



first national  
summit on trauma  
and the courts  
creating a community of healing

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges® (NCJFCJ) provides cutting-edge training, wide-ranging TA, and research to help the nation’s courts, judges, and staff in their important work. Since its founding in 1937 by a group of judges dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation’s juvenile courts, the NCJFCJ has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation’s children and families.

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# first national summit on trauma and the courts

creating a community of healing

# background

The evidence is clear: traumatic stress can have substantial negative and lasting impacts on human development, functioning and quality of life. An ever-growing body of research illuminates how child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, criminal victimization, and a host of other stressful experiences place people at risk for physical and mental health challenges, socio-legal problems, and even early mortality. The long-term human, social and economic costs associated with adverse experiences and traumatic events are substantial and emphasize the critical need for trauma-informed prevention and intervention to promote the lifelong well-being of youth, families, and communities.

Across the constellation of stakeholders working with our nation's most vulnerable children and families, juvenile and family judges and courts are in a unique position to promote healing and prevent future trauma. In 2013, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) undertook development of a court trauma review protocol in response to an increase in requests for assistance from courts and allied systems (e.g., juvenile probation) seeking to become trauma-informed. Although the NCJFCJ and organizations such as the National

Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) have an extensive history of providing training and technical assistance to courts on traumatic stress -- there was no known protocol for conducting this type of review and subsequent technical assistance to promote trauma-informed care in the unique environments and institutions of courts.

Based on work in other child and family service systems, the NCJFCJ collaborated with affiliates from the NCTSN and select courts to develop a trauma review protocol for juvenile and family court settings. With funding support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the development team worked with pilot courts from a range of geographically diverse jurisdictions to explore what it means to be a trauma-informed court. The initial conceptual framework was founded on the following key principles: (1) courts have an integral role in the healing process for the youth and families that they serve; (2) all court stakeholders should experience a sense of safety, personal agency, and connectedness when engaged with the court; and (3) court environment, practice, policy, and staffing impact all court stakeholders. Throughout this framework we embraced a public

health orientation and the importance of universal precautions when working with populations with a high likelihood of injury. Over 20 trauma consultations have been conducted at the time of this report. The Summit described below served, in part, as a "validity check" for the consultation protocol and findings, as well as a forum to strategize moving from research to practice.

The First National Summit on Trauma and the Courts: Creating a Community of Healing was held on August 5-6, 2015 at the Semi J. and Ruth W. Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education, a research center in the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. The summit brought

together both experts and judicial leaders from across the country to examine and focus on moving from research to practice in a court setting in the context of trauma, the impact of adversity and trauma on human development, evidence-based practice, environmental stress, creating communities of healing and building strong collaboration.

Participants included experts from the fields of medicine, psychology, juvenile and family court, animal welfare, social justice advocates as well as experts in the field of family violence and facility design. The Summit was chaired by the Honorable Michael Howard (Ohio) and the Honorable Denise Cubbon (Ohio), and graciously hosted by Patrick Canary and staff of the Begun Center.

## summit format and activities

To set the foundation for this working Summit, Judge Lynn Tepper (FL) and Dr. Robin Tener (OH) provided updates on efforts to help courts become more trauma-informed and to integrate them into a larger system of care. The remainder of the 1.5 day convening consisted of small group and large group discussions, including: (1) innovations in

the field; (2) challenges and key features of trauma-informed courts; (3) top ten action steps to create a community of healing; (4) evaluating progress / performance indicators; and (5) next steps and priorities. Key themes from these discussions are outlined in the following section.

# key themes

A number of key themes emerged from the small and large group discussions. They included, in no particular order:

Trauma-informed justice must be grounded in research, science, evidence-based practice, and practice-based evidence.

Secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue is a substantial -- and often unaddressed or ignored issue -- for those working in the justice system.

For the purpose of a trauma consultation with courts, it is useful to assess domains of safety, agency, and connectedness across practice, policy, persons, and environment.

Trauma-informed justice is a process (not a concrete objective), and it must be a multi-disciplinary effort.

Collaboration is critical.

Historical trauma is a substantial issue in our justice system, and it is often misunderstood or underappreciated.

Every point of contact and actor in the justice system has the potential to promote healing or help others practice new skills (e.g., self-soothing).

Moving from training to practice is a challenge for many courts.

There is a tension between safety issues (e.g., victims, judges, etc.) and trauma-informed justice. [Need for security personnel, strong security structure, etc.]

# key recommendations

The rich and insightful discussions that were had by participants, resulted in the following key recommendations to continue to enhance the work of the NCJFCJ around trauma as funding allows:

## **Develop and disseminate Environmental Checklist**

**publication:** It was recommended that the NCJFCJ develop a publication that includes a simple checklist or tool that can be utilized by jurisdictions to analyze their current court environment and identify areas for improvement. It will allow users to assess current green space, lighting, temperature, navigation, signage, seating, and other physical factors that can contribute to reducing or enhancing stress.

**Develop key principles on a trauma-informed court:** Based on recommendations from summit participants, the NCJFCJ will develop key principles related to the court's response to trauma. The principles will assist courts in identifying a philosophy of how to become more trauma responsive and ensuring that current policy, practice and environment are conducive to reducing unnecessary stress and potential stress reactions in those that have experienced traumatic events.

## **Broaden training opportunities for ALL system stakeholders including judges, attorneys, law enforcement, probation officers and community service providers:**

The NCJFCJ will continue to identify national, state, regional and local trainings and or conferences to educate multi-disciplinary stakeholder groups on the adverse effects of trauma and how to move beyond being "informed" to becoming "responsive" to the needs of the families that appear before the court.

**Develop written examples of lessons courts have learned from becoming trauma-informed (e.g., Spotlight on Practice/Strategies in Practice):** Based on the lessons learned from the field, NCJFCJ will produce a series of tip sheets that will include examples of how specific jurisdictions have transformed their response to individuals who have experienced trauma. The tip sheets will be available on the NCJFCJ website for easy access. NCJFCJ will also explore creating a web page dedicated to trauma informed court practice.

**Develop a National Judicial Institute on Trauma:** NCJFCJ will develop an institute or pre-institute aimed at assisting judicial officers in trauma-informed decision making.

**Hold a second national summit on Trauma and the Courts in 2017 and focus on historical trauma:**

NCJFCJ will seek funding to hold a second summit in 2017 in New Mexico to leverage expertise on intergenerational trauma. The summit will also offer opportunities for both experts and judicial officers to continue to develop a shared meaning around trauma and offer guidance on the NCJFCJ approach to broadening its trauma work.

**Examine implicit bias, structural and institutional racism and its effect on trauma informed systems of care:** Utilizing the Courts Catalyzing Change steering committee, NCJFCJ will seek direction on how the courts can approach bias and its effect on trauma informed systems of care.

**Continue to conduct/expand court Trauma Reviews/Consultations in jurisdictions:** Since the summit, NCJFCJ has conducted three additional trauma consultations - including one consultation examining the practice, policy and environment of a domestic child sex trafficking court. Several more consultations will occur in 2016 in both large and rural jurisdictions.

# performance measures

Researchers from the NCJFCJ facilitated a breakout session pertaining to trauma as it relates to how to measure a trauma-responsive juvenile and family justice system.

Facilitators asked participants to identify a potential outcome of a "trauma-informed" court on an index card. Participants then swapped cards with others. An individual would read the card and determine the importance of the statement by providing a score on the back of the card in which 1=Least Important and 5=Most Important. This process was done five times to provide five scores for each index card. Researchers then added the five scores together for each card to get a total sum value (maximum sum=25).

The response cards were then analyzed thematically and grouped together to identify common themes. Sum totals of each response in each category were then added together to provide overall sum for themes. Theme categories with the highest sum were considered to have the most prominent potential outcome

identified by participants. This allowed researchers to help understand what participants saw as tangible impacts of the implementation of trauma-informed justice practices (Figure 1).

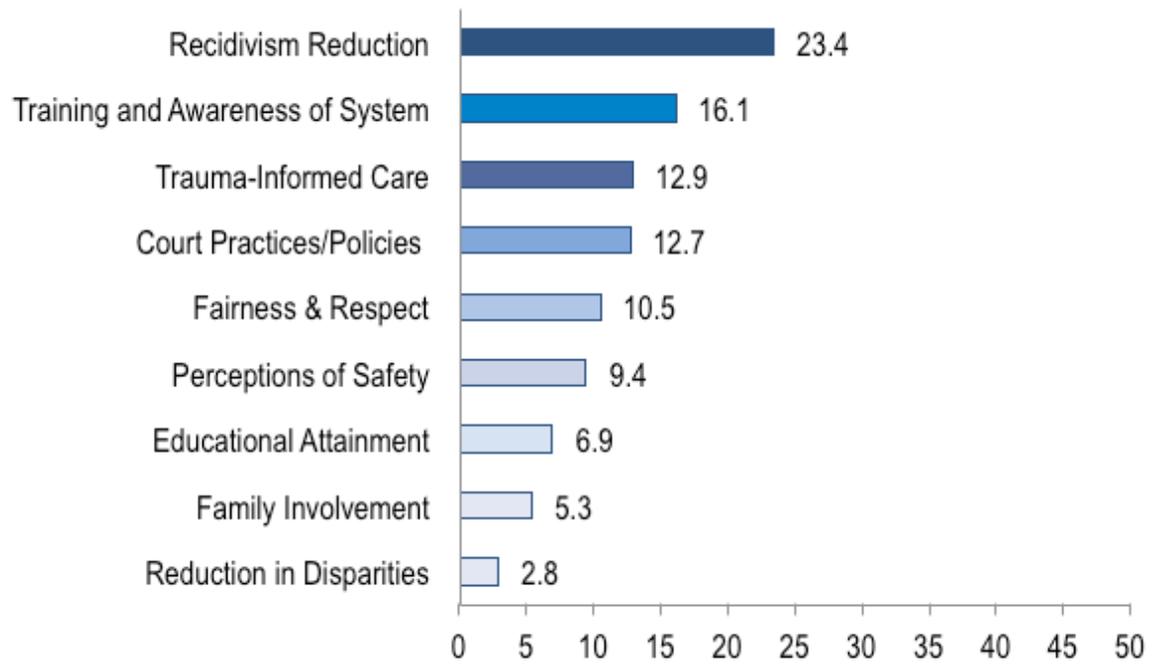
The themes or categories of potential outcomes with the highest percentages included:

Reduction of recidivism/referrals of youth into the juvenile justice system

Increased awareness and education of trauma for multi-system stakeholders

Increased number youth and families receiving trauma-informed care (assessments, screening, treatment, etc.)

**FIGURE 1: Frequency of Identified Outcomes of Trauma-Informed Courts**



# looking forward

The First National Summit on Trauma and the Courts was a resounding success in that it afforded an opportunity for experts and judicial officers from around the country to come together to explore key components of trauma-informed justice, assist in identifying performance measures and outcomes for future research and allow for robust discussion on what a juvenile and family court system can do to create a community of healing.

The Summit resulted in a unique opportunity for experts and judicial officers to cross-pollinate and develop shared meaning.

It also resulted in offering guidance to NCJFCJ on how to continue our work related to trauma as well as validate the current approach to our consultation work.

NCJFCJ will continue to build upon lessons learned from the trauma consultation process, outline and develop performance measures, and advance court-based research around trauma.

## resources

For more information about the First National Summit on Trauma and the Courts: Creating a Community of Healing, please visit: <http://www.ncjfcj.org/Trauma-Summit-2015>

For more information regarding the trauma consultation process, please visit: [http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ\\_Trauma\\_Manual\\_04.03.15.pdf](http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ_Trauma_Manual_04.03.15.pdf)



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