



A HEART OF HELP

Listening and learning from people with experience of substance use and sanctuary seeker services in Wales

Trauma-Informed Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales

Response to the Heart of Help Report

July 2024

This report was commissioned by Traumatic Stress Wales to inform the co-delivery of the Trauma-informed Wales Framework



**Straen
Trawmatig
Cymru**

**Traumatic
Stress
Wales**

This document is also available in Welsh.

We at Traumatic Stress Wales (TSW) are delighted to have commissioned and been involved in the development of this important report led on by Platform and with essential input from the Welsh Refugee Council, Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS), the New Systems Alliance and the Mayday Trust.

The Welsh Government is committed to Wales becoming a trauma-informed nation. A crucial part of this process is understanding the ways in which people who have been through trauma and adversity experience support. With colleagues across a number of services, Platform has taken time to carefully listen and consider the stories of people who have been involved in substance misuse services and people who are seeking sanctuary in Wales.

The findings and recommendations of the report are greatly welcomed, and we are very grateful to Platform and partners for undertaking this work, as well as to the people who have taken the time to share their stories and experiences.

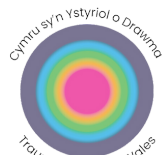
Following publication of the Framework in 2022[1], the ACE Hub Wales and TSW, along with colleagues and people with lived experience of trauma and adversity across a range of services and sectors, are supporting the development and implementation of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework. The Heart of Help report forms an essential contribution to informing the approach to implementation and how we ensure that we are maintaining the ethos of the principles of the Framework itself in doing so; namely being inclusive of all experiences of adversity and trauma and amplifying the voices of those who are more marginalised. Consideration of the recommendations from Heart of Help are an essential element of the working groups of the Trauma-Informed Wales National Implementation Steering Group (ISG), and provide evidence by which to check and test proposed initiatives against, including in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Framework across Wales.

Trauma-informed Wales developments for people with lived experience of involvement with substance misuse services and people seeking sanctuary in Wales.

We are grateful to all the people from specific groups who shared their stories in this report and are pleased to already be able to share how the findings are aligned to action that is already being taken as part of the implementation of the Framework, helping to underpin what we are doing in evidence. Further, the report will be used to inform work with people in these groups across a range of priority areas, including communications and engagement, monitoring and evaluation, skills and knowledge, and inclusion of the voices of lived experience.

The Framework sets out a strong commitment to the principles that underpin to a person-centred, strengths-based, inclusive approach. The importance of cultural sensitivity highlighted in the report through the experience of people seeking sanctuary is an important validation of the inclusion principle's commitment to recognising the impact of diversity, discrimination and racism, and understands the impact of cultural, historic and gender inequalities.

[1] [Trauma-Informed Wales Framework - Trauma-Informed Wales \(traumaframeworkcymru.com\)](https://traumaframeworkcymru.com).



A Community Summary of the Framework[2] was produced to ensure accessible language is used, and also this is also available in 13 different languages[3]. Information from Heart of Help about the how to ensure consistency and appropriate level of knowledge around inclusivity will also support the specific working group considering skills and knowledge in each of the practice levels of the Framework, alongside other commissioned work in this area.

Some examples of where we can already see the recommendations shining through in existing work include the development of resources to support substance misuse services and a wide range of cross-sector organisations engaging with their staff around the content of the recommendations. TSW are developing some films to support people affected by substance misuse and trauma that will be enhanced by drawing on the report's findings and are ensuring alignment to the Framework in the Refugee, Sanctuary Seeker and Migrant workstream. Similarly, the ACE Hub Wales have been leading, with funding from the Welsh Government, the implementation of the Trauma and ACE (TrACE) organisational toolkit across substance misuse services, and over 40 other cross sector organisations (including policing and criminal justice in Wales). The TrACE toolkit provides the resource 'offer' for the organisations wanting to implement the Trauma-informed Framework, so it is positive to see GDAS, an early adopter of this approach, highlighted in the report around the support they offer to their staff.

Our commitment to continuing to raise awareness of the Framework is strong. We are committed to building a social movement across Wales and develop a public narrative of how the Framework will help Wales become a truly trauma-informed nation.

Responses to specific points raised in recommendations.

1. Develop an implementation guide for the Trauma-informed Framework.

This recommendation is welcomed and will be considered by the Trauma-Informed Wales National ISG.

2. Ensure that people and organisations working to implement the Framework understand the need for changes to be structural and relational.

This recommendation is welcomed. Key themes emerging from the report include the need for trust, human connection and a person-centred approach. The Trauma-Informed Wales Framework principles encompass these specifically through the 'relationship focused' and 'person-centred' principles. Furthermore, the report recognises that many people accessing services face the risk of re-traumatisation, something that the Framework emphasises should be avoided.

[2] [Trauma Framework: Accessible Document - Trauma-Informed Wales \(traumaframeworkcymru.com\)](https://traumaframeworkcymru.com)

[3] [Accessible Document: Additional Languages - Trauma-Informed Wales \(traumaframeworkcymru.com\)](https://traumaframeworkcymru.com)



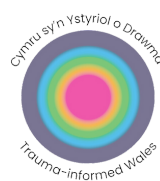
At a national level, an initial meeting of the Framework's National ISG to facilitate a relational approach has been held, and further similar meetings are planned. We are also attempting to embody a relational approach in developing materials, spending time with a wide range of people involved in this work from across different sectors and people with lived experience. We want to ensure that their voices are represented in the resources and packages that we are developing.

The TrACE Toolkit is a resource available to organisations that includes a readiness checklist and self-assessment requirement to ensure that people-organisations really think about what they are already doing, how they are doing it and what could be improved. The toolkit emphasises the need to think about structural and relational aspects. It has a number of resources alongside it to support this, including guidance around communications, success indicators and reflective practice. TSW has created trauma-skilled and trauma-enhanced level training and resources that map onto these levels of the Trauma-Informed Framework (TIF). They highlight the need to work relationally and to consider the impact of the training on staff. Organisations can use these trainings and resources to create their own bespoke training programmes to fit the needs of their staff and those who utilise their service.

Finally, whilst we recognise the need to move away from a purely medical model as highlighted in the report, and to emphasise social and psychological factors, it is important that biological aspects are also considered as these are important to an evidence-based model. Further, this would likely engage people who see the 'bio' element as an important component of an optimal model and facilitate a more joined-up, cross-sector and interdisciplinary "sociopsychobio" approach that is holistic, person-centred and rights-based.

3. Ensure the use of storytelling as a healing process, is given proper attention in any implementation guide or activity, and any future version of the framework.

This recommendation is welcomed. The National ISG is committed to linking in with different groups of people with lived experience to continue to learn about how services should look, and support should be shaped, and allow space for people to share their stories. This is a recommendation of the utmost importance, as such stories will continue to help shape the ways in which implementation can be carried out. Whilst storytelling itself can be healing, it is not easy and needs to be properly supported. Many people report that having to repeatedly tell their story of trauma and adversity to different professionals can be a challenge, and implementation should take careful account of this.



4. Develop a training approach that sets out explicitly to create relational, reflective capacity within the system.

This recommendation is welcomed. Training and resources being delivered by teams represented at the ISG highlight the importance of power, and how power can affect relationships, that people need to be 'worked with' not 'on behalf of'.

We also recognise the call for good quality training that is accessible to services. We have established a Skills and Knowledge Working Group to look at this, building on the growing knowledge of resources in Wales and facilitating enhancement of these, taking into account cost and accessibility. The recommendation will be fed into this Working Group to consider across sectors and practice levels. We are aware from recent reviews that there are a good range of resources accessible in Wales across all four practice levels, but also acutely aware more work is needed. The ACE Hub Wales e-learning offer is imminent which will be freely accessible as a trauma-aware level offer. E-learning is also being developed with Health Education and Improvement Wales which will provide freely accessible training at other practice levels.

5. Develop a bespoke approach for service commissioners that recognises the need for services to spend time getting relationships right.

This recommendation is welcomed and will be considered by the Trauma-Informed Wales National ISG.

6. Gather examples of emergent practice relating to peer support and use that to guide future versions of the Framework and future implementation activity.

This recommendation is welcomed. Peer support is highlighted in the report as being a crucial element of service delivery. We will continue to reflect on ways in which this recommendation can be embedded into our practice around Trauma-Informed Wales Framework implementation. Encouragingly, in TSW's Refugee, Sanctuary Seeker and Migrant Workstream, we are prioritising talks from services that lead on peer-support approaches, including the Red Cross and OASIS.

7. Develop a bespoke approach for Welsh Government officials and others for trauma-informed policymaking, so that the right conditions are created for trauma-informed services.

This recommendation is welcomed and will be considered by the National ISG. By linking in closely with colleagues in Welsh government and having welcome representation from Welsh government at the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework National ISG, ongoing collaboration with colleagues in policy-making positions will be crucial to be able to drive forward the rollout of the Framework across Wales.



8. Develop reflective tools and approaches that support the practice of ‘being with’, even when hearing difficult, challenging and ‘shaming’ stories.

This recommendation is welcomed. Within the digital toolkit that TSW is currently creating at the trauma skilled and enhanced levels, highlighted is the importance of being ‘alongside’ a person is highlighted, as opposed to trying to ‘fix’ or change something. Active listening, trying to understand and holding the space with an empathic and compassionate stance, can offer such vital spaces for people. We have also covered information and ideas on how the person within the role can protect themselves from vicarious trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue by working in trauma-informed ways for themselves as well as those they support. Platfform and Cymorth Cymru have worked with us to co-produce reflective practice guidance that is part of the resources available to those implementing the TrACE toolkit.

9. Conduct listening exercises and/or research across other professions and settings in Wales to explore whether the ‘relational values’ are already shared more widely, or if they can be built on.

We very much support this recommendation. We note that the report is based on the views of a relatively small number of people and that we have to be cautious in over-generalising findings. Listening spaces across multiple settings and groups, will be essential to understand this further.

