

Thank you for your time in viewing this presentation. I am a neurodevelopment specialist with Begin Again Coaching and a survivor of childhood exploitation. Since 2013 I have been a volunteer trainer, mentor and advocate with Traffick Refuge. I provided neurodevelopmental screening, so we could match the expectations of workers to the actual neurological abilities of the women and girls. In addition I shared my story in identification and neurodevelopmental trauma-response training for first responders, volunteers and victim service providers.

In discussing the background of human trafficking, adverse childhood experiences, including sexual abuse translate into biochemical and neurodivergent pathways in the brain, which open the door for exploitation. Traffickers use power and control after identifying the vulnerable.

In service to women and girls, I have seen the neurological damage that early trauma and abuse has caused, affecting memory, focus and resilience. The rescued women I sat with during the weeks following their escape, located in hotel rooms, recovery meetings and safe spaces - each in different stages of their healing journey. But I found the highest population of trafficked women at the Montana Women's Prison in Billings. According to RAC Director, Suzanne Moran, seventy percent of the native population will not leave prison because they feel they will be trafficked if they are released. The threats from their traffickers keep them in a culture and community with bleak hope for escaping their life or building a future free of patterns, cycles and fear.

In the victim services community, workers need to understand that a woman may be 68 biological years, but have only the ability of a five-year old, if complex trauma is present. By matching the goals with actual abilities, expectations are more realistic and services, including mentors and peer support to help with complex tasks, are written into the protocols.

Symptoms of poor processing begin with trauma: Starting at the victims age of 0-6 are difficulties with language (asking for help), cognition (knowing my needs) fear and reflex functions, (fight, disassociation, flight, freeze or fawn). For those age 6 to adult, a short list of symptoms include low memory (remembering help/exit numbers), difficulty following complex directions (knowing location/whereabouts), short attention span, easily manipulated (can't see the big picture, only the here and now), challenges with following conversations. These issues create vulnerabilities which may cause them to be in further danger.

In several states, human trafficking is a significant issue with both sex and labor trafficking cases. Victims come from various backgrounds, including different races/ethnicities, gender and age groups. In addressing social determinants of health, such as poverty and lack of education, I see the most vulnerable population as high-risk students in foster care, school detention programs, children involved in the criminal justice system, and the incarcerated.

My company, Begin Again Coaching, currently offers neurodevelopment screening and processing remotely to individuals with trauma.

Neurodevelopment targets screening and intervention tools that can be taught to professionals and victim service providers at the school detention level, all the way to juvenile corrections and prison.

Within a more stable structure such as juvenile detention, a young person introduced to vulnerabilities and trafficking training, with participation in neurodevelopment services, have a much higher chance of making decisions critical to safety and avoiding the problems that significant development and neurological delays imprint into adulthood.

For adults incarcerated, allowing not only the individual, but their children to have access to services as part of their exit strategy or parole plan, may also help them to voluntarily participate in both identification classes and neurodevelopment programming.

While serving survivors, I found few that were able to process higher than a four-year old level, having just experienced traumatic events. I was shocked also to see low processing levels within the recovery and reentry community.

Specifics:

A five-minute screening will determine what level the individual is able to process.

The purpose of screening is to discover the individual's current sequential processing ability. This is called a baseline proficiency level. Testing is administered one time for each person. A four-year old should be able to do 4 digits; a five-year old should do 5; a six-year old, 6. For anyone 7 years of age and older, the minimum of 7 digits is needed for typical human function. A processing level of 8 is foundational for higher vocabulary in conversational language.

The skill of holding many pieces of auditory information together benefits conversations (staying on topic and picking up nuances), following directions, staying on task and seeing the big picture beyond here and now. One level up from proficiency level is therapeutic level for that individual. The therapeutic level is where you will begin working after testing is completed to improve the auditory short-term memory.

Peer Leadership:

In developing the training and materials for duplication and implementation, I will be using a Peer Leadership Model to engage with survivor leaders and survivor organizations, providing training for the program in prospective correctional facilities. This will assist in connecting a supportive community with knowledge and resources these women and children will need.

Implementation and Impact

Contact will be made with victim service organizations, reentry and correctional facilities, state-by state. A short neurodevelopmental program description will be provided. Online or in-person training will be acceptable and when in-person, we will offer a group orientation session for incarcerated individuals if desired.

Each online training will last 1.5 hours with .5 hours left for question-and-answer sessions. In-person training will be a full day or more, to provide adequate flexibility for the corrections staff and schedules.

Outcomes and Impact

When the processing level of an individual changes, the development is like a year of growth, affecting personal goals, work tasks, conversational abilities, vocabulary, and perception: Seeing beyond here and

now to developing long term vision. Actions, follow through with probation and parole, drug court and recovery programs is a result.

Women and girls caught in the cycle, can choose to build neurological highways out of the trauma pathways. This will improve their communication with family and health care/victim services providers, as well as perception of self, expectations of safety and ability to process crisis and emotionality.

I was given the gift of neurodevelopment when finding challenges to help my son, diagnosed with Autism. In helping him, I discovered healing for the pathways in my own life that needed intervention.