



Clinicalteam@ASNChicago.org

#ASNYouthResilience

ASN Takes on Youth Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



Staff from [Association House High School](#) participate in an activity focusing on non-verbal communication and the importance of being aware of personal space, body language, stance, tone and eye contact when working with youth.

Written by Sarah Bowie (Title XX/Compass Counseling Program Director) & Kate Sandy (former Title XX/Compass Counseling Program Director)

The [Alternative Schools Network \(ASN\) Youth Resilience Project](#) is an initiative that grew from the collective desire to develop and provide additional clinical resources for [nonprofit](#) and

alternative schools in the [ASN Network](#). The [Youth Resilience Project](#) is dedicated to the cause of bringing knowledge, awareness, and support to schools around issues associated with youth trauma.

Spreading the knowledge of trauma and its impacts on youth development became a mission of [ASN's Clinical Team](#) after witnessing firsthand how it could help improve relationships, interventions, and overall programming among some of the hardest to reach youth in the alternative schools.

During the 2015 – 2016 school year, the [Alternative Schools Network](#) received funding to develop a mentoring program working with youth, ages 17-20, in three alternative schools that would help to reduce violence among participants. Mentors were trained in trauma-informed practices by [UCAN](#) and in Motivational Interviewing (MI) by [Northeastern Illinois University](#). Mentors then employed these techniques in their work with their mentees throughout the 10 month program.

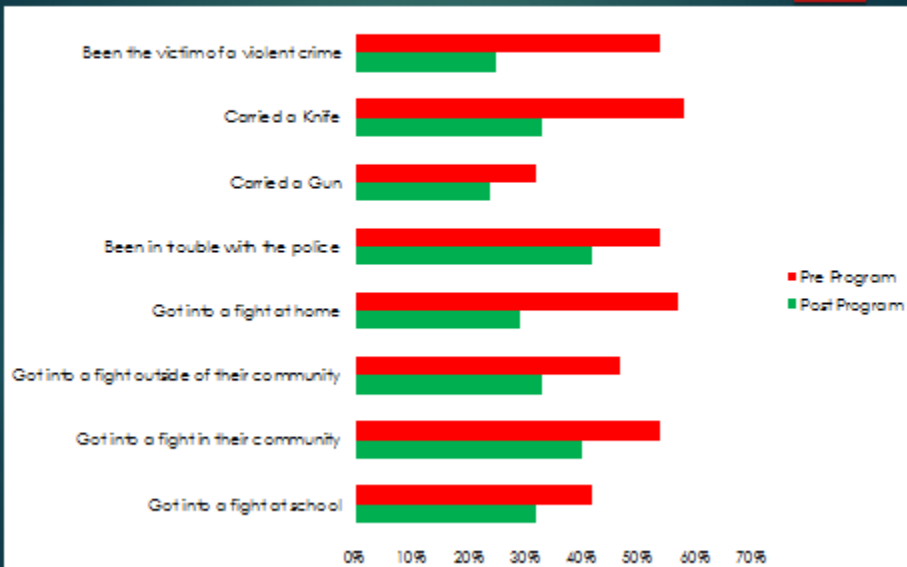
Mentors reported that having a deeper understanding of trauma and how it impacts the developing brain and body helped them to tailor their interventions in a way that took into account the root cause of some of the pain-based behavior they were seeing in their mentees. Some of the mentors felt so empowered by the training on trauma that they shared the information back to their school administrators who were able to bring in additional trauma training for the entire school staff.

By the end of the 10 month mentoring program, results from the pre and post survey that participants took in October 2015 and June 2016 showed the following:

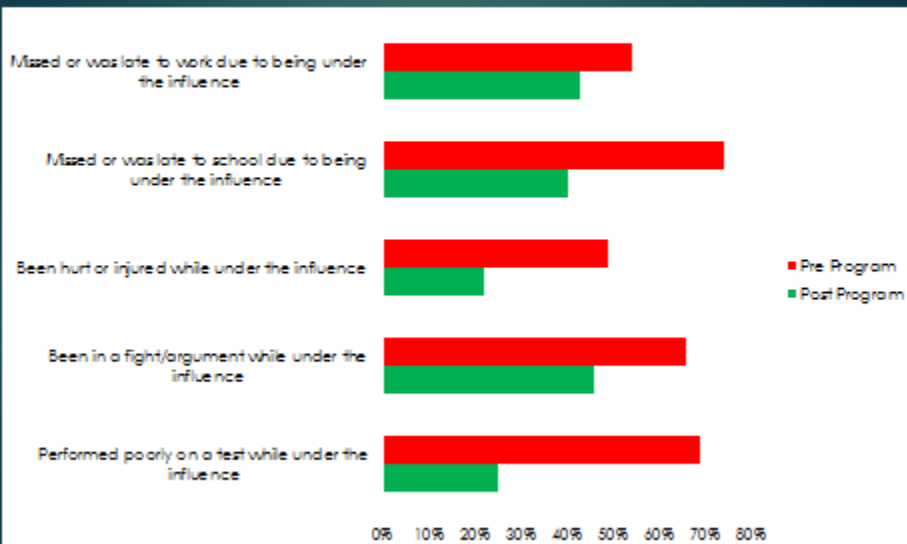
- **25% reduction of youth participants carrying guns**
- **30% reduction of youth participants fighting in neighborhoods outside of their community**
- **26% reduction of youth participants fighting in their community**
- **22% reduction of youth participants who were in trouble with the police**
- **12.5% higher school attendance rate as compared to non-participants in the same**

schools

Results: Pre & Post Program – Violent Activities



Results: Pre & Post Program – Risky Behavior



Towards the end of the program year in May 2016, 45 mentees were screened by mentors on their experiences of trauma with the on-going support of [UCAN's Peace Hub](#) pilot project utilizing the Life Experiences Profile. The results were, on the one hand, not surprising because youth in alternative schools have typically been through a lot of extremely challenging life events

before participation in ASN programs. Still, the fact that 59.1% of participants stated that they think about their trauma experiences “all of the time” or “most of the time” was incredibly eye-opening.

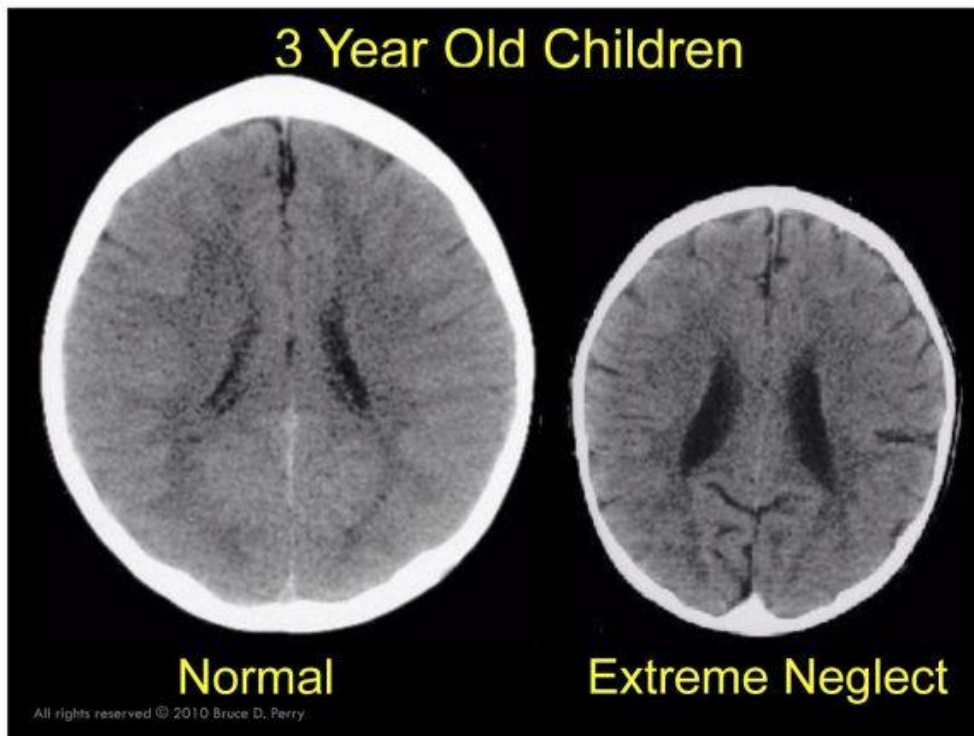
Traumatic Incident	Total % of Youth Exposed over Prior Year		
Experienced Emotional Abuse	79.50%		
Experienced Physical Abuse	73.30%		
Experienced Violent Act(s)	68.90%		
Experienced Sexual Abuse	34.10%		
Witnessed Violent Act(s)	73.30%		
Witnessed Violent Death	64.40%		

Impact	All of the time	Most of the time	Total
How often do you think about these things?	40.9%	18.2%	59.1%

After seeing these numbers, even with a small sample size of two schools, ASN staff felt compelled to do something about it. The Youth Resilience Project is a response to the need to create more trauma-informed staff members and more trauma-responsive school communities.

Trauma and its consequences

The [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) and [Kaiser Permanente](#)'s landmark [study on Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#) published in 1998 revealed the different ways in which childhood neglect, abuse and family dysfunction can negatively impact people later in life. 17,000 individuals were asked about their experiences during childhood as it related to emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect and family dysfunction (incarceration, domestic violence, mental health issues) as well as questions regarding their current health status and behaviors. The results of the study found that people who had a higher number of [adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#) were more likely to have negative outcomes later in life such as higher rates of high-risk behaviors, social issues, disease, disability, and early death. The study brought to light not only the prevalence of ACEs, but also the fact that the effects of ACEs cut across all people, no matter their race, gender, or socio-economic background. ACEs also disrupt brain development and lead to issues involving social, emotional, and cognitive impairment.



These images illustrate negative impact of neglect and trauma on the developing brain. The CT scan on the left is from a healthy 3-year-old child with an average head size. The image on the right is from a 3-year-old child following severe trauma and neglect since birth. The brain is significantly smaller than average and has abnormal development of cortical, limbic and midbrain structures. Photo from Dr. Bruce Perry, Physician and Neuroscientist at the ChildTrauma Academy in Houston, TX.

The consequences of chronic stress and complex trauma on youth development can be quite varied. Youth may respond very differently to stress and trauma depending on protective and risk factors present in their lives. Some of the signs of trauma may include physical symptoms like headache & stomach aches, unpredictable and/or impulsive behavior, over or under-reacting to loud noises, physical contact, sirens, or sudden movements, intense reactions to reminders of the traumatic event, hypervigilance, thinking others are violating personal space, challenges with authority figures, difficulty sleeping, difficulty with transition or change, higher rates of absences, increased drop-out rates, more suspensions & expulsions, decreased ability to focus, among other challenges. For everyone who interacts with young people, it is important to understand and recognize these signs and to ensure that we are supporting young people to the best of our abilities. We must also ensure that we are continually working to create environments of safety and trust, and to avoid re-traumatization. (Sources: www.nctsn.org; www.samhsa.gov)

Why focus on trauma in schools?

By providing professional development workshops, trainings, and ongoing clinical guidance and support, the [Youth Resilience Project](#) works hand-in-hand with school leadership and staff on

ways to bring about institutional change through a trauma-informed lens and corresponding interventions. The overarching belief is that a universal, trauma-informed approach to education improves the conditions for all students to learn, grow, and thrive as individuals within a safe and caring school community.



Staff at [CCA Academy](#) in North Lawndale begin their journey to becoming a trauma-informed school with a workshop on crisis intervention

The key goals for the project are to enhance trauma awareness throughout [ASN Network member schools](#), and to assist schools in the development of trauma-informed policies and practices that are guided by the principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, peer support, and cultural responsiveness. The project is a three tiered approach with those schools in Tier 1 receiving the most intensive trainings as well as support with the development of a school staff-led steering committee, titled the Resilience Team, who are tasked with fostering the development of the trauma-informed approach within the school. Tier 1 schools include, [Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School](#), [CCA Academy](#), [ASN Prep](#), and [Association House High School](#). Tier 2 and Tier 3 schools, including [Latino Youth High School](#), [West Town Academy](#), [Innovations High School of Arts Integration](#), [Youth Connections Leadership Academy \(YCLA\)](#), [McKinley Lakeside Leadership Academy](#), [Antonia Pantoja High School \(ASPIRA of Illinois\)](#) and [Olive Harvey Middle College](#), receive varying levels of professional development trainings depending on each school's needs.

As of March 2017, 114 hours of training have been provided to 606 participants at 14 participating network schools and at several community-based youth-serving organizations

throughout Chicago and the state of Illinois. The feedback from the schools and staff has been consistently positive.

"Sometimes a student's presentation makes adults take a step back. Trauma and crisis intervention training aid staff in seeing through a student's fear, frustration, and anger to find the hope, potential, and possibilities underneath. These trainings have helped me to reconnect to, and to love students even when they are pushing everyone away. After all, it is love that facilitates growth through one's hurt and pain." said Dr. Myra Sampson, Chief Education Officer (CEO) at [CCA Academy](#).

Dr. Genessa Schultz, Academic Dean at [CCA Academy](#), had this to say regarding her experience with the Youth Resilience Project: *"Becoming trauma-informed has really helped me to step back and evaluate how I interact with students. I believe that numerous situations have been avoided because as a staff we are looking at the underlying issues with which students are dealing on a daily basis. Rather than reacting to the behavior being displayed, we are able to calm students down and work with the real issue that is causing the behavior."*



Staff members at [Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School](#) smile and pose after completing the 17-hour training provided by the ASN Clinical Team in August, 2016.

[Youth Scholars, Skills and Service \(YS3\)](#) mentor, Jemina Lyle of [Association House High School](#) shared her thoughts on being a part of the process to become a trauma-informed school. She stated that *"having done the trauma informed practice trainings in the past really helped me in my work with my students because I was able to readily be more sensitive to their needs and understand their behavior a little easier. But I'm one person,*

and while there were already staff members on board with being trauma informed, it helps to have an entire staff trauma informed so that we are all giving our students the same message, one of tolerance and understanding. I believe as a staff we need to be more mindful of our word choice, our own attitudes and traumas and of the reality of our students. I know being trauma informed can and will really make a difference in our students' lives because, hopefully, it changes us!

Josh Cohen, a teacher at [ASN Preparatory Institute](#), said this about his experience in a 17 hour [Youth Resilience Project](#) training on trauma-informed interventions for youth in crisis: *"The workshop addressed many techniques we already use on a daily basis, but was most helpful because it provides a comprehensive strategy and vocabulary that makes utilizing these techniques more effective."*

With the training and support that staff members receive through ASN's [Youth Resilience Project](#) we hope to create more safe spaces for healing in our schools so that learning, growth, and positive change can continue to transform lives and communities in deep, meaningful, and sustainable ways. Stay tuned for more updates from us on the evolution of this exciting new project.

Should you have any questions, or want to learn more, feel free to reach out to the ASN Clinical Team at clinicalteam@asnchicago.org.