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## DiSC Training Vitalizes Trauma-Informed Organization



*The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' employees use Everything DiSC behavioral assessments to improve communication and create more trusting relationships between themselves, colleagues, and clients.*

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to protecting children and youth, strengthening families, and supporting communities. DCF administers programs to assist Wisconsin's children and families, including Wisconsin Works (W-2), child support, childcare licensing, childcare assistance, and adoption search and assistance. DCF also administers child welfare programs, including child protective services in Milwaukee County through the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services, and certain juvenile justice programs. Recently deemed a trauma-informed workplace under the leadership of Secretary Eloise Anderson, the DCF recognizes the important role that trusting relationships play when servicing and working with trauma-informed populations, therefore it invests significant time and energy in improving communication, collaboration, and team building among its staff.

### **Trauma Informed Care Organizations: Trusting Relationships, Clear Communication, and Authentic Connection Are Critical Components**

Organizations that adopt a trauma-informed care approach are guided by seven main principles, two of which are:

1. **SAFETY and RELATIONSHIPS**—Healing happens in safe, authentic and positive relationships. Strong relationships help create resilience and play a significant role in shielding children and adults from the effects of trauma. In trauma-sensitive organizations, interactions are respectful, consistent and predictable. The environment pays attention to physical and emotional safety and to reducing barriers to access. It is understood that many people with trauma histories must develop trust over time and as a result may not engage in services as quickly as service providers may expect.



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2. **SECONDARY TRAUMA & STRESS**—Those providing care should approach the work with families from a place of optimal health and well-being. Responsibility for staff wellness falls on both the individual as well as the supporting structure, e.g., organizations supporting staff, communities supporting caregivers, etc. It's important that those facing secondary trauma and stress can connect and communicate with others experiencing similar situations.

Thus, those who work in organizations serving individuals and families that experience and are exposed to trauma, like DCF, must have effective communication skills in order to foster trusting, supportive, compassionate, and safe relationships with those they serve, *as well as with one another*. DiSC is a perfect tool for achieving this.

### ***DiSC Is Part of the Answer to Creating Trauma-Informed Workforce***

Kim Rahal, DCF Director of Human Resources, explains the importance of creating an environment and culture that honors the needs of a trauma-informed workplace.

“It’s been about a year now since our Department undertook a trauma-informed approach (to the way in which it operates). As part of that initiative, we (DCF leadership) were looking at ways we could empower our staff and improve communication, because communication is one of the domains of trauma-informed care. We were asking ourselves ‘how can we do this?’”

In support of the trauma-informed care philosophy, Rahal focused on providing development opportunities for her entire staff and community of providers. She found the *Everything DiSC* tool and immediately began thinking about how DiSC could assist within the organization’s vision and goals of creating a trauma-informed environment. Rahal explains:

“When I came in as Director two years ago, I evaluated our Leadership Foundations training and found that the communications piece needed to be addressed...it (communication) is critical for a leader. I noticed that the communications piece, the conflict management, and having basic conversations was challenging here. I like DiSC and began thinking about how I could bring it to DCF. I chose it over MBTI, which the DCF was using at the time, because DiSC is a communication tool more than a personality assessment. It’s about behavior. It tells you ‘how you show up when...’ and it creates awareness about your default behavior, and that you can show up differently, too. I began thinking about how DiSC could be used in our trauma-informed culture to enhance our communication and conversations. We (leadership) decided to



use DiSC as part of the strategy for creating a trauma-informed workforce because it was a natural fit."

### **Results: Culture Change, Clearer Communication, and Continued Commitment**

DCF has been using *Everything DiSC* for nearly two years now, and it's part of the culture. "It's now deeply embedded," states Rahal. When asked what, as a leader, she believes is working with regard to DiSC, Rahal explains:

"What's working? It's the conversation. The tool is easy to understand. I think people grasp DiSC pretty quickly and they embrace it really well. I haven't seen anyone negatively respond. As an HR Director, I've tried to change cultures before, which is really hard. People always want to do it the way they've always done it...and when you talk about personality and communication, people get nervous. But people are not leery of DiSC. They like it, and they willingly embrace it."

When asked if she thinks *Everything DiSC* is making the impact she desired on her trauma-informed organization, Rahal pointed to the fact that the DCF initially did a pilot run of DiSC with a small group of leaders and found it to be a success; over the course of the next 18 months, they rolled it out Department-wide and even committed time and resources to having internal staff certified in *Everything DiSC*. In Rahal's words:

"I keep bringing you (Chariti) and DiSC back to DCF, don't I? I'd say it's working! And I think it will be important to continually bring it (DiSC refresher workshops, etc.) back, to continue having more discussions and using DiSC every day."

### **Conclusion**

*Everything DiSC* has helped DCF understand behaviors and communication styles of its employees, allied-providers, and individuals within the families they serve. Communication is a skill necessary in the human services industry. It affects not only the work environment but also, as DCF has demonstrated, the quality of relationships and client care in a trauma-informed setting. With such a commitment to communication both internally and externally, the DCF is on a path to being a leader in trauma-informed care services for youth and families nationwide.

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