Pioneering Peace: A Community Journey

My entry point
Origins
Milestones
Key Ingredients
Community Asset
Moving Ahead
The Peace4Tarpon web site was my first introduction to the organization and efforts
I contacted Robin Saenger, Founding Director and we met along with Mary Sharrow at Eco Bean. Just another tidbit about Tarpon Springs; there are a lot more locally owned businesses than chains – like this one, you can get Starbucks if you really want but you have to go away from the “heart” of Tarpon Springs
Robin told me some of the history of how Peace4Tarpon came to be and its ongoing purpose. She talked about bringing awareness and having capacity to grow new ideas and offer compassion. I was invited to bring my “piece” to add to the peace.
I quickly saw what a humanizing force trauma informed care and community can be. I’ve been attracted to humanizing forces for many years and this one seemed to have vast potential.
I also saw a chance to add to the resiliency of people and organizations. Like wetlands buffer, absorb, filter and aid the cycle of life.
Robin began by asking what could be done for the community especially to take care of those less able and to curb violence. Her friend Andy Blanch introduced Trauma Informed care. As Robin’s understanding grew she gathered others, and gained momentum
About the origins. Tarpon Springs is a unique community. About 25,000 population sitting on the edge of a major metropolis.
A working waterfront
A diverse population
Among the many amazing partners is Mayor David Archie whose support and encouragement has been instrumental.
Monthly steering committee meetings are comprised of a cross section of citizens, service agencies, government, business and education
The web page lists many of the major partnering organizations
Robin’s Quest +
Unique Community +
Amazing Partners =

Flywheel
Tarpon Springs, FL, first trauma-informed city, embraces messy path toward peace
A few milestones

- MOU
- Community Events
- Visioning
A memorandum of understanding serves as a reminder and a bond to all partners of the importance of the work we are undertaking and the common core of principles that drives the work
A event that symbolizes the sprit and community nature was Peace Flags, created and flown ALL OVER Tarpon Srprings
LOVE has NO COLOR
Many organizations exist independent of Peace4Tarpon but add enrichment to and enriched by partnering. One such organization is Tarpon Women’s Interfaith Network (TWIN)
Individually inspired efforts also gain momentum and sustainability through our connections. Annie Dabbs (on the left) is a retired educator who brings books into lives and homes that otherwise would be lacking with her Reader’s Choice Program.
Peace4Tarpon’s first community wide visioning day was held in December of 2013. Bringing together more than 70 people to create a map to our future
An encapsulation of Visioning
Peace4Tarpon has emerged as a major community asset. It contributes to the ongoing well-being and preparedness to handle whatever might come our way.
We are all well aware of much of the infrastructure that connects a city such as ours. Streets and highways, electricity and other utilities, storm water drainage and sewage to name a few. There's another essential connective element – person to person
We might see on the surface a health fair, a block party, or a community day to build a playground. What’s going on at a deeper level is vastly important too. We are building protective factors and resilience.
across the neighborhoods covered by individuals sampled for our survey, our data do point to signs that neighborhoods lacking in social cohesion and trust more generally have had a more difficult time in recovering from Sandy. Individuals in slowly recovering neighborhoods are less likely to believe that, generally speaking, most people can be trusted (31 percent vs. 44 percent) and are more likely to believe that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people (68 percent vs. 53 percent) compared to neighborhoods reporting greater levels of recovery. Individuals in slowly recovering neighborhoods are also less likely to say that Sandy brought out the best in people than individuals in neighborhoods reporting greater levels of recovery (63 percent vs. 81 percent).
A second asset base that Peace4Tarpon enhances is collaboration. It’s a word that has lost a little of its true meaning as we often “settle” for just getting along and getting by. Peace4Tarpon adheres to values and principles and finds the true collaboration point where resourcefulness is at its highest.
Collaboration

Commitment

Safe Transportation of Children

Responsibility
With this form of collaboration, partners start at an advanced level, with focus and coherence around shared commitments.
Connectivity and collaboration are a fine recipe for creativity. Innovative solutions and “out of the box” problem solving are par for the course. Pat Weber, Exec. Dir. Of Tarpon Housing Authority saw a need for accessible mental health counseling for her clients. She collaborated to Suncoast Center, offering them free use of space in a vacant housing unit. They now provide counseling to many who otherwise would not be able to take advantage.
The story of How Peace4Tarpon serves as a community connector that I’m most personally familiar with involves The Shepherd Center, a local interfaith outreach of compassion, education, assistance, and support for those in need within our community. I met their Executive Director at a Peace4Tarpon meeting and subsequently invited him to speak at our church. When he spoke my wife was intrigued by a new program they were starting called The Esther Program and she volunteered to mentor one of the “at-risk” women engaged in developing self-sufficiency.
My wife had experienced Strength Finders as part of professional development with her employer Wells Fargo and arranged for the mentees and mentors to complete the profile and discuss their strengths. Several of the women spoke about what an affirming experience it was to have their strength validated in such a manner.
While the mentee’s were learning about themselves my wife tells me she has learned even more. She learned that “at-risk” means daily issues, hard choices, and for anyone with unresolved trauma an almost limitless source of stress triggers.
This Tarpon Springs initiative will provide resources to help prevent and heal the many forms of trauma. It will engage and inspire us to offer what peace/piece we can to help heal the pain of trauma. We all bear witness to trauma issues during daily life, there is no “trauma-free-zone” in the world. We can ask “what happened to you?” not “what’s wrong with you?” Listen without judgement as listening is an act of love. Compassion is important and powerful. You don’t have to offer an ultimate “solution.” Build trust and have real conversations. Do no blame yourself, you are not alone.
Many partners refer to the mindset growth as having the “nickel drop.” My experience has been that understanding the impact of trauma takes us to a new edge of compassion and enables us to see possibilities anew. It is a growth vs. fixed mindset in Carol Dweck’s framework. The Arbinger Institute would call it an Outward Mindset vs. Inward, calling into focus the essence of others. Robert Kegan offers a framework of complexity and those for whom the nickel drops do grasp more complexity.
Peace4Tarpon lives, to a very great extent, the very conditions it wishes to create. Great focus is placed on these principles. At almost every juncture someone will ask “What does the community really want? Have we asked them”
The other very noticeable practice that Peace4Tarpon members employ is a special brand of attentiveness to the life stream of the community. I’ll call it attending
It reminds me of the lessons learned from observing HROs. Organizations with a lot at stake, a dynamic environment, and a set of skills and practices that enable it to succeed even when unexpected events occur.

5 characteristics of HRO

Preoccupation with failure
Reluctance to simplify interpretations
Sensitivity to operations
Commitment to resilience
Deference to expertise
Attending

- Sensitive to community life
- Willingly search for answers
- Know we’re all connected in success and failure
- Solutions can be found in the midst of problems
- Dedication to resilience
Carl Vom Eigen has identified 4 key elements in our Peace4 formula

These serve as our mission, inspiration, and vision for the future.

On the practical front, Peace4Tarpon is completing an application for 501c3 status, planning a Peace4Communities summit, and continuing to reach out to people and refine our own practices.
“The light always beckons.”

C. Terry Warner
Bonds That Make Us Free
Founder, The Arbinger Institute
May the year ahead be filled with the blessings of health, happiness, and peace.

L’shana Tova
כשנה טובה