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What is Change in Mind and Why do we need a Digest?

Change in Mind: Applying Neurosciences to Revitalize Communities is a three-year initiative of the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities. It is conducted in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Palix Foundation's Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. The primary purpose of Change in Mind is to demonstrate the larger im-

pactful role of the nonprofit sector as educator, convener, advocate, and true influencer of getting appropriate systems aligned to the science. We proposed to Share Knowledge, Improve Practice, and Impact Policy through its efforts during its participation in the initiative.

The purpose of this Digest is to present progress on our initiative and relay information from our meetings with the Alliance and Palix and conversations we have with other cohort members.

The Centrality of Relationships

One of the key concepts discussed by many of the presenters at the most recent convening in Chicago was centered around the importance of relationships in promoting healthy brain development and mitigating the effects of trauma. In early childhood, the interaction between child and caregiver develops and reinforces neural pathways. The more these pathways are used, the stronger they get. This is why early childhood education is key, as it leads to healthy development.

Even if these pathways aren't developed in childhood, they can be built later in life, but this may take longer than if we tried to learn them as a child. Relationships are important for learning later in life as well. True transformation requires relationships and coaching, instruction and information

alone are not enough. Developing a relationship that can help rebuild and recreate helpful pathways in the brain takes time and understanding and an intent to seek out the youth and family's input. As a result of the Change in Mind meeting, LSS is looking for ways to include more motivational interviewing in service provision for all programs at the agency. Motivational interviewing is a goal-oriented, client-centered counseling style for eliciting behavior change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence, similar to the Life Space Interview that can foster relationships between staff, youth and family.

Another key aspect of relationships for youth in our care is that they are a protective factor against future trauma. Not all stressful events cause trauma, and not all trauma is toxic. It is

the repeated and prolonged stress/trauma in the absence of protective relationships that are damaging to healthy development and well being. Best practices of what constitutes a protective relationship include safety, trustworthiness, collaboration and mutuality, and respect for individual differences. Protective relationships in relation to toxic stress is a great perspective from which staff can see their role when interacting with the youth in our care. These protective relationships must also extend beyond the children served and must be afforded to the staff at the agency, who are faced with vicarious and secondary trauma.

“...when people relive their traumatic experiences, the frontal lobes become impaired and, as a result, they have trouble thinking and speaking.” -van der Kolk

The CDC’s Role in Understanding the Effects of Toxic Stress

The original Kaiser Permanente study that brought the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences to the forefront of discussion was originally through the auspices of the Centers for Disease Control. Since the publication of the results from that study, the CDC has continued to explore avenues for further research and dissemination of findings. During her presentation at the Chicago meeting, the representative from the CDC indicated that the CDC is taking the position that toxic trauma in young people, in addition to its impact on long term health, has strong

correlations with high school non-completion rates, unemployment, and household poverty.

These results represent samplings from all socio-economic groups and racial/ethnic categories and means that class and race may play less of a role in these outcomes than the experience of toxic stress. It is important to remember that the principal role of the CDC involves the identification of serious threats to general public health and the development of timely responses to these threats.



So Many Goals....Where Do We Start?

One of the things we heard repeated during the meetings and discussions about Change in Mind was how daunting and overwhelming the idea of trying to change policy seems when just getting started. Do we start with our staff, Boards, coalition building, participation in governmental and regulatory environments, networking, forming alliances and partnerships, or all of them at once?

We also learned that it need not be so daunting – that with

respect to policy and practice, the best and most lasting change often originates at a very small level. At that level, you can try things without securing major changes in policy or first securing funding, like making treatment decisions which need to be made daily, or integrating trauma informed language throughout an agency, or applying for grants. These are activities we have taken, but not without risk of failure or commitment of resources.

We were reminded not to punish failure. Instead when failure occurs, we should study it, learn where we can improve, and try again. This is not to say that we should excuse failures, but should instead use failures as opportunities to dive deeper to make corrections.

Brain Science Brief– The Amygdala

Dominant organ of childhood

- Only region fully developed at birth
- Ensures survival to adulthood

Scans environment, watches for threats

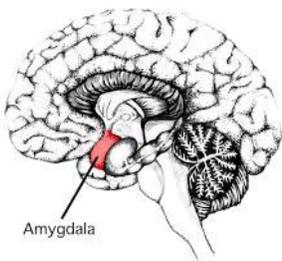
- 1st stop for ALL sensory input
- Mediate environmental triggers

Perceived threat triggers immediate action

- Impulsive behavior (i.e., fight, flight, freeze)
- Peer pressure and Amygdala
- Role in Hyper-vigilance

Role in memory

- Determines what Hippocampus remembers - survival
- Stores visceral memory vs “video” memory



“Smoke Detector”