This year’s conference theme, “Fostering Leaders for Change in Communities Affected by Trauma and Violence,” reflected the mission of activating youth, adults, and communities through YOUTH-CAN by building upon trauma-informed interventions and systems that are emphasized for our families and partners. Interactive workshops and presentations motivated participants to be more proactive partners in transforming their communities by inviting everyone – including service provider partners and their agencies, parents, mentors, youth, and advocates – to play a significant role in addressing and preventing violence and healing trauma. The conference encouraged connections and collaborations across multiple fields and levels of prevention and intervention services in order to increase youth and community access to trauma-informed resources, personnel, and services. Conference participants included direct service clinicians (e.g., social workers and psychologists), school administrators, youth program workers, policy workers, program administrators, juvenile justice representatives, and community leaders.

The networking fair fostered communication and connections among each of these areas of expertise. The cross-discipline collaborations helped to inform discussions and to create an environment of teamwork. They shared a goal of promoting leadership and engagement in youth and community members in order to create more sustainable change and healing in our communities. This year’s keynote speaker – educator, faith leader, and restorative practitioner, Robert Spicer – provided an uplifting, energizing, and motivating speech focusing on participation, partnership, and practice. Reflecting the conference’s theme, Mr. Spicer challenged participants to be more active and engaged participants in their communities, consciously taking note of the critical role each person plays in the lives of the youth most impacted by the devastating effects of violence and trauma. He invited participants to re-imagine how they can all transform their communities by implementing restorative justice practices.

Nine interactive and informative workshops provided a more in-depth focus on a variety of topics including bridging the divide between local youth leadership and law enforcement, the enduring impact of trauma on teens and their relationships, and the consequences of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and Vicarious Trauma on many professionals serving in our communities. Workshops also focused on creative therapy and its transformative potential in the healing process, showcasing peer mentorship, training, and advocacy from the perspective of young adults involved in the foster care system. And in one of the most popular workshops, Strategic Sharing: Meaningful, Effective, and Safe Storytelling, in which participants had the opportunity to witness the powerful and inspiring result of strategic sharing firsthand.

The early afternoon presentation by the Changing Voices Ensemble of the Storycatchers Theatre showcased inspiring talent and energy and motivated the audience to find a sense of hope through the healing power of the creative and expressive arts. Through their poignant performance, the ensemble imparted a sense of collective healing amongst people who have experienced similar traumas in their community. This year’s conference served to energize and inspire participants, build useful skills relevant to violence prevention and trauma healing, and support the development of linkages among participants representing various sectors, service systems, and communities.

Each of these objectives helped participants to become more trauma-informed and to learn to work together to foster leadership, change, healing and resiliency in the wide range of communities and youth whose lives they impact every day. There were over 200 attendees at this year’s conference.
“A Rock and a Rug – Using Restorative Practices to Heal a Community”

Educator, faith leader, and restorative practitioner, Robert Spicer, engaged an enthusiastic audience of conference attendees with a fast-paced, lively, and interactive keynote address entitled, “A Rock and a Rug – Using Restorative Practices to Heal a Community.” He focused on three main areas – participation, partnership, and practice – as necessary and viable steps to creating an “ecosystem of care in schools.”

Through his energetic and effervescent style, Mr. Spicer motivated and inspired the attendees to take note of the critical role they play in the lives of youth most impacted by the deleterious effects of violence and trauma plaguing our communities. He invited them to pause and take a moment of communal silence and reflection, long enough to re-imagine how we, individually and collectively, can transform our communities through effective restorative justice practices.

“The leaders in this room today are the leaders that can be the game changers for the youth of today. We are living in a society that is traumatized by the violence in our communities, and you have the power to turn it around,” Spicer emphasized.

He also underscored the power of having those in conflict engage in a conversation to better understand each other and resolve the conflict through the positive and peaceful resolution ripple effect that he has seen emerge from using a restorative justice approach.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a philosophy that centers on relationships and trust. It seeks to address the needs of the victim, the wrongdoer, and the community. It is also about true healing: dressing the wounds many of these children leave raw and bare.

“Our city is traumatized by the inaction of those that can change our circumstances. We are the leaders we have been looking for, and we must resist having a “tail light” mentality to this violence! We must be the leaders! We must be the headlights!” he exclaimed.

From active listening to empathy, he highlighted the power of love and unconditional acceptance on the transformative healing of our youth.

Unconditional love and acceptance

Mr. Spicer highlighted the need for and value of absolute and unconditional acceptance as the greatest endowment we can give our youth today. Repairing the wounds afflicting our youth can only come about through loving attention and unconditional acceptance.

“We have to stop judging our youth by standards that are unrealistic and hurtful to their development. We have to move toward a relationship that is restorative and not punitive. When we do this, we empower our youth to learn from their mistakes and grow wiser. And, finally we need to tap out and get help when needed,” he added emphatically.

It takes a collective effort to challenge the status quo and to remain congruent in our actions and words when it comes to helping the youth most in need. True healing will come about from addressing the source of the pain and re-exposing that pain to the light of compassion and understanding.

“We know that working with our youth is challenging, and in these times, whether it’s interacting with them in school or in the juvenile justice system, we may say or do something that will end up hurting rather than helping a child. That is when you seek help! It will take a village to raise all of our children! You cannot do it alone.”

“To begin the process of rebuilding our relationship with our youth is to love them, stop judging them, and tap out and get help. We need to show our youth unconditional love because they are going to make mistakes, and they need to know that there is nothing they can do to strain this love we have for them.”

- Robert A. Spicer, MS Ed
“Struggling in the Streets”

This year’s conference participants enjoyed a very inspiring, moving performance addressing community violence and other issues affecting urban communities from the perspective of the Changing Voices (CV) Ensemble of the Storycatchers Theatre, a group of Chicago south side young men and women who joined forces to make a solid effort to turn their own lives and the lives of others around.

Members of the CV Ensemble include recently released or court-involved juveniles and young adults who engage in creative exploration of the challenges they face when they return to their homes and communities. Storycatchers coordinates with CV and the Illinois aftercare system as part of an effort to increase the likelihood of successful re-entry for court-involved youth.

Storycatchers Theatre is a youth development arts organization that prepares young people to make thoughtful and positive life choices through the process of storytelling, scriptwriting, producing and performing original musical theatre inspired by personal stories. Their hard work and collaborative projects promote creative and constructive outlets that lead to positive outcomes.

The CV Ensemble performed their original play, “Struggling in the Streets,” which the group wrote, produced and performs at neighborhood venues, including schools, churches, and community centers. “Struggling in the Streets” tells the story of the Diamond family, which has been torn apart by the untimely death of their youngest daughter, Tay, and the imprisonment of the family’s patriarch, OB. On the one-year anniversary of Tay’s death, Grandma Diamond cajoles Tay’s remaining siblings to come together at her unmarked grave, where Tay’s brothers and sister panic as they learn new and surprising information about their father’s arrest and realize Grandma Diamond may be seriously ill. Each one faces a choice that may ultimately bring them together or tear them apart forever.

Life imitating art

Storycatchers Theatre uses the healing and transformative power of the expressive arts to guide court-involved adolescents in an exploration of the root causes and long-term consequences of their behaviors. Using their personal stories to create a work of art, youth and adolescents cultivate pride and increased self-esteem. Sharing their own vulnerabilities with audiences and addressing very sensitive and complex issues centered on violence, trauma and grief, also helps facilitate a sense of healing created with others who have experienced similar traumas.

Each member, with his or her own spunky style and energetic personality, played an integral role contributing to the group dynamic and performance. A sense of true comradery was evident in the interactions among the CV Ensemble, both on and off the stage. Their family spirit, heart, and bright smiles were definitely no act.

Changing Voices rehearses and tours Monday through Thursday from 9 AM – 3 PM. The Ensemble occasionally hosts open rehearsals and staged readings of works-in-progress in its home base at 100 N. Western Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60612

To make donations or contribute to this program, or if you’d like to book a show or have any questions, please contact:

Nancy McCarty at 312-280-4772

For more information, please visit:

http://www.storycatcherstheatre.org/
On behalf of all conference attendees, the Urban Youth Trauma Center Staff would like to thank the following individuals for their participation in the 2015 YOUTH-CAN Conference Workshop Sessions

**Bridging the Divide: Building Understanding between Youth, Law Enforcement & Communities**
Vanessa D. Westley (Chicago Police Department)

**Tweens, Teens & Trauma: Building Trauma-Informed Spaces**
Erica B. Davis and Delrice Adams
(Chicago Department of Public Health Office of Violence Prevention and Behavioral Health)

**Staff Wellness: Why does it matter, and what can I do about it?**
Adriana E. Molina (Project ABC at Children's Institute, Inc.)

**100 Men Rising: Bridging Restorative Practices and Complex Trauma Treatment**
Cindy Hill-Ford (Center for Restorative Solutions (C4RS)) and Ixayanne Baez (Center for Restorative Solutions)

**Connection to the Soul: Using Creative Therapy as a Tool for Healing & Transformation**
Andrea Moreno, Katie Gambach and Jessica Estrada (Opciones Saludables/Healthy Options)

**Youth Leaders: Promoting Change in Foster Care and Adoption**
Jacob Ham (National Child Traumatic Stress Network) and Sharif Griggs, Brieanna Hayes and Valerie A. Lynch (Nobody Ages Out)

**Healing Hurt People - Chicago: A Trauma-Informed Hospital-Based Violence Prevention Intervention**
Brad Stolbach (University of Chicago)

**Building Trauma Sensitive Schools Through School-Community Collaboration**
Tali Raviv and Sybil Dunlap

**Strategic Sharing: Meaningful, Effective, and Safe Storytelling**
Tiffany Conroy (Children’s Research Triangle) and Terik Brown
Bridging the Divide: Building Understanding between Youth, Law Enforcement & Communities

This workshop with Vanessa D. Westley of the Chicago Police Department provided an overview of the Bridging the Divide program, a partnership between the Chicago Police Department and the YMCA that seeks to empower local youth leadership to work with law enforcement. The program uses circle work from a restorative lens to promote engagement and healing in a safe environment and to begin to create positive relationships between the police officers and youth in the communities they serve. The audience was engaged and asked questions that encouraged the work and possible future directions.

Westley, a 25-year veteran with the CPD, has been active in training police officers for leading peace circles and working with youth. Together, they work on creating solutions to address the root causes of violence in the community through activities, like staging a play, participating in a basketball league, or creating alternatives to court processing for juveniles with the goal of improving the relationship between youth and police.

Through such action-oriented conversations and initiatives, both officers and neighborhood youth can actively participate together in safe spaces in the community.

Tweens, Teens & Trauma: Building Trauma-Informed Spaces

This workshop addressed how trauma affects teens and their relationships and how it can result in longer term symptoms at physical, psychological and emotional levels. Focusing on adolescent development, Erica Davis and Delrice Adams from the Chicago Department of Public Health provided information on how tween and teenage youth experience trauma in different areas of their lives (e.g., in their homes, schools, and in their dating relationships).

Through highlighting the various areas that tween and teenage youth experience trauma, the presenters offered evidence-based strategies and tips that providers may observe in youth who may have experienced trauma in these areas. Specifically, the presenters highlighted the need for helpers to work toward reducing the impact of trauma through the use of trauma-informed spaces.
Staff Wellness: Why does it matter and what can I do about it?

The workshop on staff wellness was presented by Adriana Molina, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), from Los Angeles-based Children’s Institute, Inc., which is a partner site with the Urban Youth Trauma Center (UYTC) and a member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). During this workshop, the impact of working with trauma-affected communities was discussed. Staff burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue were defined and discussed in detail.

Audience members had a chance to share their experiences working with trauma-affected communities and figuring out how to create a sense of trust with communities they serve and of which they are also members. Ms. Molina discussed the enduring repercussions of secondary traumatic stress on the provider and the importance of picking up on cues, such as withdrawal, mood changes, flashbacks, and numbing. An insightful comment that Ms. Molina made was “rather than presenting a picture of trauma-informed care, take a “selfie” so that you, as the provider, are part of the picture.”

100 Men Rising: Restorative Practices and Complex Trauma Treatment

This workshop highlighted the integration of restorative practices into treatment for youth experiencing complex trauma. Cindy Hill-Ford and Ixayanne Baez provided attendees with a comprehensive look into Restorative and Trauma-Informed Practices (RTIPS), a school-wide program in Oakland, CA, working with gang-involved youth. Both presenters discussed the need for restorative practices in disrupting the influences that negatively affect urban youth and families, such as the school-to-prison pipeline and the need for families and helpers to provide youth with safe alternatives in their community that facilitate effective problem-solving. To illustrate the positive effects of the program, the presenters gave practical case examples of young men who were involved in gang violence that successfully utilized the RTIPS program. Through this program, a 100% drop in suspension rates was found, and it lead to the development of youth leadership projects that spurred the creation of 100 Men Rising events in Oakland, including the Kings & Queens compassion workshop and the Life Matters restorative approach to community violence, which presents a quest for safety, information, and freedom.
Connection to the Soul: Using Creative Therapy as a Tool for Healing & Transformation

Connection to the Soul: Using creative therapy as a tool for healing and transformation was presented by Andrea Moreno, Katie Gambach, and Jessica Estrada from Heartland Human Care Services. The workshop provided an overview of the two programs: Opciones Saludables/Healthy Options and Violence Recovery Services. These programs work to empower and create resilience in the lives of young people throughout the city of Chicago through comprehensive wellness and counseling programs. The workshop explored the ways that the programs use creative therapy and how creative therapy can be transformative in the healing process for young survivors of trauma.

It also addressed the cultural implications of using creative therapy with Latino youth. The workshop featured experiential learning activities that allowed the participants to work together while learning forms of direct practice within creative therapy.

Youth Leaders: Promoting Change in Foster Care and Adoption

Jacob Ham, the program director of the HEARTS program at the Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Center in New York (a member site of NCTSN) facilitated a discussion by Shariff Griggs, Valerie Lynch and Brianna Hayes, 3 young adults who shared their experiences as youth living in foster homes. Nobody Ages Out (NAO), an inspiring group of young adults who champion the adoption of transition age youth, discussed their work in peer mentorship, training and advocacy, interspersed with testimonials about how their own histories impact their work. Audience members wanted to know about plans to expand the work they do to other cities, such as Chicago, where there is a great need for young adults to have continued guidance from others as they navigate life.

Additional discussion centered around how to help promote youth leadership, particularly in the context of trauma and community violence.

Participants share their prayer flags with the group and the significance of each image they chose to include.

Jessica Estrada demonstrating to participants how to construct a prayer flag out of tissue paper and other materials
Of note, 32.5% of CPS students felt sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks or more, and 15.5% of students contemplated suicide. Ms. Dunlap discussed the 3 E’s of trauma—the event, the experience, and the effects—and different types of trauma exposure. Dr. Raviv discussed universal strategies for integrating trauma awareness into school settings. Two videos shown highlighted the importance of trauma awareness for CPS students. Overall, this presentation emphasized the need for school-community collaboration and partnerships to ensure trauma-informed services are provided that meet the needs of youth and families in Chicago.
Strategic Sharing: Meaningful, Effective, and Safe Storytelling

This insightful workshop presented by Tiffany Conroy (Children’s Research Triangle, a member site of NCTSN) provided an overview of strategic sharing, a strategy developed to help youth share their stories and experiences in safe, meaningful, and effective ways. The presenter engaged the audience in a discussion of the powerful impact of sharing experiences with others, including testimonials to connect youth to services, to bring resources to communities in need, to empower youth in lending their voices as part of an organization’s advisory board, and to help youth within a family and community context be able to navigate how and when to share sensitive and difficult information. Attendees learned about how to develop a narrative through the stages of strategic sharing, including discussions of considering specific motivations or reasons for developing a narrative, tailoring content to audiences, and possible reactions or responses. Ms. Conroy was joined via video recording by Terik Brown, who provided a firsthand experience of the development and presentation of a narrative created through strategic sharing. Throughout the workshop, attendees considered applications to their own lives and the lives of the youth that they work, with some developing their own narratives to share with their youth.

The Urban Youth Trauma Center sincerely thanks all our conference presenters, participants, and the UYTC staff for making this event so memorable!

Dr. Haley Ford
Dr. Krystal Lewis
Dr. David Simpson
Kathryn Cherry
Alfonso Floyd
Dina Elmuti
Lynda Gibson
Rachel Wax
Dr. Jaleel Abdul-Adil
Dr. Liza Suarez
Networking Among Neighborhoods:

A key element of the YOUTH-CAN initiative is joining forces and forming partnerships and collaborations. This year’s conference focused on building a platform for all types of service providers and community members to work together towards the possibility of building a protective web for youth, families, and communities. The collaboration activity and networking fair provided opportunities for participants to connect with other individuals across roles, service systems, and neighborhoods.

Thank you to the following agencies for hosting a table at the 2015 Networking Fair:

- Community Mental Health of Oak Park Township
- National Alliance on Mental Illness-Metro Suburban
- Infant Welfare Society Children's Clinic
- Children’s Research Triangle
- Habilitative Systems, Inc.
- Bright Star Outreach
- New Moms, Inc.
- Ark of St. Sabina
- Black Star Project
- Sarah’s Inn
- Chicago Children’s Center
- Illinois Collaboration on Youth
- Albany Park Community Center
- Pilsen Wellness Center
- UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago

2015 YOUTH-CAN Conference Feedback....

General feedback on the conference:

“I really enjoyed everything about this conference. I’m evaluating myself using what I learned and coming up with new ways to address trauma in the community.”

“The conference opened my eyes in a lot of areas. Now I can be more open to help.”

Feedback on the Storycatchers Theatre youth performance:

“Very inspiring!”

“The highlight of the conference!”

“I really enjoyed the youth performance. It's great to see youth doing positive things.”

YOUTH-CAN RESOURCE DIRECTORY NEEDS YOU!!

We value your participation in the YOUTH-CAN conference and consider you a resource to our network. By request from previous conference participants, we are creating a Resource Directory as a means to initiate and/or support collaboration among providers. Please click on/copy and paste the link below to complete the on-line form:

https://www.redcap.ihrp.uic.edu/survey?s=uP3AsavmDS

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS NEEDED!
Media Campaign

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
- Margaret Mead

Those profound words have never been more relevant than they are today. At this year’s conference, participants from all across the country gathered to commit to changing the world we live in for the sake of our youth and their futures. At this year’s Media Campaign booth, bustling with colorful and vibrant posters, UYTC invited conference attendees to be active participants by taking the UYTC Pledge, writing down their pledges on posters along with the campaign’s creative slogan, “If youth can, then I can!”

Why take the pledge?

Every day, too many children are impacted by the deleterious effects of violence, and silence and inaction are complicity. If we have learned one thing from history, it is that individuals can, in fact, make a difference. Over the course of a year, or even through a lifelong commitment, our everyday actions add up in a big way. It takes a collective effort to challenge and prevent violence in our communities.

The most powerful aspect of individual actions is their ability to influence others by creating an even larger impact. Working together, individually and collectively, we can take a stand against community violence and the trauma it leaves in its wake and make a significant difference in the lives of youth. Violence prevention is everyone’s responsibility.

The UYTC Media Campaign and YOUTH-CAN pledge illustrate the importance of our everyday actions and encourage individual and community commitment to preventing community violence. There is no better time to work together to address the complexities of violence and trauma and to stop the systemic violence that flourishes in silence. We are inundated and surrounded by so much violence every day. As youth workers, clinicians, and conscientious advocates, we are committed to working together to promote violence prevention and say: Enough! Taking action to prevent violence from taking over our communities is everyone’s responsibility.

We invite you all to take the pledge with the hashtag #ifyouthcan and submit your own photos and posters. Pictured below are some of this year’s participants holding up their personal pledges:
Direct Service and Training Opportunities

UYTC is currently accepting referrals for youth that meet criteria for the STRONG Families or I-CARE treatment interventions. Training opportunities are also available for clinicians interested in learning how to implement STRONG Families, I-CARE, and/or YOUTH-CAN. You may contact uytc@psych.uic.edu for referrals or inquiries about available training opportunities.

STRONG Families is a family systems-based intervention for youth with co-occurring disruptive behavior problems and community violence exposure. This intervention specifically addresses how disruptive behavior is linked to trauma exposure, and it helps parents/guardians to better understand this connection, while helping the youth and family members heal from the trauma they have experienced.

I-CARE is a community-based program designed to enhance adolescents’ capacity to regulate emotional and behavioral responses to social and environmental stressors. This integrated approach includes strategies from empirically supported treatment programs for traumatic stress as well as substance abuse problems and is adapted from the Trauma Systems Therapy (TST) approach.

The Urban Youth Trauma Center
would like to thank all of our center’s funders and conference sponsors for making this conference possible.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network Initiative
Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township
Bright Promises Foundation
Cook County Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department
DePaul University Community Mental Health Center

Urban Youth Trauma Center
University of Illinois at Chicago
Institute for Juvenile Research
Email: uytc@psych.uic.edu
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Jaleel Abdul-Adil, PhD & Liza Suarez, PhD