



Community Empowerment Workshops
Results from Participant Phone Interviews

March 31, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background. This report summarizes an evaluation of the Community Empowerment Workshops (CEWs) implemented by Alive and Well Communities. The evaluation was conducted by external evaluation consultants. Findings are based on phone interviews completed with workshop attendees during February and March, 2018.

Method. Thirty-one (31) participants completed phone interviews. Thirty (30) interviews were audio-recorded and one interview was recorded through handwritten notes. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Transcripts were analyzed to identify consistent themes.

Results. Feedback on the CEWs was very positive. Many participants mentioned that the workshops were “eye-opening” and they were impressed with the presenters. They felt the information given was timely and important. As a result of their participation in the workshops, 94% of the interviewees described an actual behavior change that improved their own emotional wellbeing and/or that of someone else. The most frequent behavior changes mentioned included improving self-care practices and recommending the workshop to friends and family. Additionally, after participating in the workshops, 68% of interviewees reported a change in attitude about someone they know who has experienced toxic stress and/or trauma. Of those who did not endorse a change in attitude, 50% said that their attitude had already been positive before the workshop, but their existing attitudes and knowledge were reinforced by the CEWs. The majority of participants did not have any suggestions for improving the workshops, although a few mentioned varying the times and locations offered, as well as incorporating new activities. Finally, some respondents suggested methods for increasing workshop participation which included hanging flyers and offering incentives like food and door prizes.

BACKGROUND

Communities are increasingly beginning to work together to recognize and prevent the effects of trauma and toxic stress. Ongoing experience of neglect, abuse, poverty, and other environmental trauma will often lead to long-term adverse health effects (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, cancer, depression, and substance use disorders), making trauma a serious public health concern (Felitti et al., 1998). Toxic stress affects individuals across all stages of the lifespan, but the effects may be more damaging in children, particularly those without a supportive or protective environment (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014). Consequently, increasing awareness of trauma and facilitating the development of trauma-informed communities is paramount and may help to combat the negative effects associated with trauma exposure.

Alive and Well Communities is a multi-sector and broad community-based initiative focused on reducing the impact of toxic stress and trauma by accelerating the adoption of trauma-informed practices across the St. Louis region. Alive and Well Communities has been leading local efforts to bring together key community partners with an interest in responding to toxic stress and promoting healthy development. Most recently, Alive and Well Communities engaged fellow community members from north St. Louis City and north St. Louis County through their Community Empowerment Workshops (CEWs) to: (1) create understanding about the impact of toxic stress and trauma on health and wellbeing; (2) help residents develop proactive strategies to minimize the impact of toxic stress and trauma on individuals; and (3) help residents create proactive strategies for building emotional wellbeing in the community.

Rachel Kryah, MSW/MPH, and Shannon VonDras, MPH, served as the evaluators for the CEWs, assessing the impact of participation in the CEWs. This report summarizes the qualitative findings from phone interviews. The interviews were conducted in March, 2018, to gain a better understanding of changes in participants' attitudes and behaviors following their participation in the CEWs.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Method. Qualitative methods utilizing phone interviews assessed the impact of the CEWs on participants' behaviors as well as attitudes toward those who have experienced toxic stress or trauma. Qualitative research emphasizes the subjective experiences of a population, which enables a broader and more nuanced evaluation of the "reach" of a given program as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Grounded Theory was the framework used to guide the qualitative research methods which emphasizes participants' understanding of events and experiences as well as their underlying meanings (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1968). In order to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the impacts of the CEWs, the evaluator conducted phone interviews with participants to generate an explanatory account of their experiences after their participation in the CEWs, which helped to guide the conceptualization of the evaluation and key themes.

Participants and Procedures. With input from Alive and Well staff, an interview protocol was developed to assess possible behavior and/or attitude changes in participants in the time since the CEWs. The interview protocol and script can be found in Appendix A. Alive and Well provided a list of prospective participants to contact for phone interviews. Phone calls were made to 49 participants in total; 32 answered the calls and 17 did not answer. One declined to participate. In total, 31 interviews were completed. All participants worked and/or lived in north St. Louis City and north St. Louis County. Thirty (30) interviews were audio-recorded and one was being recorded through handwritten notes. The recording files and handwritten notes were transcribed and will be destroyed at the end of the project. On average, interviews lasted 10-20 minutes.

Data Analysis. Interviews were coded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti 8, qualitative data analysis software. The program facilitates the process of segmenting, categorizing, annotating, and retrieving data within documents, allowing researchers to both analyze and visualize relationships within data. Codes were utilized to identify themes and ideas as they occurred during the interviews. Applying codes allows researchers to search for content, find relationships, and capture themes within data.

A coding structure was designed based upon interview questions and refined by following line-by-line review of the transcripts. Subsequently, a coding dictionary was constructed, followed by initial coding of ten transcripts by two coders in order to develop consistency and consensus on the applications of each code. Following refinement of the coding dictionary, all remaining transcripts were reviewed independently by two coders. Transcripts were analyzed both individually and as a whole to determine unique findings and themes.

Quote Selection. The quotes presented in this report are a representation of the various viewpoints and opinions expressed by many or all of the interviewees. These quotes were selected as they best illustrate the perspectives, experiences, and ideas discussed during interviews but do not necessarily reflect the views of every workshop participant.

RESULTS

Behavior Change

Ninety-four percent (94%) of interviewees described an actual behavior change they made to improve their own emotional wellbeing and/or that of someone else based on participation in the CEWs. The most frequent behavior changes mentioned were improving self-care practices and recommending the workshop to friends and family. Some respondents noted their participation in the workshop had been very recent and therefore had not yet made changes, but had plans for behavior change in the near future.

Improving One's Own Emotional Wellbeing

The most commonly discussed behavior change following the CEWs was improving self-care. Many self-care strategies were described, including using stress balls, diet and exercise, breathing techniques, and taking time for oneself. Additionally, many participants mentioned trying to have a more positive attitude.

"I've reached out to find a counselor so I can talk about some things like grief and stress."

"I've definitely taken a step back in the workplace... For the last two weeks I've declined several different projects just so I can have some time for myself. That felt really good."

"I have actually started taking personal walks myself during the day... taking a 15, 20 minute walk every day by myself so I can just be present in the walk and not think of anything else or stress or anything like that."

"I'm trying to work on [recognizing triggers] as well [as] just to be aware of how other people's actions can affect my attitude."

Improving The Emotional Wellbeing of Others

Many participants mentioned that they recommended the CEWs to friends and family, or shared what they learned about toxic stress and trauma with others. Respondents also mentioned sharing self-care and stress reduction strategies. Some also discussed trying to "change the question" from "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?".

"I generally talk about it with people... [I tell them]... We've got to take care of ourselves. We have to set boundaries and we have to leave work at work and we have to make some time just for ourselves to breathe and do different things. Just getting that balance and boundaries."

*“I’m trying to make some of my colleagues aware... like reminding them, are you okay?
Do you need a few minutes to yourself?”*

*“I have talked to my granddaughter... Together we’re learning how to relax...The
workshop opened my eyes up just a little bit more. It’s not just taking care of yourself.
It’s maybe taking care of someone that you love also.”*

*“... And if they want to talk, don’t say what’s wrong with you. Say what happened... Because if you
say what’s wrong with you, they decide to fight you even more like what you mean what’s wrong with
me. But if you say what happened, that gives them a chance to release that and they can kind of talk
it out with you.”*

Future Plans for Change/Impact

Some participants indicated that they had not yet made behavior changes but discussed changes they were planning for the future. These plans included creating a peer support group, starting a self-care workshop for teachers and students, as well as recommending self-care and stress reduction strategies to friends and co-workers.

*“We are looking to do a support group, a peer support group for after school to help
others to deal with social engagement to where the kids are able to be more sociable,
be acceptable with each other.”*

*“We were going to start with doing a self-care workshop for the school staff so we’re all
more aware. Then possibly doing one for the students... how they can take care of
themselves and hopefully once we’re all aware and trauma-informed maybe we’ll be
able to communicate that information or inspire some folks in the community to become
more trauma-informed or trauma aware.”*

“I was going to recommend squeeze balls to one of my office mates.”

Attitude Toward Trauma and Toxic Stress

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of participants demonstrated a change in attitude about someone they know who has experienced toxic stress and/or trauma based on participation in the CEWs. Of those who did not endorse a change in attitude, 50% said that their attitude had already been positive before the workshop, but their existing attitudes and knowledge were reinforced by the CEWs.

Changing Attitudes

Most participants noted that the workshop had changed their attitudes or outlook toward those who may have experienced toxic stress and/or trauma. Examples of how the workshops impacted attitudes are presented below.

“I’ve taken [toxic stress] into consideration when I’m talking with our students at the school... knowing that our children are experiencing a lot more normal stressors than most folks and being mindful of that helps me to understand when they’re acting out that it’s not at me. Just because you’re being bad you’re acting out because of some life experiences. Now that I see that I make referrals to a social worker at the school, social workers at the after-school program.”

“My uncle’s a drug addict. [My mom] has been going through a lot of stuff. Being a drug addict a lot of times people are so quick to judge them because of your habits and I said... [to my mom] not to judge...critically for what [they’re] doing now but to always ask what happened.”

“It really helped me to look at things different and most definitely sit down and re-evaluate things instead of jumping to a conclusion and here it is someone could be having some trauma going on in they life was causing them to act out or have a attitude.”

“You normally like look at the problem versus what happened to that individual that caused them to be like that. And ask them a question is... When you ask that question it make things come out where they can see how to move forward.”

Reiteration of Existing Attitudes

Of the participants who did not feel the CEWs changed their attitudes towards those who may have experienced trauma, half said that they had already had high awareness and positive attitudes about trauma.

“I don’t think [my attitude] was [changed] because of the workshop because I was already aware of how... St. Louis Public Schools did a training at the beginning of the year and so I was already aware of how trauma can affect the brain and how it affects us all individually.”

“I would say I’m not a person who always necessarily sees the bad in everyone. I think I’m generally a positive person when it comes to people anyway. So I don’t know if I changed that much.”

“I have grandchildren at home and both of them suffered major trauma in their lives. I know what they went through because they’ve both gone through therapy, counseling trying to get over this. So I know what it is... I was already aware of it.”

Workshop Strengths and Suggestions

Overall, feedback about the CEWs was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees felt the information presented was important and that the presenters were very knowledgeable. Some suggestions for how to improve the workshops included varying the times and locations offered as well as incorporating new activities. Finally, some participants suggested methods for increasing community involvement in the workshops including hanging flyers and offering incentives like food and door prizes.

Strengths

Many participants were very pleased with the workshop and complimented the presenters’ demeanor and relatability. They noted the presentation was informative, eye-opening, and should be shared with others.

“Our facilitator, she was just really excellent. She was very engaging. She presented the information in a way that was memorable and that we all could understand no matter what level of trauma that you had experienced and she was relatable to all kinds of people. So whether we had some older people in our group and I think we had a couple of parents, so she was relatable to all of those folks in the room. And I think that is important.”

“Your speaker is really, really good. I couldn’t help but feel like I know her from somewhere because she’s just so down to earth and so personable and she really had the professional whip on the course that she teaches. That’s a positive. I just wish more people could be exposed to that.”

“That presenter was probably the best I’ve seen in a while just far as knowledge and a people person. She welcomed you in; she was aware a lot people may know some of the information. Sometimes you get people to do presentations and they speak above who they’re speaking to as far as the knowledge... That’s one of the reasons I decided to come back every day because I wanted to try to grasp as much of it that I could. She encouraged it. [And] You’re more than welcome back. I like that.”

Suggestions for Improvement

When asked how the workshops could be improved, many participants indicated the workshops did not need improvement. A few respondents said the workshop needed more time. Others suggested adding different activities and varying the times and locations offered. One participant suggested setting “ground rules” for the workshop.

“Don’t limit it; don’t limit the knowledge just to certain generations or areas or zip codes. I think you guys should open it up and expand it and make it diverse to allow people. It should include the people... I wish you guys could go and present to the social workers and to the counselors and to the principals or to the nurses or to whatever it may be.”

“I think if there were some small group discussions, maybe some roleplaying that would be helpful. The real impact of stress, toxic stress and trauma, if they have some real life examples that would be great.”

“Normally when I have workshops dealing with people’s emotions with their mental states, I usually talk about how we create a safe environment where people feel comfortable in their sharing... you have an idea of ground rules you want as a presenter but then other folks would also chime in and put on the board some ground rules as a group.”

“The only thing I would like is we actually had a little bit more time to go over everything... it’s a lot to cover and I would say the little amount of time the speaker had, she covered a lot. But it was still; give her a little bit more time to actually go over it.”

Increasing Workshop Participation

Participants showed an interest in spreading the CEWs to different communities and populations. Suggestions for increasing workshop participation in the CEWs included providing incentives such as food and door prizes, and varying the time of day that workshops were offered.

“Whenever you offer something to give to people, it could be a gift card. It could be food; it could be a snack; it could be something, you tend to have a better outcome and a better crowd... And you have to remember do not have it around like the first of the month because that’s when a lot of people get their checks. So try to have it where people might need that meal that day.”

“Door prizes and food is always a draw. I notice that we do have food at the programs usually. But I don’t know if they have raffles and door prizes and stuff like that.”

“I’m not an expert but I would say maybe later in the evening possibly. At least one of the days get people who could make it that day give them some options that day and probably one in the morning during the week as well. Try to cover all work shifts.”

DISCUSSION

Interviews conducted with CEW participants indicated a high overall level of satisfaction with the workshops. Several respondents indicated the workshops were “eye-opening” and they were also impressed with the presenters. They felt the information that was presented was timely and important. Of those who participated in the interviews, 94% reported making a behavior change that improved their own emotional wellbeing and/or that of someone else as a result of attending the workshops. Respondents most frequently mentioned improving self-care practices and recommending the workshop to friends and family. When participants were asked whether their attitude had changed toward someone they knew who experienced toxic stress and/or trauma, 68% of the respondents reported a change in attitude. Of those who did not indicate a change, 50% mentioned that their attitude had already been positive before the workshop and their existing attitudes and knowledge were reinforced during the CEWs. Many participants did not have any recommendations for improving the workshops. The few improvements discussed included varying the times and locations offered, as well as incorporating new activities. Lastly, respondents provided suggestions for increasing participation in the workshops, hanging flyers and offering incentives like food and door prizes.

Collectively, the reported impacts of the CEWs signify that the participants of the workshops have taken steps to improve their own emotional wellbeing, as well as others, and their attitude changed toward someone they knew who experienced toxic stress and/or trauma. These results, while positive, must be understood in the context of the intervention and evaluation methods. Interviews took place shortly after the participants attended the CEWs. As a result, respondents may have become highly motivated following the workshops and may revert back to less sustainable behaviors over time. Additionally, sustained behavior change may take a long time to achieve. Therefore, it is important to ensure evaluation efforts are continued for a period of time after the completion of the intervention. Lastly, it’s important to balance qualitative evaluation methods with quantitative measures. Qualitative data provides rich insight into understanding the process of change from participants’ personal experiences, but quantitative data allow results to be gathered numerically and analyzed statistically creating less bias. Nonetheless, even with the short time between intervention and evaluation efforts and the use of only qualitative methods, the results from these evaluation activities strongly suggest that the Alive and Well Communities has positively impacted CEW participants.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A

Phone Script for AWSTL's Community Empowerment Workshops

Good MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING. My name is _____, and I am calling on behalf of Alive and Well Communities. I'm calling today because we are gathering information about the impact of the Community Empowerment Workshops that you attended. You provided your name and telephone number and indicated that it was okay to contact you with a few questions about how your participation in the workshop affected you. Is this a good time to talk?

If "NO," ask to schedule a time to call back.

If "YES," continue with script.

Before we get started I just want to share some information with you. The details shared in this conversation will be used to enrich our understanding of the impact of the Alive and Well's Community Empowerment Workshops. With your permission, your story and/or quotes that you share with us may be included in reports, briefs, and other project related materials. However, no identifying information (for example names and locations) will be provided so the information will not be linked back to you or your family or friends. Is it okay to use your story and/or quotes?

If "NO," thank and terminate.

If "YES," continue.

If YES, Thank you for sharing your story. With your permission, I will be recording the audio from this phone call; it will not be shared with anyone but members of the evaluation team. The recording will be used so we can ensure that we understand your responses and accurately capture everything that you are saying. The recording will be transcribed and analyzed and no names will be used. The transcription will be securely stored on password protected computers and destroyed after the project is over. Is it okay to record our conversation?

If "NO", since I will not be recording this conversation I will be taking notes during our call so I may ask you to repeat yourself. This will just be to ensure that I accurately report the information you share. *Continue with script.*

If "YES", continue with script.

Before we begin do you have any questions?

IF "NO", continue with script.

IF "YES", answer questions and then continue with script. Turn on recorder.

1. Do you have a specific story about taking steps to improve your emotional wellbeing as a result of the Community Empowerment Workshop?
 - a. [if yes] Can you provide an example?
 - b. [probe] Examples of steps taken might include self-care (physical, emotional, social, spiritual, mental, financial)

2. Do you have a specific story about taking steps to improve the emotional wellbeing of someone else as a result of the workshop?
 - a. [if yes] Can you provide an example?
 - b. [probe] Examples of steps taken might include self-care (physical, emotional, social, spiritual, mental, financial)

3. As a result of the workshop, have you changed your attitude toward someone you know who may have experienced toxic stress or trauma?
 - a. [if yes] Can you provide an example?

4. Is there anything else you would like to share about how the workshop has impacted you?

5. Are there ways AWSTL could change or improve the Community Empowerment workshops?

6. How many AWSTL Community Empowerment workshops have you attended?

7. What zip code do you live in?

That's all the questions I have for you today. Thank you for participating in this survey. This information will help us improve Alive and Well's Community Empowerment Workshops. You can find more resources at www.aliveandwellstl.com and if you think of anything else you would like to share please give me a call at 314-479-4686 or email me at Rachel.Kryah@mimh.edu.

Have a good day!