Hennepin County – DOCCR: Trauma-Informed, Culturally Specific Programs

2019 Annual Summary

Background

Wilder Research is partnering with the Hennepin County Children's Mental Health Collaborative to evaluate a system of three trauma-informed, culturally specific programs for African American male-identified youth. Of primary interest is whether programs help ground participants in their culture as a source of strength, whether programs help participants better identify trauma and stress in their lives, and whether programs help participants better cope with trauma and stress in their lives.

Approach

Wilder Research surveyed and interviewed program participants, interviewed program staff and referral sources, and analyzed quantitative data on program participation in order to understand implementation of and preliminary outcomes for the programs. This is a summary of the second year findings of a three-year collaborative effort.

Findings

Program participants say that the programs are engaging and positively impactful; referral sources say the programs meet community needs; and staff say programs build on community strengths and relationships to meet participant needs and adjust to challenges.

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Background

Since fall 2017, Wilder Research has been working with the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation to develop culturally specific, trauma-informed programs for African American male-identified youth, and evaluate the implementation and benefits of these programs with a focus on preventing and intervening in juvenile justice system involvement.

Funding from the Hennepin County Children's Mental Health Collaborative drives evaluation of the three programs: Ujima Family Resilience Program at Rebound, Inc. (focus on prevention), HOPE at Phyllis Wheatley (focus on early intervention), and Nia at NorthPoint (focus on intervention). Programs began receiving funding in fall 2018.

Each program has unique eligibility requirements, specifically:

- Ujima Family Resilience Program - Families must reside in North Minneapolis, have at least one Black male child age 8 through 12, and have some experience with traumatic stress. Ujima Family Resilience Program staff network with schools, organizations, and agencies in the North Minneapolis community to reach and recruit families to participate. Ujima also runs a cohort model, where a small group of families participates in a structured weekly curriculum for between 12 and 16 weeks.

- HOPE - Participants are all African American males age 12 through 17 who are referred after a first contact with law enforcement. HOPE has weekly meetings with group participants, and accepts new participants into programming on a rolling basis.

- Nia - Participants are all African American males residing in or near North Minneapolis, age 12 through 17, referred by Hennepin County Juvenile Probation. Nia has near-daily group meetings with participants, and accepts new participants into programming on a rolling basis.

While specific goals and outcomes for participants vary based on which program they access, common outcome goals are that participants:

- Improve their ability to identify traumatic, stressful, and/or challenging life experiences

- Improve their ability to address and/or positively cope with traumatic, stressful, and/or challenging life experiences

- Consider the program to be reflective of their culture

- Improve their grounding in their culture

- Improve their connections to a positive support network

Current project

Wilder Research is conducting an implementation process and outcome evaluation to help understand how these programs enhance and/or improve Hennepin County's programs available to young men of color (and their families).

Wilder Research engaged program staff, referral sources, and participants in interviews and surveys since this initiative began. Figure 1 outlines who has participated in evaluation activities through December 31, 2019. We also collected quantitative information about the reach and graduation rates of the programs from Hennepin County. Evaluators analyze qualitative data for themes, and report qualitative and quantitative information on an annual basis. This is the second annual report, which summarizes information collected in 2019 and highlights key findings from 2018 data. Find the first annual report here.

1. Evaluation participants

Informant type	Number interviewed	Number surveyed
Program staff	6	-
Referral source	9	-
Program participant	29	24
Total	43	24

Note: Wilder Research gathered information from a number of informants, including program staff, Hennepin County probation staff who refer participants to Nia), and program participants. Wilder interviewed youth who participated in HOPE and Nia, and adults who participated in Ujima (though not the children in their care).

2019 annual summary

Here we present themes that emerged from 2019 data collection activities, as well as highlights from the 2018 summary. We report those themes raised by five or more informants.

Who participated in programming?

In interviews, Wilder asked program staff to describe the people they serve in their programs. All staff used positive descriptors when talking about their participants and the theme that emerged is that participants are resilient.

Beginning in calendar year 2019, grantees tracked information about how many people were referred to, participated in, and successfully completed programming. Figure 2 summarizes how many people or families the programs reached.

2. Program participants

Number of people in 2019 who...	HOPE	Nia	Ujima
Were referred to the program	15 youth	57 youth	26 families
Received some programming (though may not have completed)	8 youth	37 youth	17 families
Received a referral to other service, including mental health, chemical health, health care, or pro-social activities	1 youth	37 youth	17 families
Successfully completed program in 2019	5 youth	9 youth	14 families

Staff and referral partner perspectives

Programs are meeting a need that has not previously been addressed

In 2019, we reported on implementation lessons learned based on interviews with program staff in late 2018, and interviews from probation officers referring youth into programs in spring 2019. From these interviews about the early implementation process, we found that:

- Hennepin County, community, and program strengths contributed to program success. Funding and good working relationships with the County; community resilience, effort, and hope; and grantee's relationships with the community were all integral in programming success.

- Building trust is necessary for success. Grantees built trust with community and referral sources in order to reach potential program participants.

- Referral sources hope that the capacity of programs increases so they can refer more participants.

Programs continue to receive praise from referral sources. Unprompted, one referral source reached out in fall 2019 and shared:

> *I recently had a client complete [program], and I wanted to take a moment to recognize the staff for their great work. When I initially made the referral, I was not so confident that the program was going to be able to do anything with my young man. He had not had success in other community-based programs, and he was inching towards out-of-home placement. [This program] was his last chance. My client did not engage in the beginning, but it was not long before he was able to form a relationship with [program staff]. My client said that [program staff] believed in him when nobody else did and for the first time in a long time, my client had a Black male in his life that helped him discover his potential. We've needed this program as a resource for our clients for a long time. A program that focuses on trauma and encourages prosocial activities is what these young men need. Thank you to the entire program. I look forward to making more referrals!*

Wilder interviewed six program staff in late 2019 to update implementation lessons learned. The following themes emerged.

Programs are achieving success

Staff from all programs reported that their participants experienced growth and achieved success in 2019. All program staff said that they observed growth in participants' ability to open up about what was going on in their lives, in providing positive support to other participants, and in talking through ways to improve dealing with stress. Some program staff also said the process of connecting participants to the program once they were referred had gotten easier over the year, and they had seen a greater number of participants interested in the program. Finally, some program staff pointed to the graduation rate from their program as an indicator of success.

Programs are adapting to challenges

All program staff reported their programs had faced challenges throughout 2019, and had made important adaptations to meet those challenges. All programs started the year wanting to do more to engage community members in connecting with participants, and all programs were able to build relationships with key community members and organizations and bring in regular guest speakers and facilitators from the African American community. All programs were additionally challenged by competing demands for participants' time, and they adapted participant-driven strategies to keep people engaged. As one program staff explained:

> *Families sometimes feel like they can't say no if work asks them to come in and cover a shift during group or something. I had to get creative with ways to show them that they're valuable to their employer and can at least ask if it's okay to protect this time. And then also show them that if they protect this time and participate, that they'll be in a better position for their job and their family at the end of this.*

Participant perspectives

Programs are engaging and have positive impacts

Wilder Research interviewed and surveyed program participants at each program on two main topics, what the programs are like and perceived impact of the programs. Here, we report those themes that emerged across five or more participant interviews, as well as relevant survey data covering the topic of what programs are like.

Participants found most program topics helpful

Wilder Research interviewed 29 program participants and asked them to share the topics that were discussed during their time in the programs. They mentioned the following:

- African American or Black culture, race, or identity
- Anger or managing anger
- Stress triggers
- Thinking through decisions
- Planning for the future
- Parenting skills

Most (N=22) felt these group topics were helpful. No participants said group topics were unhelpful. Elaborating on what they had talked about, interviewees said:

> *With the different anger triggers, I didn't know it was a lot of them, and I didn't know they were impacting my life like they did.*
>
> *All of the weeks that we talked about trauma were kind of my favorite. It was the trauma that me and my kids experienced, and I'd never talked about it with them because they're so young… talking about something that's happened to us, and ways to move on, learn, grow, be better. It doesn't have to follow us for the rest of our lives.*

One-on-one time with program staff was a positive

Most interviewees (N=22) met with program staff for one-on-one meetings. We invited interviewees to share what they thought about the meetings. Interviewees said they liked the one-on-one meetings, that the one-on-one meetings were helpful, and that they appreciated the emotional support of program staff.

Programs earn praise from participants

At the end of every interview, Wilder Research asked interviewees if there was anything else they wanted people to know about the program, and 19 interviewees responded. Most interviewees reiterated that the program was helpful, and most also offered other positive comments, including that the program was good, fun, worth the time, something that they recommend for other people, and that the program was a good place to connect with peers. Interviewees said:

> *I think more people need to know about it. Where I come from, everybody has trauma and I wouldn't have known about that if I hadn't come to [program].*
>
> *It's a helpful group. You don't notice it, but you're gonna change.*

It's something a lot of people could use. In Black culture, mental health issues are severe but we don't address it, we're raised to be strong so you don't talk about things. It's a safe space for Black boys to express themselves and to be vulnerable, and we're in a time where it's scary to do that. I was raised in "I'm the adult, you're the kid, you don't have a say, your feelings don't matter." Here, kids have a space to say their feelings matter and help them express themselves. There's connecting with other families too, and seeing how other families cope with their families, and seeing how we face the same obstacles, and seeing how we deal with it and how we don't too, that was helpful.

Survey data bolsters the theme that interviewees liked the program. All survey respondents agreed that with the statement "Overall, I liked the program."

Programs helped participants better identify trauma and/or stress

Wilder Research asked interviewees if they noticed any changes in their ability to identify stress or trauma since beginning programming. Most interviewees (N=22) said yes, programs had helped them improve their ability to identify trauma and/or stress, though, six interviewees said they hadn't noticed any changes. When invited to explain, themes emerged. Interviewees said that programming had helped them identify particular triggers in their life, they'd developed coping skills, or they improved their ability to think through decisions. Additionally, almost everyone who responded to this survey question agreed or strongly agreed that the program had increased their understanding of how trauma can impact people (96%).

Finally, all interviewees who went through Ujima Family Resilience Program said they had noticed changes in their ability to help the child(ren) in their care identify trauma or stress.

Programs helped participants better cope with trauma and/or stress

Wilder Research asked interviewees if they noticed any changes in their ability to cope with trauma or stress since beginning programming. Most interviewees said yes, programs had helped them learn to cope better (77%). Wilder Research also asked interviewees if they could explain what coping skills they learned. Perhaps indicating the individualized information that interviewees received, no themes emerged from the responses. Additionally, all survey respondents (N=24) agreed or strongly agreed that they had used something they had learned about positive ways to deal with challenges in their life.

Finally, all interviewees who went through the Ujima Family Resilience Program said they noticed changes in their ability to help the youth in their care cope with trauma and/or stress. Seven interviewees identified a new coping strategy that their child or children had learned from Ujima, and six caregiver interviewees said that they had learned a new strategy to help their child or children cope with stress.

Programs helped participants feel more grounded in their culture

Wilder Research asked interviewees if they noticed any changes to how connected or grounded they felt in their culture. Most interviewees said that the program helped them feel more grounded in their culture, or see their culture as a source of strength (N=19). Additionally, all survey respondents (N=23) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more connected to their racial identity than they did before the program. Elaborating on what this meant to them, interviewees said:

> *I learned some stuff about our history that I didn't really know. It touched me in some ways. I didn't know that we'd gone through so much somehow. It was a good experience.*
>
> *It was always a lot of us talking about empowering each other and uplifting each other. A lot of that was based on being African American – being in that culture.*

Programs helped participants connect with positive people and/or programs in their community

Wilder Research asked interviewees if they noticed any changes to their connections with people or programs in their community. Thirteen respondents said that programs had helped them connect with people or programs in their community, though 10 had not noticed any changes. When asked to elaborate, interviewees mentioned connections specific to their interests, so no themes emerged. Additionally, most of those who responded to this question (N=14) said that they talked about the program with other people not in the program, indicating that program participants are also a source of connection between the programs and other people in the community.

Next steps

The majority of next steps for Wilder Research involve continued data collection, analysis, and reporting, with a special focus on adjusting data collection methods to accommodate coronavirus-related changes.

Wilder is working with programs to invite distanced participation in surveys and interviews, including phone interviews and potentially online surveys. Wilder is also working with programs to understand how the pandemic may have changed program delivery. Wilder will continue to work with Hennepin County and programs to conduct further implementation interviews with program staff, referral sources, and possibly other program stakeholders. We will continue to analyze and report information gathered through these sources, as well as demographic and other output data collected by the programs.