

How can adopting a trauma-informed approach help drive forward improved outcomes as part of Scotland's roadmap for COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation?

Learning Report: Children & Families



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Responding to trauma is, now more than ever, a public health priority. COVID-19 and the restrictions put in place to contain the virus have had a significant impact on children and families. This is particularly true for children who have experienced domestic abuse, physical or emotional neglect or other adverse childhood experiences during or prior to the pandemic. Research shows that trauma can have an adverse impact on people's lives, increasing their risk of experiencing poorer physical and mental health and poorer social, educational and criminal justice outcomes than people who do not experience trauma. However, inequality of outcomes for people who have experienced trauma is not inevitable, with a growing evidence base suggesting that adopting a trauma-informed policy and practice can help improve health, wellbeing and life chances for people affected by trauma.

Through the National Trauma Training Programme, the shared ambition of the Scottish Government, COSLA and partners is to develop a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforce across Scotland. The aim of this work is to ensure we deliver services in ways that prevent further harm or re-traumatisation for those who have experienced psychological trauma or adversity at any stage in their lives and support their unique recovery journey.

As part of the programme of support available to professionals working across local authorities and other community planning partners, the Improvement Service, in partnership with the Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland, has been hosting a series of deep dive learning events over 2020-21. Each event provides an opportunity to explore how adopting a trauma-informed approach can support key community planning priorities and support professionals to identify tangible steps to help ensure this approach is embedded in policy and practice moving forward.

The event on 19th November 2020 provided opportunities for participants to:

- Learn about the impact of trauma and what a trauma-informed approach looks like;
- Learn from existing good practice and how a trauma-informed approach can support improving outcomes for children and families;
- Hear about existing resources and support for implementation of a trauma-informed approach through the National Trauma Training Programme; and
- Discuss how a trauma-informed approach could support their area of work and organisation, and identify tangible actions that can help embed a trauma-informed approach in their area of work.

This learning event brought together over 100 attendees across the statutory and third sectors from local authority areas across Scotland, encompassing a wide range of professionals working to improve outcomes for children and families in their local authority area. Participants included practitioners, service managers, policy leads, senior leaders and Elected Members.

The event was chaired by [Iona Colvin](#), Chief Social Work Adviser, Scottish Government. We were delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of adopting a trauma-informed approach to working with children and families at a local and national level. These included:

- [John Swinney](#), Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Pre-recorded)
- [Cllr Alison Evison](#), COSLA President (Pre-recorded)
- [Dr Sandra Ferguson](#), Associate Director for Psychology & Lead for National Trauma Training Programme, NHS Education for Scotland
- [Dan Johnson](#), Clinical Director, Kibble
- [Lena Carter](#), Depute Head Teacher, & [Roslyn Redpath](#), Principal Educational Psychologist, Argyll & Bute Council
- [Shumela Ahmed](#), Managing Director, Resilience Learning Partnership

[View the full video playlist.](#)

[Download all the speaker slides.](#)



Key Messages

While the remainder of this learning report outlines the key barriers and enablers and future action and support highlighted by participants during discussions, there were a number of key messages identified throughout the event:

- Training is a key part of developing a trauma-informed approach in systems and services, but other actions are also vital for long-term culture change, including trauma-informed leadership, meaningful engagement with people with lived experience in service design, robust evaluation of what is and is not working, and supporting staff wellbeing;
- The importance of responding to trauma and developing trauma-informed systems, services and workforces requires recognition and buy-in from senior leaders and decision makers, and leaders both locally and nationally must drive forward this agenda at a strategic level;
- No individual staff member, service or organisation is solely responsible for responding to trauma. A joined-up, multi-agency approach must be taken to ensure trauma-informed practice and policy is sustainably developed and embedded collaboratively across systems and services, shaped by the lived experience of people in Scotland who have been affected by trauma; and
- While there are numerous examples of good practice across Scotland, there is a need for tools and resources to support local areas and organisations to develop consistency and accountability to ensure high-quality trauma-informed practice and policy.

Barriers and Enablers for adopting a trauma-informed approach to working with children and families – key themes identified by participants



BARRIERS

Crisis response to COVID has prevented long-term work on responding to trauma and building resilience.

The pandemic has limited the ability to provide safe spaces and trauma-informed support.

There is limited resource within services and this presents a risk of the burden being placed on frontline staff.

The conditions and capacity for relationship building require a large-scale change in attitudes.



ENABLERS

Buy-in and commitment to this agenda from leadership and senior staff makes a huge difference in driving forward actions.

Some local authorities have a champion's board – a platform for care-experienced children and young people – which strengthens the approach of work with children.

Multi-agency, collaborative working across sectors reduces the burden on single services and staff.

The ability to link this approach to national drivers such as The Promise.

How trauma informed is your organisation's policy and practice?

Participants were asked to reflect on existing work and awareness of trauma-informed approaches within their organisation or local area. The following key themes were identified across discussions:

- It was recognised that there is growing awareness of trauma-informed approaches in children and families work, but there is work to be done to ensure that policy and practice aligns with this approach fully.
- Many staff have undergone training or have access to e-learning materials, such as those produced by the National Trauma Training Programme.
- Some organisations have co-produced their policies alongside those with lived experience.
- Many attendees felt that their organisation or service strives to be trauma informed, but there could be improvement in developing consistency across all staff, departments, etc.
- Attendees highlighted that a more effective response to vicarious trauma is needed, particularly given the challenges that the pandemic has presented.

What action and support are required to ensure your organisation's policy and practice are trauma informed?

Participants were asked to reflect on key next steps and actions going forward that can support the implementation of a trauma-informed approach in their area/organisation. The following key themes, actions and areas for support were identified across discussions:

1. Strengthening awareness raising and multi-agency working

Participants highlighted that greater collaboration is needed across organisations, and that this approach could be supported nationally with opportunities to collaborate and shared learning. Attendees highlighted the need for the commitment to trauma-informed practice and policy to be communicated at both national and local levels, with effective time and resource given to ensuring consistent messaging and accessibility of information.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

- Meet regularly and share learning with other key partner organisations and services.
- Commit to raising awareness around trauma and use platform to get others involved and informed.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

There is a need for continued national support and the promotion of trauma-informed work across sectors. Attendees identified the need for more opportunities for meaningful joined-up working.

2. Prioritising support for staff wellbeing

Participants highlighted that it is crucial to support staff to respond to people experiencing trauma. Staff may be experiencing vicarious trauma, and may also have their own experiences of trauma. Attendees felt that wellbeing should be a key topic prioritised by local and national leadership: ensure that staff are cared for in order to care for others.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

- Provide opportunities for peer support and make wellbeing a top priority within organisations.
- Use the opportunity of the strong national focus on mental health and wellbeing to do things differently at local and organisational levels.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

Senior leaders and decision-makers need to commit to this agenda. It was suggested that this can be promoted through national drivers on children's rights and wellbeing, emphasising that protecting workforce wellbeing is vital to achieving these outcomes.

3. Embedding a trauma-informed approach into policy and practice beyond workforce training

Participants highlighted that more resource is needed for training and development, but also that this must be undertaken alongside a commitment to sustainably and holistically embed trauma-informed policies and practice within organisations, including developing trauma-informed leadership and collaborating with people with lived experience.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Monitoring staff training and ensuring that there are no barriers to undertaking learning and development.

Organisations can develop their own scoping of how their practice needs to change or develop in order to be trauma informed.

Scope ways to meaningfully include the voices of lived experience within any policy and practice review process.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

It was suggested that a national standard could be developed for training, policy and practice within organisations and services, in order to ensure consistency and accountability.

Attendees suggested that STILT leadership training should be mandatory to develop buy-in at senior level.

What action are you taking forward after attending today's event?



Connect with other trauma champions



Review policies to make sure they are trauma informed



Continue to build relationships with children, families and other professionals



Make trauma awareness part of everyday language



Plan how to embed support for the impact of trauma on the workforce



Develop engagement with people with lived experience

Summary

Looking ahead, stakeholders identified the need for:

- National networking opportunities and support to build awareness of trauma-informed practice in their local area or organisation.
- National standards to be developed for training, policy and practice within organisations and services.
- Further engagement with training and awareness raising from leadership in order to highlight the importance of this agenda and develop senior buy-in.
- Commitment at every level to staff wellbeing as a key priority to achieve national outcomes and embed a trauma-informed approach.

Next Steps

- The findings and recommendations from this learning report will be shared with the National Steering Group for Trauma Training, chaired by the Deputy First Minister, and will be used to help shape strategic priorities for the next stage of the National Trauma Training Programme.
- The Improvement Service, in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Government, have launched an online community of practice, free and available to all professionals across Scotland who are interested in finding out more about trauma-informed policy and practice and who would like to share learning. To join, please visit: <https://khub.net/group/trauma-informed-approaches-in-scotland/group-home>
- The Improvement Service, NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Government are supporting the development of a network of trauma champions, who are senior leaders across local authorities, NHS Health Boards and other key community planning partners. The trauma champions will be supported to drive forward trauma-informed practice and policy across their organisations and local areas in a multi-agency, collaborative way. For more information, please visit the [NTTP website](#).

Resources

The National Trauma Training Programme (NTTP) and e-learning resources

- The [NTTP website](#) provides information on the training and resources developed by the NTTP to support the skills and knowledge of the whole Scottish workforce. This includes access to e-learning modules, videos about the benefits of trauma-informed practice, and information on the Scottish Trauma-Informed Leaders Training programme (STILT).
- This [interactive PDF](#) summarises the key trauma training resources from the NTTP that are openly available to support all members of the Scottish workforce to strengthen their understanding of their role in responding to people affected by trauma.

Improvement Service briefing and infographic

[Taking a trauma-informed lens to COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation](#)

In partnership with COSLA and NHS Education for Scotland, the Improvement Service has published a briefing to highlight how adopting a trauma-informed approach to Scotland's COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation agenda can support key priorities, including improving outcomes for vulnerable people and communities affected by trauma and supporting workforce wellbeing and resilience.

[Infographic: A trauma-informed approach to Scotland's COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation](#)

In partnership with NHS Education for Scotland, the Improvement Service has published an infographic briefing to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on people affected by trauma, and how a trauma-informed approach can support Scotland's COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation agenda.

Staff support and wellbeing

[National Wellbeing Hub](#)

This national digital wellbeing hub, which is aimed specifically at professionals working in the Health and Social Care sector, supports staff, carers, volunteers and their families to access relevant support when they need it, and provides a range of self-care and wellbeing resources designed to aid resilience as the whole workforce responds to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Below is a link to a resource developed by NHS Education for Scotland that provides an overview of support available for staff wellbeing.



Join our new community of practice on the Knowledge Hub

This Knowledge Hub group is for professionals across Scotland who are working to adopt a trauma-informed approach across policy and practice. It is a safe space for professionals to connect to each other and share good practice, learning and resources. National partners NHS Education for Scotland, the Improvement Service and Scottish Government will also share useful information and resources. It is free and easy to join the Knowledge Hub.

To join, please visit: <https://khub.net/group/trauma-informed-approaches-in-scotland/group-home>

Stay up to date

Follow the Improvement Service and partners on Twitter to stay up to date with future events and new resources:

[@Improvserv](#)

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