New Avenues for Youth

Brain & Behavioral Science-Informed Pilot Proposal to REDF
November 14, 2017

Introduction
Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following Brain & Behavioral Science-Informed Pilot Proposal to REDF, whose funding, technical assistance, and guidance have strongly contributed to New Avenues’ social enterprises in the last two years. Our proposed pilot project—which aligns with REDF’s interest in developing clinically based responses to the effects of poverty, trauma, and stress on behavior—will advance our continued efforts to provide trauma-informed experiences for youth in the workplace and improve their health, wellness, and short- and long-term employment success.

Interest

Organization and Enterprises’ Interest in Brain & Behavioral Science-Informed Interventions
With a twenty-year history of delivering clinically-based services to youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, New Avenues understands the prevalence of trauma among its clients, the connection between brain function and behavior, and that brains impacted by trauma have heightened stress responses, which present significant challenges to maintaining employment. We tailor our programming to assist young people in recovering from their experiences by focusing on improving executive functioning (i.e., decision making and planning), memory, attention, perception, and affect regulation—all of which are negatively impacted by trauma but improve with trauma-informed interventions. Helping youth identify triggers in a professional setting and facilitating appropriate responses to those triggers improve young people’s potential for success as employees in our enterprises and in maintaining long-term employment once they have transitioned from our services.

Knowledge and Capacity
New Avenues’ clinical and therapeutic approach is shared across the agency’s many programs, with knowledge and capacity existing within the positions that are clinically trained, including our Clinical Program Manager, Assertive Engagement team (case managers), Alcohol & Drug Recovery Specialists, Residential Advocates (in our Housing programs), Parenting Support Specialists, LGBTQ Advocates, and Independent Living Program Coaches (in our PDX-Connect program, which supports youth transitioning from foster care into adulthood). Our staff includes those with social work and counseling degrees, lived experience, and experience delivering services related to engagement, advocacy, therapy, addictions counseling, mentorship, and more. Staff regularly participate in clinically focused trainings and meetings offered by New Avenues, Multnomah County (which offers three Trauma-Informed Care [TIC] trainings a year), and other partners, with topics including Neurobiology of Trauma, Assertive Engagement, Positive Youth Development, Motivational Interviewing, and more. New Avenues also has a TIC Team—compromised of clinical staff who participated in a “Train the Trainers” curriculum offered by Mandy Davis of Trauma Informed Oregon—that works with each agency program to develop customized, trauma-informed approaches to service.

Plans for Increasing Knowledge and Capacity
Because business objectives do not always align with mission-based goals, and since most shop managers do not come from social-work backgrounds, often receive only minimal training for working with high-need youth, and may lack knowledge about the barriers our clients face, we see great
opportunity to expand trauma-informed practice within our enterprises. As you know, last year, with support from REDF, we hired an Enterprise Skills Trainer, who has delivered training in and built awareness of the need for a robust, cohesive, holistic approach to addressing and responding to trauma in the workplace. Earlier this year, she also organized “Power of the People: An Exploration of Professional Adaptive Skills for People of Color in White Workplaces,” an event for youth of color engaged in our enterprises that addressed racial trauma and the effects of intergenerational trauma as a result of systemic racism; gave youth an opportunity to talk with a prominent member of society who has lived experience with these issues; and focused on developing coping skills. We envision other such opportunities for youth, plan to develop training and feedback mechanisms for shop supervisors/managers regarding trauma-informed practice (i.e., reinforcing the concepts of Motivational Interviewing, helping them build trauma-informed vocabulary, and more), and hope to offer additional training opportunities for youth and adult staff through the proposed pilot (described in the “Pilot Idea” section).

Challenge and Opportunity

Challenges and Opportunities Addressed by Brain & Behavioral Science-Informed Interventions

The interventions we propose to pilot (described in the next section) will:

(For Youth)

- afford an opportunity at trauma recovery as they build job and life skills, earn wages, and prepare for future employment
- introduce neurobiology and offer psychoeducation to help them discover that some of their behaviors and actions have been sculpted by trauma
- facilitate opportunities that help them “rewire” their brains, so that they respond appropriately when experiencing triggers
- learn to communicate professionally and to give and receive feedback
- build resilience and develop coping strategies for future employment once they exit services

(For Supervisors/Managers)

- help them support a holistic, trauma-informed environment and avoid unintentionally reinforcing trauma, so that youth can be successful in the workplace
- help them learn about neurobiology and understand how the trauma-impacted brain behaves
- help them effectively provide feedback to youth, using a trauma-informed approach
- help them anticipate youth reactions and triggers to discussions about professional development or growth (and mitigate those responses)
Potential Impact and Value of Addressing Challenges/Opportunities
The impact of addressing the challenges and opportunities addressed above will: 1) help youth maintain internships/work experiences in our enterprises; 2) help them attain and sustain long-term employment; 3) present opportunities for them to expand on the positive changes to their mental health, resilience, and workforce readiness; 4) help them continue to identify what positive changes look like for them as individuals, so they can continue to grow and develop; and 5) help adult supervisors/managers effectively support and be inclusive of individuals who have experienced trauma (and help them bring that approach to their own future employment).

Categorizing Opportunities and Challenges
For supervisors/managers who do not have social work or clinical backgrounds, the primary challenge is the lack of training and experience working with high-need youth; the opportunities are 1) to further train them in trauma-informed, inclusive approaches to management and supervision, and 2) to create better experiences for youth as a result. For trauma-impacted youth, the primary challenge is to maintain employment; the opportunity is to engage in a safe environment that considers trauma and improves the prospect of sustained employment in the short and long term.

Pilot Idea

The pilot project we propose includes three intervention components:

1) Online Learning Module for Youth on the Impact of Trauma
The online learning module that we propose to create is a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)-based intervention that will help youth recognize and understand the impact of trauma on their brains, their behavior, and their lives; it will also introduce coping strategies for and approaches to addressing challenges. With this awareness and knowledge, youth will be better equipped to heal, recover, and succeed in employment, both in the short and long term.

Produced by e-learning developer Diversa (described in the next paragraph) in consultation with clinical experts at New Avenues and elsewhere, the hour-long module will be offered to all youth entering an internship or work experience in our enterprises. It will define and introduce concepts of trauma; incorporate findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences study (ACEs); explain the neurobiology of trauma; and examine behaviors that present in trauma-impacted brains and how trauma impacts employment performance (i.e., what might come up in a professional setting). It will also explore what trauma recovery looks like and emphasize hope and possibility, including ways that we can support trauma-impacted individuals, how the brain can heal itself, and strategies to mitigate the negative outcomes of triggered responses.

Diversa has 15 years’ experience designing curriculum geared towards diverse learners. Their e-learning tools are interactive, using powerful video and technological tools to present concepts and create scenarios that have a high degree of fidelity to actual experiences and environments. Last year, the company created an online learning module for New Avenues on Motivational Interviewing that is widely used by agency staff and our partners. (We would be pleased to make it available to you, upon request.) The new online learning module that we propose will be available to and easily accessible by all REDF-funded organizations (and other social-service providers) and relevant for the long term.
2) Workforce Wellness Curriculum
The Workforce Wellness Curriculum will incorporate grounding skills and coping strategies that are based on concepts from Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Youth will be offered guidance and have the opportunity to engage in self-care while employed in our enterprises, including participation in a weekly Workforce Wellness Class—a structured, hour-long gathering that will deliver concrete, evidence-based, skill-development activities that mitigate adverse effects of and promote healing and recovery from trauma. Areas of focus will include mindfulness, meditation, yoga, grounding skills, and strategies and tools for self-care that youth can practice on their own and on the job. Outside specialists will be engaged to offer these activities, with support from agency staff; we will also leverage appropriate activities currently offered by our workforce development program Promoting Avenues to Employment (PAVE). New Avenues’ Pathways Mental Health Counselor, with guidance from the Clinical Program Manager (a Licensed Clinical Social Worker), will design the curriculum, which will also include education for adult enterprise staff on the skill-development activities that will be covered, so they can reinforce trauma-informed practice in the workplace. To further promote participation and to support youth in applying learned concepts and practices, the Enterprise Skills Trainer—with whom youth already have a positive, safe relationship—will also participate in the classes.

3) Trauma-Informed Supervisor’s Manual for Social Enterprises
The Trauma-Informed Supervisor’s Manual for Social Enterprises will, as the title suggests, provide evidence-based, trauma-informed guidance for supervisors/managers for supporting high-need youth in the workplace. A key tool in the onboarding and continued training of supervisors/managers, the manual will: 1) review what trauma is and how it may present, 2) incorporate existing clinical knowledge around trauma-informed supervision, 3) incorporate direct feedback from enterprise supervisors/managers, including challenges they experience working with high-need youth, and 4) create a guide for strengths-based practice that incorporates the principles of Positive Youth Development, Assertive Engagement, and Motivational Interviewing, as well as scenarios and practice opportunities. The manual will be researched and created by a qualified consultant, with guidance from New Avenues’ clinical staff.

Timeline

Online Learning Module: Diversa can begin production of the module in January 2018 (following award notification) and complete it by June.

Workforce Wellness Curriculum: Curriculum development can begin in January 2018 and be completed by March, with Workforce Wellness Classes and related training of supervisors/managers beginning shortly thereafter.

Trauma-Informed Supervisor’s Manual for Social Enterprises: Research and production of the manual can begin in January 2018 and be completed by June, with related training of supervisors/managers beginning shortly thereafter.

Scale of Impact
New Avenues’ social enterprises served 95 youth in FY2017, with a similar number of youth anticipated to be served in the year ahead, each of whom will complete the online learning module, have access to the Workforce Wellness Curriculum, and benefit from the guidance and training that supervisors/managers receive from the Trauma-Informed Supervisor’s Manual for Social Enterprises.
The pilot may also benefit youth engaged in PAVE (which served 383 youth in FY2017), as well as other social enterprises and organizations that offer job-training and employment services for young people who have experience trauma. Others impacted will include up to 10 enterprise supervisors/managers, 5-10 members of New Avenues’ Trauma-Informed Care Team, and 8 PAVE team members, all of whom would engage in various components of the pilot.

**Type and Amount of Resources and Investment Required**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Training Module Development (Diversa)</td>
<td>30,000</td>
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<td>Workforce Wellness Classes (Specialists @ $125/activity)</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<td>Supervisor’s Manual Consultant</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<td>Supplies and Materials</td>
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<td>Assertive Engagement Team Staffing*</td>
<td>1,046</td>
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<td>Indirect Costs</td>
<td>5,107</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44,153</strong></td>
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* This includes 40 hours of staff time devoted to project implementation and 8 hours of related supervision.

**Potential Partners/Consultants**

As described earlier, Diversa will develop the online training module. A range of partners with expertise in mindfulness, meditation, yoga, grounding skills, and self-care will be engaged for the Workforce Wellness Curriculum. We will hire a consultant to research and create the Supervisor’s Manual.

**Leveraged Resources**

Support provided by the Enterprise Skills Trainer (funded by REDF and Northwest Area Foundation) will be leveraged to complete the project. For the Workforce Wellness Curriculum, we will leverage appropriate activities currently offered in PAVE and seek volunteer contributions of services and materials from members of our Employer Advisory Board and Ambassador Board. New Avenues’ Trauma-Informed Care Team will also lend expertise and guidance as needed.

**Leadership and Staffing**

**Staff Roles in Planning/Implementation of Pilot**

*Online Learning Module*: New Avenues’ Program Director and Clinical Program Manager will advise Diversa in research and production as needed. Their work on the pilot will integrate with and supplement existing responsibilities.

*Workforce Wellness Curriculum*: New Avenues’ Pathways Mental Health Counselor will design the curriculum, which will also include education for adult enterprise staff on the evidence-based skill development that will be covered. The Enterprise Skills Trainer will help coordinate Workforce Wellness Classes. Their work on the pilot will integrate with and supplement existing responsibilities.

*Trauma-Informed Supervisor’s Manual for Social Enterprises*: The Enterprise Skills Trainer and Clinical Program Manager will support the activities of the consultant hired to research and create the Supervisor’s Manual. Their work on the pilot will integrate with and supplement existing responsibilities.
Leadership’s Role in Supporting and Facilitating Efforts
New Avenues’ Leadership Team will play an oversight and advisory role in the proposed pilot, supporting efforts to create and maintain a more trauma-informed environment for youth. Changes will not be needed at the organizational level; at the social enterprise level, a manageable amount of additional time and resource will be devoted to the strategic priority of developing and piloting the proposed tools and program enhancements and to continually training new staff.

Definition of Success

Successful Outcomes of the Pilot
We rigorously track success indicators of program participants during and following their exit from work experiences and internships. Successful outcomes of the pilot would include:

- Increase in the number of youth completing work experiences/internships in our enterprises
- Increase in the number of youth making soft-skill gains
- Increase in employment sustained after youth exit work experiences/internships in our enterprises (which would positively impact participants’ ability to exit poverty and homelessness and maintain stable housing)
- Improvements in housing, education, and health/wellness status
- An accessible and replicable program model (the proposed pilot) with broad application and longevity for a range of service providers (including other New Avenues programs, REDF-funded organizations, and more)