

Chapter 25

What If a Whole Community Came Together? Collaborating to Ensure No Wrong Door to Services

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ABSTRACT

Isolation is often a key factor and contributor to childhood trauma in rural communities. Not only does it potentially mean that there are less “eyes” on a family but it also means less supports and positive connections for a family. It means less ways out of the maze of childhood trauma and poverty. This chapter will explore how to build community in rural areas so that families feel connected and supported. It will give tools and tips for engaging traditional and non-traditional partners to create a web of support for families. It will call upon research and scientifically proven tactics for community engagement as well as more grass roots efforts that work in rural communities. In addition, the article will give real life examples from some of the most rural areas in the state of Maine of how communities have come together to support children and ensure better screening, intervention and treatment.

INTRODUCTION

Children living in rural communities are exposed to trauma at higher rates than children who live in suburban or urban communities. Although services are sparser, there are resources and solutions within the community that can be developed and implemented to counteract this problem. This chapter will explore how to build community in rural areas so that families feel connected and supported. It will give tools and tips for engaging traditional and nontraditional partners to create a web of support for families experiencing who have experienced trauma and adversity. This chapter will also use examples from rural Maine and other areas to demonstrate methods for engaging with rural communities to address child trauma.

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BACKGROUND

Twenty percent of the US population lives in rural America (Clay, 2014). When coupled with other adverse experiences like poverty and isolation, trauma can be even more dangerous for children. Research tells us that a supportive community and caring adults can be the safeguard for children. These adults and the extended community can act as a buffer and build resilience in children so that they are able to withstand adverse experiences and grow from them. Further, these caring adults can often identify when there is a problem and possibly intervene on behalf of the child or children.

As John Adams once said, “As much as I converse with sages and heroes, they have very little of my love and admiration. I long for rural and domestic scene, for the warbling of birds and the prattling of my children.” The picture of blissful childhoods filled with exploration and safety in rural America differs from reality. In fact, many children living in adversity in rural settings are suffering silently in isolation, with no access to help and seemingly no way to alter or escape their realities. There are solutions to this problem and these solutions can be found within the community and infrastructure that already exists in rural America.

Living in a rural setting presents a host of positive attributes for children, including community connections and relationships, less exposure to community and gang violence, and a lower cost of living. In addition, there are risk factors that living in a rural area brings that can cause challenges for children, such as

- Poverty,
- Isolation,
- Privacy and Stigma,
- Higher rates of trauma,
- Historical/Intergenerational trauma—that is, no knowledge/awareness of a different way of living,
- Lack of service/response system.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Issues, Controversies, Problems

There are a host of issues at play in rural communities such as poverty, isolation, historical trauma, lack of privacy, stigma, and weak response system. These issues can negatively impact the experience of exposure to trauma. In addition, whether the issues underlying or compounding, they act as barriers to healing from trauma. They are also fuel for symptomology and traumatization.

Poverty

Almost half of the population of the world lives in rural regions and mostly in a state of poverty. Such inequalities in human development have been one of the primary reasons for unrest and, in some parts of the world, even violence. — A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

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