

# Executive Summary: The Cuyahoga County Defending Childhood Initiative: An Outcome Evaluation

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## Background

- ❖ Childhood exposure to violence (CEV), either as a witness or victim, is often associated with long-term physical, psychological, and emotional harm. Children exposed to violence are also at a higher risk of engaging in criminal behavior later in life and committing acts of violence against others.
- ❖ In 2010, the Department of Justice (DOJ) launched the Defending Childhood Initiative (DCI) to address CEV and trauma
- ❖ Cuyahoga County was awarded both a planning and full implementation grant to improve the county's response to CEV

## The Cuyahoga County Model

- ❖ The Cuyahoga County Defending Childhood Initiative (CCDCI) is a county-wide, comprehensive program designed to reduce or eliminate CEV and its consequences and serves children between 0 and 17 years of age.
- ❖ While the CCDCI approach to CEV and trauma include several unique parts, the three main areas are 1) screening children for CEV and trauma, 2) conducting diagnostic assessments on children who have experienced elevated levels of CEV and trauma, and 3) providing trauma-informed treatment to children in need of such services.
- ❖ In July 2012, local child-serving systems (child welfare and juvenile court) as well as several behavioral health agencies began screening children for CEV and trauma using one of two screening tools (one tool for children aged 0 -7, one for children aged 8 and over).
- ❖ Based on the screening results, children can be referred into a full diagnostic assessment provided by FrontLine Service.
- ❖ Upon completion of a diagnostic assessment, children and families may be referred to one of five evidence-based, trauma-informed treatments with a local service provider.

## Screening Data

- ❖ Between July 2012 and November 2015, 23,471 children were screened for CEV and trauma. This includes 10,372 children aged 0 – 7 and 13,099 children 8 and older.
- ❖ Of the children screened, 53% were male, 63% were African American, and 24% were Caucasian.

- ❖ The majority of the children were screened by the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (64.6%).
- ❖ 28% of children aged 0-7 and 67% of children aged 8 and older were exposed to at least one of seven different types of violence.
- ❖ 16% of children aged 0 – 7 and 50% of children aged 8 and older have witnessed someone being attacked
- ❖ 38% of children aged 8 and older reported being punched or hit in the last year

### Assessment Data

- ❖ 2,245 children were referred for a full diagnostic assessment resulting in 1,024 completed assessments.
- ❖ 18% of children were referred due to high scores on the screening tools, while 81% were referred due to worker ‘overrides’.
- ❖ Of the children assessed, nearly 94% reported at least one past-year victimization and 85% reported at least two past-year victimizations.
- ❖ Common types of violence exposure reported by children during assessment included: being assaulted by other kids (49%), witnessing an assault without a weapon (48%), being assaulted without a weapon (47%), experiencing emotional abuse from other kids (41%), and experiencing psychological abuse from adults (38%).
- ❖ In general, boys, non-whites, and older children experienced more violence.
- ❖ Children who reported high levels of violence exposure also reported high levels of trauma symptoms, violent behavior, and problem behavior.

### Treatment Data

- ❖ 870 children were referred for trauma-informed treatment. As of October 2015, 265 children and their families have completed the CCDCI trauma-informed treatment.
- ❖ Trauma-focused CBT was the most commonly provided trauma-informed treatment (77%).
- ❖ Pre and post testing revealed that the CCDCI treatment produced significant improvements in trauma symptoms, violence exposure, and problem behaviors.