



DOVER
CHILDREN'S
HOME

"It takes a community to raise a child."

**Youth Voice, Relationships, and Residential Culture:
Making or Breaking Programs into Trauma-Informed and Restraint Free Environments
One Step at a Time**

<https://doverchildrenshome.org/>

Dover Children's Home Presenters

Renee Touhey-Childress, MSW, LICSW

- ▶ Executive Director
- ▶ 15+ years experience working with foster families, at-risk youth, and in residential care
- ▶ Prescribing Practitioner of DCH



Melissa LaRocque, MSCJ

- ▶ Director of Operations
- ▶ 15 years experience working in child protection, and with at-risk youth in residential care
- ▶ 'TBRI' practitioner & 'Mandt system' staff trainer of DCH



Today's Agenda

- ▶ 1. Administrators & Leaders -Know Your 'Why'-
- ▶ 2. 'Our Story' - as Administrators and Caregivers
- ▶ 3. Learning Objectives- Implementing a Culture Shift:
 - ▶ Language and Documentation
 - ▶ Physical Environment & Spaces
 - ▶ Personnel Responsibilities and Roles
 - ▶ Activities & Recreation
 - ▶ Budgetary Considerations
 - ▶ Responses to Behavioral Incidents
 - ▶ Training of Staff & Development of Workforce Culture



Know Your 'WHY'

- ▶ What is your 'WHY'?
- ▶ Why do you work where you do? Why do you come in everyday?
- ▶ Why do you try to find solutions to the problems you face?
- ▶ Why does it matter?
- ▶ Why are you here today?



Sometimes in order to do this work, you must be vulnerable yourself and explore parts of your past with a fierce honesty - Understanding your attachment style. Where are you on your own healing journey.

Renee - What is My Story?



Renee: As the Executive Director:

*My Vision & our mission

*My Why

*How am I doing that everyday in my work?

- ▶ As a caregiver:
- ▶ Our Story with Sarah



Melissa - What is My Story?

Melissa: At DCH- Director of Operations

*My Vision & our mission

*My Why

*How am I doing that every day in my work?



- ▶ As a caregiver:
- ▶ Our story with Liana



How Do We Do It - What Changes Have We Made as an Organization?

- ▶ **Its about the culture- look at yourselves first**
 - ▶ Attitude & Beliefs
 - ▶ RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS!
 - ▶ Youth Voice
 - ▶ Personnel Team Building
- ▶ Do random fun things with your staff and kids whenever you can!
 - ▶ Take vacations!
 - ▶ Make a carnival!
 - ▶ Make Traditions within your home/program



Two Different Schools of Thought-

* Relationship-Focused

- Intentionally creating attachments and connections to youth
- Prioritizing relationship and healing over compliance and expectations of program
- Creating opportunities for experiences, memories, holding vulnerable conversations and fostering trust



* Compliance-Focused

- Enforcing youth to do what “they are supposed to”
- Implementing consequences to non-compliance first
- Demonstrating adult authority over youth
- Focusing on rules and accountability over relationship first



Bringing us to our learning Objectives-

- ▶ JUDGEMENT FREE ZONE- BE HONEST
- ▶ *Show of hands how many people in the room are working with youth who are getting restrained where they work?
- ▶ *Show of hands how many people in the room are working with youth who are so difficult it feels like the staff have “given up” trying with them?
- ▶ *Show of hands how many people feel like they have been disconnected from their staff, work, or the youth you serve?



WHAT YOU SAY & HOW YOU SAY IT... MATTERS!

Language & Documentation

Relationship-Focused First

Person-Centered

Talking Positively about the Kids (not just in front of them, but at all times, even when they are not around)

Talking through a lens of recognizing and validating their trauma

Documenting positives as much or more than negatives

Documentation that is factual, professional, and solutions-focused

Examples: Presenting a youth for intake: Trauma-focused first, behavioral-focus second

Incorporating Youth Voice...

- ▶ House meetings
- ▶ Satisfaction surveys
- ▶ Follow through on ideas/changes for the program

- Example: DCH had a group of youth who were passionate about gender identity issues and creating a more inclusive environment in the Home - with their input, we removed gender-based language and created a Home where bedrooms and placement are based on behavior and need vs. gender.



Youth Voice/Youth Choice....



How do we ensure this happens?

*Grocery List- Youth tell us what they want!

*Activities- Youth tell us what they are interested in doing

*Celebrations- what THEY want-

*holidays - how it feels safe for them

Adults can still set parameters around this

- ▶ Think about any given day of your life showing up to live at a place you did not choose, with people you do not know, with older people creating the rules and telling you what you have to do hour by hour of your day!
- ▶ We give our youth choices any place we can!
- ▶ CHOICES help support building trust and practicing good decision making
- ▶ They are teenagers; not toddlers- they can and should have a say in THEIR life



From Before They Walk Through the Door - Every Word, Every Action, Will Affect Their Progress

Behavioral-Focused ...

- ▶ Struggles at school
- ▶ Argumentative with adults
- ▶ Manipulative
- ▶ Restraint Hx in programs
- ▶ Hx of stealing from others



Trauma-Focused ...

- ▶ Hx of Neglect throughout childhood; food insecure so will often take food to ensure they are fed
- ▶ Repeated placements and struggles to trust adults
- ▶ Will try and get the need of touch met by initiating behaviors that lead to restraint
- ▶ Does not feel supported at school and reports feeling high anxiety

small
CHANGES
BIG DIFFERENCE

© 2015 by Linda Lantieri

www.lantieri.com

What Does Trauma-Informed LOOK Like?

Creating Spaces to Set the Tone

Physical Environment & Spaces

- ▶ Making your spaces about the youths needs and wants
- ▶ Bedrooms- lets talk about this
- ▶ No seclusion spaces at all
- ▶ Creating environments of felt safety and always providing all basic needs
- ▶ What we did: Changed our common areas: Hang out Lounge/ 'Zen Den'

Hang out Lounge





Other Examples of Trauma-Informed Spaces at DCH

- - - > Empowerment Boutique < - - -

- ▶ Youth who want the privacy and comfort of shopping in the house - supporting youth with body image concerns and feeling beautiful in their own skin

What Happens When We Remove 'Seclusion Rooms'?



YOU WILL HAVE LESS RESTRAINTS - Trauma Informed- Being confined in a closed off space is the feeling of being trapped- fight, flight or freeze- most restraints will follow when youth feel trapped and fearful

We have had ZERO Restraints for over a decade! You can too!

Created 'Zen Den' Space→
Inviting/Calm/Supportive





Other Things We Do At Our Home in Our Spaces....

Personnel Responsibilities & Roles: To Mission, To Youth, To The Team

How many people in leadership positions know the kids personally?

How many people in leadership take the kids on vacations themselves?

How many people in supportive roles (kitchen, janitorial, fiscal/etc) know the kids at all?

When kids are being challenging, how many staff say, "that's not my job to handle that."

If Every Member of your agency does not know the youth served, personally,
(not by a report, billing census, or because they hear it in passing by) - - -
THIS MUST CHANGE - AT EVERY LEVEL





He caught one!



Summer Solace

On a weekend trip to Acadia in early August, I was able to take part in an experience that no one involved will soon forget. We managed to get everyone up and on the road at 4:30 in the morning to drive to the ocean for sunrise. The picturesque oceanic sunrise never came. Thick waves of morning fog blanketed the entire coast. Despite this, the moment was incredibly powerful. The stillness of the early morning and the rhythmic crashing of the waves was a moment for all eternity. I stood and watched the three kids we brought out before the crack of dawn, sitting almost meditatively, absorbing the peace of that moment. I thought to myself, "this is what Summer means".

At the end of the summer, we threw a carnival at the home. A bounce house, a dunk tank, cotton candy, the works. Another element of summer exemplified. **The laughter and joy that came from all the kids as they took turns dunking staff into a tank of freezing cold water were worth their weight in gold.** There is an innocence that comes in these moments, pasts are irrelevant, futures aren't impending. The innocence of youth is the only thing in focus. It cannot be emulated, only cherished in its authentic appearance.

Rob Macneil, Facilities Assistant

Just One Example- Reflection in our '22 Year In Review - Our Facilities Assistant on a trip to Acadia with the youth.

“ I do not work direct care with the kids, but I care directly about them.”

All of our personnel at every level know and come to work for the kids first, and then do their “jobs” second

When in Doubt...Ask Yourself, What Will This Do for My Relationships?

- ▶ This is what helps kids feel supported where they live AND helps personnel feel their work is valuable.
- ▶ When a youth leaves your programs (for positive or negative reasons) do they come back to visit?
- ▶ What is the culture like for support before during and after living at your home?
- ▶ We ALWAYS keep our doors open to any youth we have served and help them in any way we can
- ▶ How do you hire staff? (“Its another body for ratio” OR “they will be committed and compassionate to our kids”
- ▶ This is not glorified babysitting work- and the language, attitude and beliefs around this need to align itself with true healing work in order for cultures to change and violence & restraints to be eliminated



Activities & Recreation

All Community Programs have some component of activities & recreation - so what is the purpose of these in your programs?





Learn and Have Fun! And Also..... To Support YOUTH VOICE & Relationship Building

- ▶ *How many of you in the room have been in a healthy long-term relationship with someone?
- ▶ Do you still go on dates/outings/vacations/do fun things together? - - - Why is that?

(Hint: To *continue growing the relationship*)

Why should we not do the same then with our youth?

In our time at DCH we have both together or with other staff;

- *Taken all the kids to Washington DC for a week
- *Taken all the kids to Nashville for a week
- *Taken a few kids to New Orleans to help with Hurricane Katrina rebuild
- *Taken all the kids for a week to Maine, Vermont and Cape Cod and continue to do so

Always Be Intentional...

- ▶ Youth Voice- Find out what makes your kids excited, what they would like to do, and or look forward to—
 - ▶ Then try and make every (reasonable) effort for that to happen
 - ▶ Twofold outcomes: 1.) Youth feel heard, valued and important
 - ▶ 2.) Staff develop and strengthen their relationship to the youth
- ▶ Inevitably having better relationships with staff/caregivers will also reduce restraints, improve the staff's experience of work, and improve the personal outcomes and goals of the youth
 - ▶ **WIN! WIN! WIN!**



Money Certainly Doesn't Grow on Trees...Especially When You Run a Non-Profit Budgeting Accordingly



- ▶ We know financially running a program is not easy and we know that people can't casually be planning agency wide trips and activities without adjusting budgets
- ▶ **How do you spend your money now?**
- ▶ If you have restraints, are you paying out workman comp claims for staff injuries?
- ▶ Are you paying overtime for staff to stay to help manage behaviors/restraints/ shifts needed?
- ▶ If you have high turnover of staff, how much are you paying to rehire/train new staff ongoing?
- ▶ Think about how much money directly or indirectly is paid towards the result of aggressive behaviors in the program
- ▶ You could spend that money on a vacation or weekend activities over and over instead!

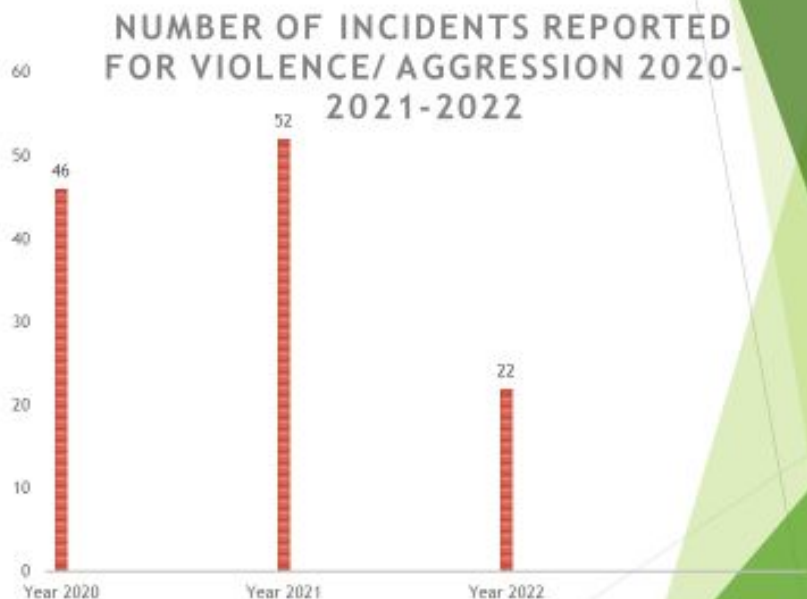
Cultural Shifts Take Time.... But Invest the Time and Money and Everyone Will Benefit From the Rewards

- ▶ Get to a place in your programs where the staff and kids have such great relationships, your expenses are to continue growing those relationships versus repairing the damage that was done within it.
- ▶ Ask for donations and or sponsors wherever you can!
- ▶ We tell the community what OUR kids tell us they want to do, and they deliver on that
- ▶ We have not had any staff assaults
- ▶ Property Damage - yes- and also many incidents do not occur due to the relationship they have with the facilities staff
- ▶ We have minor overtime, but staff leave shift when they are generally supposed to because there are not crises and restraints taking place
- ▶ We have turnover, but we also have longevity in many positions, including direct care.



Here is some data points on violence/aggression in our program...

- ▶ We have been tracking incidents since 2020 and a focal point has been to reduce acts of violence and aggression towards others
- ▶ We implemented an evidenced based trauma informed curriculum in 2022 and saw a 42% decrease in these behaviors from 2021-2022 for violence/aggression.
- ▶ **YOU CAN DO THIS TOO!**





Responding to Behavioral Incidents.. (And yes we see behaviors too!)

- ▶ Our kids are teens with trauma- they have behaviors!!
- ▶ Tell us about some of the most frequently seen behaviors in your programs....
- ▶ And how are these generally handled?

Addressing Behaviors as Communication and a Need to Reconnect

We try to understand where they are coming from...

- ▶ Unmet needs?
- ▶ Trigger from trauma?
- ▶ Fear reaction?
- ▶ Survival reaction?

- ▶ All behavior is a communicator and serves a purpose



Then we treat them like we would our own kids...

- ▶ With respect and dignity
- ▶ With fair and logical consequences
- ▶ NO points or levels or institutionalized language or responses
- ▶ Consequences are time limited and appropriate to the behavior
- ▶ Natural consequences
- ▶ Always ensuring the relationship remains intact

And Lastly....Training of Staff & Development to Establish Workforce Culture

Tell us about your staff...

- ▶ Expectations/experiences/ “knowing their why”
- ▶ What training do you provide?
- ▶ What retention efforts are made to keep staff?
- ▶ Remember your staff are taking care of these kids, we need to take care of them

What do we do??

- ▶ Hire, train and continue to orient people to the mission and understanding their “why”
- ▶ Ex: Team Building days



What Should the Environment Feel Like for Staff?

Honesty & Transparency with staff

- ▶ Building relationships with the staff across every domain to help support them building strong relationships to the kids
- ▶ Helping staff grow professionally-
- ▶ Training/Succession Planning
- ▶ Consistent Supervisions
- ▶ Sharing information in ways that demonstrate agency transparency in decision making

Retention of staff

- ▶ Looking at wages & benefits
- ▶ Offering set schedules and some flexibility
- ▶ Work/life balance/boundaries
- ▶ Inviting to fundraising events
- ▶ Recognizing employee needs to best support them to support youth needs
- ▶ Offer ongoing trainings and opportunities for growth



How do we Measure if this works? Let's Look at some successful outcomes..

Youth Resiliency Checklists

- ▶ Youth self report on a variety of protective factors.
- ▶ Kids we have served From intake to latest survey administration here are the increases:
 - ▶ MS- 62%- 79%
 - ▶ KK 67%- 73%
 - ▶ KL 20% -45%
 - ▶ LT 53%- 61%
 - ▶ WA 46%-58%
 - ▶ CP 62%-71%



Who are these Kids? What helped them? RELATIONSHIPS!!

- ▶ CP- First had her as a minor in care- built GREAT relationship with her. Left at 18 to be on her own and within months ASKED to come back and stayed voluntarily for help and support. Reported 9% increase in protective factors by the time she left.
- ▶ Circumstances for leaving was Pregnant and had baby
- ▶ What did DCH do for her?
- ▶ Unconditional “yes” - Instant she asked to come back- was met with yes and immediate love and support
- ▶ Constant support around her trauma HX
- ▶ Baby shower for her baby to meet all needs
- ▶ Non-Judgmental approach



KK: Had him as minor in care and left at 18 to reunify with mom

- ▶ Within a month was referred back when it didn't work out with mom with violence/aggression in the home
- ▶ What did we do for him?
- ▶ Unconditional "yes" - Instant he asked to come back- was met with yes and immediate love and support
- ▶ Constant support around his trauma HX and disabilities (ASD)
- ▶ When mom said he "couldn't" we showed her how he could
- ▶ (Ex: getting drivers license) - moving to Independent Living apartment
- ▶ Supporting his interests and growth



The slide features a decorative background. On the left side, there is a vertical arrangement of numerous blue circles of varying sizes, connected by thin, light-colored lines, resembling a network or data visualization. On the right side, there are several overlapping, semi-transparent green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, creating a modern, abstract design. The text is centered on the right side of the slide.

Their stories may be
different and yet,
there is one
common factor for
each...

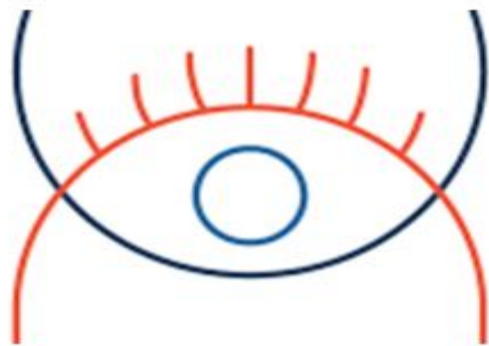
The staff at DCH built meaningful genuine **relationships** with these youth and they self reported to have more protective factors and clinically achieved more progress in their treatment goals and domains because of this

And what else happened along the way?

- ▶ We listened to them and what they wanted/needed - - YOUTH - VOICE
- ▶ We never had a circumstance ever close to warranting a restraint
- ▶ Staff have positive experiences of working with them
- ▶ Youth have positive experiences of living at DCH
- ▶ Healing has begun

The
Healing
Journey

Cultural transformation must begin with authentic leaders who value human beings.



Questions?? Comments??

Thank you!

To contact Either of Us -

Renee Touhey-Childress
(rtouhey@doverchildrenshome.org)
603.781.2126

Melissa LaRocque
(mlarocque@doverchildrenshome.org)
603.312.0595



DOVER CHILDREN'S HOME