

## **Browning Alternative Schools Program December 2016**

Browning Alternative Schools continue to integrate Youth Mental Health First Aid to all students. This curriculum is sponsored by the Good Medicine Program and is delivered by Chris Lewis in coordination with one of our certified counselors. With this program student learn to recognize stress in themselves and their friends and have access to strategies to process these symptoms. Students enjoy this program and we are pleased with the positive impact that it has had on our students and staff.

Gear Up has ramped up their presence with our programs and we are pleased to welcome the ladies from the program weekly. GEAR UP is working with students to complete college applications, financial aid and scholarship applications and also has begun the portfolio process and career interest inventories with our students. Promoting college and career pathways with our population is extremely important and GEAR UP is a great resource for our school. Ours students were welcome to visit the Salish Kootenai College Campus and the University of Montana and enjoyed the trip very much.

The Alternative Schools are adopting a trauma informed approach to improve the school climate. We are hosting Trauma Informed Team meetings twice a month to help integrate this philosophy throughout the entire District. We are working to not only address the acute and chronic trauma that occurs on a daily basis but we are also creating a trauma intervention model that will address historical and cultural trauma. Cultures can be traumatized when repeated denigration, attempts at assimilation and genocide occur. Native Communities continue to live with the impact of the intergenerational trauma of colonization and the Boarding School system. Following 9/11, the North American culture became organized around fear and terror as a direct result of the trauma experience around that event.

At its' core, the trauma-informed model replaces the labeling of students as being resistant or uncooperative with that of being affected by an "injury". Viewing Trauma as an injury shifts the conversation from asking "what is wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?"

The core trauma –informed principles are:

- Acknowledgement- recognizing that trauma is pervasive in our community
- Safety
- Trust
- Choice and Control
- Compassion

Teachers and other service providers can be traumatized after hearing the stories and witnessing the suffering of students or clients who have experienced trauma. This is called "vicarious trauma" and it is common in our community. We believe that these interventions will help us to work with the community in a more positive fashion and create a welcoming and supportive environment. For reference I am enclosing this month's notes and a handout we shared with the District.

Honor Group – This grief and loss support group made up of PC and BLA students meets each Thursday morning at Project Choices. Many students in the alternative department have experienced profound death in their lives, and the purpose of the group is to provide stabilizing support for those in need. In addition to discussing healthy ways to cope with trauma and death on the reservation, this week the group will be creating memory flags to Honor and remember lost family and friends. Charlie Speicher and Nikki Hannon co-facilitate the group each semester.

This month we were lucky to host Dr. Shane Doyle who is a Crow Indian from MSU Bozeman. He spent the day with our students and shared his work on many PBS Historical Series and his work as the lead anthropologist in the Anzick boy project. The Anzick boy is a skeleton of a 12-year-old indigenous boy who is over 12,000 years old, he was found in the Gallatin area and his DNA is crucial in helping to map the genomes of Native Americans. Dr. Doyle shared his past as a young student who was raised by a single mother and dropped out but returned to school.



## **Re-Creating Holiday Traditions Ideas for Families Facing Loss and Transitions**

For families in transition, the holidays often represent one of the most difficult times of the year. Inevitably we are surrounded by reminders of “the holiday season” in public places, on TV and on the radio. The lights, music, gifts and evergreen may seem out of sync with internal feelings and/or may trigger painful memories. As tempting as it may be to deny the existence of the holiday season, avoid it completely, and somehow emerge in January, this fantasy is futile. So the question becomes not how to avoid or deny, but rather:

*How can we help ourselves through the season, explore short-term and long-term priorities, and gradually learn to make holidays meaningful once again?*

**Clarify priorities and reduce stress:**

- **Inventory your holiday preparation.** What is important? What is not necessary? Eliminate unnecessary pressures on yourself and others. Shift the focus to things that are really important to you and your family.
- **Resist overextending or over-committing.** Be realistic to avoid feeling that you have failed.
- **Inventory your holiday traditions.** Do you have family traditions? Is it important to carry them on this year or is this a good time to begin some new ones? Reevaluate, consider, and discuss ways of keeping traditions you find meaningful in ways that may alleviate some of the pain. Attempt to merge traditions in blended or newly formed families.

**Focus on what is most helpful and most meaningful for your family at this time.**

- **Give yourself permission to create meaning in your own way.**
- **Give special consideration to activities that are significant to both you and your family.**
  - If Christmas or Hannukah hold religious significance for you, allow time for honoring that significance in your activities.
  - Create a ritual to honor someone who has died or someone who is not able to be with you this year.
    - Hang a stocking in which everyone can place notes, poems, photos, drawings.
    - Light a candle during meals or significant gatherings.
    - Include an activity in that person’s honor/memory (snow angels, sledding, reading a treasured book aloud...).
    - Have an interactive card, mural, or chalk board where people can jot down passing thoughts, feelings, and sentiments.
- **Don’t hesitate to do whatever makes the holidays more meaningful and more bearable for you.**
  - If you thrive on the busy-ness and the meaning of bringing a large group of family and/or friends together to get you through the day – then by all means, DO IT!
  - If you want to hang a stocking of a deceased loved one, then do it!
  - Where is it that you feel most alive – most content – most centered? In the outdoors? In yoga? In a church service? Dancing? Drawing? Baking with the kids? Knitting with friends? Sledding? Meditating? How can you integrate this into your holidays?



- **Allow yourself to do things differently if it would be easier.**
  - Go to a different church or attend an alternative gathering.
  - Open presents at a different time (i.e. Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning)
  - Have a small dinner instead of a large one.
  - Have dinner at a different time and invite the family for dessert in the evening.

#### **Take care of yourself.**

- **Create space to honor your grief and your pain.** Do whatever helps with this: talk, cry, write, look at photos, play music, visit special places. Remember it is ok to cry.
- **It is ok to talk with others** about your loved ones and your experience. Others may not bring up painful subjects believing that they are protecting you. If you desire, break the silence and mention it yourself. Assess your support, work to clarify your needs, and allow yourself to lean on others.
- **Take time to be with others and love them, but also give yourself permission to spend time alone.** Carve out space to grieve and validate the changes – time to cry, time to contemplate.
- **Find a creative outlet.** Write, draw, dance, sew, photograph, design, build, sing...
- **Let go of pleasing everyone else, and do some things that are especially meaningful to YOU.** Think about blatant self-care. What could bring you even the tiniest bit of comfort, peace or beauty? A daily bath? A walk with a dear friend? Reading silly books or magazines? A precious flower? Polishing your toenails? Listening to favorite music? Visiting a museum, library, café or other special place?

#### **Recognize that our greatest joy may come in doing something for someone else.**

- **If you are a parent, try especially hard to bring your children into the planning of the holiday and make it positive for them.** Include them in your grieving activities. Listen to them, talk to them, be with them. When asked directly, kids often have clear ideas about how they wish to acknowledge people they care about who are not present during the holidays.
- **Great pleasure can come from helping others.** If you have the energy, sort out old clothes and household item and donate them to a shelter, group home, or thrift store. Think about making cookies for someone who has been especially supportive to you. Write a note to someone who has been on your mind and loves mail. Donate a can of food to the Food Bank.

*Written by: Tina Barrett, LCPC and Melanie Trost, LCSW of Tamarack Grief Resource Center incorporating ideas from Johnson, W.Y. (1991). The Holidays: A mixture of love and pain. Thanatos, p. 28-29. Specializing in bereavement camps, Tamarack Grief Resource Center honors and strengthens individuals and families throughout their journey with grief.*

November 29, 2016

### Trauma Informed Team Notes

Robin Bird  
Daniella Rinehardt  
Jack Parent  
Kim Tatsey-Mckay  
Dawn Magee  
Chris MF Lewis  
Charlie Speicher  
Jennifer Ehlers  
Ashton Smith  
Matthew Johnson  
Gus Garces

**Expressive Art Therapy-** Counselors loved the workshop, would like to invite Co Carew and Corky Clarimont back to do another workshop focusing on Native American art styles and theme integration into expressive arts. Kim and Matthew will work on putting together Art supplies for each building to do art therapy with students.

**Trauma and the Holidays-** Being aware of the stress of the holidays, both staff and students. Holidays mean different things to different staff members. What can we do to support our staff and students who survive the holidays not celebrate the holidays? Work hard to build those relationships going into the holidays. Can the CISM team have a role during the holidays? Helping people to celebrate the little things that are important...health, family, meals with family. Teach the joy and fulfillment of community service.

Members mentioned that several of the new teachers appear to be struggling and could greatly benefit from a trauma informed set of interventions. Issues were:

- Lack of social support
- Trauma informed classroom interventions
- Classroom composition issues
- Trauma informed support from coaches, administrators and other staff.
- Kim and Matthew will talk to Jason to see how we can support these teachers. Ideas include:
  - Organizing listening sessions
- Care packages
- Access to Trauma resources

Charlie provided an excellent resource from the Tamarack Grief Recovery Center- Re-Creating Ideas for Families Facing Loss and Transitions. (handout enclosed)

- Clarify priorities and reduce stress
- Focus on what is most helpful and meaningful for your family at this time
- Don't hesitate to do whatever makes the holidays more meaningful and more bearable for you
- Allow yourself to do things differently if it would be easier
- Take care of yourself
- Recognize that our greatest joy may come in doing something for someone else.

The following Trauma Informed Training opportunities are available to our school through a collaborative effort from the Blackfeet Tribe:

#### Trauma Awareness Training

- Defining acute, developmental, historical and secondary trauma
- ACE study
- Resilience

#### Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC): Interacting with children experiencing trauma caregivers and professionals

- Regulating your own emotions when dealing with challenging behavior
- Steps to become more attuned with children's emotions and behavior
- Strategies to help children identify emotions
- Strategies to calm children who are hyper aroused and help modulate and express emotion
- Activities to increase self-identity

#### Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and Self-Care

- Defining secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue
- Historical trauma and lateral violence
- Assessing levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction using the ProQol
- Creating self-care plans.

Let me know what you think about these topics.