

# Maine Strong

Together Fostering Resilient Communities

Improving  
Future for  
Children by  
Investing in  
Providers  
That Serve  
Them

Project BRAID prioritizes  
**ORGANIZATIONAL  
SUSTAINABILITY  
AND COMMUNITY  
RESILIENCE**



# TO BUILD BETTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN, INVEST IN PROVIDERS THAT SERVE THEM

## MAINE STRONG TALKS TO RURAL COUNTIES ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

In 2016 a small team in Portland, Maine designed Program **BRAID** (**B**uilding **R**esilience in **A**reas **I**mpacted by **D**omestic **V**iolence) to support rural communities in Maine affected by domestic violence. At first, the project was focused on improving and expanding direct services for children impacted by domestic violence, including evidence-based clinical treatments. As the work progressed, however, it became clear that transformative change would take more than advanced training. "Right away we observed that it would be nearly impossible to improve outcomes for children affected by domestic violence without increasing the capacity of the professionals that work with them every day" reflected BRAID Project Director, Aurora Smaldone. Training and consultation on clinical modalities and child development was a necessary and important element but insufficient alone. Through four years of intensive work with behavioral health organizations and domestic violence agencies in the project's target communities:

**Project BRAID recommends the following approaches to transformational provider capacity building:**

**1) Acknowledge and address pain and suffering. First and foremost, support providers in attending to their own well-being.**

Child and family serving professionals cannot do their best work when they are physically, mentally, and spiritually depleted. Too often capacity-building programs for providers focus exclusively on increasing content expertise without a focus on personal and professional resiliency and well-being. "Many providers who work with domestic violence survivors carry the heavy burden of secondary trauma," said Aurora Smaldone. "They have also given selflessly of themselves sometimes at the expense of their own health." Because of this, Project BRAID devised comprehensive and culturally responsive consultation, training, and support, for its network of providers. "Especially during times of crisis, we need to put our oxygen masks on first," said Dory Hacker, BRAID Clinical Manager. "You cannot expect a resilient workforce, healthy organizations, and the provision of quality care when providers are utterly burned out and fatigued."

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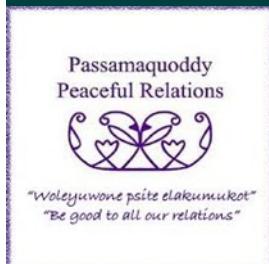
To support health and well-being, Project BRAID provided the following to the organizations they served:

- ◆ In-depth trauma training and workshops on vicarious trauma
- ◆ Implementation of reflective supervision practices within partnering organizations
- ◆ One-on-one consultation on stress management
- ◆ Promotion of mindfulness and wellness practices
- ◆ Emphasis on collective care, not only self-care
- ◆ Support groups on building and maintaining well-being
- ◆ Myriad resources on resilience
- ◆ Space and time for professional and personal reflection
- ◆ Training and support on inter-personal communication techniques

**2) Forge and strengthen trusting, cross-disciplinary relationships.**

Strong and personal professional networks ensure children impacted by domestic violence are connected to services and resources that increase safety and improve outcomes. Historically in Maine, communication divides existed between local domestic violence resource agencies and community-based mental health agencies. An exception to this, tribal domestic violence agencies and tribal health centers had longstanding and collaborative professional relationships, benefitting their mutual clientele. To build lasting relationships between community mental health and domestic violence agencies, Project BRAID assembled a cross-sector learning collaborative bringing together representatives from both agencies from each target community. Among participants were domestic violence workers and clinicians from the Passamaquoddy tribal reservations at Pleasant Point and Indian Township who were able to share with the group (cont.)

## BRAID NETWORK OF COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

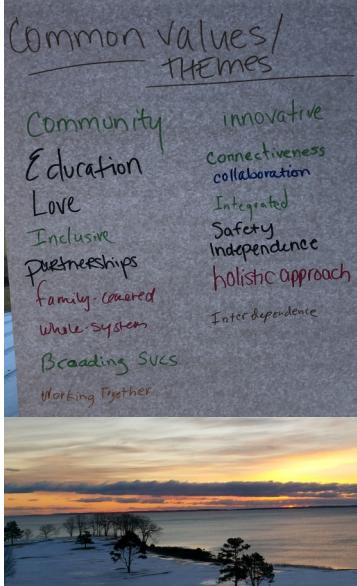


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MAINE STRONG TALKS TO RURAL COUNTIES ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

(cont.) strategies for developing close-knit relationships to better serve children. The collaborative met monthly (virtually) and came together three times in person to build and strengthen bonds, strategize, and plan for the future. According to the lead clinician in Washington County, "This project had a great component of connection" and having relationships will lead to better service provision. "The times we met were powerful, and we need to commit to making that happen more...when we do this work from a community place, relationships are more significant than how we offer treatment."

## RESTORATIVE CONNECTION AT LEARNING SESSION 2:



## 3) Effect professional identity change – from generalists to child specialists.

At the outset of Project BRAID, partners were interviewed as part of a needs assessment process and asked about the ways in which children were served by each partnering agency. More than one domestic violence agency lead reported that the organization, "didn't serve children" focusing instead on adult survivors. Over the course of four years, each agency transformed its perspective on the ways in which it impacted improved the lives of children impacted by domestic violence. Partnering domestic violence agencies, in particular, uncovered, identified, evaluated, and improved the specific ways in which they sought to meet the needs of children. "Because of Project BRAID" one domestic violence agency leader commented, "we are more equipped to think about children." This fundamental perspective shift has resulted in an increase in confidence when it comes to meeting children's needs. "We always thought we had to refer children out because we serve adults... now we realize what we can do for children specifically." In addition, domestic violence resource shelters were revamped via Project BRAID with children and families in mind. The following features were added to various shelters as a result of the project:

- ◆ Playground sets
- ◆ Child-friendly bedding and linens
- ◆ Child-appropriate entertainment options
- ◆ Child play areas
- ◆ Multi-lingual children's books
- ◆ Safety/privacy fences in outdoor areas
- ◆ Child-focused programming and activities

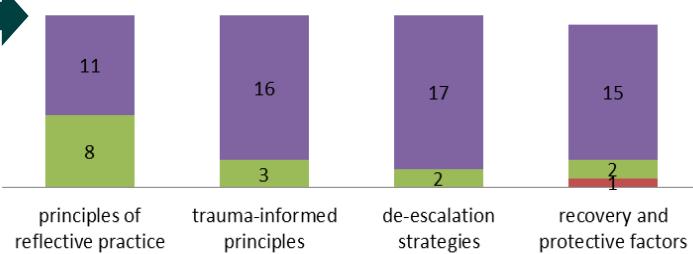
**Evaluation:** Project BRAID's Sustainability Learning Collaborative included:

- ◆ Advanced training on special topics
- ◆ A focus on resiliency
- ◆ Community partnerships
- ◆ Evaluation consultation

When thinking about sustainability, project evaluator Ellen Puccia said, "it is important to be able to show future funders the impacts of our work. Increasing participants' skills in evaluation techniques will help them do that." BRAID's evaluation of the learning sessions shows that the project has made an impact on how participants will approach their work in the future.

These topics covered during the workshop will be beneficial to my work with parents and their children affected by domestic violence:

■ strongly disagree ■ disagree ■ agree ■ strongly agree



# ORCA CORNER

## IMPACT AND OUTCOMES FOR SYSTEMS AND INDIVIDUALS

### ORCA Corner: [Systems Impact]

**Outcome:** The clinical team at Aroostook Mental Health Center (AMHC) and the domestic violence advocacy team at Next Step (both in Washington County) have recognized the inherent value of professional relationships with one another. This collaboration, forged through Project BRAID, has improved care coordination, treatment, and well-being of clients impacted by domestic violence.

**Relevance:** This professional network plans to sustain its collaboration beyond the lifespan of the project, and to include others as needed.

**Contribution:** The experience participating in the Project BRAID Learning Collaborative gave this group the opportunity to build relationships that they value and will continue to grow.

**Authentic source:** Data reflecting this outcome comes from group interviews with Learning Collaborative participants at the second Learning Session conducted by Project BRAID clinical and evaluation staff. Project BRAID constantly monitors how well things are working as part of its process evaluation.

### ORCA Corner: [Individual Impact]

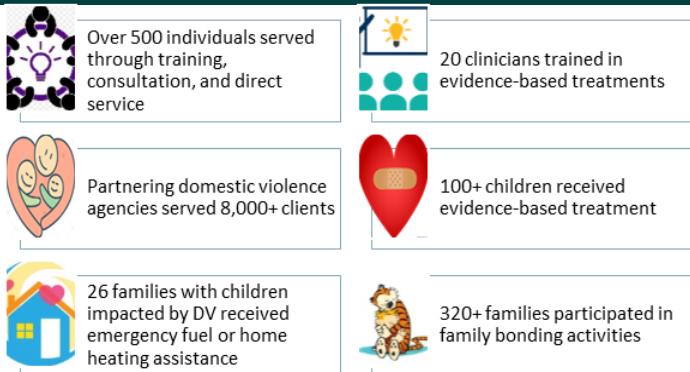
**Outcome:** Mary Beth Snell (name changed for privacy), a senior clinician at the Pleasant Point Health Center serving the Passamaquoddy Tribe on Pleasant Point Reservation has realized the direct relationship between her own well-being and the quality of care she provides.

**Relevance:** She is better equipped to serve children and their caregivers impacted by domestic violence.

**Contribution:** According to Mary Beth Snell, she now has models to use "especially with DV." In addition, Project BRAID helped her stay on trauma-filled cases because she had a community "to talk to about the challenges." The project "encouraged, supported, and informed" her. Moreover, Project BRAID gave her license to take control of her own health in the name of improving care for others. "On a personal note, Project BRAID inspired me to reduce hours, lose 50 pounds, and take advice for self-care". She now feels prepared to tackle new professional challenges and evolve as a "leader".

**Authentic Source:** The above quotations were collected during a group evaluation interview call on August 17, 2020 involving Project BRAID staff, local evaluator, and Project BRAID Learning Collaborative participants.

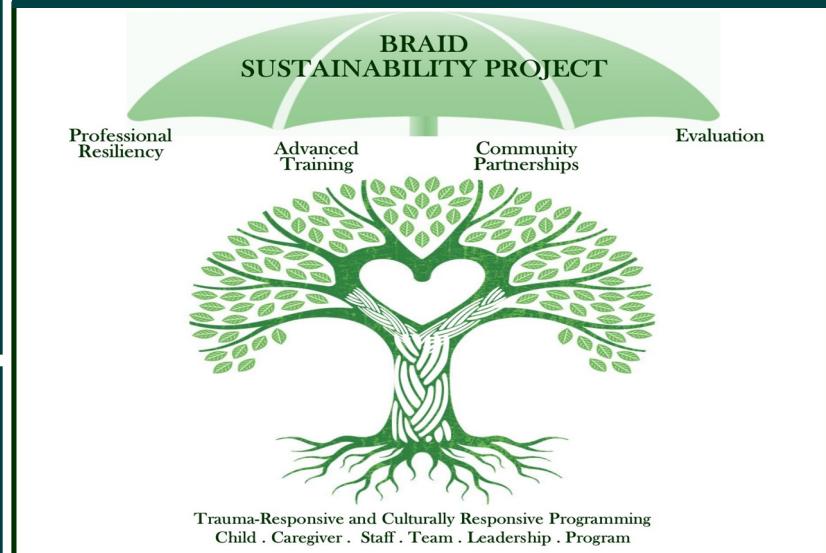
### THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF PROJECT BRAID:



### Pitfalls to Avoid:

- ◆ Don't shy away from heterogeneous professional learning communities
- ◆ Don't be afraid to push the "pause button" and also don't be afraid to keep going
- ◆ Don't be afraid to shift gears (especially during a national crisis)
- ◆ Turnover can be both a challenge and a glorious opportunity for new champions and training/onboarding new staff

### RESPONDING WITH HEART, INNOVATION AND RESILIENCY BUCKETS!



### BRAID TEAM

