

University City Leads Trauma-Informed Schools Effort

Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR, knows all too well the impact of trauma on students. She saw it in her work as a principal. She continues to see it in her current role as the superintendent in The School District of University City. But perhaps more important, she lived it as a transfer student from St. Louis.

Dr. Hardin-Bartley is championing the effort to help educators understand the impact of trauma on students and their ability to perform at high levels in the classroom. In her first month as superintendent, she quickly pulled together a team of teachers and staff to participate in a trauma-informed workshop. She introduced the trauma-informed concept and practice to administrators during a special retreat at the start of the school year and was instrumental in bringing the Alive and Well STL advocacy training to University City High School (UCHS).

Helping teachers understand the mental state of their students and the impact of their words and behaviors on students experiencing trauma is personal for Dr. Hardin-Bartley.

"I had a sixth grade teacher who basically told me I would be nothing. But there were others who saw something in me and helped me navigate some of the challenges I was experiencing," Dr. Hardin-Bartley said. "That's why I can stand here as superintendent of The School District of University City. We absolutely have the power to destroy a child or build them up...we have to change mindsets."

According to Program Director Emily Luft, Alive and Well STL is working to make St. Louis a trauma-informed community. "We will need citizens who understand the impact of stress and trauma and actively work to make our community a healthier and more supportive place to live," Luft said.

Alive and Well STL, a large community effort sponsored by the St. Louis Regional Health Commission, is working to publicly address stress and trauma, how to handle both positively and make St. Louis a trauma-informed community.

Area schools, including University City High School, are working together over an 18-month period to become trauma-informed with other community



Wiley Price

Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley greets guests at the recent Trauma-Informed Schools workshop hosted by Alive and Well STL.

stakeholders, including staff, parents, administrators and boards. Other local school districts collaborating on the effort include Jennings, Parkway, Rockwood and St. Louis Public School Districts.

In the workshop at UCHS, participants were taught about the public narrative framework for social change and practiced telling their stories in addition to receiving and offering feedback.

UCHS senior Raven Bullard shared a powerful personal narrative about the importance of addressing student trauma.

"There is a set up in society that kind of traps a lot of people...for me it's important that people feel supported as they are navigating their issues. At school you are kind of expected to just keep it together and get done what you need to get done," she said. "I want people to realize that yes, as students, we have things to get done toward our future but we have to do that while we are still working through our trauma. It's important to me that people feel supported so I want to do that."

Bullard is working to raise her 4.1 GPA even higher before graduation in May 2017. She has been accepted to the University of Memphis and was offered a scholarship to Kansas University. She is also awaiting application responses from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, University of Richmond (Virginia) and Washington University in St. Louis.

The event was one of many quarterly events that will be held through the end of 2017. They will focus on how to merge the knowledge of the collaborative members with the passion and expertise of the community.

To learn more about Alive and Well STL, visit www.aliveandwellstl.com. For more information about the St. Louis Regional Health Commission, go to www.stlrhc.org.



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