



On Balance

A publication of Dane County Department of Human Services
and the Dane County Juvenile Court Program

April 2018
Volume XII, Number 1

DCDHS Trauma Informed Care Summit

On Friday April 13th, the Dane County Department of Human Services held a Trauma Summit at the American Family Insurance Training Center. Over 200 staff were in attendance for this very powerful and timely training. This training provided staff with the opportunity to explore exposed trauma with the clients that we serve, as well as, the Vicarious Trauma that we can experience through our work and personal lives.



Dedicated to a community of hope, respect,
partnership, and safety where everyone thrives.



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On the web @ www.countyofdane.com/juvenilecourt
www.danecountyhumanservices.org

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DCDHS TRAUMA INFORMED CARE SUMMIT April 13, 2018

MORNING KEYNOTE

LIFE- You deserve the one you are working for!

Tamra Oman

MORNING WORKSHOPS

A) Vicarious Trauma- Doing the Work & What the Work Does to Us

Tamra Oman & Paula Buege

B) Adverse Childhood Experiences, Resilience, and the Role of the Public Service Worker (part 1)

Dr. Jasmine Zapata

C) The Insidiousness and Normalization of Trauma: I am Not That Book You Read Nor That Training You Attended

Dr. Algernon Felice

D) Bikers Against Child Abuse (B.A.C.A)

Sheri "Eddie" Edwards-Badger City Chapter

Joe "Lurch" Northwood-Big River Chapter

E) 6 Clicks: The Difference Between Brain Intoxication and Emotional Competence

Krista Morrissey



AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

A) What Judges Expect From Social Workers In Court - John Bauman, Moderator

Judges: Shelly Gaylord, Everett Mitchell, Juan Colas, & Julie Genovese

B) Adverse Childhood Experiences, Resilience, and the Role of the Public Service Worker (part 2)

Dr. Jasmine Zapata

C) The Insidiousness and Normalization of Trauma: I am Not That Book You Read Nor That Training You Attended

Dr. Algernon Felice

D) Adverse Childhood Experiences- The Conversation

Paula Buege

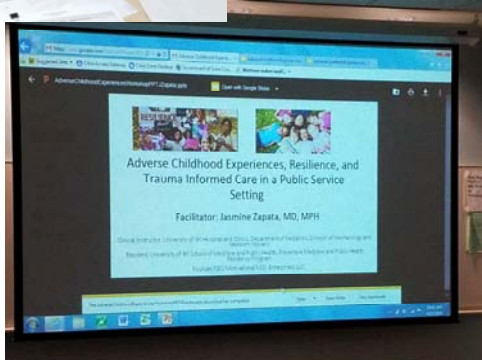
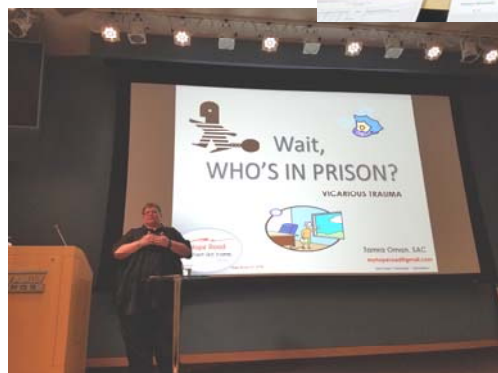
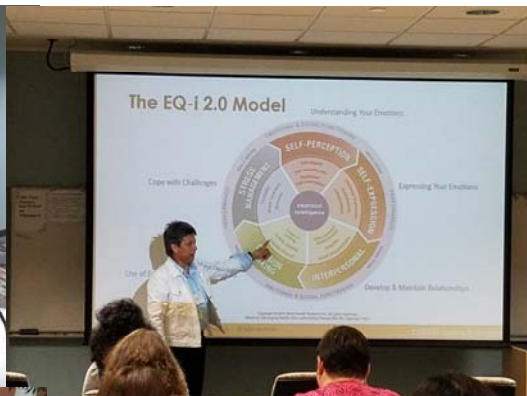
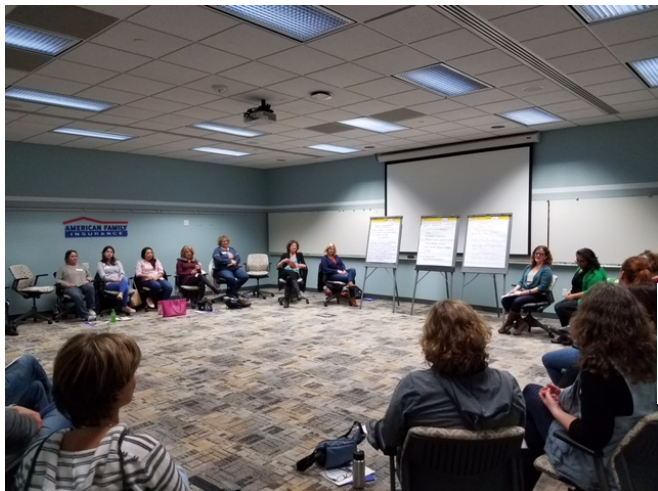
E) Mindfulness

Sarah Shatz



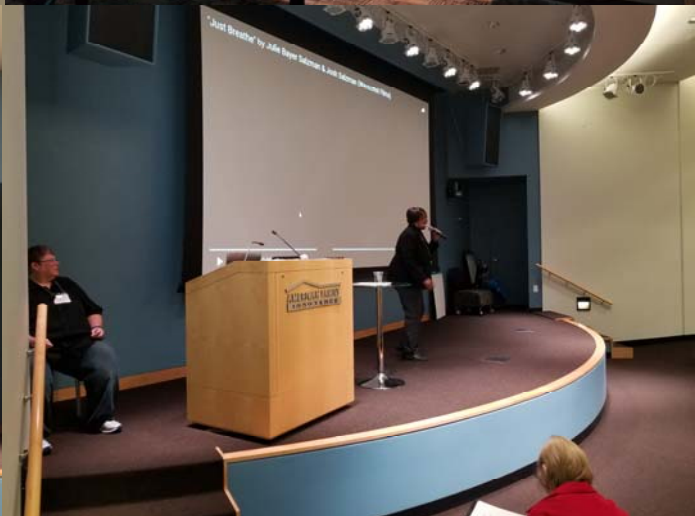
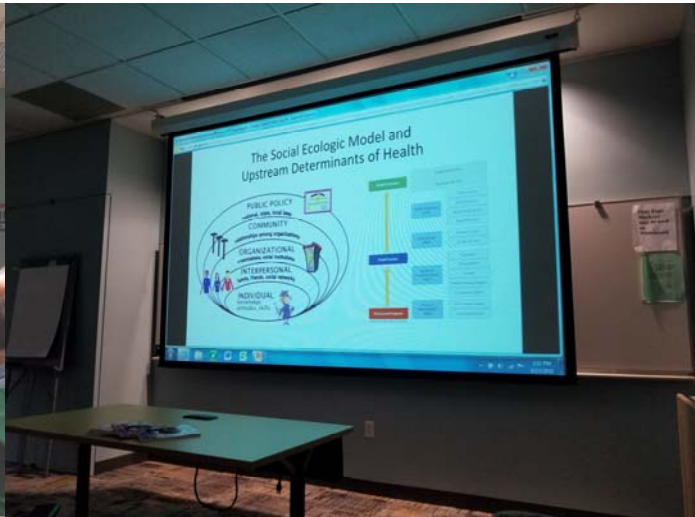
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More Pictures from the DCDHS TRAUMA INFORMED CARE SUMMIT—April 13, 2018



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More Pictures from the DCDHS TRAUMA INFORMED CARE SUMMIT—April 13, 2018



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2018 Juvenile Court Recognition Awards

By John Bauman

The Dane County Circuit Court Judges in the Juvenile Division will sponsor the 20th annual Juvenile Court Awards on May 3, 2018 at the Goodman Community Center. Justice Shirley Abrahamson will be the featured speaker and Presiding Juvenile Division Judge Shelley Gaylord will lead the event. The ceremony is a celebration and recognition of youth and the commitment others have made to the lives of youth and families in Dane County. The recipients of this year's recognition awards are:

Outstanding Service Award

Jim Huff-Jim is a Dane County foster parent who started his career in the



Linda Johnson for Jim Huff

business world. He has provided care to numerous boys over the years and uses his calming energy to help them work through some of their trauma issues. He is patient, understanding and supportive, yet is firm with the boys.



Brad Munn

Brad Munn-Brad provides free weekly golf lessons to youth at the Juvenile Shelter Home. Staff and youth say that Brad is inspiring and has a tremendous amount of patience and compassion. Youth are able to gain new experiences as a result of Brad's involvement in their lives.

Outstanding Achievement Award



Dee Dee Randle

Deovan "Dee Dee" Randle-Dee Dee has many years of involvement with the Juvenile Court system in Dane County. During the past three years, she has shown a great deal of personal strength and hard work and as a result has become a very competent and focused young woman who will graduate from high school in June.

Tashonna Robinson-Tashonna has overcome a number of barriers over the past few years. She has raised her GPA during this time, has worked summers for MSCR and will be attending Tuskegee University this fall.



Liza Anderson for Tashonna Robinson

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Awards

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The George Northrup Award

Lori Casper-Lori is a Bailiff and is usually assigned to courtroom 2A. She is compassionate and easily builds relationships with kids who are struggling. She has a calming effect on others and is skilled at de-escalating situations. Lori goes above and beyond in everything she does, including her work in Special Olympics and numerous fundraisers.



Lori Casper



Marcus Murphy

The Peter Rubin Award

Marcus Murphy-Marcus is the Director of the Steps to Success program at Family Service and led the program for the past 15 years. Marcus has the ability to inspire youth and colleagues to be the best they can be. During his time at Steps to Success, Marcus has also coached numerous sports in the community and has volunteered time in Madison schools.



Veronica Hereford



Veronica Hereford's Group

The Ervin Bruner Award

Veronica Hereford-Veronica is a Program Leader in the Court Diversion Unit at Human Services and is a supervisor in the Rock County Juvenile Detention. She has previous experience at the Dane County Juvenile Shelter, DAIS and other programs. Veronica demonstrates kindness, encouragement and positive energy to her co-workers and the youth she works with every day.

On Balance

Root to Rise: A New Take on Student Teacher

By Sean Hubbard, Briarpatch

If you wander the halls at West High School while classes are in session, you will likely find yourself in the company of students. You would also likely notice that most are students of color. Typically, these students struggle with behavioral issues at school and, as a consequence, are credit deficient and in danger of not graduating on schedule, if at all. For many of these students, the classroom is a space associated with feelings of isolation, failure, and powerlessness. Roaming the halls can offer respite from these feelings as well as an opportunity to get into trouble. School staff have few, if any, positive opportunities to offer students who have become disengaged from school. The educational outcomes for these students match those of many other students of color, especially black students. The 2013 Race to Equity report laid bare the shockingly disproportionate educational outcomes that black students in Dane County face. While districts across the county have made progress in addressing these outcomes, the disparities are still very real.

In her 27 years as an educator with the Madison Metropolitan School District, Denise Hanson has seen the results of the report play out in her classrooms and in the hallways. Time and again, she has noticed how students of color struggle to find meaningful, positive connections to school, the kind of connections that allow students to thrive. Ms. Hanson wanted to create a program that would combat this process and allow students of color, and school staff, to fully realize their potential. Root to Rise is the result.

Root to Rise began in the Spring of 2017 with six seniors at West High School. The program gives high school students an opportunity to practice leadership skills, exercise power, and develop self-efficacy through assisting elementary school

teachers. Since then, an additional 15 students have participated in the program, with more scheduled to participate in Fall of 2018. All program participants are students of color, who have expressed interest in teaching or education as a career, or who are interested in working with younger students in a classroom setting. Participants must also be in need of additional credit to graduate, beyond what could be attained through scheduled courses. These students are typically the ones who can be found wandering the halls during class – disconnected and isolated academically.

The program places students in classrooms at the elementary school either in their neighborhood or that they themselves attended as children (going back to their “roots”). They are paired with classroom teachers who act as mentors, and the West students in turn act as mentors to the younger students. Teachers welcome the additional help in the classroom; an extra set of eyes to help manage behaviors and an extra set of hands to give much-needed attention to younger students is a boon for any elementary school classroom. The younger students also benefit, not just from the extra academic attention, but from having a role model of their same race.

Participants earn a small stipend at the end of the semester, in addition to earning up to one full credit towards graduation, depending on the number of hours they put in. Although the money and the credit might hook them in, their motivation quickly changes once they begin interacting with the younger students. Many of the high school students who participate in the program say that they are considering a career in education or teaching after working

with their mentoring teacher in the classroom. They note how satisfying the work is, how nice it is to have younger students look up to them, and how supportive the program is for their own learning. And this is one of the primary goals of Root to Rise, to build a pool of future teachers of color by giving students of color the chance to practice key leadership skills in a classroom setting. Many of the students in the program have never had a teacher of color, let alone a teacher who is of the same race they are. There are currently only three teachers of color at West High School. This is one of the reasons many students of color feel so isolated in their classrooms.

Briarpatch joined Ms. Hanson in the Fall of 2017 to help grow and sustain the program. Participants meet with Briarpatch employment programs staff to discuss their experience, provide feedback on their performance, and make sure they are keeping up with the assignments they need to complete to receive credit. Briarpatch also assists with employment training and facilitating opportunities for career exploration and planning. Briarpatch is currently developing tools with Ms. Hanson to begin systematically measuring the impact that Root to Rise is having on participants.

Although anecdotal, the available evidence is very encouraging. Classroom teachers, school staff, and high school and elementary students alike are finding overwhelmingly positive outcomes from the program. One high

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Root

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school participant noted that Root to Rise gave her the confidence to make it through finals week. Where she would have normally given in to stress and anxiety and avoided studying, she now had the self-efficacy to succeed and thrive in her school work because, as she put it, “I don’t want to let my students down!”

Another Root to Rise participant said the program saved him his senior year

and not only gave him joy, but allowed him to graduate on time with his peers. The elementary school students, who now have someone like themselves to look up to, protest when their mentor isn’t there. One of the most powerful, if intangible, indicators of success is that you are not as likely to see one of the Root to Rise mentors wandering the hallways anymore – because they are off making a difference in the classroom.



*Wood art piece created by Alan Chancellor and an
ADDSII youth installed in a group room at NIP*

On Balance

Reviewing the Use of Police in Madison Schools

By Heather Crowley

In February 2017, the MMSD's Ad Hoc Committee to review use of ERO's in schools convened, to continue through June 2018 at the latest. This committee is comprised of community members from various disciplines who volunteered to participate in this important undertaking. The backgrounds of community members span the fields of legal, educational, government, corporate, law enforcement, advocacy, community development, and research. The remaining members are three current MMSD board members. The committee has met monthly since inception and will effectively end once recommendations are formalized.

For the past year and a half, the committee has reviewed the current contract between the Madison Metro School District and the Madison Police Department contract to discuss whether the current version should be modified or continued. The committee has been provided with, as well as gathered, information regarding history and current practice with relation to police in schools. During the process, the committee has compared other similar size districts and their practices. We have interviewed youth both who are, and who are not, involved in the legal system. We have interviewed MMSD faculty and staff. We have reviewed arrest data and considered disproportionate numbers. We have considered the information shared in presentations by Law Enforcement, Restorative Justice facilitators, community groups, youth groups, community members, parents, law enforcement reform advocates, and others. We also all bring our own personal knowledge based on background to add to the discussion. Major themes that have come to light during this process: traumatization or re-traumatization of youth of color, efficacy of response/ proper use of ERO's, administrative variants among the high schools that may impact the role of the ERO, and cost/benefit of the ERO contract vs expanding other student services.

The Committee hopes to provide its recommendations to the Board of Education before the end of the school year. Ultimately, the Board will decide how to utilize the recommendations and whether they will make changes to, or maintain the current contract. This contract will also be considered by the MMSD Guiding Coalition, which is an internal workgroup.



On Balance

Youth

Corner

The following were written by some of our REPLAY students for the Youth Corner. They had the option of writing about 5 different topics, of them, the 2 they chose were the Bubbler Program and REPLAY school. REPLAY currently accepts male students from MMSD, grades 7-10 who are system involved. We are always looking for additional students.

"I like Bubbler because it is fun, educating, hands on video game designing program. I liked the video game design unit because I'm really into video games. When I was in grade school video games were my thing. Bubbler taught me to look at video games different. When Nate, the guy who taught the unit, had us work on designing a video game it really stuck with me. Nate told us about where he worked and I would like to work there sometime. I heard the starting salary averages around 55 thousand per year. There are lots of perks working for the job as well. I'm considering getting an associates degree to pursue this career." By T.

"I am a student at REPLAY. I like this school because it is a smaller class. The teachers care about the student's education, and has time to help each student. The teacher also has time to show us how to solve problems in different ways if the student does not understand. There is less drama and distraction here. I am also able to work and get catch up on credits. I also like the transportation to and from school. It has helped me attend more, so I learn more. Therefore REPLAY is a good school." By A.

"I like REPLAY because the teachers actually care about the student's learning. I'm also able to work at my own pace so that makes me feel like I can reach my full potential. I LOVE the small space here because you can do kinda whatever you want as far as learning. We have a say in how and what we do. Usually if you ask questions and do what you are supposed do it goes well here. REPLAY helps us learn other things that other schools usually don't teach. The most important thing is social skills, for example how we talk to people. Because that is so important now and in the future. This has helped me in my life, when I am doing business, I know how to word every thing. I really appreciate being at REPLAY." By T

On Balance



Agency Spotlight – Sankofa

By Rhonda Voigt

I have heard the name of this agency being used here and there but no one seemed to have much information about Sankofa so I decided to check it out. I met with founder Dr. Valerie Henderson and therapist Ashley Ball to learn more. Per Dr. Henderson, Sankofa is a Swahili word that signifies recovery; return to your past to protect your future. Sankofa has been in Madison since 2012. They are a group of 15 therapists and case managers of diverse backgrounds, including Spanish speaking staff. Their mission is to re-gain trust in community mental health providers by helping their consumers uncover their truths and address any barriers to improving quality of life. Therapists and case managers are community based which indicates that they are not required to do their work in an office setting. Sankofa employs a trauma focus including psychoeducation, cognitive behavior therapy and a variety of other treatment modalities to meet the needs of their consumers. Sankofa offers a variety of group sessions including:

- ⇒ Anger management groups for men
- ⇒ Abuse prevention for women
- ⇒ Youth group (boys ages 8-12)
- ⇒ AOD group
- ⇒ Education group - tutoring (ages 8-17)
- ⇒ LGBT Queer Group – (young adults)
- ⇒ Black Women’s Group
- ⇒ Single Mother’s group (children can come with)
- ⇒ Women's Group

Sankofa’s goal is to complete all new intakes within a week whenever possible. Upon completion of intake, a therapist will be assigned and begin working with the consumer to develop an individualized case plan. Ms. Henderson happily reports they are always hiring new therapists to meet the growing needs of their program. Though they do not advertise, Sankofa is expanding through word of mouth. Sankofa accepts most insurances. They are CCS/CCF certified.

Scheduling an appointment is easy:

- ⇒ email at sankofabch@gmail.com
- ⇒ call at 608.285.9101

If you leave a message when you call, leave your name and phone number and your call will be returned within 24 hours. Per the Sankofa website: “During our initial contact, we will assess some of your needs and try to schedule your first appointment with a therapist within one week. Unlike other agencies, we do not believe in you having to wait for services for six weeks or longer. We understand that when you need help, it is important that we try to aid you as quickly as possible. We want to be of service to you when you are ready.” <http://sankofabch.org>

On Balance

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

ON BALANCE catches up with Diane Prellwitz

March 15, 2018

Hello former co-workers. It is Plainswoman Diane sitting at my kitchen table in our country home, listening to the wind blow and watching the dust swirl. We have not had the severe weather events in southwestern Kansas that so much of the country has experienced but we are in a bad drought--a serious matter for farmers and gardeners. I have had a veggie garden since moving here which has been a rewarding experience but also a challenge, given the weeds, the insects and now the drought. Guess I will see what kind of moisture we get this spring and then decide if there will be a garden this year...

I heard from Debbie that the Delinquency Unit is undergoing more changes - hopefully an additional supervisor will be a good thing. I do still miss parts of the job but I do not miss the stress of trying to keep track of so many things and solve so many problems. I did start volunteering 2 to 3 part days per week at our local nursing home in April, 2013, which provides just the right amount of structure. I am part of the activities department and I love it! I have become an "in demand bingo caller" and also do a craft project most weeks. The best craft projects are those with "no rules" and it has been fun to come up with easy, fun projects. Jack and I are good together and we have an almost 5 year old female black lab named Maddie (short for Madison). She is my walking partner - a good motivator to "just do it"!

I still feel a connection to the Delinquency Unit and the difficult work you do every day. Take care of yourselves!

P.S. We did get some rain and a little snow March 18. Not enough to end a drought but a start! :)

On Balance is a publication of Dane County

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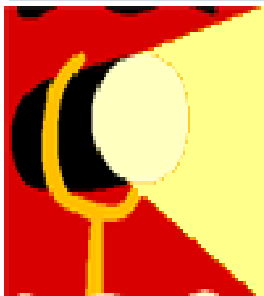
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Comments? Contact Dawn MacFarlane at 608-242-6267 or macfarlane@countyofdane.com

On Balance



Staff Spotlight – Jeff Ward

By John Bauman



Jefferson Victor Ward is the youngest of five siblings and has four older sisters, all who helped shape his personality. He was born in Chicago and cites his step-father John Tiller as having a profound impact on his life. Jeff was named after his grandfather, who moved from Alabama to Chicago in the 1920's. Jeff has been married to Teresa for 25 years, they have three children and five grandchildren ranging from 5 months to 9 years old. Jeff attended Wright Jr College in Chicago and then UW-Eau Claire, but states that most of his learning has come from interacting with other cultures.

One of the formative experiences that Jeff had when growing up was his work as a camp counselor when he was in high school. He tutored younger students in math and science and was able to be in a mentor role. Jeff held other positions prior to working for Dane County. He was a group home counselor, semi-truck driver and heavy equipment operator. Jeff has also been on the Mentoring Positives Board, Salvation Army Board, has refereed basketball games and started and led a MSCR basketball team for adults who won 18 championships.

Jeff began his career with Dane County in 1992 as a LTE in the Public Works Department as an Aquatic Weed Harvester. He began to work part-time for the Juvenile Court Program at the Juvenile Shelter Home in 1994, moved to Juvenile Detention shortly after and finally hired as a full-time Juvenile Court Worker at Shelter in 1996. Jeff was on loan to the MMSD as a grant funded engagement coordinator at East H.S during the 2005-2006 school year. As a result of the connections he made with students and positive outcomes, MMSD created four formal positions the following year. He transferred from Shelter to the Home Detention Program in January 2008 and has been in that position since then. Jeff has indicated that he has retirement in his sights and will be doing so this spring.

Jeff states that his philosophy of working with youth comes easy to him. "I treat people the way I would like to be treated myself. I understand that I meet families in my work who are often in crisis and I'm only looking at the tip of the iceberg. Patience, understanding and listening more than talking are important. I have come to learn that most people will open up to you if they are comfortable with you in a non-judgmental way." When interacting with Jeff, people can expect an experienced person who has met many different people and believes that families don't want their kids in legal trouble. "I want to help them get through this experience and become a productive citizen."

Jeff would like readers to know that "I try hard with every kid and family I meet. I use my family experience remembering how my parents raised me, which was with compassion and a loving understanding that life has the possibility of getting better if you just believe it." Jefferson Victor Ward has helped to improve the lives of countless youth and families over his career. His genuine caring and dedication will be missed.

Corner

Transparency as the CYF Administrator

Being a transparent leader is important and provides practical ways on how to improve openness in the CYF Division. In this CYF Corner, I explore why trust, honesty, and respect in the form of transparency are core values needed to build upon successful teams.

For me, trust and transparency are plain and simply workplace demands of employees seeking awareness of what is real and true. People easily grow tired of surprises and want to exist in a work environment that allows one to have greater clarity of thought – by eliminating the unknowns that can often creep into our work environment and relationships we foster. It is important for me to be proactive in sharing where the CYF Division is now, where it is headed and forthright about its future.



Martha Stacker, Ph.D.

Transparency can be a problem with many leaders, as they are not aware of the everyday realities that exist around them. Leaders can remove themselves from the teams they lead, focusing on communicating with only the executive team or mostly by email. By doing so, leaders can often neglect the core teams that literally make everything work. The reasons for this separation are sometimes justified due to other demands/expectations of leaders and there are some benefits and disadvantages. However, I believe that the most influential leaders are those that are visible and accessible. People want to relate to leadership and want to know that their leaders have experienced the same problems, successes and/or have overcome similar hardships. I have town hall meetings, make an effort to routinely visit sites, attend and hold events, and have an open door policy to contact me with suggestions, concerns, or questions.

In the CYF Division, we practice compassion and empathy. From this lens and my perspective, being honest is easy when there is good news to share - like promotions/retirements, Division growth, acknowledgements, and successful outcomes. Staying honest when the news is bad, the need of increased accountability or significant changes is not always so easy. No one likes being the messenger of news that may be unfavorable, but it is always better to know than to be kept in the dark. As a transparent leader, I value honesty above everything else. True to my philosophy of transparency, I do not hide the truth from people that I serve no matter how hard it is to deliver. Most people avoid conflict more than anything else. Whenever there is the slightest risk of challenging your superior or looking uninformed, most people will keep quiet or say they agree, even though they may disagree wholeheartedly.

For me to have transparency requires vulnerability and looking critically at myself, as well as, the CYF Division. Although the steps are relatively straightforward and easy, practicing it requires a lot of stepping out of my comfort zone. Being a leader is hard, as it often involves a lot of criticism. It's easier to avoid or ignore criticism than to listen to the complaints and questions. Transparency means I open myself up to criticism and make myself vulnerable in favor of the needs of the people that I serve.

Transparency can be a powerful unifier if embraced. It forces a team to work smarter together. Team building through transparency takes shape when the leader of a team can openly discuss what he/she believes is the strengths and weaknesses of the team with feedback. Why? When we are informed about the CYF Division expectations and concerns – as it pertains to both individuals and the collective unit; this allows the group to mature together and it cultivates a business spirit that allows for cross functional responsibilities and opportunities for growth/expansion. This benefits everyone.

On Balance

Schools Struggle to Support LGBTQ Students

Recent research finds the majority of teachers want to help LGBTQ students but don't always know how.

By [Emelina Minero](#)

Pinning Roddy Biggs against a locker, a student whaled on him, giving him a black eye, fracturing his eye socket, and bruising his ribs. It wasn't a lone incident for Biggs, who came out as gay to his Tennessee high school when he was a freshman.

"I didn't really do the best in school because of it," recalls Biggs, now 23, who says homophobic slurs, death threats, and shoves were commonplace. "I had depression and panic attacks and all that stuff along the way."

Biggs can still remember the teachers who ignored the bullying or simply said, "That's not cool," and walked away. But there were also the educators who tried to help, like the science teacher who took him to the principal's office after he was beaten and sat with him for more than an hour during class time. Oftentimes, though, the best efforts of teachers were stymied by district or state regulations that stopped them from doing much more.

"Most of the educators wanted to help, but did not know how or were limited in what they could do," says Biggs, referring to Tennessee's lack of legislation preventing the bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) students. Tennessee is one of 32 states that do not have such protections in place. From cyberharassment to physical violence, [bullying is a serious problem](#) for many schools, but bullying



Brenda O'Connell

Elementary school students in Madison, Wisconsin, form a peace sign as part of a Unity Day celebration.

LGBTQ students in particular is more likely to be ignored or mishandled by staff, according to [recent research](#).

The researchers surveyed nearly 2,500 teachers and students across the country and found that teachers were less comfortable intervening with bullying due to sexual orientation and gender identity than with bullying based on race, ability, and religion. And while 83 percent of educators felt that they should provide a safe environment for their LGBTQ students—by displaying visible symbols of support or disciplining students for using homophobic language, for example—only half had taken action to do so, according to the [Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#), an organization that helps K–12 schools create safe environments for LGBTQ students.

Teacher Intervention Reported by Students

This lack of support for LGBTQ students stems from a variety of causes.

Some teachers reported feeling uncomfortable talking to their students about sexuality due to their beliefs or perceptions about what's appropriate—often conflating sexual orientation with sex—while others felt pressure from administrators or parents to keep tight-lipped. And a lack of professional development on how to address LGBTQ issues and bullying has left teachers ill-equipped to establish LGBTQ-inclusive cultures or to identify anti-LGBTQ behaviors and harassment. Meanwhile, the emergence of highly politicized issues like allowing transgender students to use bathrooms aligned with their identity has raised the LGBTQ profile nationally, but made constructive dialogue harder.

The Need for Training

For Loretta Farrell Khayam, a high school math teacher in Northern Virginia, the hesitation to support LGBTQ students reflects a simple lack of training.

"We've had no guidance from administration on how to handle students transitioning," said Khayam, who wants to help a transgender student at her school. "I'm not a young, hip teacher. I don't know what to say or do. It would be nice to hear from our administration—both school and district level—what we as a school and a school system will do to support these students."

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LGBTQ

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Courtesy of GLSEN

Students attend an LGBTQ summit for youth. LGBTQ students often have to go outside their schools to find support.

While there has been an increased interest in training educators on topics like inherent bias and equity and inclusion, these trainings often do not include LGBTQ issues because most school systems aren't requesting it, according to educators and advocacy groups. And when teachers have asked for training, some report that they've faced reluctance from administrators who said they need to focus on other priorities.

Melissa Joy Bollow Tempel said she encountered pushback when she wanted to start including professional development on gender identity in the training she provided as a culturally responsive teacher-leader in the Milwaukee Public Schools district. Bollow Tempel had to go outside the district to receive training herself, and her offers to share what she had learned were repeatedly resisted.

Even within the 18 states with anti-

bullying laws aimed at protecting both sexual orientation and gender identity, and within "blue bubbles" like California, both discomfort and neglect are common, according to Vincent Pompei, director of the Youth Well-Being Project at the [Human Rights Campaign](#), the largest LGBTQ civil rights organization in the U.S. Pompei noted that attendees at a recent training in Southern California couldn't differentiate sexual orientation from gender identity.

Students Taught an LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum

"Educators still have a tremendous amount of worry around LGBTQ inclusion—they fear parent or community pushback, and are uncertain if they'd be supported by school or district leadership if they took action," Pompei said. "We say students need to see visible signs of a safe space, but educators also need to know that their administration supports them and will have their back if a parent or community member with anti-LGBTQ views complains."

Avoidable Struggles

When LGBTQ students feel the lack of staff support at school, the impact can be substantial.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are [two to three times as likely](#) to be bullied as non-LGBTQ peers, and they're more likely to miss school and almost five times as likely to [attempt suicide](#)—the number is even higher for [transgender people](#)—according to a major survey of 15,600 high school students by the [Centers for Disease Control and Preven-](#)

[tion](#). Another study found that [bullied lesbian, gay, and bisexual students](#) reported higher levels of substance abuse and risky behaviors than heterosexual students who were bullied.

Students Hearing Biased Language at School

"My middle school didn't have any procedures, and my teachers didn't know what to do," reflects Miles Sanchez, a ninth-grade bisexual and transgender student in Colorado. Sanchez says he repeatedly went to administrators to ask them to establish policies to protect LGBTQ students from bullying. "I feel like a lot of my struggles could have been avoided if educators were trained in dealing with bullying for all types of students," he said.

The problem is not restricted to students.

Teachers like Hanan Huneidi, a 7th-through 12-grade teacher for at-risk students in the Bay Area, California, says she feels that if she includes LGBTQ content in her lessons, staff and students assume she's trying to push a particular agenda because she's gay. Huneidi says she has at times avoided the topic because she doesn't always want to "automatically be the representative of all gay things."

Last year, a frustrated Huneidi told colleagues they needed to "carry the torch too" in disciplining students for using homophobic hate language, which is against school rules.

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LGBTQ

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Creating a Safe Space

To address the need for more awareness, organizations like [Gender Spectrum](#) and [History UnErased](#) are providing professional development and support for K–12 classrooms. Resources provided by these organizations include lesson plans, workshops, and [guides](#).

And some districts, like the Madison



Jennifer Herdina

Staff from Welcoming Schools read “I Am Jazz,” a story about a transgender girl, to a kindergarten class in Madison, Wisconsin.

Metropolitan School District in Madison, Wisconsin, are embedding professional development directly into their schools. The district has a staff social worker in charge of LGBTQ-specific staff training and family support, and last year the district adopted the LGBTQ professional development program [Welcoming Schools](#).

As part of the program, district staff members—including school psychologists, social workers, and teachers—received training so they can coach their colleagues on topics like embracing family diversity and

preventing bias-based bullying. The district also hosts parent and student panels to share LGBTQ students’ experiences with staff, and community events, like readings of children’s books with LGBTQ characters. But according to LGBTQ advocates, it doesn’t take a top-down approach to make a difference in students’ lives—help can come from a single educator.

Sometimes it’s as simple as putting up safe space signs, or a sign that says a classroom or school is welcoming of all identities; reprimanding a student who uses the phrase “that’s so gay”; or reading a book with an LGBTQ protagonist. Small changes from one person can often lead to bigger ones from more.

Dan Ryder, a teacher at Mount Blue High School in Farmington, Maine, said he’s personally seen change happen slowly over the nearly two decades that he’s worked at his school. He remembers the days of “don’t ask, don’t tell” and the widespread use of homophobic slurs. Now, he says, students in the school’s tech program are making signs to affix to new gender-neutral bathrooms of their own accord.

“I’m doing my best to show them that even though I may be a straight, cis, married white male, we are all fairly complex beings that change over time and have experiences that may unite us more than we realize,” he says of his own efforts to help students. “Often we just need someone to say, ‘Hey, you are who you are. I

get it. It’s OK by me. And I want to be helpful to you in whatever way that means for you.”



Brett Bingham

A safe space sign at Marysville Elementary School in Portland, Oregon.