



Episode 18: Trauma Recovery Centers: A Comprehensive Response for Victims of Violent Crime

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Intro:

Welcome to the NCJA Podcast. This podcast series explores promising practices, provides guidance on strategic planning, and discusses how the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program or Byrne JAG contributes to improving justice systems across the country. We hope you enjoy it.

Gillian Caplan:

Hello everyone. My name is Gillian Caplan and I'm a program manager at the National Criminal Justice Association. On this episode of the NCJA Podcast, I am speaking with Shakyra Diaz, Chief of Federal Advocacy at the Alliance for Safety and Justice, and Stephen Massey, Director of City Lookout Trauma Recovery Center to discuss trauma recovery centers, a model to support victims of violence. Thank you both so much for joining us today. I would love if you could start by telling us a little bit more about your backgrounds and then we'll dive right into the questions.

Shakyra Diaz:

Perfect. Thank you Gillian. Glad to be here. Shakyra Diaz. I am the Chief of Federal Advocacy for the Alliance for Safety and Justice. I am a mom. I actually started professionally as an educator and was very fortunate to work at my old high school and trio programs upon finishing up my undergrad, and I was encountering the world and seeing it very differently than I did when I was a young person. As an educator, I saw that there were differences in how my students were able to access support. I felt unprepared in providing the support that my students and families needed, not because I didn't have the desire or that their families didn't have the desire. There were just so many challenges in the way which got me interested in policy. I wanted to understand why is it that students in my school had metal detectors but did not have soap in the bathroom, for example.

I started doing policy work, became a registered lobbyist focusing specifically on reform issues centered around justice reforms as well as education. And that led me to the Alliance for Safety and Justice. I have also lived in Cleveland the majority of my life. I am a victim of crime. I'm a survivor. I've known over 40 people who've lost their lives to violence. So I understand this intimately from my own personal experience, but also understand this from a macro policy perspective. And was really driven into this work out of a desire for better support for young Shakyra's and better support for my students, my former students. So that's what motivates me, ensuring that people have the support they need when they need it. Thank you.

Stephen Massey:

Hi, and my name is Stephen Massey and I'm the director of the City Lookout Trauma Recovery Center in Springfield, Ohio. Population size, a little under 100,000 and I am very honored to be here. And a little bit about my background is a, wow, it's been a long journey. I started off wanting to save the world as most people in the helping profession did, and I think some of the first acts of service for me was working in group home settings with youth service, boys, a group home, and working under some champions who really kind of helped me understand what it was all about, and each phase of the



journey meet with different turn. And from there I started doing some direct care work. Home settings were honoring people who had disabilities. And then from there I went into AOD work working in addictions and recovery work.

And from there I was pivoted to a direction working in the mental health field and behavioral health and transitioning over to counseling and advocacy and then also doing some work with reentry, working with restored citizens as an advocate to help them advocate for faces that they would normally have a lot of hard barriers to face to navigate the systems and come back in community and join us as neighbors after doing their time. And also advocating for a lot of those individuals who should not have been incarcerated as long. So having done that work, sometimes I forget all the things I've been honored and blessed to be a part of. And now in our center, we've done a lot of trauma work over time, and we'll talk about that here on the podcast, has led me to being the director of one of several trauma recovery centers in the United States.

Gillian Caplan:

Well, we are definitely honored to have you both with us today. So thank you so much for joining us. Let's dive right in. So to lay the foundation for this conversation. Shakyra, can you describe what trauma recovery centers or what we can refer to them as TRCs are and the different components of this program?

Shakyra Diaz:

Yes, I will. Thank you for that. So little context here. The Alliance for Safety and Justice is a multi-state organization that is working specifically to reduce the reliance on incarceration and reengage in and increase investments for proven best practices that stop crime from happening in the first place. One of the pivotal programs that we immediately realized needed to grow across the nation are trauma recovery centers. The origin story of trauma recovery centers, they started out in San Francisco. The founder, Dr. Alicia Boccellari, was having a conversation with an emergency room doctor about gun violence victims. And the doctor indicated to her, We can sew them up but we can't make them better. The idea, the profound statement that came out of that is that there has to be a healing that happens that is beyond physical. Right. And the Trauma Recovery Center was initiated in San Francisco.

Our organization worked to grow that model around the country. We currently have 41 trauma recovery centers across the nation and there are specific reasons why they exist. Some may be wondering, well there are victim services like people may be thinking that exists and it does. However, two-thirds of crime victims do not get the help that they need overwhelmingly, and often the help that exists is not accessible or crime victims are not aware of. In communities experience repeat victimization or violence that support just is almost nonexistent. Part of the way that we understand violence and we know more about violence today than we did 20 years ago or 30 years ago for example, but some of the impact of unaddressed trauma is lasting. It can lead to the loss of stability. People may not be able to go to work or maintain their homes or keep a home.

Coping with drugs or alcohol when they're unable to access support, that's one of the avenues that can lead somebody into the justice system. Also, a key component is that trauma is intergenerational. If parents are struggling, that's going to impact children. The other piece that is often really key is that crime victims who do not get support often experience repeat victimization or contact with the justice system. They become the person who's causing harm to someone else down the road. We often see this



sometimes in sentencing phases of trial where you get to hear about all the horrible things that happened to someone when they were young and then you're seeing this person right as they're about to be sentenced. This work that the trauma recovery centers do intercede in that. And the goal here is that there is... It's not a lost cause. When somebody experiences harm or violence, when they witness harm or violence, the story doesn't have to end there. With proper support and investment that is really centered around that individual.

I often think about this, I'm a former educator, so I think about this as in the context of IEPs, individual education plans, which children have in schools when they need support. This is an individual healing plan where the crime victim is able to work in partnership with the Trauma Recovery Center professionals on a healing plan that gets them back on track so that they are stable, where they're not relying on drugs or alcohol, where they are able to stay employed, where they are able to stay housed. All of those things are ways to stop crime from happening and it really is central to the understanding that crisis can become crime if we don't intercede. And this is a great way of interceding.

Gillian Caplan:

Thank you so much for that. And I know you may have mentioned this before, but I think it's important to mention it again, How many TRCs are there currently, nationwide and in what states are they located? And then once you answer that, can you also tell us how the majority of these centers are funded? Is it state, federal, private funding?

Shakyra Diaz:

So currently there are 41 trauma recovery centers in the country. California, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida, Iowa. Stephen, feel free to jump in here.

Stephen Massey:

Yes, New Jersey and New York. Yes.

Shakyra Diaz:

And they're still growing. We're we're working with attorney generals across the country to grow the model. When we talk about funding, funding is coming primarily from VOCA. We also know that trauma recovery centers, in some cases are able to access either state-based resources or philanthropic support, but it doesn't match the need because of the level of victimization and the fact that many victims of crime are not able to access support for a number of different reasons. It's important to know that trauma recovery centers are very much crime victims centered. So what is unique about trauma recovery centers from other mental health services is that sometimes the services that are existing or in place are not practical for victims of crime.

A lot of mental health services require the person, the client to go to them. Trauma recovery centers, come to the victim and get them to a place where they are able to just be out and about more. They guarantee 16 therapeutic sessions. They ensure that support is provided cross systemically. For example, a parent who's a victim of a crime may need someone to speak to their children's school to let them know what's going on, some of the challenges that are happening. A crime victim who is now



mobilely challenged may need additional support that someone who is a sexual assault victim may or may not need. So it's very unique and individualized.

Gillian Caplan:

So a tailored way to help with healing is what I'm hearing.

Shakya Diaz:

Exactly.

Gillian Caplan:

Well, thinking more locally and turning towards Springfield, Ohio, specifically, what was the process from soup to nuts of standing up the City Lookout Trauma Recovery Center?

Stephen Massey:

Yes. I'll just backtrack real quick to fill in what Shakya had mentioned because it's funny, these things are growing like wildfire and we're very excited. So I know we've got Southern California, Northern California, Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Florida, and I think Michigan has recently joined. And we have been in conversation with other states as they talk to us about how our TRCs are running and what the process was to start, especially if the demographics are similar. So we will see other states join this movement as well. But on a local level, the story started with... We were invited to Columbus here in Springfield, Ohio. We had a standing working relation with our now governor who was then the attorney general, Mike DeWine. And it was proposed to the attorney general's office through victim services, along with ASJ collaborating with other stakeholders and leaders across the country that they brought in who we call the mother, Dr. Alicia Boccellari at UC San Francisco.

And we were all invited to a meeting where we were told that, hey, this is a model that's viable to change the game for serving survivors. And we see that you're already doing a lot of the work. So I'd start there with saying on a local level, we were already doing some of the work. We weren't a trauma recovery center, but we were doing a lot of trauma work, a lot of counseling, advocacy, working with domestic violence survivors, even offenders. Working on both sides of the scope because we know in order to make a community whole, we can't just disregard one group of people, we have to work with our community and that's what trauma recovery centers represent. So we were able to really go back and forth between working with California, leaning on all their expertise, asking them a ton of questions and making sure we put the pieces in place.

So we started off with developing our staff, a team of nine clinicians, four crime victims advocates, an outreach coordinator and a director. And we started to put the pieces together and we started looking at what other TRCs in California were also doing and the ones that were developing locally in Ohio. And we all were taking pages from each other's playbook. And from that we were able to put in place a lot of support working with local people like the courts, our victim witness programs, our shelters, housing partners, law enforcement, working with all types of people who could support us. If I could take a minute, I have this cheat sheet that I use. And really what it does, it helps to give you the idea of what happens in the life of someone who works for a TRC. And this can range from us doing advocacy work,



doing funeral arrangements, court accompany, working with youth, crime victims compensation, doctor's appointments, visitation, working with children, all types of resources, helping people back into trades, colleges, safety planning.

And I could go down this list, so I might save some of it for some of the other questions. But if you think about that, it would entail getting the community partners involved, like stores, resources, auto dealerships, auto mechanics, transportation, safety planning, working around getting cameras, phones, making sure families are stable, making sure that their needs are met, getting them to counseling. So there's a lot of moving pieces, and each TRC is going to look different. Ours is a community based one, so we're not connected to a larger hospital system, which gives us a lot of flexibility to tailor our needs for our survivors to what our community looks like.

Shakya Diaz:

Just to jump in on that a little bit, I think it's important all the services and support that Stephen outlined, which is what? The level of support that TRCs provide crime victims, it really helps affirm this fact, you are more than your victimization. So it looks at the whole person and the needs that they have to get them on track often above and beyond where they were. So it's meeting someone where they're at and taking them to a level of stability that they may or may not have experienced prior to victimization, which is why it's important to have those partnerships to ensure that there is coordination with other systems, which is all integral part of the model and unique.

Gillian Caplan:

You are more than your victimization. I think that is a takeaway that we should all probably take from this. And Stephen, you've touched on what stakeholders that you've had engaged, which is essentially the entire community. But how did you ensure that those stakeholders, those right people were at the table?

Stephen Massey:

A lot of meetings, a lot of engagement, a lot of strategy and a lot of just consistency with staying the course and making sure that... We wanted to help them understand what this model could do for the community as a whole. Making sure that we invited them in the space to do what they do best. If we talk about our child advocacy center, they're already in place. They do great work working with children and families around advocacy when it's related to victimization or stability or just resetting or just lifting them up, elevating them. And that's just one partner of many working with our victims witness department, helping them understand that their role and scope is similar, what we do, but we do a lot of different things and that we can actually take the warm handle and also we can help them in forming the trust fibers where the system has failed a lot of survivors through.

Not to say anything bad about victims witness services through the courts, but I always say this, that many times where we were called for support when there was a victim or survivor, it was the grand jury. So now we have this viable relationship and partnership with the courts and victims witness services. And this is just one example, as Shakya mentioned, that we can help all survivors and this is not a one and done. And that we can also help them understand that you have rights and you can exercise them the way that you feel comfortable with. You can be honored, but also too, we will walk with you and make sure that you're not exploited anymore.



Shakyra Diaz:

Super important. The justice system may have different goals, but the TRCs central goal here is the stability of the crime victim. So that's always going to be central.

Gillian Caplan:

And I know that you mentioned an array of services that a victim can receive from the TRC, but could you just give us kind of a laundry list of the types of services that someone can receive from your TRC and then also who is eligible to receive them?

Stephen Massey:

Yeah, I'm going back to my list again. I believe this list is really... We've been in presentations and I've had people email me and say, "Could you just send me that pamphlet you were holding?" And I'm thinking, Yes I can. So I share it with them. And so there are things on this list that you don't really think about. This is the life of a person who has value and this is important to them. One that you probably wouldn't even expect to hear on this cast is that pet safe, making sure that a survivor's pet is safe and that we can take care of them because that's family to them. The intake process, various forms of therapy, survivor-centered services, notaries, in-home advocacy, registering them with VINE victims information identification, which gives them a know and where that person that may have exploited them is if they want to know.

And just giving them that comfort, housing, navigating old wounds to make sure that they don't have to worry about the burden of something weighing over them that will prohibit them from healing and being safe and being able to move forward and feeling like they don't have the right to even be a survivor. Outreach initiatives, locks, cameras, personal items, housing, food, doctor's appointments, once again, protection orders, legal aid, helping them with their voice and stories through maybe a speaker's bureau process down the road when there's an opportunity for them to feel like they want to tell their story and be empowered, have a platform to be elevated. Working with landlords, just helping them with equity across the board, translation services, coaching, working with data sets to help them understand that they can go into a deeper level of survivorship.

I have one survivor, he wrote a book and he has his own 501C3 and he's a very bright young man. Well, his brother got shot and he has his own 501C3 where he worked youth and through the TRC when I was sitting with him at a point in time where he was in the fetal position as he started to heal, these were some of the dreams he had. And today he's rocking the house and I just get to sit back and watch the show. College trades, there's just so many things that we can offer for survivors on their healing journey that goes way beyond just the basic, we want you to feel better.

Shakyra Diaz:

Stephen, that story you shared about that crime survivor, it makes me think of all of the things that could have gone wrong. A lot of what we see as community violence sometimes can stem from retaliation. So investing in this young man whose brother was a crime victim, one, helped elevate him, prevented him from retaliating, and instead he started his own non-profit. That's the kind of work that we want to see multiplied across the country because it is this restoration of hope. And that's how we believe we elevate safety for all across the country, is by restoring hope and providing that level of



support. Because when we leave someone to their own devices when they are the most vulnerable and they feel alone and abandoned, the outcome of that is not a good one. And we all feel the outcome of it.

Stephen Massey:

Yes, I agree.

Gillian Caplan:

And it's understanding that by helping the individual, we're helping our entire community. And that's really what it sounds like you all are doing with these TRCs. You've given us one amazing success story. I wanted to ask a little bit more about some other successes that you may have had, but also some challenges that you experienced when implementing your TRC or others across the country.

Stephen Massey:

You can't really put limitations on what a TRC will become once you get the work started and you do it, and you start with this process of vision and moving into direction of what's next. And so a couple other highlights is that we've been able to work with law enforcement, do debriefings after critical incidents where we've had some mass shootings. We've worked with Oregon district shooting survivors. But in the mass shooting debriefings where we work with law enforcement, first responders, we've been able to do group counseling with them. Also, advocacy to help them, help the people who are trusted to protect our community. Another highlight which is trending is that we've been able to do a lot of work in schools over the last two years through our TRC. Now we're working with youth and adolescents. We're actually going to one school where we bring in an age appropriate curriculum and it's tailored to help draw survivors and the school loves it.

Now the TRC are a part of school systems and youth. So now we're looking at intervention and prevention for our young people who have a lot of trauma or who've experienced it or even to help them understand that you don't have to go into those spaces if you're not already in those spaces. It's just a lot going on. If I were to say some of the challenges that we've had here locally that we know this model is designed, one of the strong components is that we want to impact people who've been in a trauma one and two hospital settings.

And since we're a community based and we're in a city that really doesn't grasp that concept fully because we're not part of the [inaudible 00:25:14] we're partner of it, we've had to continue to fight to get them to understand the value in what we do and how we can help serve people who need to be dignified after they've been a victim of a crime. But we're working on it and we've had some success there, but I'd like to see more and I will continue to stay hopeful and work through that.

Gillian Caplan:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I have no doubt you'll be successful. As a final question, for state administering agencies who are interested in using Byrne JAG or VOCA dollars to fund TRCs, what are some takeaways that they should know as they embark on this process?

Shakyra Diaz:



First and foremost, we are happy to partner with anyone who is seeking to learn more about trauma recovery centers. We have worked with state leaders and administrators on how to use federal funds in such a way that helps grow trauma recovery centers. So I'll offer that, first and foremost. I do want to be able to provide a couple of some insights here about the return of a trauma recovery center. The TRC model costs 30% less in usual care. A lot of that is because they're handling the navigation and coordination with other systems on behalf of the crime victim. Generally, the budget for a trauma recovery center is \$1.2 million and that allows trauma recovery centers to serve 750 clients per year. I like to view that as 750 families. So it's much larger than the direct crime victim.

We see reductions in a number of things and growth in a number of other areas. Victims experience improvement in health and life functioning. 74% show an improvement in mental health, 51 show improvement in physical health, 52% show a decrease in alcohol use, PTSD symptoms decrease by 46%, depression symptoms decrease by 47%. So again, this from our perspective, it's a comprehensive way of stopping crime from happening before it happens. The way that we see the growth happening, again, we started, there was one TRC and now we're at 41 across several states, and it is a model that's not viewed as controversial. We have TRCs in these states, we have TRCs in our states. Everyone understands the practicality of why this is necessary. And it's key to elevate the fact that no one is turned away from a trauma recovery center. There are some mental health agencies who may not serve people with past convictions or people with complex mental health diagnoses. TRCs do not do that.

The doors are open for everyone, but it's important to elevate that. But key took trauma recovery centers, one is expanding TRCs to every state in any community that is struggling with violence. That's first and foremost. Expanding technical assistance and training to grow ability to the model, because that's very, very key. Developing a pipeline to grow the number of specialists who work within trauma recovery center and collecting and analyzing data to monitor impacts. Byrne JAG is one of the most flexible bonds that exist. I really can't think of any other one that has the potential within the federal scope as Byrne JAG. Within the scope of elevating public safety and innovation, trauma recovery centers fit right into that. And we're happy to partner with any state administrator willing to learn more, bringing in leaders such as Steve Massey here, who's one of the best TRC directors in the country, as well as bringing in the founder and other TRC directors. So we're here, we're ready. And overall, again, our goal here is to stop crisis from turning into crime.

Stephen Massey:

Yes, I would just add that I think Shakyra has said it all and that we have the saying that it's been trending throughout our lab at the TRCs nationwide that what will we do without the Alliance and Safety and Justice. It's just something that we say now because they have advocated for us to grow these TRCs and to help us keep our TRCs stabilized. I would challenge anyone who wants to be a part of this to reach out to the Alliance of Safety and Justice, reach out to UC San Francisco, reach out to your local legislators and tell them that there's something that they need to know about. And to also look at the National Alliance of TRCs, get on the website and find that information and to see the data information and the things that are happening with TRCs nationwide. Patience and also finding supplemental funding streams are going to be critical to create that sustainability and traction for TRCs. But I would say that if someone wants their community to change, they should look into TRC model presence and what it has to offer.



Gillian Caplan:

Well, I have a feeling that the Alliance for Safety and Justice are is going to be getting some calls after this podcast. I just want to thank you both so much. This conversation has been incredibly impactful and informative. And again, just want to thank you for sharing your knowledge, your experiences and your stories.

Shakya Diaz:

Thank you for having us.

Stephen Massey:

We're honored. Thanks.