

Abstract

A trauma-informed court reduces stress and promotes healing by prioritizing safety, dignity, and fairness for all it serves and the professionals who work there. One way to create such a space is to bring art into the courtroom. Research shows that exposure to art can lower stress, promote belonging, and signal compassion. AOC staff in the Family & Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) and WA State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) create artwork that reflects local history and culture, now displayed in dependency courts to make them more welcoming and family-friendly. Early feedback from judges and staff shows that art brightens public spaces, offers moments of calm, and helps professionals feel supported. This effort demonstrates that small changes to the environment can make a court more trauma-responsive.

Our Team

This project was undertaken by AOC staff who are court improvement professionals and artists: Arina Gertseva, Rosalynn Guillén, April Kraft-Duley, Rachel Muñoz, and Laura Vogel. Our shared vision is to bring creativity, care, and beauty into courts serving children and families. The team engaged court communities, listened to their needs, and created artwork that is meaningful and tailored to each site.



Project Goals

- Create artwork that reflects local history, culture, and identity
- Use art to foster belonging, care, and compassion
- Show how small art installations support trauma-responsive practices in courts
- Gather feedback from judges, staff, and community members on impact

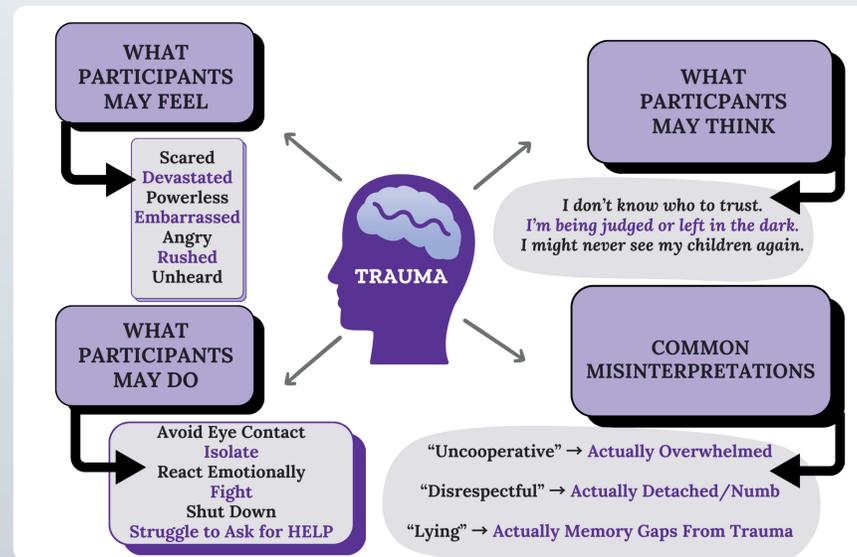


Research About Art and Spaces

- Artwork can lower stress and promote calm (SAMHSA, 2013).
- Trauma-informed court environments foster safety and trust (NCJFCJ, Memphis 2021).
- Courthouse environments send powerful messages. A trauma-informed design can reduce stress, promote trust, and encourage participation in the justice process. (The Court Manager, 2025)



How Trauma Shows Up in Court



Trauma-Informed Courts



A trauma-informed court recognizes the impact of trauma on court participants and people who work in the court - including attorneys, judicial officers, and staff. These courts adapt policies, practices, and environments to minimize stressors and support healing. At their core, trauma-informed courts place well-being, dignity, humanity, and fairness at the center so that every interaction fosters safety, respect, and trust.

Our Work Connecting Art, Justice, and Research

We are collaborating with four dependency courts, **Jefferson, Clallam, Yakima, and Spokane**, to introduce art into court environments as part of a research-driven effort to build more trauma-responsive spaces. Artwork has already been completed for Clallam and Jefferson counties, our team is with Yakima, and Spokane scheduled to be the next participating county. This project is informed by evidence showing that art can reduce stress, foster belonging, and signal compassion in institutional settings.

Our team is committed to measuring the impact of these efforts with data, ensuring that courts, families, and professionals can see the impact of creating environments that support dignity, healing, and connection.



Court Partner Feedback

We have received positive feedback from court professionals in Jefferson and Clallam Superior Courts. This feedback is important because it reflects real-world experiences, highlights what is working well, and helps guide future improvements. Below are quotes from court professionals:



"The two mountain scenes are to the left of the bench and directly across from where the jury sits. I love looking at them during long court days and recall how soothing and peaceful my time in the mountains are. The harbor scene is at the back of the courtroom and brings a great feel to that part of the courtroom."

Judge Brandon Mack, Jefferson Superior Court



"The artwork brings a more welcoming appearance and livens it up!"

Kaysey Clayton, Clallam Co.

"The art adds vibrancy and color to the space, yet it's respectful and has meaning to the community that the courthouse serves."

Karen Robison, Jefferson Co.



Next Steps

This art initiative is only the beginning. By bringing creativity and cultural components into the courthouse, art opens the door to a broader transformation in how courts respond to trauma and support families. It lays the groundwork for deeper, systemic change and reminds us that courthouses can be not only places of justice, but also spaces of dignity, healing, and connection. Building on this foundation, the FYJP, together with WSCCR researchers, will continue to support courts in several key ways:

<p>Self-assessment of Trauma-responsive Practices</p> 	<p>Feedback from Court Visitors</p> 	<p>Trainings for Court Professionals</p> 	<p>Engage Local Artists and Children in Producing Art</p> 
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