

# data snapshot

## Our Impact on Trauma, Grief, and Loss (TGL)

In partnership with  
**rams**

### Summary

During the 2010–11 school year, eight Wellness Centers offered support groups to high school students experiencing trauma, grief and loss. At the start of the groups, **81% (n=26) of the participants were above the clinical range for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). After participating in the 12-week support groups provided by Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS), the number of students above the clinical range was reduced to 52% (n=12).** The evaluation of these group services highlight the severity of symptoms experienced by students, the need for services to address those symptoms, and the positive impact of the RAMS Trauma, Grief & Loss Groups (TGL Groups).



### Context

Experiences of trauma, grief, and loss can interfere with students' emotional health and school success. Adolescent experiences of trauma, grief and loss are not uncommon—in a national study of children and adolescents, 71% reported exposure to direct and/or indirect violence in the past month.<sup>i</sup> High school students who have experienced traumatic events may experience anxiety, fear, worry about themselves or others, changes in behaviors (withdrawal from others or activities, irritability, angry outbursts or aggression, changes in academic performance, decreased attention, absenteeism), repetitive thoughts and comments about death and dying, or heightened difficulty with authority.<sup>ii</sup>

More than half of students participating in Wellness TGL Groups experienced the death or homicide of a family member. (Table 1)

### Trauma, Grief, & Loss Group Services

Richmond Area Multi-Services, Inc. (RAMS), the Wellness Initiative's core behavioral health service provider, obtained Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding to hire behavioral health counselors with trauma expertise to work across the Wellness Centers providing crisis support, ongoing 1:1 counseling and case management, and group services to students experiencing trauma, grief, and/or loss. This Data Snapshot focuses on group services provided during the 2010–2011 school year. Ten groups of 5–7 students each met for an average of 12 weeks at 8 different school sites.

#### STUDENTS ABOVE CLINICAL RANGE FOR PTSD

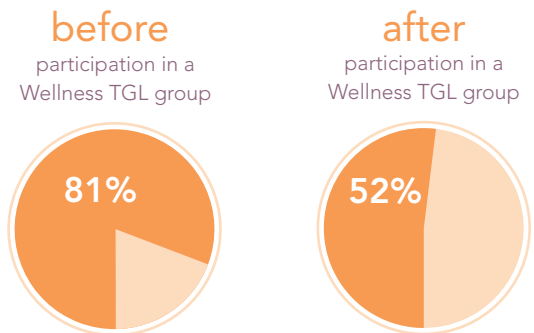


TABLE 1

Traumatic Events reported by group participants	
Death or Homicide—Family Member	54% (16)
Death or Homicide—Other	19% (5)
Violence	15% (4)
Health Problems/Illness	4% (1)
One student indicated two events, total=26	

<sup>i</sup> Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., Turner, H., & Hamby, S. (2005). *The victimization of children and youth: A comprehensive national survey.* *Child Maltreatment, 10*(1) 5-25.

<sup>ii</sup> National Child Traumatic Stress Network, (2008). *Trauma Toolkit for Educators.* <http://www.nctsn.org>

## Curriculum

The TGL group curriculum, developed by RAMS, is a combination of Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Seeking Safety therapy. CBT is a treatment model that teaches people to reframe negative thoughts in a more positive and instructive way. CBT incorporates sensitive interventions with cognitive behavioral, family, and humanistic principles and techniques. Seeking Safety is a therapy that helps people recover from trauma/PTSD and substance abuse ([www.seekingsafety.org](http://www.seekingsafety.org)). The aim of both these programs is to help adolescents learn new skills to process thoughts and feelings related to traumatic life events by managing and resolving distressing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and enhancing safety and growth.

## Results

TGL Groups significantly reduced PTSD & Functional Impairment scores from pre- to post-survey. On the Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS), the pre-survey mean was 28 and the post-test mean was 21, indicating a significant reduction in PTSD symptoms. It is also important to note that CPSS scores were considerably above the clinical range of 15 at both pre- and post-survey. The Functional Impairment Scale also yielded a significant improvement from pre- to post-survey (Table 2).

These results indicate that participation in short-term TGL support groups can significantly improve the health and well-being of students and thus may positively impact their capacity to succeed at school.

TABLE 2

Outcomes by Matched Pairs†			
Scale	N	Pre-survey Mean	Post-survey Mean
Total CPSS	14	27.78	21.71*
Functional Impairment Scale	23	4.39	3.82*

\* Results are significantly lower from pre- to post- survey at the .05 level

†25 students completed both a pre- and post- survey. Matching of pre- and post-surveys yielded 14 valid matched pairs for the total CPSS scale and 23 valid matched pairs for the functional impairment scale.

If any of the questions were not answered, the scale could not be computed leading to the small number of computed scores.

*“Wellness allows students to deal with life. Their trauma frequently overshadows their academics, but Wellness allows their true selves to shine through.”*

— SFUSD High School Teacher

### EXPLANATION OF TECHNICAL TERMS

#### Trauma

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (<http://www.nctsn.org>) defines trauma as an experience that threatens life or physical integrity and that overwhelms an individual’s capacity to cope.

#### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

According to the National Center for PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder resulting from a traumatic event that can be life-threatening to the individual and/or to others. Among the feelings the event can trigger are fear, confusion, and anger.

#### Survey Instrument

The evaluators of the TGL groups utilized a survey instrument based on the Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS) designed for children and adolescents (Foa et al., 2001). The survey was given to the group as a pre-survey during the first group session and again as a post-survey at the close of the group.

#### Measures

Two measures were used to evaluate the impact of the group on student participants: the CPSS scale and the Functional impairment scale. The CPSS scale consisted of 17 questions that assessed child PTSD symptoms. The functional impairment scale consisted of six items that assessed whether exposure to trauma impaired daily life activities (e.g., schoolwork, relationships with friends, etc.).

#### Reference:

Foa, E. B., Cashman, L., Jaycox, L., & Perry, K. (1997). The validation of a self-report measure of posttraumatic stress disorder: The Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 9(4), 445–451.