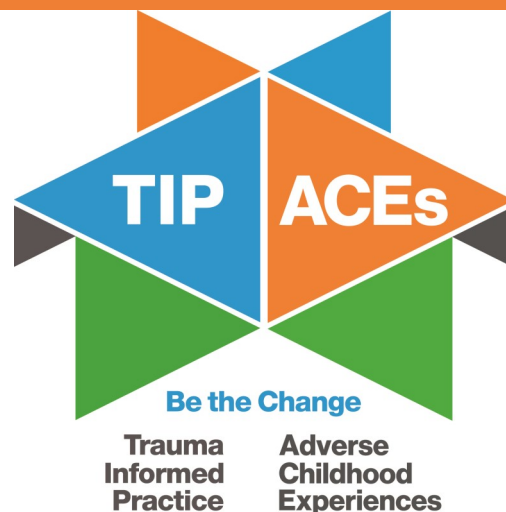


Systems to Support our People: Embedding a Trauma Informed Approach



Welcome

Welcome to this report on two recent events organised by the SBNI on a Trauma Informed Approach: a recognition and celebration event on 22 January and a conference on 23 January. The Conference, "Systems to Support our People," brought together 158 dedicated professionals and experts to emphasize the importance of integrating trauma informed services across all relevant organisations in Northern Ireland.



I extend my heartfelt thanks to all participants and presenters for their invaluable contributions to the conference. Your presence and insights have been instrumental in making this conference a success.

Two key points emerged from the day. Firstly, the critical role of trauma informed practices in government policy was underscored by Junior Ministers Aisling Reilly and Pam Cameron. Their commitment to embedding these practices across all sectors highlights the government's dedication to fostering a supportive and resilient society.

Secondly, the insights shared by Professor Mandy Davis, Portland State University, provided a global perspective on a trauma informed approach. She inspired us to strive for excellence, highlighting the importance of cross-governmental and sectoral partnership.

Thank you once again for your participation and commitment to this issue.

Bernie McNally
Independent Chair,
Safeguarding Board for
Northern Ireland

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Government Commitment to Trauma informed Practices



The Conference was opened by Junior Ministers Aisling Reilly and Pam Cameron, who underscored the importance of embedding a trauma informed approach within government policy. Minister Reilly commended the SBNI for advancing trauma informed practice. She emphasised that trauma affects not only individuals but also families, communities, and society at large. By embedding trauma informed practices at the core of government policy, the aim is to create a supportive and resilient society.

Minister Cameron acknowledged the widespread impact of trauma in Northern Ireland, noting that many people have been affected either directly or indirectly. She highlighted that the region's history, coupled with everyday adversities, has deeply embedded trauma within communities. Minister Cameron stressed the need for coordinated action to address this issue and highlighted the SBNI's pivotal role in leading cross-departmental and multi-agency efforts to create systems-level change.

Both ministers' speeches highlighted the importance of strong leadership and strategic commitment to ensure the sustainability of these practices. The government's commitment aims to build a society where systems and services work collaboratively to meet community needs, ensuring Northern Ireland is a safe and prosperous place to live.



Aisling Reilly: "Trauma affects not only individuals but also families, communities, and society at large. Embedding trauma informed practices at the core of government policy is essential."

Government Commitment to a Trauma Informed Approach

Pam Cameron: "Northern Ireland's history, coupled with everyday adversities, has deeply embedded trauma within our communities. Coordinated action is crucial to address this widespread impact."





Insights from Experts and Systems Change Leaders

The conference featured insightful sessions from experts like Dr. Suzanne Mooney and Dr. Colm Walsh. Dr. Mooney shared evidence-based findings on effective trauma informed practices, while Dr. Walsh emphasised the need to recognize and respond to adverse childhood experiences. These sessions provided attendees with valuable knowledge to implement a trauma informed approach effectively within their organisations.

Additionally, leaders driving systems change shared their real-life experiences, celebrating the positive differences they are making by embedding a trauma informed approach in their organisations. Their contributions highlighted the practical benefits and challenges of implementing these practices, inspiring attendees to strive for systemic change.



Learning from National and International Experiences

The conference spotlighted the new draft Programme for Government (PfG), which prioritises a trauma informed system for all. Learning from Scotland, where a trauma informed approach has been mandated in the PfG for the public sector, offered valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of such an approach.



Professor Mandy Davis from Portland State University praised SBNi's progress, comparing it to Oregon's established trauma informed structures. She saw the conference as a chance to reflect on Northern Ireland's strengths and discuss trauma's societal impact. Professor Davis emphasised the need for cross-governmental and sectoral partnerships to reform and transform systems, ensuring more efficient services for those in need. Sharing her international expertise, she detailed her experience of embedding a trauma informed approach at state and federal levels, including the voice of lived experience. She also envisioned a Trauma informed Centre of Excellence in Northern Ireland, inspiring attendees to strive for excellence in trauma informed practices.



Perhaps the highlight of the conference was the heart-warming performance by the **Thornfield House School Choir**, which added a touch of inspiration and community spirit to the event.



Dr Jayne Brady Closing the Conference

The Head of the Civil Service, Dr Jayne Brady, attended in person to give her closing remarks to the conference.

In her speech she emphasised the importance of embedding a trauma informed approach across Northern Ireland, highlighting the region's leadership in this area. Her speech underscored the alignment of the conference theme with the draft Programme for Government and its missions of People, Planet, and Prosperity. Dr Brady stressed the need for strong leadership and a top-down strategic commitment for sustainability, reminding the conference of the economic cost of unresolved trauma in Northern Ireland already at £1.3 billion.

She said, "Having a trauma informed approach is very much about ensuring our systems and services are joined up, working to meet the needs of our communities, and ensuring that Northern Ireland is a safe and prosperous place to live. It is about creating a whole of government, whole systems approach aimed at improving life expectancy and increasing productivity – an approach that works creatively and openly across boundaries under the collective direction of the Executive."

There was encouragement from Dr Brady to move from "trauma aware" to "trauma informed collective action," whilst recognising that this is an ongoing journey with the need for continuous reflection and evolution. Dr Brady reiterated the Northern Ireland Civil Service's commitment to this ongoing journey with the vision to have a trauma informed approach ingrained in all organisations, systems and services across Northern Ireland.



Closing remarks of Dr Jayne Brady



Good afternoon everyone.

I am sure you have been both inspired and energized by the range of speakers; from hearing about the evidence base for embedding a trauma informed approach, and the experiences of organisations who have begun that journey, to gaining an understanding of the national and international perspectives that can help guide us as we move forward. The good news is that Northern Ireland is already world-leading in many respects in terms of adopting a trauma informed approach in the public and the third sectors.

It is good to be able to speak to you today with the benefit of my own experience of working with colleagues to develop and embed a trauma informed approach right across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Good progress is being made and I am glad to have this opportunity to assure you of my belief in, and commitment to, this important work.

The theme of this conference aligns closely with the title of the draft Programme for Government (PfG), "Doing what matters most"; it also supports its three proposed Missions - People, Planet and Prosperity. It is acknowledged within the draft PfG that a number of programmes across the Executive deliver early intervention work using a trauma informed and public health approach. There is also recognition of the levels of trauma in our post-conflict society, and a commitment to working across the Executive to embed trauma informed, responsive systems - systems that help people to easily navigate and access the support they need, when they need it, and for however long they need it. This commitment extends to developing a trauma informed public sector, equipping staff at all levels with the skills needed to work in partnership and support people as they rebuild a sense of control and empowerment in their lives.

This is very much about ensuring our systems and services are joined up, working to meet the needs of our communities, and ensuring that Northern Ireland is a safe and prosperous place to live. It is about creating a whole of government, whole systems approach aimed at improving life expectancy and increasing productivity - an approach that works creatively and openly across boundaries under the collective direction of the Executive.

Embedding a trauma informed approach in everything we do is essential but, as was evidenced in the Queen's University research in 2024, a top-down strategic approach is important for ensuring sustainability. The draft PfG sets the scene for this, referencing a 'trauma informed and public health approach' and work "across the Executive to embed trauma informed responsive systems". This is an approach for everyone to embrace; it is not just for the public sector – as has been demonstrated by some of the lived examples of organisations about which you have heard today, and by the representation at this conference.

It is clear that we cannot have a collaborative trauma informed approach without strong leadership. Leaders and organisations often talk about a strategy in which they have a vested interest, emphasising the need to work together to deliver on objectives. However, we need to collaborate and connect before these strategies are written. Doing so results in greater effectiveness in working with the public, increases public confidence and boosts morale for those who deliver services. This also results in improved communication between systems, more effective services and greater cost-effectiveness. The cost, to our economy, of unresolved trauma in NI may have already been referred to today – £1.3 billion.

A Trauma informed Approach encourages us all to "be the change" – that means moving now from being "trauma aware" to taking trauma informed collective action. You will have heard today how bottom-up and middle-out approaches to being trauma informed are working so well across many sectors; but now a strategic, top-down commitment is also essential to ensure sustainability. This is everyone's business, across all departments. We are all living in a post conflict society and cannot ignore the impact of our troubled past on this generation and the next – not just on those accessing services, but on those commissioning, designing, delivering and financing them.

I would like to take this opportunity to re-iterate the NICS's commitment to leading and modelling the embedding of a trauma informed approach. However, we recognise that this is a journey without a final destination. We will always need to pause, listen, reflect, review and evolve.

We want, and need, to get to the place where we have a trauma- informed Northern Ireland; where it is ingrained in all our organisations and services, in all our cultures and our traditions. It is the right thing to do, the necessary thing to do, on all levels. The next chapter is now ready to be written – we need to stay connected to ourselves and each other and ensure that we work to fulfill Northern Ireland's potential to be a prosperous and safe place in which to grow up, live and work. There is no limit to what can be accomplished; I encourage you all to reflect and act on what you have heard today.

Feedback from participants

"No step is too small on the journey"

"We are going to meet as a collective leadership group to review the toolkit and develop actions to ensure we become a more trauma informed service"

"The support from SBNI and other agencies has been superb!"

Conference Clarity: 96% of respondents felt the conference had a clear message.

Key Learnings: Emphasis on the need for greater collaboration, embedding trauma-informed approaches (TIA), and leadership in driving policy.

Organizational Priorities: Training staff, developing implementation plans, and fostering a trauma-informed culture.

Support Needed: Continued guidance from SBNI, training resources, and networking opportunities.

Satisfaction Ratings: High satisfaction with conference administration, agenda, presentations, materials, and venue.

"Brilliant conference, it's brought a renewed focus at the right time with a new PFG."

Recognition and Celebration of Organisations' Contribution to Embedding a Trauma Informed Approach.

On 22 January 2025, a special awards event was hosted by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, at Dunsilly hotel, Antrim, to recognise and celebrate the dedication and achievements of many who have helped embed a trauma informed approach within their organisations.

Awards were presented as a testament to the exceptional efforts and contributions made by individuals and teams alike.





Full List of those who were recognised

- Learning & Development:** ACC Ryan Henderson, Police Service of Northern Ireland (Justice sector) (accepted by CI Louise Cummings)
- Workforce Wellbeing:** Dawn Richardson and Dr Claire Luscombe, Salvation Army (Community/Voluntary Sector)
- Lived Experience and Involvement:** Shauna Corrigan, Fane Street Primary School (Education Sector)
- Policy and Practice:** Colleen Heaney, Gillian McAllister and Sinead Dolan, Youth Justice Agency (Justice Sector)
- Environment:** Barbara Gergett, Nikki Cole, Karen McCann, Andrea McKittrick, Snowdrop Room Royal Jubilee Maternity (Health & Social Care Sector)
- Working Together:** Sharon McCullagh and Marie Gallaher, Department for Communities Fresh Start Team (NI Civil Service)
- Continuous Improvement:** Michael McCracken and Amanda Stewart, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (Justice Sector)
- Resourcing:** Stephanie Hanlon, Public Health Agency (drugs and alcohol in the PHA) (Health & Social Care Sector)
- Evaluation and Sustainability:** Karen Morgan, Victims and Survivors Service (Community/Voluntary Sector)
- Leadership:** Amanda Stewart, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (Justice sector)





After the awards presentation, Helen McKenzie thanked everyone who has supported the trauma-informed journey with SBNI from the start. Each supporter received a pyramid paperweight inscribed with "Thank you for your contribution to starting the Trauma Informed Journey."

Honourees included:

Joanna Brown, Paul Brush, Orla Conolly, Carol Diffin, Paul Doran, Kieran Downey, Astrid Hamilton, Colleen Heaney, Ryan Henderson, Anne Marie Hughes, Brian Ingram, Marcella Leonard, Frances Lyons, Grainne Magee, Gillian McAllister, Gordon McCalmont, Paul McConville, Eilis McDaniel, Aileen McGuinness, Gary McMichael, Marian Molloy, Karen Morgan, Maria Morgan, Paul Morgan, Carmel Murray, Dawn Richardson, Sheina Rigg, Nicola Topping, and Una Turbitt.

