



YOUTH SERVICES

202 East Fifth Street • The Dalles, OR 97058
p: [541] 506-2669 • f: [541] 506-2661 • www.co.wasco.or.us

Pioneering pathways to prosperity.

Date: March 16, 2017

To: Chair Representative Lively and, Co-Chairs Representative Hack, Representative Piluso and members of the Committee

From: Molly Rogers Director
Director, Wasco County Youth Services

RE: Trauma-Informed Practices within the community context

Good Afternoon Chair and Honored Committee members, thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Molly Rogers, I am the Director of Wasco County Youth Services.

My testimony today is to highlight the impact of trauma-informed practices on social services systems in Wasco County and how that changed the experiences of providing services to our citizens. As you have heard from Claire we started our journey to find a better way to provide services to children and their families in 2011 with awareness that our systems were not working together – even if we stated we had a common goal.

In fact if you lined all of our Vision and Mission statements on the wall the common words included wellness, safety, and family engagement. Even with all of our good intentions we did not have the tools to actually work together and move the dials on these critical elements expected from our community and the families we serve. The core management team for the community trauma-informed initiative includes Executive Director of our community mental health organization, Superintendent of our largest school district, District Manager of Department of Human Services, and myself as the Director of Youth Services. In the beginning we also had the Administrator of the Wasco County Commission on Children and Families and now retired Chief of Police for The Dalles. This group had traditionally talked about “safety” in the form of cameras in school and enforcement of rules. Once we embarked on our trauma-informed community journey we quickly realized we were working on the wrong section of the river.

We started to look at all of our interactions with children and families and realized that we needed to work up stream and start with emotional literacy for our children. Again, I want to share very specific examples of how we did something different within our community. Our alcohol and drug prevention and promotion specialist is supervised from the Department of Youth Services. The Prevention Specialist, Debby Jones, came to me and shared a tool kit that focuses on teaching children – 0-5 years of age – about feelings and

what are appropriate behaviors for children to show their feelings. I want to pause – this is the Prevention Specialist for teen alcohol and drug use and abuse. Based on her experience and expertise she shared that teaching kids the dangers of use in middle school was way too late to move the dial for use among adolescents. Taking a bit of a leap we decided to explore this notion more. She trained and created collaborations with childcare providers, elementary teachers, and other early childhood professionals to implement an emotional literacy campaign – Pocket Full of Feelings. This has blossomed into two-hour boot camps for parents of young children to first and foremost meet their child's emotional needs. Opening doors for strong communication and trust so as children age they have key adults in their lives to support them in their choices to remain alcohol and drug free. We are now working on a parenting element for parents to understand and manage emotions of toddlers through teens.

In our community the heroes that work with children and families have embraced the trauma-informed approach and I believe they have been waiting for us in decision making roles to support their work from the organizational perspective. Claire mentioned the cross training of over 214 professionals from across our region. The key difference in this strategy is the training “together” within our geographical region. Our separate professions often have trainings, but we have decided to invest as a community rather than discipline. This is one of the policy decisions I want to emphasize and encourage you as a committee to consider as you are assessing and recommending policy direction for the state agencies to have the flexibility to engage with both staff and funding decisions. Let me further explain. In our region we have been successful because of grants and some local support through community-based agencies. State partnerships include staff ability to attend trainings, but not ability to invest in trauma-informed structure. My statement is not about new monies, just the encouragement for agencies to invest locally.

As I move to close I want to share one more example of what becoming a trauma-informed community has meant to Wasco County. Just over a year ago we found ourselves in the middle of what we have come to know as the “Trauma-Triangle” where as a County we were struggling with in-fighting and some potential legal issues. We started down a path of changing our culture and while Wasco County has implemented 100% Love as the name for our culture guide, it is deeply rooted in trauma theory and changing the question of what is wrong with us to what has happened. In just one year we have stabilized our hiring, increased employee engagement and became very focused on serving our citizens with 100% Love to meet their needs.

I thank you for the opportunity to share our story from the Gorge region, and appreciate any consideration you may have to ensure that all of Oregon has the opportunity to experience services from providers in a trauma-informed practice model and that we take care of our organizations as they are experiencing episodes of toxic stress within our very difficult job duties.