

# **New York City Department of Correction Trauma-Informed Care Report Calendar Year 2024**

## **The Department's Trauma-Informed Care Guidelines**

Trauma-informed care is defined as an approach that acknowledges the impact of trauma on individuals. In an effort to ensure that trauma-informed care is prioritized and integrated into all operations, the Department provides mental health awareness training as well as information on the impact of trauma to its employees. In order to ensure a trauma-informed care approach when implementing new policies and practices, the Department considers the following:

1. Examining the widespread impact of trauma and understanding the potential paths to recovery;
2. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma;
3. Responding by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into Department policies, procedures, and practices; and,
4. Seeking to prevent re-traumatization.<sup>1</sup>

## **Training Data**

### **Correction Academy In-Service and Recruit Training**

There are several trauma-informed care aspects built into the New York City Department of Correction's ("DOC" or "the Department") in-service and recruit training which are outlined herein.

### **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training**

MHFA Training is a collaboration between the Department's Correction Academy and Health Affairs Division. In CY24, the Correction Academy increased the number of MHFA instructors, as well as expanded the training to include non-uniformed staff and volunteers, which in turn yielded an increase in the number of people trained. MHFA training instructs on how to recognize the signs of distress in people in custody (PIC) who may be experiencing mental illness.

- ❖ A total of 1,091 staff members, inclusive of uniformed staff, non-uniformed staff, and volunteers, have been trained on this topic since 2020:
  - CY20 – 149
  - CY21 – 154
  - CY22 – 255
  - CY23 – 181
  - CY24 – 352

Though the Department's goal is to consistently provide trainings to PIC as well, it was prevented from doing so in CY24 due to depleted staffing levels.

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<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA. (2018). Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions. Retrieved from: <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

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❖ A total of 31 PIC have been trained on this topic since 2020:

- CY20 – 0
- CY21 – 0
- CY22 – 0
- CY23 – 31
- CY24 – 0

### **Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training**

CIT training is designed to teach staff primarily assigned to mental health housing areas the common signs and symptoms of mental illness, as well as how to recognize those symptoms during a crisis situation. The goal of CIT is to improve safety for both PIC and staff. Instead of dispatching a tactical team to a crisis situation, staff are enabled to respond and utilize verbal de-escalation skills to defuse a situation where a PIC may be experiencing a crisis, thereby ideally averting the need for any use of force.

❖ A total of 192 staff, inclusive of staff from both NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H)/Correctional Health Services (CHS) and DOC, have been trained on this topic since 2020:

- CY20 – 24
- CY21 – 0
- CY22 – 8
- CY23 – 21
- CY24 – 139

The Department recently registered a contract with a vendor that allows it to secure additional trainers, which was the direct result of a \$250,000 grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). As a result, the Department expects staff training numbers to only go up during the three-year spending period for the grant.

### **Training Initiatives**

#### **Gender Responsiveness Training**

The Gender Responsiveness curriculum is a condition of assignment for all staff assigned to the Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC). In CY24, TDD trained 82 staff members Department-wide, 51 of which were assigned to RMSC.

#### **Visit Process Training**

In CY24, TDD conducted the annual Visit Process Training. This training highlights the positive effect that visits have on both PIC and their loved ones. The training emphasizes the importance of employing a trauma-informed approach to security searches, such as the pat-frisk search, which can be particularly sensitive for transgender, gender non-binary, and gender-expansive

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visitors. Development of these training materials included input from the City's Commission on Human Rights. TDD trained 213 staff assigned to visit areas in CY24.

### **Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor Training**

TDD partnered with Vertex LLC in CY24 to provide Department staff with the first 85 hours of the 350-hour Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor Trainee program (CASAC-T). This training equipped 23 Correction Officers and 1 Captain with the knowledge and skills needed to observe, identify, intervene, and report on these behaviors. The course also teaches how trauma can lead to alcoholism and substance abuse.

### **MHFA Instructor Training**

In CY24, TDD partnered with the National Council for Mental Wellbeing to deliver the MHFA Instructor Certification Course to the Department's instructors in the Correction Academy and the Health Affairs Division so that each is capable of delivering the program to in-service staff. TDD also partnered with internal stakeholders, such as DPCP, the Correction Assistance Response for Employees (CARE) Unit, and the Health Affairs Division, to deliver MHFA to the Department's non-uniformed staff members and volunteers who provide program support and operational assistance to the facilities.

### **Staff Wellness Training**

The Department recognizes that trauma impacts both PIC and staff. Because of that, the Department is excited to have scheduled train-the-trainer sessions with Desert Waters Correctional Outreach in CY25 for both TDD and CARE Unit instructors. Trainings will focus on topics like career fulfillment in corrections and peer-on-peer support.

### **Programs that Incorporate Trauma-Informed Care**

In CY24, the Department continued to expand its trauma-informed care programming. The Division of Programs and Community Partnerships (DPCP) led the way in these efforts.

DPCP is leading the implementation of various programs and practices for incarcerated women that support healing in the hope of creating futures that afford less adverse contact with the justice system. In collaboration with national experts and community partners, the Department developed a training on gender-responsive practices and trauma-informed care for all uniformed and non-uniformed staff who work in RMSC, the Department's facility for women. In December 2022, DPCP partnered with the Correction Academy to launch the training and begin delivering it to new recruits.

To support incarcerated mothers in overcoming the trauma associated with being separated from their children, the Department implemented programming designed to help maintain and

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even strengthen these relationships. In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), the Osborne Association, and Hour Children, the Department offers the Visitation and Family Assistance (VAFA) program. In CY24, the Department continued to facilitate quarterly Community Engagement Days at RMSC, which allow for incarcerated mothers to spend time with their children while engaging in familial activities. These Community Engagement Days also happen in the men's facilities. The Department also continued its partnership with the Caribbean Women's Health Association to provide doula services for the incarcerated women in RMSC, which provides pre-natal care, birthing support, and post-natal care.

In late 2021, the Department was awarded two grants to further promote child-friendly visits, which enabled the expansion of the VAFA program at that time, as well as the construction of child-friendly visit spaces and hiring for Visit Facilitator roles. To enhance family visitation throughout all of its facilities, the Department constructed a child-friendly visit space at the Otis Bantum Correctional Center (OBCC), the George R. Vierno Center (GRVC), RMSC, and at the Central Visits building. We presently have Visit Facilitators working in OBCC, GRVC, and at Central Visits, and are in the process of hiring them for both RMSC and the Robert N. Davoren Center (RNDC). In CY24, our Visit Facilitators engaged 3,115 PIC, 2,715 children, and 4,234 caregivers.

In October 2022, the Department resumed its partnership with the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) to help facilitate off-island visits for incarcerated parents and their children, simultaneously expanding it to fathers for the first time. In CY24, the Department facilitated CMOM visits for 108 PIC and 267 family members. The Department also launched a related initiative with CMOM that focused on installing interactive exhibits in each of the Department's family visits areas. These exhibits are museum-quality and are designed to support executive function and the growth of literacy skills in children. Thus far, spaces have been opened at RMSC and GRVC, with plans to expand the program to OBCC and Central Visits in CY25.

In CY22, DPCP hired a Director of Interventions and Special Population Services to programmatically respond to violence and manage restrictive housing settings within the Department. The Director supervises four Social Workers and two Intervention Specialists, all of whom work with PIC through a trauma-informed lens and specifically target their caseloads to include people who partake in acts of violence while incarcerated. Rooted in restorative justice practices, part of this initiative includes expanding family-based interventions, which mirrors elements of family counseling sessions, but revolve around goal-setting and reflective activities. The Social Workers and Intervention Specialists work with PIC and their families before, during, and after sessions. In CY23, this team took on a role providing additional support to people who demonstrate self-injurious behavior, though this work is done across all Department facilities, and not just in restrictive housing settings.

And finally, the Fine and Performing Arts and Tablet Operations units, both under the broader DPCP umbrella, also provide some form of trauma-informed care services. The Arts Unit regularly

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works in collaboration with facilities when a traumatic event may have taken place, to help route extra support via special projects or programs where needed. And the Tablet Unit affords PIC the ability to submit any number of different requests in an expedited manner via their assigned tablet.

### **LGBTQ+ Affairs**

In August 2023, the Department reorganized the LGBTQ+ Affairs Unit to have it fall under the broader DPCP umbrella. The Unit currently has one Executive Director and three Program Coordinators. The Program Coordinators cover each jail on Rikers Island, providing discreet ways for PIC to disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation, assisting with gender-aligned housing requests, and providing one-on-one gender and sexuality education to those exploring their identity. The team also collaborates with external organizations to enhance programming for LGBTQ+ PICs.

One example of this is the team's work with Destination Tomorrow, an LGBTQ+ community center in the Bronx, which facilitates a weekly program at RMSC's Special Consideration Unit (SCU). The program focuses on reintegration, teaching on essential skills like resume building, salary negotiation, and financial literacy. Additionally, the program connects participants to local community resources, including housing support, community building, and gender-affirming healthcare workshops.

In CY22, the Department took steps to help decrease the levels of gender dysphoria experienced by PIC who identify as transmen, transmasculine, and/or gender non-binary by approving the use of chest binders for use by PIC. Chest binders allow individuals to safely compress their chest and appear more traditionally masculine, which can decrease feelings of gender dysphoria. Chest binders and now gender-affirming undergarments continue to be distributed to this day. The unit also works with the Department's Law Library to provide name change services to PIC who identify as transmen, transwomen, and/or gender non-binary. These efforts began in CY23.

The unit enhanced its outreach to LGBTQ+ PICS throughout CY24, even setting up a dedicated hotline to directly request support. Because of this, engagement substantially increased, with engagement sessions rising 320% year-over-year as compared to CY23.

### **Chaplaincy Services**

In CY24, the Department continued to expand access to in-person congregate services. The Department currently has eleven full-time and seven part-time Chaplains, who in addition to affording congregate services and religious studies, regularly tour housing units to meet with anyone who requests spiritual counseling. Staff are also able to consult the Chaplains as needed.

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### **Mental Health Services**

CHS, the direct provider of health care in the city's jails, maintains a service for PIC called the Health Triage Line. PIC can call the line directly from their tablet or by using one of the phones in the housing area to speak directly with a CHS nurse Monday-Friday between 5:00am-12:00pm; PIC can also leave a message. The Health Triage Line allows for PIC to speak directly with a CHS nurse to discuss mental health concerns; to schedule appointments (i.e., nursing, medical, or mental health); to refill prescriptions; to request lab results; to ask about medications; and to inquire about any other health-related issue. The CHS nurse addresses individual concerns and, if necessary, places the PIC on a sick call list to be produced to the clinic by the Department.

### **Future Outlook**

The Department remains committed to providing trauma-informed care to those in its custody. Addressing underlying trauma supports a safer and more humane environment for everyone living and working in the city's jails. The Department looks forward to continuing, if not expanding, all of its efforts outlined herein in the years to come.