Organisational Toolkit Information Booklet

SBNI
Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

TIP ACEs
Be the Change

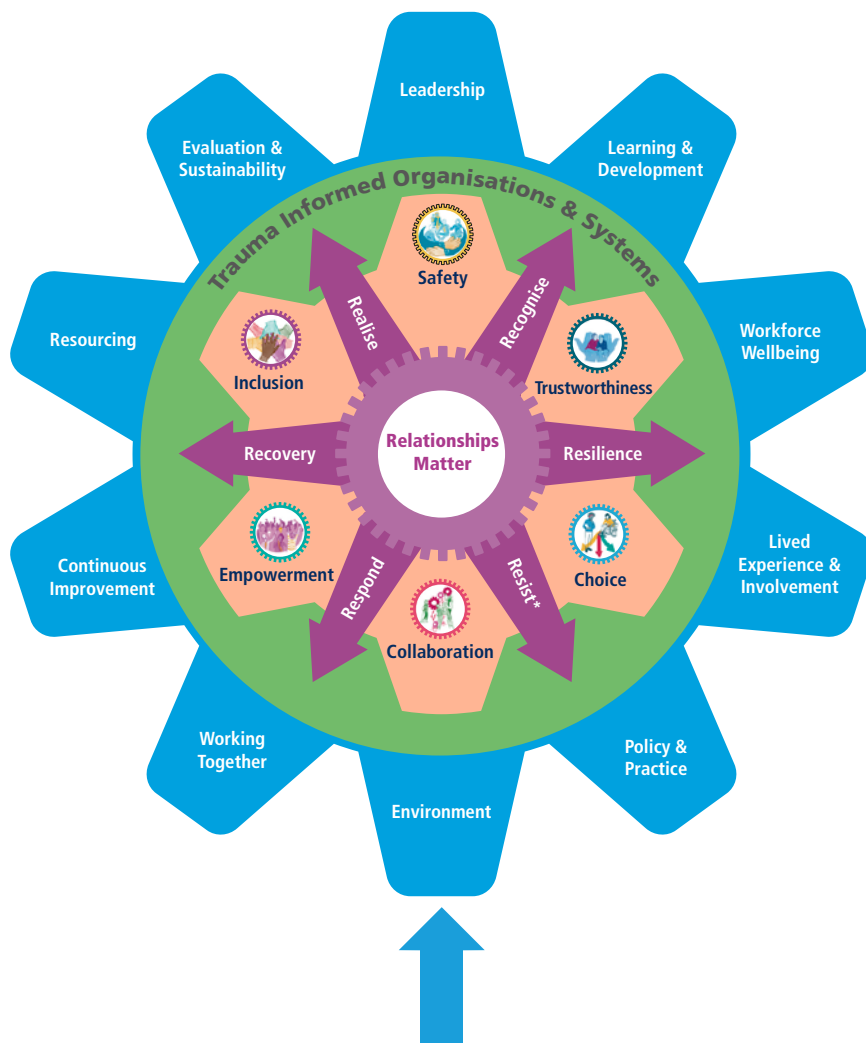Environment

Contents

Version 1.0

Introduction

Developing a trauma-informed organisation is best thought about as a step by step approach, a process and a journey.

This information booklet is intended to be used in conjunction with the **SBNI Trauma Informed Toolkit – Embedding a Trauma informed Approach within Organisations and Systems.** It is one of a series of ten booklets exploring the toolkit focus areas.

The ten focus areas and associated checklist were adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) original ten implementation domains. These implementation domains were based on **organisational change management** literature embedded with models of trauma informed practice.

Alongside the key trauma informed principles, this framework provides a pathway (with multiple potential starting points) to embed a trauma-informed approach (TIA) across your organisation. While we recognise extended periods for implementation are required, we also emphasise the importance of small steps on the journey.

This resource will focus on the integral importance of **environment**, not just the physical environment, but also how cultural and emotional considerations will ensure we have psychologically informed environments. **Inclusive** environments that have been designed in **collaboration** with staff and service users will ensure people feel **safe** and will help build effective and **trusting** relationships from the outset.

* Resist re-traumatisation
  Adapted from SAMHSA

Key Considerations:

- Within a trauma-informed organisation, the environment must foster both physical and psychological **safety** for both clients and staff. (SAMHSA 2014)

- The impact of trauma is across the life span and not the same for any two individuals. Ideally therefore **all** spaces should be trauma informed and **any** space can be, if given careful consideration

- To provide such environments organisations must purposely ensure that trauma informed principles and practices are embedded into every element of their structure, policies, services and overall climate and culture

- Thought must be given to how and when environments and related polices will be reviewed and also to how any potential changes or updates will be resourced

- A trauma informed environment will reduce barriers to engagement and promote **empowerment** of staff and service users

- Whilst applying trauma informed principles to future building and facility design is important, organisations can take initial, less intensive steps that will lay the foundation for physically and emotionally **safer** environments

- **Collaboration** with staff, clients, families to involve them in decisions about the spaces they use will provide opportunities for tailored responses, ensure **inclusivity** and reduce potential re- traumatisation

- Spaces where people feel they belong and are valued will be open and inviting. This will also 'facilitate social connection' (Dilani 2018) that can in turn build community resilience and healing.

Physical Environment

Consistent with findings in the international literature, some of the case study organisations in the Queen's University Belfast Trauma Informed Approach (TIA) Implementation report 2024, identified how relatively small changes to the physical environment had been a good starting point on their implementation journey. Even minor physical changes were reported to have made a huge difference to staff, clients and other using their facilities / services.

Human beings instinctively scan their surroundings to ensure it is safe and notice any potential risks or danger. For people who have experienced trauma this survival response is heightened and they also might perceive environments differently depending on their life experiences.

A physically safe environment in a trauma-informed organisation may have some of the following characteristics:

- Well-lit exterior areas that do not allow for congregating outside entrances / exits, security guards available as needed, and monitoring of who is entering and exiting the building

- Low noise levels

- Signs that are warm, welcoming, and positive

- Seating arrangements that allow adequate space between individuals and clear sight lines of those entering a room

- Private areas to de-escalate stressful situations, promote calm, and attend to self-care

- Non-binary and gender-fluid spaces and activities (SAMHSA, 2014).

The building is the first thing people will see when they are using services or attending appointments. Therefore, what message are staff and service users receiving about how they are valued when they arrive? Regular maintenance is important to ensure buildings are not only attractive but also safe for people to use and indeed a place of pride for local communities.

Entry and exit signs must be clear to see and buildings should be well-lit. Adequate parking is important and if this is not available on-site, people should be informed in advance of where the closest car park is. If people do not drive they could also be advised of access to public or community transport to facilitate attendance.

As outlined by SAMHSA the placement of seating is important in terms of our personal space. However social distancing can be of significance for those with neuro diverse conditions or to allow for wheelchair access. Seating must be comfortable and also allow for height differences as this can help address any power imbalance. People should be asked where they would like to sit as people who have experienced trauma may like to be close to exits. This aligns with the trauma informed principles of **choice** and **empowerment.**

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 requires us to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities. Other considerations for people with disabilities or neuro-diverse conditions are:

- Adaptations for those with hearing issues e.g. screens in reception areas may reduce clarity of speech as may positioning of chairs for those who lip read to ensure people are face to face

- Sound proofing for both sensory issues and confidentiality issues

- Sensitivity to lighting- can lights be dimmed

- Accessibility for those with mobility issues e.g. a lift or a manageable distance from the waiting area to room or service area

- Height of reception desks for wheelchair users

- Adaptations for those with sight issues e.g. contrasting colours to make door handles or steps stand out, paint colours that reflect light, furniture in contrasting colours to the walls.

In a pioneering initiative Pentonville Prison has developed a neurodiversity unit for men with neurodiverse conditions in an attempt to reduce challenging behaviour and self-harm. The unit has a sensory room that aims to improve emotional regulation and general wellbeing of the men who use it, and potentially break the cycle of reoffending. This unit is an excellent example of a safe, tailored and inclusive space that benefits the people using it, the staff and the wider public. 'Pentonville now has the lowest self-harm rates in the country and is the least violent prison of its type in the UK.' Coping in the chaos: Pentonville's neurodiverse unit is changing prison life | Seen & Unseen

Access to safe outside areas or seating areas that have a view of an outside area can offer people a **choice** of spaces to use when attending services or organisations. This can allow people to get some fresh air and connect with nature.

"Plants perform an important……. function by connecting occupants to the natural world, which has been found to reduce stress and pain, and to improve mood."

The Importance Of Trauma-Informed Design (forbes.com)

Collaborating with service users/clients and staff and involving them in designing or making changes to the physical environment is an essential part of the trauma informed journey. Asking people from the local community to create artwork for the spaces, consulting about colour schemes that create a landscape of healing and recovery will help people feel valued and respected.

It is also important to consult with and listen to staff to get their opinions on staff well-being areas-what such a space looks like, where it is situated and how it allows for some quality time away from the office or desk to relax and reset. Treatment or consultation rooms also have to be attractive and comfortable, a physical space that will enhance therapeutic interventions by adding feelings of calm and **safety.**

Psychologically Safe Environments

Changes to the physical environment as outlined above can be a first step in supporting people to feel safe and emotionally well which in turn improves engagement. A psychologically safe environment would:

- Include training for clinical and non-clinical staff in how to communicate effectively with clients and greet them in a welcoming and respectful manner

- Ensure staff maintain healthy interpersonal boundaries and appropriately manage conflict

- Provide staff and clients schedules and structures that are predictable and give adequate notice when there are changes

- Respect the physical boundaries of staff and clients and provide options like leaving office doors open

- Offer gender-responsive services, embrace traditional cultural connections, be culturally relevant, and address historical trauma. (SAMHSA 2014).

In the unique context of Northern Ireland, the location of services may need to be considered when thinking about psychological safety. Certain towns or areas and/ or the presence of flags or murals may evoke emotional responses and increase people's feelings of danger or threat before they have even entered the building. Whilst it may not be possible to offer services in another location or building, organisations need to think about what they are doing to support people when they arrive, possibly already "triggered":

- Has there been training for staff to recognise and respond appropriately to people already in survival mode on arrival?

- Is there a safe and confidential space that a distressed person (adult or child) can use including staff, that will support self -regulation?

Friel and Beavis (2022) discuss the need for 'creating a safe structured listening space involving mental and emotional containment, that respects, supports and validates experiences'.

Psychologically safe work environments demonstrate that team members are valued and can often be a protective factor in someone's life, a sanctuary away from other stressors or concerns in their homelife;

> *"Beyond providing a livelihood, a healthy workplace can also build competence and help team members remain anchored in a shared purpose while providing lifelong connections, collaboration, and community opportunities"*

TOOLKIT: Trauma-Informed Workplaces (ctipp.org)

Accessibility of services is often thought about in terms of physical modifications but must also include issues of diversity, equity and inclusivity of services and ensuring social justice is at the fore of planning and delivery. When designing a space through the lens of a trauma-informed approach it is important to ensure the environment is culturally relevant. Designers should utilize décor and materials that are respectful and responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of staff, clients, and guests (SAMHSA, 2014). Does the artwork reflect different cultures? Are signs or information leaflets in different languages? Are staff who greet people trained to engage respectfully and competently with those who have English as a second language, a hearing impairment or literacy difficulties? All of these considerations can help people feel they belong, support emotional regulation and support a person to feel psychologically safe.

Organisational Climate and Cultural Environment

> "An organization's culture………… includes the personality or spirit of the organization, the core identity (who we are and what we do), the creation story (how we came to be), the moral narrative (why we are essential), the way people work together and the way they feel about their work interactions. Within the organization there is a sense of 'this is how we do it here'." (Hormann and Vivian, 2013)
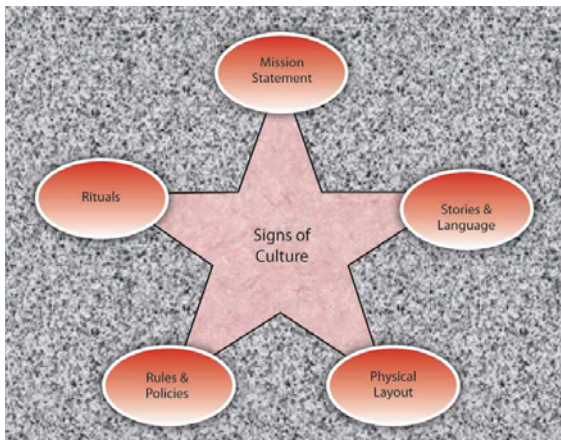
Measuring organisational climate can be difficult for leaders. This is because it is more about how people feel and often the unwritten or unspoken rules that contribute to people's experience of the culture and emotional tone of the environment. Tools-for-Transformation-Guide-1-Final.pdf (ncdvtmh.org)
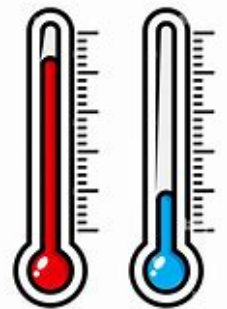
Leaders must encourage and indeed welcome feedback, engage in meaningful and authentic interactions with staff and service users and implement any suggested changes or improvements. This can strengthen the organisational climate in positive ways. **Please refer to the information booklet on Leadership.**

The goal is to create an environment and organisational culture that embodies the six principles of trauma informed practice (inclusion, safety, collaboration, empowerment, choice, trustworthiness) where staff's experience at work, across sectors, is the same as the experience we wish for those availing of the services, adults and children.

Evaluation and Review

Trauma informed improvements to spaces need to be evaluated. A good baseline measure of a building or environment can be a 'walk-through' used to assess the physical, emotional and cultural elements through a trauma informed lens. It is advised that the 'walk through' includes service users as well as clinical and estates staff and indeed leaders. It is important that this is done for each individual environment as different buildings will have specific considerations and different organisations may have a different emotional culture.
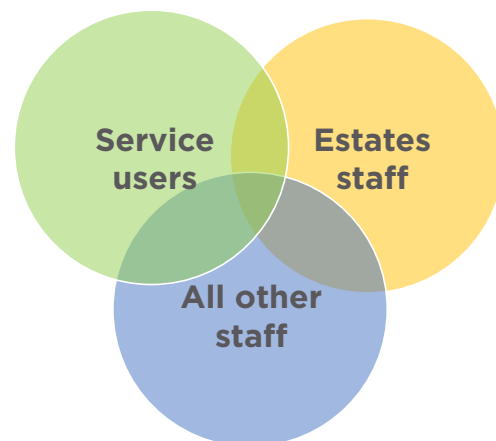
For example, it is not acceptable to do a walk through in one health trust building and then use this to inform what is needed in all buildings. This universal approach can imply that difference is not welcome in the space and communities may not feel 'seen'. It also means potential triggers for re- traumatisation in a specific environment could be missed. A walk through of buildings or services by staff, clients, leaders means any potential triggers from when a person arrives until they leave, can be identified and addressed.

| Hot spot or activation | Why does this happen? | What is it activating? | How to make it less so |

(Mandy Davis, Trauma Informed Oregon)

Evaluation and review need to be embedded in policy and practice (see information booklet on policy and practice) and mechanisms need to be in place for people's suggestions to be recorded. Feedback should not only evaluate the service delivered but also ask questions in relation to the environment e.g. the waiting area, access to the building, the welcome and interaction with reception staff etc. How are people informed that their ideas or changes to environments they have suggested have been made? Are we asking 'what matters for you?' and are we asking the right people?

Section B: Local Examples

Salvation Army, Thorndale, Trauma Informed Physical Environments

Physical Environment Examples

Thorndale is a Salvation Army project providing support to vulnerable families in partnership with health and social care trusts. The Salvation Army commenced a pilot project and collaborative partnership with the SBNI in 2020 following participation by a senior member of staff in the SBNI 'Be the Change' leadership programme. The aim of the project was to gain a more accurate understanding of how to respond more effectively to the needs of service users and staff, with particular focus upon identification of enablers and barriers in response to trauma and adverse childhood experiences. It was recognised that trauma-informed environments can support the building of relationships that are more open and trustworthy between providers of services and users of services, whether they be clients or staff members. The NI senior manager described the process of refurbishing one of their buildings and whilst acknowledging that it was still 'just a building', her experience of the 'intentional' efforts taken to involve service users and staff in the design process had brought many unexpected benefits.

".... if you really seriously focus on the physical environment or the environment... that people either work in or come to live or receive their support, the benefits of that, I think, are even bigger than we had anticipated"

Collaboration was key to ensuring the environment was trauma informed and the process started with facilitating staff to 'walk through' their own work environments, or indeed other Salvation Army projects, using a trauma-lens to consider what service users would see, hear, or smell to help orientate staff to the lived experience.

Staff spoke of meaningful involvement in the design of the building and they felt 'so included and consulted and involved at every step of the way', from choosing colours, purchasing furnishings to naming rooms. Children had been involved in creating mosaics in the play area. Further images of this project are available here: https://www.safeguardingni.org/resources/physical-environment-examples

NI Prison gardens and outdoor areas

NORTHERN IRELAND
PRISON SERVICE

The benefits of gardens and outdoor spaces for mental and emotional well being is widely recognised. In a prison environment, which traditionally can be stark and austere, access to gardens and outdoor areas can be of significant importance in providing a welcome break from a prison cell or landing. Being immersed in nature can produce better mindsets and positive feelings that can in turn improve behaviour and relationships between people in prison and staff. Northern Ireland's first prison sensory garden was in Magilligan prison and this has been replicated on the other 2 prison sites.

In 2019 a show garden created by prisoners in Maghaberry won a National Trust Gold Award. The garden was built by 14 men, using recycled materials and bedding plants and was created to reflect their journey in prison from the beginning until release.

Below are pictures from the gardens in Hydebank Wood College. Such spaces improve the physical environment for both the people in Hydebank and prison staff. This in turn has a positive impact on the psychological and emotional environment for everyone. Not only do the gardens provide time outside in nature and purposeful activity, they are also spaces that people can use when engaging with other agencies. Talking in an outdoor space can enhance interventions by contributing to feelings of calm and connection which can improve trust and psychological safety. The gardens also contribute to the rehabilitative process as they provide people in prison with training and skills that may improve employment opportunities upon release.

Conclusion

It is essential for organisations wishing to implement a trauma informed approach to consider all elements of the environment and the potential impact on their staff, service users and communities. Tailoring the environment to each person's unique requirements and circumstances will not always be possible but evidence shows that small changes can make a difference. Engaging with service users and communities to find out what safe environments look and feel like can help inform future design or adaptations that will promote inclusion and engagement. 'Environments become associated with history and community stories....' (Rouf et al 2021). It is important therefore for communities to feel respected and valued, to have their histories and cultures acknowledged and to be involved in decisions about the environments they frequent. This requires investment from commissioners and leaders to ensure that environments are given the attention needed to be truly trauma informed.

Your feedback matters

Thank you for taking the time to read the information booklet. We welcome all suggestions for improvement. Please feel free to share any new or existing local examples for inclusion by contacting us on SBNI.Info@hscni.net. To download the toolkit or contact a member of the team directly please click here Trauma Informed Tooll

References (additional to the Toolkit)

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TIO | Trauma Informed Oregon - Your Resource for Trauma Informed Care https://traumainformedoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/TIC-Physical-and-Inclusivity-Environment-Review-10-03-2024.pdf

Focus Area Action Plan
Environment

Environment

Start Date	Tasks	Actions	Lead	Completion Date	Comments