"There's Never a Time Where I Felt Like They Wasn't Helping Me": Trauma-Informed Approaches in a Music-Based Creative Youth Development Program

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Creative youth development (CYD) programs, which bridge artistic expression with positive youth development, serve youth from diverse backgrounds in community settings. Trauma-informed approaches (TIA), most commonly applied in clinical settings, offer a relevant framework for creating safe, supportive environments for program recipients, staff, and collaborators. To date, however, there is limited actionable guidance operationalizing TIA in CYD programs. This study examined how TIA manifested in the program experiences of interest-holders from Beyond the Bars (BTB), a music-based CYD program in Philadelphia, PA. We conducted a qualitative secondary analysis of interview data from 16 BTB students, four staff, and six community partners, collected from January to June 2022 during a prior participatory evaluation of BTB. Guided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) conceptual model of TIA and implementation domains, we used codebook thematic analysis to identify specific practices through which BTB embedded TIA. Findings elucidated concrete strategies through which BTB currently integrated or could prospectively integrate TIA across five organizational domains: (a) culturally relevant program design, (b) program leadership and operations, (c) student safety and engagement practices, (d) cross-sector collaboration, and (e) monitoring and evaluation. Limitedly, we also identified system-level challenges stemming from resource constraints and operating programming in settings less focused on youth autonomy. Our results demonstrate how numerous examples of TIA are integrated into the organizational culture and program delivery of a music-based CYD program. Youth development practitioners, program developers, and methodologists may look to this study as a resource to concretize TIA implementation and evaluation.

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