Trauma, Addictions, Mental Health, and Recovery (TAMAR)

Introduction

Justice-involved individuals often experience complex and multiple traumas over the course of their life span. The prevalence of trauma in the lives of incarcerated individuals is significantly greater than the general population. Not only do individuals arrive at facilities with trauma histories, the experience of being in an institution can be highly traumatizing.

TAMAR is a comprehensive curriculum that is generally appropriate for people who have experienced trauma and who are incarcerated. It is easily customized to engage and address the unique needs of special populations. In response to a Request for Proposals to the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) customized TAMAR to specifically address gender, adolescents, people who identify as LGBTQ, and people who have been victimized sexually while incarcerated.

Programming

TAMAR is a 15-week program that delivers trauma-related topics or exercises to closed groups of 12-15 participants, as the learning in each module builds upon the previous one. Group size is intentionally small so that staff facilitators can customize awareness and skill-building activities to support the strengths and meet the individual needs of each participant. Similarly, staff facilitators are able to notice when a participant is struggling with the material and are able to offer individual support and referral to appropriate sources.

Participants are to meet twice a week for 90-minute sessions; however, topics often generate much energy and discussion. Some groups may need more time than others to complete certain exercises, however all efforts should be made to respect the agreed upon 90-minute session as a demonstration of how to maintain established boundaries. TAMAR is primarily a group treatment intervention and may also include activities such as journaling and creative expression. The curriculum includes a facilitator's manual and gender-specific participant workbook. All TAMAR resources are to be referenced and implemented as intended.

Conclusion

As one of many agencies which prepare individuals for re-entry into the community, DOCCS will remain committed to reviewing and researching evidence-based best practices to increase the likelihood of success and decrease the return to a correctional setting.