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# TRAINING OUTCOMES AND PROGRAM DELIVERY: PILOT EVALUATION OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED SPORT PROGRAM

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## Background

Traumatic exposure in youth can lead to:

- Cognitive and emotional dysregulation
- Disengagement and isolation
- Violence and aggression

Trauma-informed programs can help build youth **resilience** through:

- Fostering caring relationships
- Facilitate supportive program structure
- Providing opportunities to build skills

Program leaders can **learn and apply** these principles to guide youth to a path of healing and thriving through **SPORT [1]**

### PURPOSE

To explore leaders' experiences of learning, designing, and delivering a trauma-informed sport program to at-risk youth.

## Methods

### Context

- 3 sites across Canada of a national not-for-profit organization that targets at-risk youth

### Participants

- 16 program leaders (11 female, 5 male)
- $M_{age} = 34.30$  years old  $SD = 12.26$

### Procedure



### Program

- Held weekly for 1-hour sessions
- Implemented 3 seasons (season = 6 to 8 weeks)
- Sports included: basketball, hockey, & soccer

### Data Analysis

- Deductive-inductive thematic analysis [2]

## Results

### Strengths of Pilot Experience

After attending training, the leaders expressed **increased awareness and knowledge of trauma-informed practices** which could help them work with youth more effectively.

*I learned to really look at where that child's surroundings are, and all the different elements that can have an effect on the child going into that sport. Really being in the moment with the child and helping them through those things. Having more language – different ways to talk to children.*

The leaders found the **program design to be valuable** in helping youth build resilience skills.

*I do think the program adds a safe and healthy environment for kids to experience competition, and set them up for the success. Helping them go through that failure process to, say if they don't win, building them up to get past that, and building that resilience.*

Throughout delivery of the program, the leaders gave examples of their own **successful implementation** of a trauma-informed approach.

*This one I kid I noticed wasn't himself at all... there were lots of things that he was doing that he knew was wrong, and wasn't listening. It took that [training] piece for me to actually take him aside and say "I've never seen you be like this, something obviously is going on, so what is happening?" - and he broke down and [opened up about his issues]. I probably wouldn't have reacted the same way without going through that trauma-informed lens.*

### Challenges of Pilot Experience

**Lack of leader support** made it difficult to deliver the program as outlined in their training and design, as more human resources were needed than expected:

*Had no assistants which made transitions a bit slower and harder to engage in [both] coaching from the bench and leading the game at the same time.*

*For one person to be dealing with all those kids, there's got to be some sort of rotation. Even two leaders is not going to be sufficient if we want to run a successful program.*

The leaders faced difficulties with **time limitations** from dealing with transportation issues, social-behavioural issues of youth, and program interruption.

*Kids would hardly listen and be fooling around and then once we get things going the parents come to pick up their kids early, and we don't get to finish the program properly.*

### Goals for Future Delivery

To address challenges related to a lack of staffing, it was suggested that training should help leaders **learn skills to train staff**.

*What would have been neat is to learn how to train how another staff: "Here's what you must have in order to run a successful program." Because right now we have to basically compile a week of training into an hour to train assistants.*

An identified challenge was a time limitation; the leaders suggested that programs could be structured to have longer sessions to **increase youth engagement time**.

*I think parents value the reaction out of their kids. If we make sure kids are getting the full experience from beginning to end, by starting the program early, and [kids] are going home and talking about it, their parents will value it. Then when [parents] come pick-up [their kids], they are not just seeing it as taking kids out of the sport, but rather taking [their kids] away from something meaningful.*

## Discussion

This study provided insight into the feasibility of learning and delivering a trauma-informed sport program through the experiences of youth community program leaders.

- With a fundamental understanding of the impact trauma has on youth, leaders can be effective in identifying trauma histories and respond to youth appropriately. This can help create a safe and welcoming environment [3]
- Leaders can refresh and reinforce their skills in youth development through training and experience [4,5]
- Challenges reflect the nature of youth programming – tight budgeting leads to lower institutional supports to help balance multiple responsibilities of leaders [6]
- The goals discussed by the leaders attempt to address multiple challenges of delivering quality youth programming, considering solutions that focus on enhancing youth engagement outcomes [7]

## References

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