CASE STUDY

How Montgomery County, Ohio is Working to Become a Healing-Centered, Trauma-Responsive County

Overview

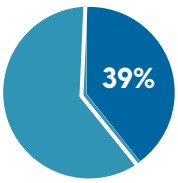
For Montgomery County, Ohio, adopting healing-centered, trauma-responsive, and resilience-building programs and practices is an opportunity to help children thrive in the face of adversity. A county-wide initiative led by the Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services Board (ADAMHS) with support from the United States Office of Minority Health intends to transform the culture of the county to mitigate the impact of adversity and trauma on children's health and well-being while reducing health disparities. Aurrera Health designed and supported the implementation of a protocol to help individuals who work with Montgomery County residents to identify youth and families who may have experienced adversity, provide education on the impacts of toxic stress and evidence-based strategies to support healing and resilience, and connect them with services and supports to prevent and mitigate toxic stress. Additionally, Aurrera Health developed educational workshops for youth- and family-serving staff across the county, along with a comprehensive train the trainer program to support the ability for in house long-term training.

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Montgomery County

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences that occur in childhood, such as violence, child abuse, and neglect, and growing up in a household with challenges including with mental health and substance misuse. There are additional adversities that children face, including racism and discrimination, bullying, community violence, and poverty. Nationally, two thirds of adults have experienced one or more ACE.[i] In Ohio, more than one third of children who are living in poverty have experienced two or more ACEs.[ii] In Montgomery County, 22% of Black youth in grades 7 through 12 reported having three or more ACEs.[iii]

Nationally

2/3 of adults have experienced **1+ ACE**



Ohio

More than **1/3** of children living in poverty have experienced **2+ ACEs**

Children who experience adversity without the protection of nurturing relationships and support systems can suffer from toxic stress, a physiological reaction to an increase in stress hormones.[iv] When this happens for an extended time, it can lead to lasting wear and tear on the body and brain, affect youth's brain, hormones, and immune system.[v] Toxic stress can lead to a higher risk of developing health problems in childhood and into adulthood – such as depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, cancer, heart disease, and earlier death.[vi] However, early detection and intervention have been found to be critical in reducing the impact of adversity on children's long-term health.

Impact of Adversity on Health (Effects)

The PROTECT Initiative

The Promoting Resilience Overtime To Eradicate Childhood Trauma (PROTECT) initiative is comprised of three key activities:

1. **Raise awareness of the impact of trauma on health and well-being**
2. **Build a county-wide network of care to provide services that promote resilience and well-being**
3. **Identify youth and families in need of services and supports and connect them with the network of care**

The effort was led by three county agencies: Juvenile Court's Minority Diversion Contact Program, Children Services, and the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services. Aurrera Health developed and facilitated workshops for staff to provide them with an understanding of trauma, adversity, and the impacts of thereof; skills and strategies to support youth and families who have experienced adversity; and tools to establish a county-wide network of care for referrals and support services. Aurrera Health also developed and facilitated workshops related to secondary traumatic stress, addressing the negative impacts of prolonged exposure to high-stress work environments and offering strategies and opportunities for staff to better their own health and well-being, support their teammates, and adopt an agency-wide culture of compassion and prevention.

Following these workshops, Aurrera Health developed a screening protocol for each agency. Along with assessing for exposure to ACEs and adversity, the screening protocols contain a multi-tiered referral program to connect youth and families with concrete supports. These include low-barrier interventions that families can incorporate into their daily routines, as well as referrals to higher-level supports and services.

To learn more about our work and how we promote healing-centered, trauma-responsive programs, policies, and practices across the country, visit our Pathways to Resilience initiative website.

[i] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2020.

[ii] State Health Improvement Plan: Ohio 2020-2022. Ohio Department of Health. Retrieved from https://odh.ohio.gov/static/SHIP/2020-2022/2020-2022-SHIP.pdf

[iii] 2019 Montgomery County Community Health Assessment

[iv] Harvard University Center on the Developing Child: ACEs and Toxic Stress. Retrieved from https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/

[v] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). Vital signs: Estimated proportion of adult health problems attributable to adverse childhood experiences and implications for prevention – 25 states, 2015-2017. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (68). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6844e1.htm

[vi] Roadmap for Resilience: The CA Surgeon General's Report on ACEs, Toxic Stress, and Health. December 2020.