do the good® for all:

Mainstreaming Trauma-Sensitive Sport Interventions

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At Doc Wayne, we are experienced in working with youth survivors of complex trauma, sexual exploitation, and a host of other difficult life circumstances. In moving forward, we are passionate about bringing best practices accrued through this work to mainstream youth who are facing less dire life circumstances, but who are nonetheless struggling to thrive and flourish at their own pace. Trauma not only includes cataclysmic events, such as natural disasters, but also encompasses chronic stressors such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse - the consideration of which informs what are alarmingly high rates of trauma exposure. Our programming and specialized techniques have proven to be effective in the most complex and challenging situations and, based upon these results, we are confident that every child can benefit from a more deliberate sport or physical education experience as sport is a vehicle for learning, instilling hope, and gaining skills.

**Awareness**

The notion that young people may likely be exposed to trauma during key developmental years and that they can be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of such traumas should no longer, in and of itself, be seen as a revelation. If you are an educator, coach, helper, or administrator and have not yet been exposed to these daunting facts we are here to help. It has been fifteen years since the first Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) studies suggested that as many as six in ten individuals experienced some form of childhood abuse, neglect or trauma and that such experiences were predictors of several negative health and well-being consequences in adulthood (Felitti et al, 1998). In the intervening years, numerous high Visibility incidents of violence toward youth, as represented by wall-to-wall media coverage of school shootings, child abductions and natural disasters as well as further research supporting the conclusions of the first ACE studies would seem to make the societal redress of youth trauma a shared priority for public, private and volunteer stakeholders. Whether as a result of digesting sound statistical data on the subject or as a reaction to public outrage at the seemingly rising prevalence of highly-publicized anecdotes of violence against youth, trauma-informed youth interventions – once the exclusive preserve of clinicians and dedicated treatment facilities – have been gaining wider acceptance as an element in addressing the effects of trauma on “general population” youth.
Proven Sport-Based Intervention

Since 2002, Doc Wayne has been taking a holistic approach to offering youth a therapeutic sports experience which addresses urgent and complex mental health needs by infusing trauma-informed care models with tailored cultural competency. Throughout our existence, we have focused primarily on youth who are identified as having undergone complex trauma combined with serious emotional disorders, substance abuse, and severely challenging behaviors. Recently, however, a climate of steadily increasing public awareness of the pervasiveness of ACEs among children enrolled in traditional public schools, mainstream youth sports programs, in addition to those who are deemed at-risk and the potentially deleterious consequences such experiences precipitate in adulthood is offering community stakeholders a moment of pause. In this sense, the realization is being progressively made that extension of clinician-developed, theory-based programming like Doc Wayne's to segments of the youth population beyond those in treatment programs is less a precaution at this point than it is long-overdue pragmatism.

The impact of Doc Wayne programming has been rigorously evaluated and, even in the context of the challenging populations, which we serve, has proven to be overwhelmingly positive. In a quantitative evaluation of Doc Wayne's effectiveness with participating youth, participants were found to be less likely than their non-playing residential peers to require physical holds in the form of “restraints” and “isolations” while in their residences. These positive behavioral impacts are supported by additional qualitative data. Participant interviews spoke to the success of Doc Wayne's mission to contribute to youth self-efficacy and positivity:

“I became nicer and got to accomplish more...because I had to try in order to succeed. I took things like never give up and teamwork and used those things in real life to accomplish things.”

Doc Wayne coaches have also described the transformative nature of the Doc Wayne experience for those who facilitate it:

“I think I still have that competitive edge but I define success very differently. Success isn't about the score at the end of the game, it's about: Did your kid show up? Did everybody stay in the game even if it meant they were standing on the sidelines cheering?”
While the Doc Wayne experience transforms coaches, coaches help transform the Doc Wayne experience through the process of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) which we use to conduct monitoring and evaluation of Doc Wayne coaches. In order to provide consistent and effective feedback, real-time observation of Doc Wayne programming by clinically-knowledgeable staff is conducted, resulting in the moment constructive criticism being available to coaches. Such observations and critiques then form the basis for future curricular enhancements.

**Massachusetts in the Forefront**

The 2005 publication by Massachusetts Advocates for Children, Harvard Law School and the Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence entitled “Helping Traumatized Children Learn” proposed a broad policy agenda for the management of traumatized youth in public school settings which recommended the development of state-funded school-wide action plans “addressing the needs of traumatized students” (Cole et al, 2009). Around the same time, the Massachusetts state legislature voted to enact a *Safe and Supportive School Environment* grant program aimed “to assist school districts with the development and establishment of in-school regular education programs and services to address, within the regular education school program, the educational and psycho-social needs of children whose behavior interferes with learning, particularly those who are suffering from the traumatic effects of violence” (“Grants and funding,” 2013). Such grants are intended to facilitate collaboration between trauma experts and schools, provide trauma-informed training for teachers and administrators and fund policy analysis of school and community programs to assess their level of trauma-sensitivity.

While Massachusetts may have been among the first states to recognize the urgency of providing trauma-informed interventions to mainstream youth and to support their implementation, school districts in states throughout the country have progressively begun adopting trauma-sensitive models.

**Supporting Educators**

At Doc Wayne, we stand uniquely poised to embed our proven therapeutic sport-based curriculum in physical education classes that are a regular part of any public education. Doc Wayne's therapeutic sports program is designed to achieve four related objectives: (1) promoting youth participants' personal development, (2) improving their capacity for pro-social relationships, (3)
maximizing their capacity for inclusion and participation in therapy and school and (4) becoming an experience that participants can apply to all other aspects of their lives on and off the field. Our do the good (DtG) curriculum as well as Chalk Talk group therapy and Global Life Empowerment (GLE) programs are based on The Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency Framework (Kinnibugh & Blaustein, 2005) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), making our interventions suitably well-grounded from a theory standpoint. Using Doc Wayne's novel approach to team sports, physical education curriculum designed to promote healthy lifestyles can be enhanced to contribute to not just physical but psychological well-being in a manner consistent with the growing number of trauma-sensitive interventions in other areas of the regular school experience.

**Supporting the Coach as the Educator**

The regular school setting is not the only one in which Doc Wayne's interventions, heretofore limited in their scope, could be expanded and proven effective. According to Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at the University of Michigan, more than 35 million American children participate in some form of organized youth sport program each year. Disquietingly, coaches in such programs frequently report difficulties in interacting with their players stemming broadly from a lack of training and knowledge (Stankovich, 2010; Houseworth, Davis & Dobbs, 1990; Sage, 1989). Compounding this problem, according to noted sports sociologist Jay Coakley, “A serious obstacle to change is that many people who currently control youth sports programs are mostly concerned about making them bigger, increasing the emphasis on the performance ethic, going to state and national tournaments and developing more structures to control children, parents, referees and coaches” (Coakley, 2009 p. 142).

In stark contrast to these realities, at Doc Wayne our innovative programming takes the inherently pro-social and developmental qualities of sport and amplifies them through a user-friendly model which prioritizes inclusion, cooperation and positive risk-taking. Positive youth sport experiences are not a given and, at times, alienation, hyper-competitiveness and immense pressure can be experienced by youth and their supporters. Coaches in our network are trained not only to recognize and manage the signs and symptoms of youth trauma but to provide a consistently positive and uplifting message to all participants while allowing sport's natural conduciveness to sociability and personal development shine through.
Mainstreaming Trauma-Sensitive Techniques

In closing, it should be noted that interventions like Doc Wayne's unique trauma-sensitive youth sports programming, so long employed to great effect with some of the most challenging cases, is – to a large extent- what is missing and what is increasingly being sought in traditional public schools and youth sports programs. The realization that ACEs and incidents of youth trauma are occurring with alarming regularity among youth that populate these setting and that such occurrences have so long gone unaddressed or mismanaged may turn out to be the urgent alert that our society needs to ensure that fewer youth slip through the cracks. The application of Doc Wayne's expertise in diverse settings could take a number of forms from the embedding of curriculum to the use of the train-the-trainer model, but the expansion of our proven methods to broader youth population is becoming a priority of shared value.
Acknowledgements

This paper could not have been completed without the youth we serve and their dedicated coaches. Doc Wayne coaches are the backbone of our program, trained to be the vehicles and living representations of the do the good® curriculum.

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Contact Us

Comments and questions are welcome in response to this paper. If Doc Wayne can aid your work or collaborate to assist youth please contact:

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David De Fazio has been involved in sports as an athlete, coach and scholar for most of his life. As a sportsman, he was the 2007 Swiss Ice Dance Champion with Nora von Bergen as well as an international competitor and a member of Switzerland’s national team from 2006 to 2009. He has nine years of experience teaching figure skating and ice dance to both youth and adult athletes ranging from beginners to high-level competitors. David holds a Master’s Degree in Sustainable Peace through Sport from the United Nations University for Peace and the International University of Monaco.
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