

CULTIVATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH: 2015 TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER CLIENT SURVEY RESULTS

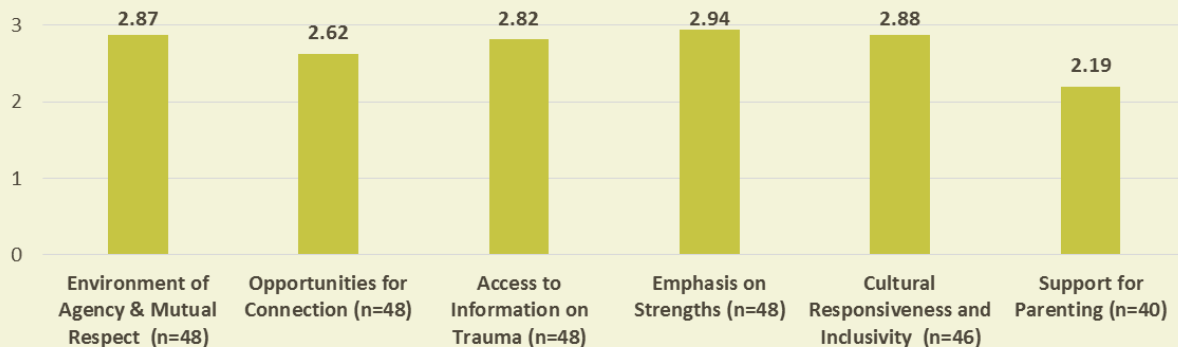
Tahirih Justice Center has an institutional commitment to continuous learning and implements several strategies for monitoring and evaluating its success in all areas of functioning. Central to our mission, Tahirih’s legal and case management services on behalf of courageous immigrant women and girls are among the most important programs to assess and continually improve. We have long incorporated formal and informal client feedback into our program practice in order to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in our client-centered, trauma-informed service delivery. Coordination of learning across our three offices in Baltimore, Greater DC, and Houston helps ensure that the 900+ cases we litigate annually are done in a manner most supportive and empowering for our clients.

In 2015, Tahirih piloted the use of the new *Trauma Informed Practices (TIP) Scale** as a client survey tool to evaluate our client-centered, trauma-informed, culturally-competent service model.

The results of the survey pilot broadly confirmed the effectiveness of our approach, with an average score of 2.72 out of 3 across all six trauma-informed practice areas. The survey also provided a window for reflection around potential areas of development, such as exploring parenting support needs for clients with children and creating opportunities for clients to connect with one another.

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

The Six Areas of Trauma-Informed Practice: Average Responses



Scores within the six areas indicate the extent to which survivors feel Tahirih program staff meet the principles of trauma-informed practice, according to the TIP Scale. Maximum possible average is 3.0. Scale: 0 = Not at all true, 1 = A little true, 2 = Somewhat true, 3 = Very true.

Percentage of Clients Responding “Very True” to the Following Statements:

- 96%** *I can trust staff.*
- 92%** *Staff treat me with dignity.*
- 96%** *Staff respect the strengths I have gained through life experience.*
- 96%** *Staff respect the strengths I’ve gained through my culture or family ties.*
- 92%** *Staff understand that I know what’s best for me.*

* The Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) Scale was developed based on studies conducted by the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health; Boston College; and Michigan State University. The tool was created by a collaborative of academics, national experts, advocates and survivors to help trauma-informed programs evaluate practice from a survivor’s perspective. For more information, see: Sullivan, C.M. & Goodman, L. (2015). *A Guide for Using the Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) Scales*. Available at dvidenceproject.org/evaluation-tools.

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

An internal Client Survey Working Group was formed in 2015 to evaluate Tahirih’s current client feedback tools, determine what assessment methodologies may be more effective, and implement a cohesive cross-office survey plan. The Working Group concluded that Tahirih’s existing surveys, which primarily use postal mail to solicit feedback after cases have been closed, were yielding unacceptably low participation rates. Furthermore, the group determined that it would be more desirable to increase opportunities for clients to give feedback throughout their time receiving services from Tahirih, both to increase client empowerment and improve program performance.

In order to test the new TIP survey, Tahirih aimed to administer it to at least 40 individuals most representative of former and current clients from our offices. We successfully met this target, with participation from 48 clients who were or are recipients of immigration legal services. Of those, 50% additionally received social services, and a small percentage accessed family law services.

The TIP survey, available in English and Spanish, contains 33 statements which are evaluated by respondents on a scale of “Not at all true” (0) to “Very true” (3), some with the option of “I don’t know.” Tahirih administered the TIP survey verbatim, though we elected to add four demographic questions to help track and monitor respondent diversity for internal purposes. These questions identified the office location where the client was served, the type of services accessed, the client’s native language, and the method of survey collection (via volunteer administrator or self-administered). A final text box, “Additional Comments (Optional),” provided space for comments within the survey.

Each office compiled a list of potential survey participants. Staff telephoned each individual to explain the nature of the survey and asked whether they would be willing to provide anonymous feedback by responding to questions administered by a trained volunteer at a later time. The majority of those reached agreed to participation and welcomed the opportunity. Each office then trained a small number of volunteers using a standardized training curriculum, based on the *Guide for Using the TIP Scales* to promote consistency. Surveys were conducted by volunteers primarily via telephone over the course of several months, with oversight by designated local office survey coordinators. At the conclusion of the TIP pilot in December 2015, the Client Survey Working Group met to consult on the 48 completed survey results.

“I received a lot of support. I’m astonished by the amount of help they gave me, always showing a lot of professionalism.”

“The staff were wonderful. They gave me my life back. They worked so hard to improve my health and overcome my depression.”

– 2015 CLIENT SURVEY FEEDBACK

OBSERVATIONS

The survey is organized around six subject areas of trauma-informed best practice. Below is a summary of the results organized by those categories.

- 1. *Environment of Agency & Mutual Self-Respect:*** (Average 2.87 of 3)
100% of respondents selected either “Somewhat true” or “Very true” in response to the statements: “Staff treat me with dignity” and “I can trust staff.” This indicates the program is highly competent in establishing the trust, respect, and dignity essential to effective client-service provider relationships.
- 2. *Opportunities for Connection:*** (Average 2.62 out of 3)
Although the results were positive, they were generally lower than other areas and reflect that creating opportunities for clients to meet each other is not a focused Tahirih service. While clients have an opportunity to connect with each other at our annual local office client parties, we are looking at ways to increase those opportunities in recognition of their value to clients. In 2016, we are planning events that will enable clients to interact with each other, such as life skills workshops and support groups.
- 3. *Access to Information on Trauma:*** (Average 2.82 out of 3)
90% of respondents felt it “Very true” that Tahirih’s program created opportunities to “learn about how abuse and other hardships affect relationships,” and that they felt they had the opportunity to “learn how abuse and other difficulties can affect mental health.” Both of these are vital survivor perspectives to help lay the foundation for healing and self-empowerment. We are reflecting on ways we may wish to incorporate more learning opportunities for clients on the impact of trauma.
- 4. *Emphasis on Strengths:*** (Average 2.94 out of 3)
As the highest average score across the six subject areas, this score again demonstrates Tahirih’s aptitude in working to a strengths-based approach with clients. Results showed 96% of respondents felt it “Very true” that staff respect the strengths that respondents’ have gained through their culture, family ties, and life experiences. 92% responded “very true” that staff recognize the strengths those clients brought to their relationships with their children, family, and others.
- 5. *Cultural Responsiveness and Inclusivity:*** (Average of 2.88 out of 3)
The results in this area confirmed Tahirih’s strengths in respecting diversity. Here, clients evaluated staff respect for cultural backgrounds, religion, and/or spiritual beliefs, as well as staff compassion towards those who face physical or mental challenges, those who have experienced generational abuses, and/or those who confront discrimination as part of everyday experience. 7% of respondents however indicated that it was “Not at all true” that “Staff understand my financial situation.” Though Tahirih’s services are offered entirely free of cost, we are investigating approaches to improve responsiveness to our clients’ financial situations and needs.
- 6. *Support for Parenting:*** (Average 2.19 out of 3)
Of all six subject areas, this was rated the lowest and had the highest instance of “I don’t know” responses. Here, the survey asked respondents to evaluate the support provided by Tahirih in helping them to develop skills and understanding around parenting children who witness or experience abuse, and how their own experience with abuse may impact their children. While this type of parenting support falls out of the realm of Tahirih’s current social services program offerings, and not all respondents were parents, Tahirih plans to follow up with clients with children to understand their potential needs for this type of support, and also increased referral networks to those agencies with these services.

NEXT STEPS

The Working Group determined that the TIP will be administered throughout 2016, coordinated by each of the local offices, in order to facilitate the best comparative sample to 2015 and provide more information.

To reduce variance and improve data interpretation, increased training will be given to volunteer survey administrators. Each office also aims to increase client participation by incorporating opportunities to provide feedback throughout the duration of service. This will include a general practice of informing clients at the outset about the client survey and option to participate at any time.

At the conclusion of 2016, Tahirih will evaluate and compare data with a view to program improvement as well as whether the tool itself should be modified to better suit Tahirih's needs. We also plan to incorporate learnings from the survey into our trainings for pro bono attorneys around effectively working with trauma survivors. Given Tahirih's core value of providing services in a client-centered manner, we look forward to increasing opportunities for clients to offer feedback to us so that we may continuously improve our services.

Contact Kristen Uhler-McKeown, Director of Legal & Social Services, at kristen@tahirih.org for more information.