Developed by the Missouri Trauma Roundtable through the Department of Mental Health

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Catholic Family Services

Child Advocacy Services of Greater St. Louis

Comtrea Community Treatment

Crittenton Children's Center

Disaster and Community Crisis Center at UMC

Fulton State Hospital

KVC Hospitals

Lafayette House

MO Children's Division

MO Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

MO Dept. of Mental Health

MO Division of Youth Services

Ozark Center

Pathways Community Behavioral Healthcare

Resilience Builders

St. Louis Center of Family Development

Truman Behavioral Health

POLICY GUIDANCE FOR TRAUMA INFORMED

HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES

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DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

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POLICY GUIDANCE FOR TRAUMA INFORMED

HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES

This document is designed as a guide for organizations working to become trauma informed. It is not limited to any particular system or type of organization so addresses the issues from a broad perspective. An organization's Human Resources (HR) structure may vary in its formality and breadth of responsibility therefore concepts outlined in this document may need to be adapted to match the needs of an organization/agency/business.

What is common and required for any organization working on being trauma informed are four key factors:

- Leadership (desire and authority to make the change);
- Strategic Planning (creating the plan);
- Change Management (implementing the plan and maintaining momentum); and
- Trauma Informed Principles (an understanding of the impact of trauma)

The first three factors are addressed in the document *Organizational Considerations Working Towards Becoming Trauma Informed*[1]. Trauma principles are restated below. It is through the lens of these principles that an organization examines, possibly revises, or adds HR policies and practices.   *The MO Model: A Developmental Framework for Trauma-Informed*[2] was developed based on the five principles identified through the work of Fallot and Harris.[3] There are other versions of trauma informed principles that an organization may adopt.[4]   The following is a brief description of the five principles used in this document and referred to as the Principles:

- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety for individuals as well as staff
- **Trustworthiness:** Making tasks clear, ensuring consistency within practice and maintaining appropriate boundaries
- **Choice:** Maximizing the experience of developmentally appropriate choice and control
- **Collaboration:** Maximizing collaboration and sharing of power
- **Empowerment:** Focus on building capacities and encourage having a voice and mastery of life and prioritizing the individual's power and growth

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[1] Organizational Considerations in Becoming Trauma Informed: First Steps 2017   http://dmh.mo.gov/trauma/

[2] https://dmh.mo.gov/trauma/MO%20Model%20Working%20Document%20february%202015.pdf
[33]

https://www.healthcare.uiowa.edu/icmh/documents/CCTICSelf-AssessmentandPlanningProtocol0709.pdf

[4] http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions;
http://www.mhsinc.org/files/file/Online%20Training%20Handouts/Principles%20of%20trauma%20informed%20servic es%20for%20women.pdf; http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/90.pdf;
http://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Is-Your-Organization-Trauma-Informed.pdf

Trauma, for purposes of this paper, is defined by any adverse experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. Effects of trauma have no prejudice and no boundaries. People of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and economic conditions experience trauma; therefore, effects of psychological trauma are more likely than not present in all work environments. Trauma can affect a person's functioning, including interacting with others and work performance. It can affect behavioral reactions, including anxiety, isolation, substance use, and may result in high risk behaviors.

Trauma, and an individual's responses to the trauma, should not be judged or placed on a continuum, just as what causes trauma in one person shouldn't be compared as more or less horrific than another's. Every person deals with trauma/toxic stress in their lives in different ways.

Handling the effects of trauma can be challenging for an employer because often the traumatic experience may not be shared with or known by them. A basic philosophy change could be as simple as assuming every employee wants to be a high performer and working through whatever barriers that exist is one step toward trauma informed human resources and performance management. A trauma informed organization is able to fully realize the prevalence of trauma, recognize the effects of trauma, and respond with trauma informed policies and practices. HR departments are essential in helping an organization make the shift to be trauma informed as seamless and normative as possible. Many HR practices already incorporate the Principles. However, there may not always be a conscious connection between effective HR and trauma informed practices.

Studies have shown the positive effects of employee satisfaction and increased productivity when employees feel valued, understood, and supported. The Principles may increase employees' sense of security and support. A trauma informed organization understands the need to be responsive to staff who work in highly stressful situations on a daily basis.[5]

STAGES OF EMPLOYMENT

HR activities may be divided into 4 stages of employment: pre-employment, onboarding/orientation, ongoing employment, and off-boarding. Each stage offers opportunities for employees to experience a trauma informed culture. The following discussion offers trauma informed considerations and questions for each stage of employment. The information is based on the Principles.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT

Pre-employment is everything before the employee's actual start date. This includes advertising, recruitment, job descriptions, interviews, confirmation of employment and any pre-employment

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[5] http://www.proqol.org/, http://www.apa.org/education/ce/ccw0008.aspx

activities used by the organization. Trauma informed practices at this stage take into consideration the importance of communication at every step of the process, understanding the level of anxiety that any applicant may experience and how important the environment is in allowing the applicant to be focused and calm enough to explain his unique knowledge, skills, and attitude.

The Principles guide the development and review of pre-employment policies and activities. Considerations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Do job descriptions include an accurate description of skills and attributes that support a trauma informed organization?
- Does the recruitment material clearly describe the job duties and application process in a way that promotes the Principles?
- How are time frames for interviews and selection communicated to applicants?
- How are changes in the process, if there are any, communicated to applicants?
- How are salaries and benefits established and negotiated from a lens of collaboration and choice?
- Is there an opportunity for applicants to address emotional and physical safety concerns regarding the job and its environment?
- How are applicants who are not selected for employment informed?
- During the interview process, are applicants provided a safe environment and a safe process for interviewing?
- How is the process and purpose around pre-employment testing and background checks communicated?

ONBOARDING AND ORIENTATION

This stage of employment is defined as the time between start date and initial proficiency on the job as defined by job expectations and performance reviews. Although there are many good onboarding and orientation practices that inherently support the Principles, thoughtful application may decrease time to proficiency and increase employee understanding and engagement.

The Principles guide the development and review of onboarding and orientation policies and activities. Considerations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- How are initial expectations clearly communicated between employee and supervisor?
- Does your onboarding process include the personal and agency-wide safety measures?
- What supportive measures are in place in the event there is a personal or workplace traumatic event during the employee's orientation?
- Does onboarding information include resources for staff self-care, work life balance?
- How and when do new employees receive information about their performance?

- How does current staff meet, greet, and support the new employee?
- What opportunities are available for new employees to offer observations or suggestions?
- How can the department promote collaboration and inclusion of new employees?
- Is a clear and specific outline of the onboarding plan shared with the employee at the beginning?
- Are their multiple ways that are easily accessible for the new employees to learn about their (written and unwritten) job, policies, benefits, and practices?

ONGOING EMPLOYMENT

This stage of employment is defined as the time following onboarding and orientation and prior to off-boarding. Using the Principles in this stage compliments good HR practices by supporting on-going retention and engagement as well as mitigating the risk of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.

The Principles guide the development and review of policies and activities for ongoing employment. Considerations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What process is in place to build and support a diverse and inclusive work environment?
- How does staff have voice and choice in performing their work?
- How are the Principles incorporated into the performance management system for issues such as motivation and behavioral correction?
- How are the Principles incorporated into the internal investigation process?
- How do employees provide feedback to the organization?
- How are employees informed of career opportunities?
- How do you show appreciation and recognition of staff?
- What are the structures in place in the organization to assess and minimize vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue in the workplace?
- How does the organization assess safety and health risk?
- How does the organization encourage and support self-care?
- How does the organization use its benefit programs to meet the diverse needs of the employees and their families?
- What choices are available for employees in the benefit offering?
- How are decisions made in the organization and how are employees involved?
- How is information communicated to employees and how does an employee communicate to others in the organization?
- How is change processed through the organization?

- How is the employee engaged in establishing goals and objectives for their position, department, and organization?
- How are the Principles incorporated into the employee learning and development processes?
- How are the Principles incorporated into the policy development and review process?
- How are employee needs assessed and addressed when a personal or work related traumatic event occurs?
- How are the Principles incorporated into determining things such as employee schedules, rewards, and training needs?
- How does the organization measure and celebrate success?
- What is the process for continually reviewing the Principles?

OFF-BOARDING

Off-boarding is a strategic process for transitioning employees out of an organization such as retirement, pursuing a new position or involuntary separation. It provides another opportunity for the entire organization, not just HR, to practice the Principles. Creating a safe and trusting off-boarding process is ideal, as the idea of moving away from a job can be stressful for the employee. It is important to consider the potential impact on the remaining employees during off-boarding. Using the Principles during off-boarding also benefits the employer; given the experience will likely influence future recommendations of former and current employees.

The Principles guide the development and review of policies for off-boarding. Considerations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is the procedure to address safe and empowering off-boarding?
- What is the communication plan for sharing information with the rest of the organization? Does it present information in a neutral way?
- What is the communication plan to provide needed information in regards to the transition of job responsibilities to others?
- What is the organization's process for knowledge transfer?
- What supports are offered to the exiting and remaining employees to address the change, such as outplacement services, resources for self-care and Employee Assistance Program?
- If a layoff of employees occurs, what is the procedure to support remaining employees, such as addressing the loss of co-workers, shifts in job responsibilities and load, goals of organization to maintain the current staff, or remaining employees' concerns over their own job security?

- What is the procedure to share off-boarding information with the exiting employee such as, benefits, references, access to the organization and re-employment?
- What is the process for a safe and confidential exit interview?
- What procedures are in place to commemorate or show gratitude to the exiting employee?
- What is the organization's policy/procedure on providing references/information for former employees?
- How is the transition of company and personal property as well as access to the organization accomplished?

EXAMPLE REVIEW PROCESS

Below is one specific example of how to use the Principles in addressing a human resource issue. Please note there is not one answer for all organizations. Each organization has a method for reviewing its policies and practices. It may occur on a regular basis following a structured format or it may be ad hoc or something in between. When an HR policy or practice is under review is a time to consider it through the lens of the trauma principles. The review is not in isolation but completed within the full context of the organization as there may be competing principles or needs.

In this example the organization is reviewing its pre-employment interviewing process. For this organization regulations require the organization to exclude from employment people with certain criminal convictions. Additionally, the organization has operations in communities with "ban the box" which prohibits asking about convictions prior to a conditional offer of employment. The organization does not have a choice in employing people with certain convictions. During the review of their process the employer should consider the Principles by asking "how does the particular principle apply to our policy or practice?" The principle of **Safety** is reviewed in the context of creating an emotional and physically safe context in which the interview process occurs as well as creating/maintaining an emotionally and physically safe work environment. **Trust** should also be considered in all parties involved being fully informed of requirements and potential outcomes for any action. Providing detailed information early in the process also **empowers** the parties in making fully informed decisions/**choices**. . The organization could provide a detailed explanation of the required background checks and a list of the prohibited convictions prior to or during the interview so the applicant has the choice as to whether to continue with the employment process. By being open, detailed and transparent in the sharing of information the parties are **collaborating** in creating shared responsibility.

In summary, HR plays a significant role in support of the employees of the organization as well as in shaping policies and practices. There is not one list of appropriate "trauma-informed" HR policies that can apply for all organizations. Rather it is important that each organization within the full context of its specific demands and requirements review policies and practices through a trauma informed lens.