



About Wesley Family Services

Based in Western Pennsylvania, Wesley Family Services is a nonprofit organization that **provides behavioral healthcare and therapeutic support services to more than 30,000 individuals and families** annually. Its programs in Autism, intellectual disabilities, behavioral health, and education use a trauma-informed and evidence-based approach. Wesley has a privately run K-12 school that serves students from over 50 school districts across five counties.



Challenges

As an organization serving children with significant trauma backgrounds, Wesley wanted to expand its knowledge of **trauma-informed practices** in order to improve relationships with the students at its K-12 school. Staff were seeking tools and resources to create a school culture that was more trauma-focused, with a **goal of decreasing therapeutic restraints and aggressive behaviors.**

"The buy-in was so quick after learning about Ukeru and the possible outcomes it could have with our culture."

ALICIA TATANGELO
*Education & TCI
Coordinator, Wesley
K-8 School*

Working with Ukeru

"When first learning about Ukeru®, the idea seemed **so different than other approaches** we were used to implementing," says Education & TCI Coordinator Alicia Tatangelo.

Through a series of "train the trainer" sessions in 2017, 2018, and 2019, Wesley certified a total of eight trainers within the organization. Those trainers subsequently **trained all of the school staff, putting an emphasis on culture change** and the goals they wanted to meet as a school.

During the students' first day back after summer break, trainers went to each classroom to support the staff in introducing this new approach. This included introducing the blocking pads to students and encouraging them to ask questions about Ukeru.

To ensure the culture change was sustainable, trainers conducted numerous training refreshers and continued to check in with staff and students throughout the school year. Wesley also invited Ukeru's parent company, Grafton Integrated Health Network, to participate in a leadership discussion to help trainers and administrators serve as role models for staff.

"Shortly after implementing Ukeru, we had a student in crisis who was outside and escalated. He had large sticks in his hands, so staff wouldn't go near him," remembers Tatangelo. **"Staff had pads, offered space, and provided a comforting approach. The student was able to de-escalate with these interventions. When processing afterward, he expressed to staff how he gained trust with them, saying, 'I expected you to put your hands on me. I felt safer because you didn't put your hands on me.'"**

"Seeing the passion of the trainers and hearing success stories gave us a sense of excitement to start implementing at our own school."

ALICIA TATANGELO
*Education & TCI
Coordinator, Wesley
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Results

Over a two-year period (2017-2018), Wesley Family Services saw the following results:

- A **43% reduction in the use of restraints**
- Challenging behaviors **decreased by 32%**
- Staff report feeling more **secure and safe** when students need to release physical energy. Ukeru has given them more options for de-escalating a child in crisis and is helping them communicate with students to avoid harmful behaviors
- Students have grown comfortable with the **Ukeru blocking pads** and sometimes use them independently to ease stress

Today, Ukeru is always attempted before resorting to restraints.

43%

Less restraints



Challenging behavior decreased 32%



Students comfortable with pads



Staff feel more safe and secure