

A Community Journey Towards Resilience

GETTING STARTED. In spring 2010, Robin Saenger, then Vice Mayor of Tarpon Springs, first encountered the [Adverse Childhood Experience](#) study. It was immediately clear to her that many of the social problems elected officials deal with daily have roots in violence and trauma. She reasoned that if multiple problems have a common cause, they may have common solutions — and the initiative to make Tarpon Springs a trauma-informed city was born.

As Vice Mayor, Saenger understood that citizen participation was key to community change. From the beginning, Tarpon residents joined city officials and committed professionals in shaping the new initiative. A small group started meeting regularly to learn more about trauma and resilience and to develop a strategy for change. By fall 2010, the library announced the purchase of new collections on trauma for adults and children and a community education day had been planned.

Over 250 people came to the first event. Soon afterwards, the initiative was named Peace4Tarpon (P4T), a website and Facebook page were developed, a local TV station featured a series of interviews about the project, and the City Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding to engage with the effort. Since then, trauma-informed practices have taken hold in a variety of organizations. Monthly Steering Committee meetings are open to anyone who wants to participate, and new people and organizations are constantly getting involved.

The *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* (SAMHSA) has a long-standing commitment to addressing the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. The **SAMHSA Spotlight Series** highlights different approaches to building trauma-informed, resilient communities. A setting is [trauma-informed](#) if the people in that setting *realize* the widespread prevalence of trauma, *recognize* the signs and symptoms, *respond* in an understanding and supportive manner, and *resist* doing further harm.

The goals of the **Spotlight** series are to:

1. Highlight innovative approaches to trauma-informed community change.
2. Provide information to other communities interested in becoming trauma-informed.



POPULATION: 23,000

FOUNDED: in the early 1870's by settlers, including adventurers, farmers, artists and fishermen

Oldest city in Pinellas County

Known as the Sponge Capital of the World, the industry was well established by 1890. In the next two decades, over 500 Greek sponge divers arrived

Highest percentage of Greek Americans in any U.S. city; known for Greek culture and religious events

Vibrant arts community and home to world-class Leepa Rattner Museum of Art located at St. Petersburg College

Natural resources include beaches, parks, barrier islands, bayous, and the Anclote River

Photo credit: Sue Thomas



The Change Process

FOCUS ON OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN LOCAL AGENCIES

P4T describes their planning process as “organic.” That translates, in part, to capitalizing on inspiration and opportunities wherever they arise. In early 2013, the minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church was inspired by the prayer flags at a Buddhist festival. She proposed organizing a “peace flags” event to promote P4T. Three months later, 4,000 peace flags were strung together between palm trees, fluttering in the warm breeze, and thousands of people were learning about trauma-informed communities.

Volunteers are encouraged to “Bring whatever piece/peace they can.”

Hundreds of Tarpon Springs residents had played a role. An art therapist helped the minister organize the event. A local hotel donated sheets to be cut into flag-sized pieces. Interns from St. Leo’s College did outreach, taking materials to the Farmer’s Market, the library, local businesses, churches and schools and collecting completed flags. The Mayor issued a proclamation in support of the event. The City Manager overcame a local ordinance prohibiting hanging materials in public spaces by deeming the project a public art installation. A Unitarian church quilting circle sewed flags together, and volunteers and city employees spent a day stringing them up. The project was timed to coincide with an annual Arts Festival which attracts thousands to the area. As pedestrians and motorists stopped to observe, P4T was there explaining why it is so important to address trauma and demonstrating the power of community involvement.



Volunteers at Peace Flag Event

The [Pinellas Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition’s](#) (PERC) journey to becoming trauma-informed also started with one person. Denise Hughes Conlon, PERC’s clinical director, was inspired by what she heard at the P4T Steering Committee in 2010. When she added the ACE assessment into PERC evaluations, the results were startling. Out of a possible high score of 10, the sex offenders in her program had an average ACE score of 9; women, 7; individuals with substance use issues, 6; and batterers 5. Clearly this was a direction worth pursuing. By 2013, she had incorporated the [Seeking Safety](#) curriculum into the substance abuse program, begun addressing trauma among sex offenders, made broad changes to the policy and procedures manual, trained the entire staff, and developed a tool to assess their progress. Plans for the future include the development of a peer support group and the adaptation of a SAMHSA anger management curriculum to include trauma-informed principles and practices.

Spotlight on Implementation

ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT.

P4T was founded on the premise that every citizen has a gift to offer to the community. This “asset-based” approach permeates all activities. One of P4T’s first steps was to develop social marketing materials. Posters were hung throughout the city, and window stickers reading “Peace4Tarpon – Good for Business” (or “Good for Children” or “Good for Families”) started appearing. It wasn’t long before there was a “buzz” in the community, and people started offering to help. People contribute professional skills or share personal passions. For example, a member of the local fire department became the pro bono videographer. In another example, P4T supports the efforts of a retired media specialist who organizes volunteers to read to children in the park. Ripples expand outwards as individuals take the message to their own networks. In the past 6 months, 2 additional community organizations have requested assistance in becoming trauma-informed, the Unitarian Universalist Church and the Probation Office.



CROSS SECTOR COLLABORATION. Members of P4T do not just collaborate, they share resources. If one person or agency expresses a need, chances are good that someone else will meet it. When Suncoast mental health center wanted to place therapists in a high-risk neighborhood, the Housing Authority offered two apartments, rent-free. When a social worker described a family about to be evicted with no way to move their belongings, a P4T member with a truck offered to help. This spontaneous sharing reflects the belief that community problems are everyone’s responsibility.

FINANCING. P4T has no paid staff and no ongoing funding. They believe that too much money too soon can create competition instead of interdependence, and that resources will be found when needed. For P4T, the most important question is not “Where can we find funds?” but “How can we use existing resources differently?” So far the strategy has worked. For example, the first Community Day was supported through a small grant from the Rotary Club, pro bono speakers, and food from local restaurants. In another example, over 1,000 community members have participated in a free 4-hour workshop on Critical Incidents in Trauma Resolution offered by a local psychologist.

SAMHSA’S IMPLEMENTATION DOMAINS

SAMHSA has identified 10 domains that are essential to the implementation of trauma-informed approaches in both organizations and communities. Domains highlighted in this document are indicated by arrows. For further information, see [SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#).

- ▶ **1. GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP** communicate and support the vision of a trauma-informed community.
2. Policy is reshaped to be trauma-informed.
3. Physical environment promotes safety and resilience.
- ▶ **4. ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT** of all citizens and organizations is encouraged; no group is excluded.
- ▶ **5. CROSS SECTOR COLLABORATION** is the norm.
6. Screening, assessment, and treatment are in place for identifying and responding to trauma.
7. Training and workforce development are available for organizations and for the general public.
8. Monitoring and quality assurance processes are used uniformly to inform and improve services.
- ▶ **9. FINANCING** mechanisms make trauma-informed programs and trauma specific services sustainable.
10. Evaluation data are collected from a variety of perspectives.

Tarpon Springs Highlights

- In 2014 Tarpon Elementary School raised its performance rating from F to C+. P4T contributed to this progress by providing mentors, tutors, a uniform bank, and home visits.
- P4T publishes a bi-annual resource guide for families, including everything from food banks to recreational opportunities. The guide is published in Spanish and English and is also available online.
- A professor and graduate students at the University of Florida are conducting an evaluation of P4T at no cost to the project.
- St. Petersburg College in Tarpon Springs is currently developing a certificate program in trauma-informed approaches as a first step towards a possible degree program.
- A breakfast held in 2015 for all Tarpon Springs school principals was the first step towards district-wide systems change. Afterwards, one middle school made a commitment to becoming trauma-informed and several others are exploring the possibility.

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE: The number of individuals and organizations donating time and resources to P4T has exploded. A partial list of community partners includes 4 churches, 4 restaurants, 4 small businesses, 5 government agencies, 3 colleges, 1 civic group, and 25 key individuals who donate an estimated \$177,000 annually in volunteer hours. Hundreds of others also contribute to specific projects.

COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY SHARING: Inspiration for P4T came from the ACE study, trauma survivors sharing their personal stories, and the *Trauma Resolution Center* in Miami. New information and ideas were shared by visitors to Tarpon Springs from communities doing similar work, including Greenfield, MA; Ann Arbor, MI; and Sitka, AK. P4T has been the direct inspiration for several other communities, including Kansas City; Warwick, RI; Meadville/Crawford County, PA; and Gainesville, FL.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Peace4Tarpon

<http://www.peace4tarpon.org/>

Peace4Gainesville

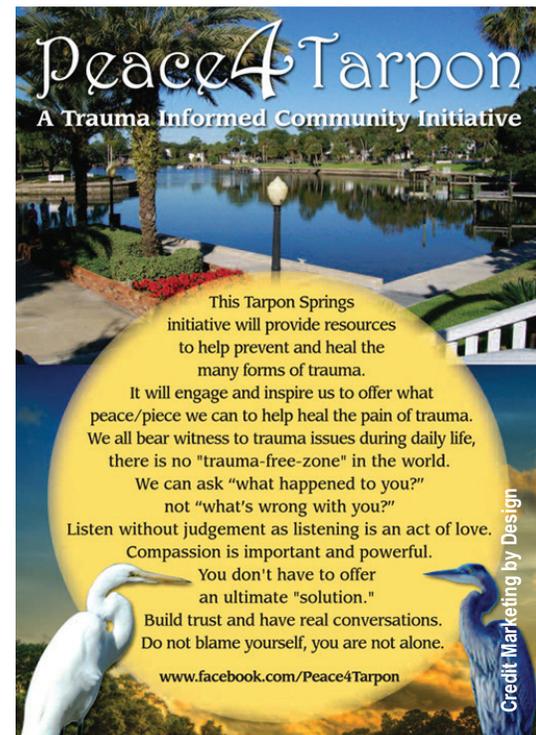
<http://www.peace4gainesville.org/>

Trauma Resolution Center

<http://www.traumaresolutioncenter.net/>

Asset Based Community Development

<http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>



Social marketing poster designed by community members.

