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Trauma Informed Care is the Best Care

Sinnissippi Centers seeks to better serve those who have experienced trauma

(Dixon, IL)

The experience of traumatic events throughout one's life is one of the most significant predictors of major mental illness, substance abuse, learning disabilities, and the experience of later trauma in the family. That trauma can be re-experienced in any given situation or setting, which can even include a caring treatment setting. With this knowledge, Sinnissippi Centers has embarked on a journey to become a fully "Trauma Informed Organization".

Over three days in November and December, virtually every employee at Sinnissippi Centers received Trauma Informed Care training from the National Council on Behavioral Health. The training was aimed at transforming the entire organization. Staff who were trained included clerical, maintenance, accounting and human resources staff in addition to the agency's clinical personnel. For many years, clinicians at Sinnissippi Centers have studied and understood the impact of trauma and recognized that appropriate treatment is critical to address the resulting distress. However, individuals come into contact with other staff at agencies, and these staff members can also have an impact, positive or negative, on individuals who have experienced trauma. That is why in order to be a Trauma Informed agency; all staff have to be trained in its principles.

Trauma Informed Care training teaches that trauma results from a wide variety of life events and can take many forms. Sources of trauma include natural disasters, physical or sexual abuse, homelessness, the loss of a loved one, chronic poverty, divorce or separation, or literally anything else that is experienced as traumatic by the individual. Those who have support from family and friends, stable finances, opportunities for fulfillment such as a good job, and have good mental health tend to fair better in the face of trauma. Without these protective factors, or for those who have a biological predisposition to mental illness or substance abuse, trauma can result in serious neurological and emotional changes.

A serious reaction to traumatic stress can result in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A common misconception is that this disorder is isolated to veterans. In fact, PTSD is often underdiagnosed in those with trauma histories that occur in their own home or community. A reaction to trauma is very often misinterpreted as depression, ADHD, bipolar disorder or even schizophrenia. Especially for those who have experienced repeated trauma, heightened fear and sensitivity leads to abnormal behaviors that often mirror one of these other disorders. Without recognizing and addressing the underlying trauma, those symptoms may never decrease.

To truly realize the goal of being a totally trauma informed agency, Sinnissippi will continue to analyze virtually every process, policy and procedure to determine if they are sensitive to those who have experienced trauma. These efforts will address not only how Sinnissippi provides direct treatment, but how the agency hires and evaluates staff, the comfort of agency facilities, the content of marketing

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materials and social media, the role of service consumers in decision-making, how treatment outcomes are evaluated, and how Sinnissippi Centers views itself as part of the larger community. The organization will also look to its partners to embrace these efforts and be more trauma-informed as well.

These enhancements won't just be on paper. A real difference will be felt by those who interact with Sinnissippi Centers on many levels. Clients will find it easier to access services, and feel more welcome and valued. Clinical staff will learn and utilize even more evidence-based approaches to treatment, and better utilize outcomes data to track progress. Consumers of services will be involved in all of the important functions at SCI, resulting in an array of services that better meets their needs. Sinnissippi Centers will be proactive in addressing the causes of trauma, as well of conditions that compound the anxiety and shame its victims often feel.

The expert trainers and consultants are clear on one point: No organization can ever become perfectly trauma-informed. However, it is the goal of Sinnissippi Centers to approach that ideal as closely as humanly possible.

Sinnissippi Centers is a behavioral healthcare agency serving Carroll, Lee, Ogle and Whiteside Counties and provides substance abuse screening and treatment services. The agency incorporated in May 1966, and is celebrating its 50th anniversary year.

For more information about programs and services, call Sinnissippi toll-free at 1-800-242-7642. Sinnissippi has office locations in Dixon, Mt. Carroll, Oregon, Rochelle and Sterling.

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