



Trauma Informed Care shaping care of youth

By LINDA HALL
Staff Writer

WOOSTER — Trauma Informed Care training is changing the way the behavioral problems of young people in its care are handled at The Village Network.

It has been beneficial for staff members and foster parents alike.

"Foster parents have said it is the best training they have been through," said Dave Paxton, TVN's southeast regional director, because it demonstrates "seeing foster children through the trauma lens."

The latest research shows trauma experienced by a child has an even greater impact than previously thought.

"It's a whole different cultural shift," said Deb Jenkins, TVN's director of

marketing and communications. "It's evidence-based."

At The Village Network, "we try to restrain as infrequently as possible," Paxton said, and wanted to further "reduce the need for physical restraint."

With Trauma Informed Care, power struggles between youth and authority figures are reduced.

Paxton gave as an example a young lady who was being restrained in Knox County residential care because she threw things at staff members when they gave her demerits for "trashing" her room.

When they began focusing on her trauma — abuse by her brother — they discovered "booby-trapping" her bedroom was her way of keeping it from happening, Paxton explained, although

her motive was subconscious. Once she began to feel safe, the problem diminished.

It's a matter of helping the youth "identify their trauma triggers," he said.

Children are "coming into foster homes, bringing this baggage with them," causing them to act up behaviorally.

Depending upon when their abuse occurred, their impulse and emotional control may have been thwarted. "Those functions are not going to be age-appropriate," Paxton said. "From the beginning, (they're) off-kilter."

Part of the training is learning how to set up an environment for a child, making it less institutional and more homelike, Paxton said.

Establishing a setting with "as few

power struggles as possible," Paxton said, "can be a challenge because you have to keep these kids safe."

When a youth is acting out, "the staff is trained to keep a distance ... and talk (him or her) down," Jenkins said, while the youth is cooling off.

The plan is to refrain from restraining the children "unless they are harming themselves or someone else," Jenkins said.

"(It is) a judgment call to keep that child safe," Paxton said, allowing him or her to let out pent-up anger and emotion.

The training is also helpful to staff members or foster parents who may experience "secondary traumatization" when hearing about abuse suffered by

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the children in their care reminds them of their own.

Paxton also pointed out abuse is not the only problem confronted; neglect or an impoverished environment is another.

"Neglect has proven to be just as damaging as abuse, if not more so," he said.

"Trauma Informed Care focuses on what happened to the child and not what

is currently wrong with the child," Paxton said in a statement, noting The Village Network-Mount Vernon/Knox County was the first of the networks to introduce TIC into the curriculum.

"It led to a first-year 95 percent drop in critical incidents at their location," he said.

Jenkins outlined the objectives of foster parent training in TIC — including educating them on the impact of trauma on

a child's development and behavior and giving them the knowledge and skills to respond to the child appropriately; and helping traumatized children learn coping mechanisms and make healthy attachments.

Two grants are funding the trauma workshops for foster parents, she said.

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