



Written Testimony for House Human Services Committee Hearing

Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Interim Charge # 4

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TNOYS is a statewide membership organization with the mission to strengthen, support, and protect critical services for Texas youth and their families. This includes services for youth who are in foster care, experience homelessness, and are at risk of systems involvement. TNOYS' work includes legislative and regulatory advocacy, training and consultation for providers, and initiatives to get young people who have lived experience involved in decisions about their own lives, as well as in the larger planning and delivery of services.

Please refer to written testimony submitted by TNOYS' Director of Child Welfare Policy, Dr. Katherine Byers, addressing prevention and early intervention, services and supports for youth aging out of foster care, residential child care rates, youth homelessness, and more. This document focuses on TNOYS' work to promote trauma informed care.

Trauma Informed Care

TNOYS has been a leader in working to ensure that services for youth and families in Texas are trauma-informed. TNOYS adheres to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)'s definitions of trauma informed care and trauma informed approaches. Those definitions are available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions> and include the following:

According to SAMHSA's concept of a trauma-informed approach, "A program, organization or system that is trauma-informed:

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands its potential paths for recovery;
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization."

SAMHSA also defines a trauma-informed approach as reflecting adherence to six key principles:

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1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration and Mutuality
5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

The Texas foster care system, as it stands today, does not adequately reflect all of these principles. The principles with which TNOYS is most engaged in system reform are the principle of collaboration and mutuality and the principle of empowerment, voice and choice.

Collaboration with Youth and Youth Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

When young people who have experienced trauma such as abuse or neglect are not given the opportunity to use their voice to weigh in on basic decisions about their lives, they may experience re-traumatization. The research of Gordan Hodas, a pioneer in the field of trauma-informed care, supports the importance of empowerment.¹ Youth are able to retain some feeling of control over their own lives or destiny when they have the opportunity to collaborate with providers in regard to making decisions about the services they will receive or their day-to-day experience.² When youth who have experienced abuse have the opportunity to use their voice to advocate for themselves and others like them, they are given back the power they lost through the initial trauma.³

Research also shows that youth involvement in programming supports positive outcomes by facilitating an ongoing youth-adult partnership that supports change.⁴ Additionally, by experiencing strong, positive relationships with adults, youth are likely to develop leadership skills, build other strong relationships, and become a stronger part of the social fabric of their communities and society.⁵

¹ Hodas, G. (2006) Responding to childhood trauma: The promise and practice of trauma-informed care. Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, p.7.

² Harris, M. & Fallot, R. (2001) Using trauma theory to design service systems. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

³ Flasch, P., Murray, C. & Crowe, A. (2015) Overcoming Abuse: A phenomenological investigation of the journey to recovery from past intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(22), 3373-3401.

Easton, S., Leone-Sheehan, D., Sophis, E. & Willis, D. (2015) "From that moment on my life changed": Turning points in the healing process for men suffering from sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24(2), 152-173.

Prilleltensky, I., Nelson, G. & Pierson, L. (2001) The role of power and control in children's lives: an ecological analysis of pathways towards wellness, resilience and problems. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 11(2), 143-158.

⁴ Duncan, B., Miller, S., & Sparks, J. (2004) The heroic client: A revolutionary way to improve effectiveness through client-directed, outcome-informed therapy. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

⁵ Benard, B. (n.d.). The Foundations of the Resiliency Framework. Resiliency in Action. Solvang, CA. Retrieved from: <https://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources/the-foundations-of-the-resiliency-framework/>



The **TNOYS Recovery through Participation program** provides training on these concepts and others and supports service providers with strengthening their commitment to collaboration with youth and youth empowerment, voice and choice. The program provides supports for providers with development of meaningful, age-appropriate, and effective strategies to engage youth as collaborators in decisions about their own lives as well as in the planning and delivery of services. Over the last two years, TNOYS has trained 71 Central Texas organizations through our Recovery through Participation program.

In early 2019 TNOYS will be partnering with Child Protective Services to host free training workshops for foster care providers and CPS caseworkers on the topic of building alliances with youth in order to prevent challenging behaviors such as running away.

Youth Participation in the Legislative Session

TNOYS strives to work in partnership with young people who have lived experience. Last year we formally launched a Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC), comprised of young adults who have lived experience with foster care and/or homeless. These young adults were nominated by TNOYS member organizations to participate in our YALC program and will be engaging in our advocacy efforts during the upcoming legislative session. For example, YALC members will be hosting a Capitol Day event for young people who are homeless and in foster care and other at-risk situations across the state on Friday, February 1st.

TNOYS encourages members of the Legislature and your staff to engage with these young leaders and other young people who have lived experience as you craft policies that will impact their lives. Research highlights the need for youth and families to be involved in policymaking, in order to ground policies in real-world experiences and ensure the best outcomes for those they impact.⁶

Reducing use of seclusion and restraint practices

Over the years TNOYS has led substantial work in the area of reduction of traumatizing seclusion and restraint practices. For example, over four years TNOYS worked with ten Texas residential treatment centers to create “cultures of care” that prevent behaviors from escalating to a point that calls for seclusion or restraint. The evaluation report detailing the success of that initiative is available at <http://tnoys.org/wp-content/uploads/TNOYS-Creating-a-Culture-of-Care-Final-Evaluation-Report.pdf>. The key finding from the report is that managing youth behavior without traumatizing practices is entirely possible. The project relied on the *Six Core Strategies*, a free, evidence-based program available through SAMHSA.

⁶ Vickers, M. & Wells, N. (2017) Nothing About Us Without Us. *Academic Pediatrics Journal*, 17(7), S20-S21.



Last year TNOYS completed an environmental scan for the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health that looked at the status of work to reduce use of seclusion and restraint practices across systems throughout the state. The report includes recommendations for advancing efforts to reduce use of seclusion and restraint practices across systems. The report is available from TNOYS or the Hogg Foundation upon request.

Statewide Collaborative on Trauma Informed Care

TNOYS has been heavily involved in Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission's Statewide Collaborative on Trauma Informed Care (SCTIC). I serve as the chair for the SCTIC's cross-systems workgroup, which is focused on ensuring the provision of trauma-informed services across systems. The Children's Commission has invested substantial time and resources into this collaborative work and has done an exceptional job of engaging an extensive list of stakeholders relevant to this work. TNOYS urges this committee and the Legislature to support the work of the Children's Commission and the SCTIC.

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