

Handle with Care:

Integrating Trauma-Informed Practices in School Policy



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Handle With Care

- A program aimed at ensuring that children who are exposed to crime, violence or abuse receive appropriate interventions so they can succeed in school to the best of their ability.
- Research shows that trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships and function appropriately in the classroom.

Who Created HWC?

In 2012 Handle with Care was created in a subcommittee of the West Virginia Children's Justice Task Force in Partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of West Virginia as part of a Defending Childhood Initiative.

2012 Developed the HWC Program

2013 Piloted the HWC Program

2015 WV State Police launched HWC statewide

2018 HWC Stakeholder meeting in all 55 counties

2021 HWC in over 40 states

Spokane County - Schools Currently Implementing

Districts Signed On:

- Central Valley School District
- Cheney School District
- East Valley School District
- Freeman School District
- Mead School District
- Medical Lake School District
- Nine Mile Falls School District
- Reardan-Edwall School District
- Riverside School District
- Spokane Public Schools
- West Valley School District

Organizational Support From:

- Northeast Washington Educational Service District 101 (NEWESD 101)
- Community Prevention and Wellness Initiative (CPWI) Coalitions
- Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition (SRDVC)
- Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD)

The Problem

Students experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences may experience trauma as a result of their exposure to the event in their homes, schools and community.

These students have increased risk for negative outcomes such as poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and delinquency.



The Solution

Improved cross-agency communication among first responder organizations and schools can help the increase support for students experiencing trauma.

Increased use of trauma-sensitive strategies by educators and school leaders will lead to improved educational and life outcomes for students experiencing trauma as a result of the adverse childhood experiences.



Why Handle With Care?

Handle with Care aims to formalize and improve consistent communication between first responders (law enforcement and fire department) and school staff.

The purpose of this communication is to:

- strengthen the relationship between first responders, school staff and students.
- provide notification to the school that a child has experienced something that may alter the way they act or perform at school in the following days and weeks.
- serve as a reminder for school staff to use trauma-informed interventions when responding to children.
- identify children who are experiencing trauma and provide necessary support.

When should HWC be implemented? ANYTIME children are present.

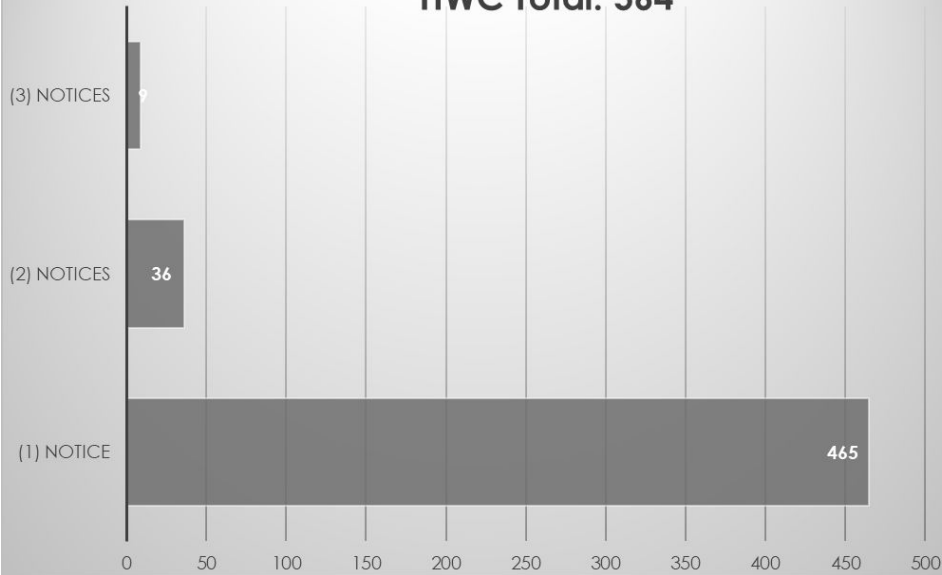
- Domestic Violence
- Serious accident
- Parent arrested
- CPS called
- Bullying/cyberbullying
- DOA at home or of a friend
- Search warrant
- Living with a parent with mental illness
- Overdose
- SWAT call

HWC Notice

- **It's only three words: Handle with Care**
- No details are ever given
- It should arrive at the school before the start of the next school day.
- Need to know basis only at the school.
- Does not stay in child's permanent record
- **It does not mean you approach the child**

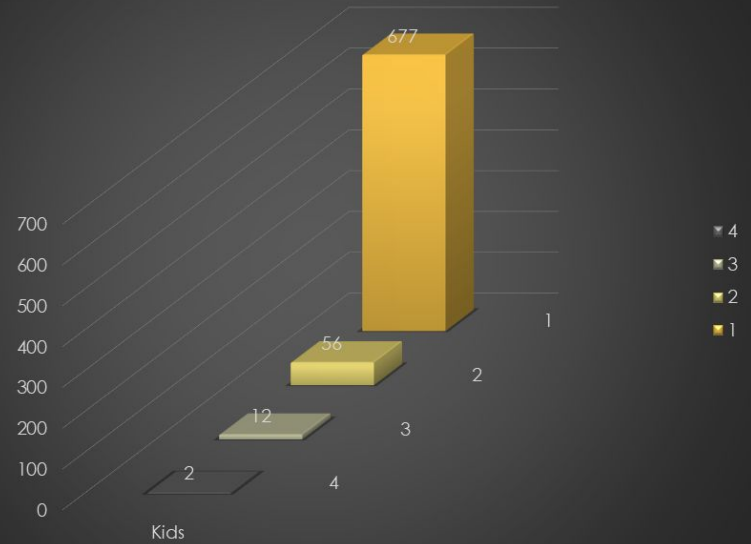
Let's pause...

HWC Total: 564



November 2021

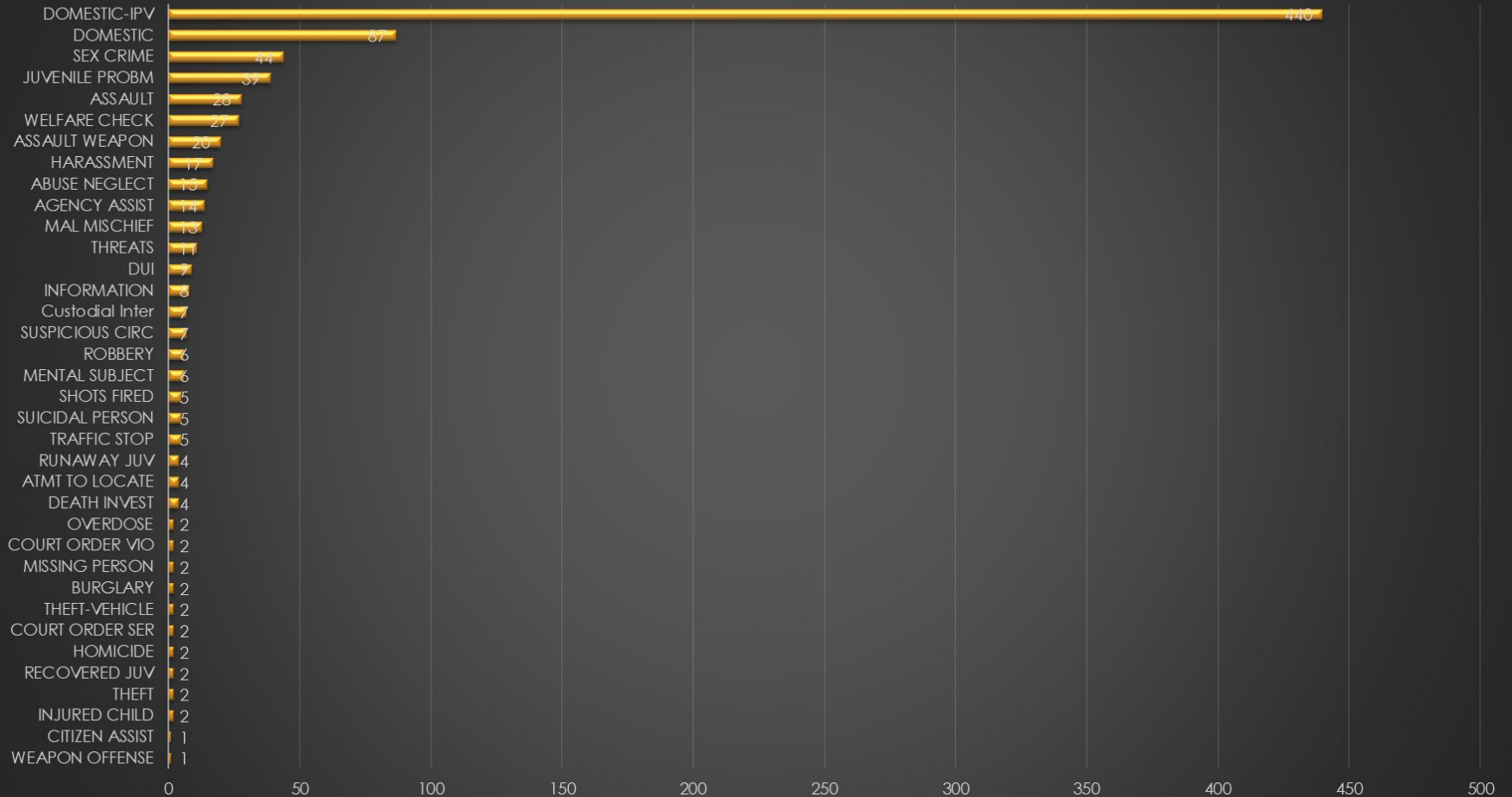
HWC notices



January 2022

Total HWC Notifications - Yakima, WA

HWC by Incident Type



WHY?

ACES: SERIOUS CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Kids at Risk Tend To:

- Get behind in school
- Start skipping/ Drop out of school
- Become involved in things they should not be involved in
- Often end up meeting Law Enforcement

Risk Outcomes:

- Cause structural changes in developing brain
- Diabetes
- Heart Disease
- Cancer
- Depression

Which Can Lead to Serious social problems

- Homelessness,
- Inability to sustain employment,
- Delinquency, violence, and criminal behavior,
- Long term use of health, behavioral health, correctional and social services,
- Compromised ability to parent

HWC In Schools

Handle With Care sets schools up to be proactive, rather than reactive. With informed, caring personnel ready to share their calm, rather than contribute to the student's chaos.

Outcomes of a traumatic situation can be minimized which:

- Reduces disciplinary actions
- Reduces absenteeism
- Builds students resilience, self-respect, and confidence

A Trauma Sensitive School



A respectful and safe environment where children can build positive relationships with adults and peers, learn to manage their emotions and behavioral responses, and find academic success.

Why create a trauma sensitive school system?



Schools provide possibilities for traumatized children to forge relationships with caring adults and learn in a *supportive, predictable,* and *safe* environment.

Policy Work

- Substance use prevention does not exist in a silo - it requires dedicated cross-sector collaboration
- SRDVC began piloting with Spokane Public Schools in early 2020 with assistance from NEWESD 101 and SRHD
- Local CPWI Coalitions under the NEWESD 101 umbrella began working with these organizations and their school districts in order to formalize this process
- CPWI Action Plan: Working with our school district and local first responders/law enforcement to implement “Handle with Care” - A comprehensive policy that provides students experiencing trauma at home a variety of preventative community and school supports
- Provide trauma informed training to the district and analyze Healthy Youth Survey data, specifically the questions that measure school performance.

Example: Cheney - TALK 2 Healthy Choices

- Began with a phone number
- Handle With Care “button” connects address to school district
- Huge project- 6 different law enforcement departments (FAFB PD, Airway Heights PD, Kalispel Tribe PD, Sheriff’s Department, Cheney PD and EWU PD)
- Huge project- 4 different fire agencies

While it’s a huge project the improved cross-agency communication among first responder organizations and schools help the increased support for students experiencing trauma = **SO WORTH IT!**

Questions & Conversation