

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: Violence Against Women and Girls



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Responding to trauma is, now more than ever, a public health priority. The COVID-19 pandemic has, and will continue to, place women, children and young people experiencing all forms of violence against women at increased risk of harm and trauma for the foreseeable future. This includes women and children experiencing domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. 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 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 the 8th December 2020, which took place as part of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based-Violence, 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 women and children affected by VAW;
- 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 women and children affected by VAW in their local authority area. Participants included practitioners and frontline workers, service managers, policy leads, senior leaders and Elected Members.

The event was chaired by [Chief Inspector Sarah Taylor](#), Police Scotland, and chair of Equally Safe Edinburgh. 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 women and children affected by VAW 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 Caroline Bruce](#), Head of Programme, Transforming Psychological Trauma, NHS Education for Scotland
- [Ann Hayne](#), Gender-Based Violence Manager, NHS Lanarkshire
- [Sheila Noble, Violence Against Women Partnership Coordinator, Fife Council & Mairi McAllister, Assistant Manager, Fife RASAC](#)
- [Jen Stewart](#), Manager, Perth & Kinross RASAC

[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 violence against women – key themes identified by participants in breakout sessions



BARRIERS

Long-term culture change is needed to recognise, understand, and embed a trauma-informed approach across Scotland.

There is limited capacity for staff to undergo training and development, particularly in light of COVID-19.

Given staff focus on delivering high-quality services, it may be challenging to find time to focus on the strategic changes to systems that may be required.

The pandemic response has limited staff capacity to engage in partnership working to achieve shared outcomes and develop a shared language.



ENABLERS

Responses are more effective when there is joined-up, collaborative working across organisations and sectors.

Trauma champions and leadership commitment help to break down silos and develop shared understanding and buy in.

Staff across frontline services feel encouraged when they have opportunities to share learning and learn from others.

Space to reflect on practices which have not been trauma-informed in the past can help to envisage new ways forward in the future.

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

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

- Participants highlighted that trauma-informed practice has been incorporated to some extent within VAW work for a long time due to the nature of the work and breadth of knowledge of staff; however, many participants noted that the practical implementation could improve.
- Many attendees felt that their organisation or sector was in the early stages of fully embedding a trauma-informed approach.
- Some organisations have undergone training, and have been made aware of resources and development opportunities for strengthening trauma-informed practice. It was recognised that awareness is sometimes inconsistent across all employees and organisations.
- Participants noted that there will be a variation of the progress being made across local authorities, organisations, and sectors in Scotland.
- A key area where further development was required is robustly embedding this approach into policy and practice.
- Attendees also hoped to access increased opportunities to collaborate with other organisations to develop a joined-up approach to responding to trauma.

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. Ensuring systems and services are informed by lived experience

Participants highlighted that services need to be informed by meaningful engagement with people with lived experience of trauma. All staff who come into contact with members of the public need to have training to understand trauma and its impact: to be fully embedded, responding to trauma needs to be recognised as everyone's business.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Have safe and supportive conversations within the organisation and with service users to identify where improvements can be made.

Seek opportunities to raise awareness of trauma and the need for a trauma-informed approach, including promoting the NTTP resources.

Provide support for staff – vicarious trauma needs to be better supported so staff are able to provide high-quality support to clients.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

Attendees suggested that it would be useful to have access to a framework that outlines how agencies/ organisations can co-produce systems and services with people with lived experience of trauma and abuse, and ensure that this engagement is trauma informed and not tokenistic.

2. Embedding the language of trauma into policy and practice

Participants highlighted that there needs to be a shared language and understanding of trauma across Scotland, supported and prioritised at a national level. Policies and procedures also need to be trauma informed to ensure this approach is embedded as a whole systems approach within and across organisations/agencies.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Prioritise a multi-agency approach locally when driving things forward as this avoids sole responsibility being placed on individual services. Look at opportunities for joined-up working with others.

Develop a set of standards for organisations to work towards to ensure they are trauma informed, to support consistency and accountability and help drive forward improved outcomes for people experiencing trauma.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

Leadership is needed to ensure that policies and procedures are trauma informed and the intended outcomes are being achieved for people and communities affected by trauma.

There is strong need for sustainable funding and resource to be put towards training the workforce and supporting wider transformational change.

3. Staff development, accountability and evaluation

Many attendees acknowledged that further resource for training and development is required, but that this also needs to be supported by long-term evaluation and monitoring and cannot be isolated. There is a need for a consistent approach across different organisations, sectors and geographies both to help improve outcomes for people and communities affected by trauma and also support workforce skills development and wellbeing.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Support staff to undertake training and monitor progress. Advocate for further resource.

Collaborate within networks, share learning and seek out case studies and examples of good practice from others.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

At a national level, oversight and support is needed to help support this work and to build capacity within and across organisations and drive forward improvements.

A framework to ensure accountability and encourage organisations to measure progress and performance against a minimum standard is required.

Attendees suggested the development of opportunities for professionals to share learning and good practice across Scotland.

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



Ensure all training and policy activities are given a trauma-informed lens



Promote further training on trauma across local partnerships



Develop a multi-agency plan for a trauma-informed response across services



Take forward discussion about how to better support staff wellbeing



Build-in time to discuss training. Be kind and available. Listen and learn.



Share information and raise awareness beyond usual networks

How can a trauma-informed approach make a difference for survivors?

Key messages from SafeLives Authentic Voice Panel¹

“(If people were trained in trauma)... it would have made a huge difference at the start for me”

“Some of the questions the police had to ask me were awkward, and I couldn't answer properly in front of my parents...maybe if they had considered how difficult it was then I would have responded differently”

“We need champions to make sure the systems are doing what they should with trauma”

¹ This is a panel of women with lived experience of domestic abuse who gave feedback on the findings from this event.

Summary

Looking ahead, stakeholders identified the need for:

- National networking opportunities to share learning, collaborate with other organisations and sectors, and build awareness of trauma-informed practice.
- Guidance and support to ensure that systems and services are informed by lived-experience.
- Support for staff to undertake training and development opportunities – both at an organisational level and on a national, capacity-building scale which prioritises responding to trauma.
- National standards which identify key policy and practice components in a trauma-informed approach, which organisations can use to guide their approach.

Next steps

- The findings 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:

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