Organizational Considerations In Becoming Trauma Informed:
First Steps
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DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

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Organizational Considerations Working Towards Becoming Trauma Informed

If an organization is considering starting on the journey to becoming trauma informed it must understand and embrace trauma informed principles. **It is through the lens of these principles that an organization examines its policies, practices and environments.** *The MO Model: A Developmental Framework for Trauma-Informed[1]* was developed based on the five principles identified through the work of Fallot and Harris.[2] There are other versions of trauma informed principles that an organization may adopt.[3] 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

In determining its readiness to being the journey of becoming trauma informed, an organization must examine three key areas. These areas are critical to the success an organization will have in achieving their goal. The three key areas are:

- Leadership (desire and authority to make the change)
- Strategic Planning (creating the plan); and
- Change Management (implementing the plan and maintaining momentum)

LEADERSHIP

A critical and required factor for an organization to become trauma informed is for top leadership to be fully supportive of, committed to, and to personally embrace the Principles. Leadership must recognize the benefits of being trauma informed and incorporating sound practices to support the Principles as well as the impact it will have on customers (customers includes clients, students, consumers) and staff, to achieving the organization's mission and its financial health. Becoming a trauma informed organization normally requires system-wide transformation. It includes assessing policies, practices and environments to align with the

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

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

[3] http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions;
http://www.mhsinc.org/files/file/Online%20Training%20Handouts/Principles%20of%20trauma%20informed%20services%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

Principles and culture. Change can be hard for individuals and organizations. Leadership must champion this transformation as well as allocate resources including people, time, money and technology. Organizational leadership should empower others to take responsibility for the implementation, and for maintaining it as a foundation to the mission and strategic plan. Some models of leadership will naturally parallel the trauma informed principles. Other models of leadership which are more authoritarian or paternalistic may impede progress. In summary, leadership must embrace and model the Principles of being trauma informed in creating a sense of safety and trust, encouraging and allowing collaboration, choice and empowerment for staff and customers.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is the process of defining:

- Mission Statement - Why do we exist?
- Vision Statement - Where do we want to be?
- Values Statement - What do we believe in?
- Goals and Objectives - What do we want to accomplish?
- Strategies and Tactics - How will we accomplish the work?
- Implementation Plan - What are our priorities?
- Evaluation – What metrics will we use to measure progress?

Incorporating the Principles into the strategic planning process provides the guidance and direction to the organization.

All organizations have four critical resources that must be used effectively to be successful.

- Technology that is used to create the product or deliver the service;
- Finances the organization uses to pay for what it requires; and,
- **People whose skills and talents are utilized to do the work.**
- Partnerships with other organizations that can help support the change

The main driver in the use of its resources is the mission and vision of the organization. The people are considered to be an organization's greatest resource.[4]

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change is constant. The process is led by leadership and ultimately everyone is involved in change. Change that is well managed leads to improvements in processes and systems, is

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[4] http://www.hrvoice.org/the-link-between-strategic-planning-and-human-resource-planning/

responsive to staff and customers and has a positive impact on culture. Poorly managed change will lead to chaos, disruption and has a negative impact on organizational outcomes, employee productivity, and morale. Change management processes are extensively researched and well-defined. The additional step taken here is to align change processes outlined in the organization's model with the Principles. The steps below are an example of a change model as adapted from Kotter International.[5]

Steps to Effective Organizational Change

1. Explore if and why change is necessary - What current practices are not working? How would we benefit from making this change? Do we have the necessary resources to embark on this journey?
2. Identify strengths and resources the organization has on which it can build, including identifying multiple "trauma champions".
3. Allow space and time to review the past and honor the intentions of the previous work that had been done.
4. Make a commitment to moving forward and ensure access to needed resources.
5. Create a compelling message - Why will this change have a more positive impact than current practices? How will it benefit staff as well as people served?
6. Create open lines of communication - Design multiple ways to engage employees, customers and vendors.
7. Communicate, communicate and communicate - Explain the plans, provide progress reports, and give people time to ask questions and clarify their individual roles. Different channels/modes of communication may be necessary including informal mechanisms of communication.
8. Develop a learning community to encourage peer to peer learning and support.
9. Establish mechanisms to measure progress starting with a baseline and review regularly.
10. Celebrate and ensure short term successes (wins). Make sure that people know how they have contributed to the organization's success.
11. Hard wire the changes - Continue to reinforce by structure, policy, rewards and practices why the changes are essential and what the benefits are.

Working towards being trauma informed will definitely invoke change. To increase chances of a successful culture shift, the organization must intentionally determine the change model or approach through which it will advance its work.

This document is the initial attempt to capture some core considerations for an organization deciding to become trauma informed. As becoming trauma informed may be a shift in the ethos of the organization, leadership, strategic planning and an intentional model for change are critical pieces to examine in preparation for the work to come. Leadership must not only fully support the goal but must

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[5] http://www.kotterinternational.com/

empower others to be actively and meaningfully involved. Leadership can neither be unilaterally directive or passive, but must model the implementation of the Principles. The Principles also must be integrated and reflected in the organization's strategic plan. And finally the organization must intentionally consider how information will be communicated in support of the change process. Other factors may be equally important in the process of becoming trauma informed and it is expected this guidance will be updated as our knowledge in regards to how best to achieve the goal of becoming trauma informed grows.