools (NOTE: The current grant cycle, SY19-22, has 12 Enhanced Grantees)
- Districts with a TSS Grant are rural and suburban, and have identified at least 100 Students in Temporary Housing
- Every Trauma-Sensitive Schools Grantee program included activities in 3 categories:
  - Creating a safe and supportive environment
  - Fostering secure attachments to a nurturing adult
  - Providing an opportunity to strengthen non-cognitive skills
Examples of Grant Activities in Each Category

Through a Trauma-Sensitive approach, schools can help students to regulate their “fight, flight, or freeze” response, which may be in overdrive because of a traumatic or adverse experience.

❖ Bonus: The approach is beneficial schoolwide and appropriate for ALL students.

**Safe and Supportive Environment**
- Calm-down kits/corners in classrooms
- Making it clear who “safe adults” are in school
- Focus on positive reinforcement, not punitive consequences

**Attachment to a Nurturing Adult**
- Formal mentorship (i.e. Lunch Bunch, Check-in/Check-out, Bibliotherapy)
- Placing staff members at entrances and exits to greet students

**Strengthen Non-Cognitive Skills**
- Social-Emotional Learning curriculum
- Mindfulness moments
- Setting goals and then, discussing strategies to reach those goals
Provide a brief introduction to trauma-sensitivity and an overview of New York State's Trauma-Sensitive Schools Grant program.

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HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

ENHANCED MCKINNEY VENTO GRANT ACTIVITIES
WHITE PLAINS DEMOGRAPHICS

• 5 Elementary Schools
• Eastview Middle School (6th Grade)
• Highlands Middle School (7th & 8th Grade)
• 1 High School
• 1 Alternative School
• Total Number of Students: 7,218
• Total Number of Students at Highlands: 1,053
CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL
CAPACITY BUILDING

- Committee thoroughly trained
- Turn-key to whole staff
- Faculty meetings
- Specialty workshops for TA’s
- District wide course offerings
- Social-Emotional Conference
WELCOMING BUILDING ENVIRONMENT

• Care closet
  – Food
  – Toiletries
  – Clothes
  – School supplies
  – Community resources
• Partner with community organizations
  • Westchester Knicks
  • ROAR Tickets
  • Rewarding positive behavior
• SuitUp!
  • Career exploration
  • Visit a corporate campus
  • Problem solving activities
• Field Trips
  • Relationship building
FOSTERING SECURE ATTACHMENTS

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL
MENTORING

• Piloted Mentoring Program 2017-2018
  – 8 Mentors with 5 mentees each
  – Weekly Afterschool meetings
  – HS Mentors
  – HW Help and activities

• Revised Program for 2018-2019
  – 30 Mentors with 1-2 mentees each
  – Lunch time meetings
  – Structured check-ins
  – Tracking meetings

• New and Improved Program for 2019-2020
  – 30 Mentors and 50 mentees
  – Weekly school day meetings
  – Biweekly after school sessions
MENTORING TRIPS
IDENTIFY SAFE PEOPLE IN THE SCHOOL

The Holidays Are Supposed to be Happy...

But for many students & families they are not!

If you need to talk, come see...

Ms. Donahue (SAS Counselor) Rm 157A
Dr. Segreti (School Psychologist) Rm 155B
Ms. Rich (School Psychologist) Rm 157C
Ms. Lembo (Social Worker) Rm 331
Ms. Halofonua (Social Worker) Rm 333
Ms. Chu (Guidance Counselor) Rm 145
Mr. Salley (Guidance Counselor) Rm 323
Ms. Guarin (Guidance Counselor) Rm 259B
Ms. Valdes (Guidance Counselor) Rm 155
WELLNESS DAY!

• Two guest speakers presented to 7th and 8th grade students
  – From this Moment On: Reminded students that their past does not define them and that they have the power to make positive choices that can help improve their lives and the world around them
  – The Teen Brain: Taught students about their developing brain and how using substances can negatively affect them

• Presentations were discussed in classrooms
• Students had opportunity to ask anonymous questions to the presenters during their lunch period
WELLNESS NIGHT!!

Highlands Wellness Day
March 19, 2019 6:00pm-8:00pm

Don’t miss this exciting event! Bring your family and listen to amazing speakers! Children ages 10-14 will have fun activities to choose from and for children ages 4-9 babysitting services will be available.

Free Registration! Free Dinner! Raffle Prizes!

Featured Speaker: Michael Nemery
The Teen Brain and Risky Behaviors: This presentation will provide information and strategies to help your teens make healthy choices and stay safe. Participants will learn about the developing adolescent brain and will explain the behaviors you might be seeing at home.

Featured Speaker: Javier Sanchez
Who CARES? Young people gravitate towards, respond to, and are willing to learn from adults they feel truly care about them. Participants will walk away with a renewed passion for parenting well as impact tools and resources that are immediately applicable, engaging, relevant, and fun.

Register Now!
To register online scan the QR code or complete the registration form below.

Return completed registration form to Highlands Middle School 138 Grandview Ave White Plains

Name: ___________________________ Email: ___________________________ Phone #: ___________________________

In the spaces below, please indicate the number of people attending for each age group.

_______ # of Adults _________ # of Children ages 10-14 _________ # of Children ages 4-9

For more information contact Cindy Lambo, School Social Worker at 914-423-2271 or clambo@white plains.k12.ny.us
STRENGTHENING NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL
TEACHING COPING TECHNIQUES

• Cool Down Kits
• ROAR Class
• DBT Groups
• Mindful Mondays
• CPR
FOR MORE INFORMATION

CINDIE LEMBO, LMSW
SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER
HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL
128 GRANDVIEW AVE WHITE PLAINS NY 10605
914-422-2271
CINDIELEMBO@WPCSD.K12.NY.US
OVERVIEW

- Provide a brief introduction to trauma-sensitivity and an overview of New York State’s Trauma-Sensitive Schools Grant program.

- Highlight the successes from White Plains CSD in creating a trauma-sensitive school, including specifics on effective programs and activities.

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Quick Tip Resources

* Can be used in schools, CBOs, housing agencies, shelters, etc.

- Matrix of Trauma-Sensitive Strategies for School Success

- Trauma-Sensitive Schools Checklist

- Tip Sheet: Navigating Difficult Conversations
More In-depth Resources

- The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) – “Helping Traumatized Children Learn”
  https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/
  NOTE: If you can’t read the entire book, check out page 80 of Vol. 2 for a two-page list of “Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions.” It’s easy to digest and is a great starting place.

- NYS -TEACHS website, “Trauma-Sensitive Strategies for School Success” page:
  https://nysteachs.org/topics/trauma-sensitive-strategies/

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
  https://www.nctsn.org/

- New York State McKinney-Vento Grant Application, including the materials for the “Enhanced Grant for Trauma-Sensitive Schools”
Next Steps

Upon returning to your work-day activities:

- Familiarize yourself with the Matrix of Trauma-Sensitive Strategies for School Success and other available resources. *(hint: print it out and have it posted near your work-space)*

- Facilitate knowledge building among others. *(hint: demonstrate through your own actions; insert trauma-sensitive language into advice you may give colleagues; provide a trauma-sensitivity training)*

- Incorporate trauma-sensitivity into an already existing initiative/program in your school/district. *(hint: School Climate work, PBIS, Restorative Justice, etc.)*

- Use at least one strategy during each interaction with a student/family in temporary housing *(hint: if you are going into a stressful or potentially frustrating situation, try to identify a few strategies beforehand)*
CONTACTS

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