

Evaluation update for DOCCR’s Trauma-Informed, Culturally Specific Programs

Background

Since fall 2017, Wilder Research has been working with the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation to develop culturally specific, trauma-informed programs for African American male-identified youth, and to evaluate the implementation and benefits of these programs, with a focus on preventing and intervening in juvenile justice system involvement.

Funding from the Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative supports the evaluation of the three programs. The programs are Ujima Family Academy at Rebound, Inc. (focus on prevention), HOPE at Phyllis Wheatley (focus on early intervention), and Nia at NorthPoint (focus on intervention). Programs received funding in fall 2018, and all have had at least one cohort of participants.

Current project

Goals

Wilder Research is performing an implementation and outcome evaluation for this suite of programs. While specific goals and outcomes for participants vary by program, common outcome evaluation questions are:

- Did the participant improve their ability to identify traumatic, stressful, and/or challenging life experiences?
- Did the participant improve their ability to address and/or positively cope with traumatic, stressful, and/or challenging life experiences?
- Did the participant feel the program was culturally competent?
- Did the participant improve their grounding in their culture?
- Did the participant improve their connections to a positive support network?

Timeline of work

Wilder Research began work on this project in 2017. The following outlines work that has been done.

1. WILDER WORK COMPLETED

Work completed	Date
Literature review exploring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Best practices for trauma-informed programming for male-identified African American youth to prevent or intervene in juvenile justice system involvement – Methods to assess trauma-informed programming – Methods to assess trauma in African American male-identified youth 	Fall 2017
Review RFP responses	Spring 2018
Participate in question and answer sessions with RFP respondents	May – June 2018
Develop outcome measures for evaluation plan, incorporating elements from literature, from grantees, and from HCCMHC’s requirements	Summer 2018
Finalize evaluation plan	Fall 2018
Develop data collection tools	Fall – Winter 2018
Conduct grantee focus groups	Winter 2018
Conduct interviews and surveys with program participants	Ongoing, beginning Winter 2018
Conduct interviews with key referral informants	May – June 2019
Participate in quarterly meetings with grantees and Hennepin County	Ongoing

Evaluation participants

Wilder Research interviewed program staff and people who refer youth and families into the programs, and have also interviewed and surveyed youth and families who have participated in the programs. Figure 2 outlines who has participated in evaluation activities through July 31, 2019.

Preliminary findings: Implementation

Wilder Research conducted brief, preliminary analysis of the program staff interviews. The following themes were raised:

Community-based programs are trying to meet a need that would not otherwise be addressed.

Program staff agreed that these grants allow them to try to meet a community need that had not been addressed previously. Staff agreed that there was an unmet need to help African American boys and adolescents identify and cope positively with trauma. While the method to meet that need varied across programs, all agreed that they would not be able to attempt to meet that need without the county's investment.

Help from Hennepin County, as well as the community and program strengths contributed to implementation success.

Wilder Research asked program staff to identify what had gone well with implementing the new programs. Staff agreed that Hennepin County resources, including funding, good working relationships with contract managers, and good working relationships with county referral sources helped them implement the programs and connect participants to the programs. Staff also agreed that community and program assets helped with implementation. Staff identified community resilience and the desire to help African American boys and adolescents as helping implementation. Finally, program staff said that the connections and reputation that their nonprofits had in the area was helpful for implementation and connecting participants with the programs.

2. EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS

Informant	Number interviewed	Number surveyed
Program staff	5	-
Referral source	9	-
Program participant	11	11
Total	25	11

Implementation required program staff to build trust with community and referral sources.

Wilder Research asked program staff to identify challenges to implementing the new programs. Staff agreed that connecting participants to the program was the most challenging part of implementation, though all have been able provide programming for at least one cohort of participants. Staff also agreed that receiving appropriate referrals and getting participants to commit to coming to the program depended on staff building trust and relationships with potential referral sources, as well as with community members who might benefit from programming either for themselves or a family member.

Preliminary findings: Outcomes

Wilder Research conducted brief data analysis of the participant interviews completed, and we present some preliminary findings from the evaluation of program outcomes. The following themes were raised by 3 or more interviewees. One important consideration is that while the information below is an accurate summary of information collected to date, **it is possible that more – and more prevalent – themes may emerge** as Wilder Research interviews more program participants.

Referral sources see these community-based programs as addressing critical needs.

Wilder Research interviewed people who referred participants into Nia and HOPE. Interviewees agreed that Nia and HOPE were addressing critical needs faced by African American male-identified youth. Speaking about their difficulty finding appropriate programming for the African American male adolescents on their caseload, one interviewee said,

Trauma-based is everything. We have a couple programs that help with that, some of them are way too intense which can get to a fail for lack of participation and time. [The program is] wonderful – my guys want to get attached to it and learn about trauma and coping without realizing that. Where have they been for the last 20 years?

Referral sources want to increase the capacity of community-based programs.

Wilder Research asked referral sources if they noticed any areas for improvement for Nia and HOPE. The only theme that came out of this question was that referral sources wanted to be able to refer more youth into the programs, or, to increase the capacity of the programs. This was also a theme in response to a question about whether there was anything else that the interviewee thought that Hennepin County should know about these programs. One interviewee said:

That was my first statement – make sure [program] never goes away. It's wonderful. It's easy to refer to, reports are good, it's the first thing that comes to my mind about pro-social, trauma -- they fit the issue for what we need in North Minneapolis. And I love the idea that [program] will continue to work with the guys when they're done instead of kicking them out the door. [Program] is amazing and I hope they stay and grow.

According to participants, programs are positively impactful.

Wilder Research interviewed participants from all three programs. Preliminary analysis of these interviews shows that participants agree that the programs are positively impactful. Most participants agreed that:

- Group programming included helpful topics
- They improved their ability to understand trauma or stress
- They improved their ability to cope with trauma or stress in ways that work for them

We reiterate here the caution above: while this is an accurate summary of themes raised so far, it is possible that more prevalent themes will supersede those presented here as Wilder Research interviews more program participants.



Next steps

Wilder Research continues to interview and survey program participants, and will also work with Hennepin County and program staff to collect and report participant data, including demographic and other outcome data. Future reporting will include more detailed analysis of survey and interview data from participants, referral sources, and program staff.

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For more information

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