



Annual Report

Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy

Prepared by:

The Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

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Annual Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2022, the Virginia Department of Social Services made an official, ongoing commitment to become a more trauma-informed and healing-centered agency by establishing the first-ever Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP). The OTRP leads agency-wide efforts to infuse and sustain trauma-informed and healing-centered knowledge and skills into VDSS culture, policies, and practices; fosters collaboration with state-level stakeholders to align and coordinate trauma and resilience efforts and initiatives; and meaningfully engages with local partners and communities to promote resilience and healing in the children, families, and individuals served.

While becoming trauma-responsive lies on a continuum and is an ongoing process, the new office has made significant achievements in the first fifteen months at VDSS. The OTRP:

- » Created the **Trauma-informed Language Brochure** that provides guidance on utilizing language that focuses on strengths and resilience.
- » Conducted a series of focus groups made up of family services and benefits program front line workers, supervisors, and regional practice consultants to learn more about the impact of vicarious trauma as well as the coping strategies and agency-driven efforts for mitigating vicarious trauma to guide further research, policy, and practice.
- » Launched efforts to implement the evidence driven Science of Hope framework at VDSS, which included certifying thirty-two Hope Navigators from across all portfolios in a two-day training and launching the agency's Hope and Resilience Transformation Team (HARTT).
- » Convened a cross-agency Lived Experience Community of Practice to collaborate on the best practice strategies for centering the voices of those who have lived experience.
- » Collaborated with and provided support to the Department of Juvenile Justice in implementing the Screening for Experiences and Strengths (SEAS) statewide. Over 2,200 SEAS were administered during the first year.
- » Provided training and capacity support on the Virginia HEALS **Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery**, the work of the OTRP, and other trauma and resilience-centered topics to

In April 2022, the Virginia Department of Social Services made an official, ongoing commitment to become a more trauma-informed and healing-centered agency by establishing the first-ever Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP).

over 1,330 service providers and policy makers at the local, state, and national levels.

- » Dedicated and managed a significant portion of \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act Funding that was appropriated to support Virginia's Trauma-Informed Community Networks (TICNs) toward funding a statewide public awareness campaign on trauma and resilience and toward supporting TICN-engaged agencies in becoming more healing-centered.

BACKGROUND

Virginia HEALS (**H**elping **E**veryone **A**ccess **L**inked **S**ystems) is an initiative that was developed as part of the Linking Systems of Care (LSC) for Children and Youth statewide demonstration project, supported by the United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC).

Children and youth experience victimization and trauma at alarming rates, and the systems charged with caring for them often provide fragmented and ineffective responses for them and their families. OVC wanted to learn what is needed to bring healthcare, child welfare, justice, advocacy, and other systems together to coordinate and align efforts to ensure a timely and seamless response to young victims, their families, and caregivers, no matter the system of entry.

These goals of the demonstration project were to:

1. Identify children and youth who have experienced trauma and/or victimization.
2. Provide children, youth, and families comprehensive and coordinated services to fully address their needs.
3. Establish policies and practices to sustain this approach long-term.

In order to meet these goals and guided by data and input from people with lived experience and a variety of community-based and state-level stakeholders across systems, the Virginia HEALS team developed the **Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery for Children, Youth, and Families** and supporting **Toolkit**.

What is Resilience?

Individual and Family Resilience:

The capacity of individuals and families to withstand, adapt to, recover, heal, and thrive in the face of adversity and trauma. Having safe, stable, and nurturing relationships builds individual and family capacity.

Community Resilience:

The capacity of a state or community to create and strengthen safe, stable, and nurturing conditions and systems that help individuals and families withstand, adapt to, recover, heal, and thrive in the face of adversity and trauma.

When Federal support for the project concluded in March 2021, the Virginia Department of Social Services sustained and expanded the Virginia HEALS project by creating the Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy in April 2022.

Acknowledging that public policy is integral in shaping how health and human services are provided to Virginia’s children, families, and individuals and can be the motivating force in becoming more trauma-responsive and promoting more widespread prioritization and promotion of resiliency and healing, the **Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy**:

- » Leads efforts to infuse and sustain trauma-informed and healing-centered knowledge and skills into Virginia Department of Social Services culture, policies, and practices;
- » Fosters collaboration with state-level stakeholders to align and coordinate our trauma and resilience efforts and initiatives; and
- » Engages with local partners and communities to promote resilience and healing in the children, families and individuals served.



» **Leads efforts to infuse and sustain trauma-informed and healing-centered knowledge and skills into VDSS culture, policies, and practices**

The Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP) at the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive, trauma-informed, and healing-centered practices. To achieve this, the OTRP conducts assessments to gauge the readiness for trauma-informed approaches and serves as a valuable resource for technical assistance and advising on trauma, healing, and resilience. Additionally, the OTRP actively promotes the implementation of trauma-informed and healing-centered policies and practices by reviewing training curricula, guidance documents, and other materials across diverse portfolios and the divisions within them at VDSS. These efforts better ensure that a supportive and healing culture is fostered throughout the organization.

Guidance and Curriculum Review

One way to better ensure that trauma-informed and healing-centered principles, practices, and policies are infused and reflected across diverse portfolios, divisions, and programs at VDSS is to have OTRP staff review and provide salient feedback on a variety of training curricula, guidance documents, and other materials. Over the course of its first year, OTRP staff provided significant feedback to Enterprise Learning and Development, the Division of Child Support Enforcement, the Division of Local Training and Development, and multiple programs within the Division of Family Services.

Education on Trauma and Resilience

As a new division at VDSS, educating agency staff on trauma and resilience has been an integral first step in initiating agency culture change to become trauma-informed and healing-centered. In addition to facilitating presentations for the Executive Team, the Senior Leadership Team, and staff across various divisions at the agency, the OTRP was also featured in an article, *Making VDSS a Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered Agency*, on VDSS Connect, a monthly interactive internal communication that highlights organizational culture work taking place throughout the agency. In addition to maintaining the [Virginia HEALS website](#), the OTRP has also developed an internal and [external website](#) for the office, which features links to a variety of resources on trauma and resilience.

Trauma-Informed Language Guidance

The language used in policies and programming to describe individuals and populations has a direct correlation with how those individuals are viewed and treated when seeking services. In September 2022, OTRP staff facilitated a presentation on trauma-informed and person-centered language to over 250 VDSS staff. Feedback provided after the presentation suggested that a tangible user-friendly

guidance document to check documents and other communications for trauma-informed and person-centered language was needed. The **Trauma-informed Language Brochure** is a public-facing document that has been shared with VDSS, other state agencies, and local community partners throughout the Commonwealth to provide guidance on utilizing language that focuses on strengths and resilience and to provide resources for further reflection and language policy development.

The OTRP created the Trauma-Informed Language Brochure to provide guidance on utilizing language that focuses on strengths and resilience.

Vicarious Trauma Focus Group Project

Vicarious trauma occurs when a person is exposed to the trauma of another. As a result, the person's worldview may shift, and they may experience symptoms that can negatively impact their life and their work.

To better understand the impact of vicarious trauma on the workforce, the OTRP conducted the Vicarious Trauma Focus Group Research Project, engaging front line workers, supervisors, and Regional Practice Consults representing family services and benefits programs. The goal was to learn more about the impact of vicarious trauma as well as the coping strategies and agency-driven efforts being utilized for mitigating vicarious trauma.

The information gathered during twenty focus groups conducted throughout May and June of 2023 is currently being analyzed, with a report of findings forthcoming. This data will be used to develop a survey related to vicarious trauma that will be disseminated more broadly to all local departments and regional office staff; and the information and insights collected over the course of multiple phases of data collection will, ultimately, inform the department's policy and practice to mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma in the workforce moving forward.

Science of Hope and HARTT

In May of 2023, the OTRP launched efforts to implement the Science of Hope framework at VDSS. Put simply, hope is the belief that the future can be better, and that you can make it so. The science of hope is well established as a vital coping resource and protective



The OTRP launched efforts to implement the evidence-driven Science of Hope framework at VDSS, which included certifying 32 Hope Navigators from across all portfolios.



Hope Centered
CHAN HELLMAN

factor for children, adults, and families across the lifespan. It also has a strong research record for being one of the best protective measures for psychological well-being, associated with positive associations for both the agency workforce and the children, families, and individuals they serve.

VDSS has selected a multi-phase implementation process aimed to infuse hope into the agency by way of organizational culture, organizational policies, and organizational services. In May 2023, thirty-two VDSS employees representing all portfolios participated in a two-day training to become certified as Hope Navigators. This group, which makes up the agency's newly formed Hope and Resilience Transformation Team (HARTT) is working with Dr. Chan Hellman, Director of the Hope Research Center, and his colleague, Dr. Angela Pharris, to develop and implement a strategic plan for implementing the hope framework across the agency.

» **Fosters collaboration with state-level stakeholders to align and coordinate trauma and resilience efforts and initiatives**

The OTRP also works to foster collaboration on trauma-informed policy and practice with state-level stakeholders. The OTRP provides support to other state agencies as they undergo policy and practice reviews similar to VDSS's. Additionally, the OTRP leads efforts to connect various programs and initiatives that align with and promote trauma-informed and healing-centered care, creating a unified and supportive network of resources. Through these endeavors, the OTRP aims to foster resilience and create an environment where individuals and families can heal and thrive.

Virginia Trauma-informed Leadership Team

The Secretary of Health of Human Resources is tasked with fulfilling directives in the 2018 Appropriations Act and Executive Order 11 to create a system of trauma-informed care in Virginia. To best carry out these directives, a state-agency level Trauma-Informed Leadership Team (TILT) was established in 2018. Participants in Virginia's TILT include representatives from the Departments of: Social Services, Medical Assistance Services, Health, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Criminal Justice Services, Juvenile Justice, and Education. The OTRP staffs the TILT, providing leadership, facilitation, and support at bimonthly meetings.

Lived Experience Community of Practice

In the fall of 2022, the OTRP sent out an internal survey to identify Lived Experience (LEx) groups and to capture/learn more about how lived experience was being implemented and utilized by VDSS and its state-level contractors. Questions on the survey addressed policy and practice related to recruitment, leadership, trust-building strategies, and compensation, among other items. Through this survey, seven VDSS-affiliated groups were identified:

- » SPEAKOUT-Youth Advisory Board (VDSS Division of Family Services)
- » DFS Parent Advisory Council (VDSS Division of Family Services)
- » Fostering Responsible Parents in Virginia (VDSS Division of Child Support Enforcement)
- » Lived Experience Advisory Board (VDSS Division of Community and Volunteer Services)
- » SAVES Lived Experience Advisory Council (VDSS Division of Child Support Enforcement)
- » VOICES (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance)
- » Virginia Parent Council (Families Forward)

After surveying VDSS-affiliated LEx contacts and convening the group to discuss findings, the group communicated that they wanted to continue to meet. Simultaneously, the OTRP team identified

several other state-level LEx groups and efforts at other state agencies and their partners. The OTRP expanded the survey and the group, now referred to as the LEx Community of Practice, to include these other agencies, including the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health.



In the pursuit of a more trauma-informed and healing-centered approach, OTRP is dedicated to fostering collaboration with state-level stakeholders.

The Lived Experience Community of Practice, convened and facilitated by the OTRP, is interested in collaborating on the most effective and best practice strategies for centering the voices of those who have lived experience with the challenges related to navigating systems and accessing services.

The LEx Community of Practice, convened and facilitated by the OTRP, is interested in collaborating on the most effective and best practice strategies for centering the voices of those who have lived experience with the challenges related to navigating systems and accessing services in order to foster more compassionate and responsive systems that effectively addresses the needs of individuals and communities. The LEx Community of Practice has access to a diverse range of experiences and knowledge from individuals with different backgrounds across state agencies and community partners.

» **Engaging with local partners and communities to promote resilience and healing in the children, families, and individuals we serve.**

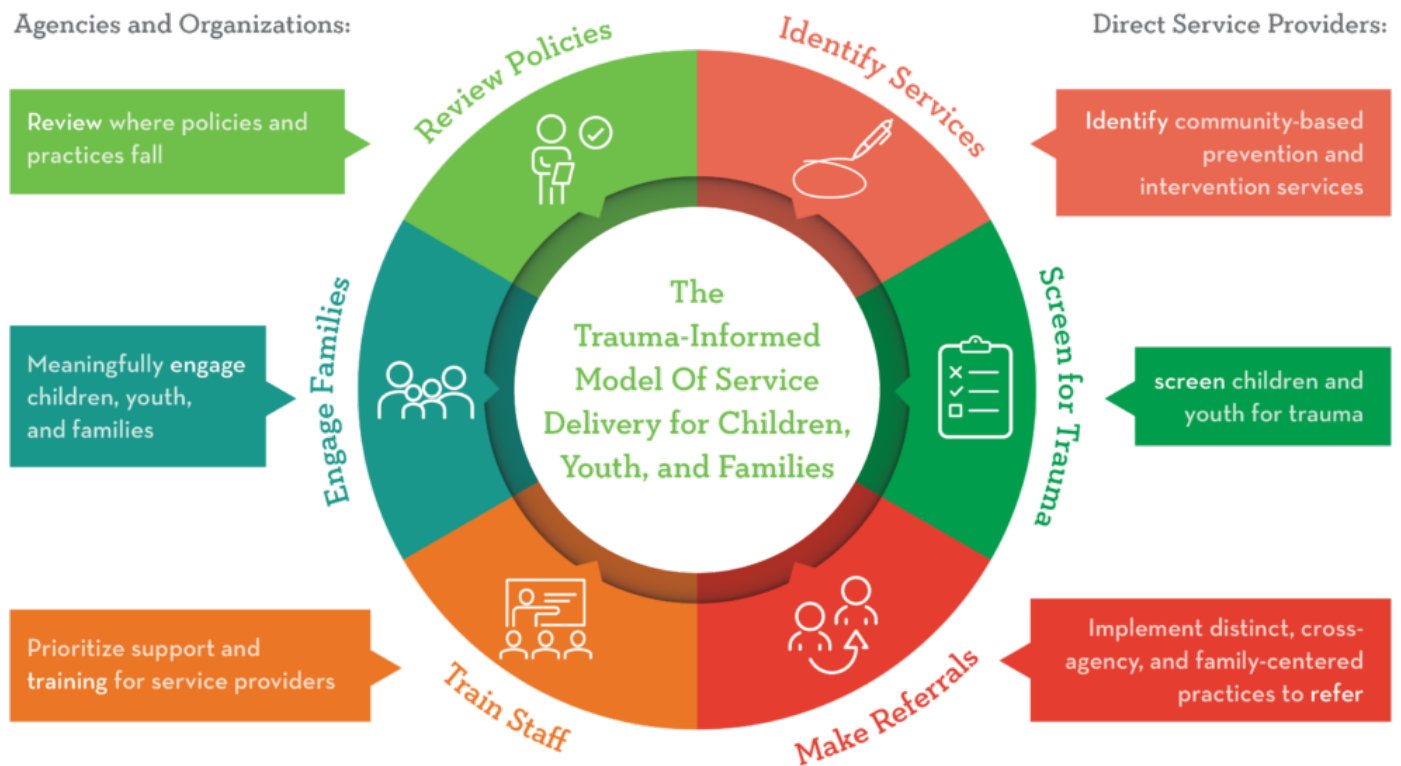
The Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy has been actively engaging with local partners and communities to promote resilience and healing among the children, families, and individuals being served. The OTRP strives to provide essential resources, training, and technical assistance to local agencies and organizations, with a focus on the **Virginia HEALS** Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery. In support of these activities, the OTRP explores and implements various training and funding opportunities, fostering the adoption of trauma-informed and healing-centered policies, practices, and programs across the state.

Support for Implementing Virginia HEALS Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery

The Virginia HEALS Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery, and the resources provided in the **Toolkit** that supports it, continue to have a significant impact across systems. The OTRP is committed to ensuring that those providing services to children, youth, and families in community are provided training and technical assistance on trauma-informed and healing-centered policy and practice. The Virginia HEALS Toolkit includes:

- » **Community Resource Mapping Facilitation Guide** and **e-Learning**
- » **Family Engagement Guide** and **e-Learning**
- » Screening for Experiences and Strengths (SEAS) and **e-Learning**
- » **Referral and Response Protocol** and **e-Learning**
- » **Trauma-Informed Agency Self-Assessment** (updated in 2022 to incorporate vicarious trauma and historical/collective trauma)





Screening for Experiences and Strengths (SEAS) Implementation

The Screening for Experiences and Strengths (SEAS), developed as part of the Virginia HEALS demonstration project, is a brief screening tool for trauma and/or victimization in children and youth to identify and assess for the effects of trauma for the purpose of making family-centered referrals for further assessment or services. The tool is designed to be used across systems and sectors and is unique in that it has a section on protective factors to promote a strengths-based approach that identifies supportive relationships that promote resilience.

Over the course of nearly two years, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) collaborated with the Virginia HEALS team to develop a comprehensive procedure for how SEAS would best be implemented with justice-involved youth. In 2022, DJJ finalized this procedure; and, in collaboration with the newly formed OTRP, trained approximately 450 juvenile probation and parole officers and facilitated informational sessions to more than more than 300 stakeholders and partners, including Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court judges, guardians ad litem, defense attorneys, and Commonwealth's Attorneys on SEAS and the screening procedure for DJJ. Administered as part of the Social History information gathering process, over 2,200 SEAS were administered in the first year of implementation.

In early 2023, the SEAS was also implemented in three programs at the Newport News Department of Human Services. It is anticipated that the work of this agency will serve as a model for other local departments in the Commonwealth seeking to implement trauma screening.

Training

In the last year, the OTRP has provided training and capacity support from a trauma-informed and healing-centered lens to over 1,330 service providers and policy makers at the local, state, and national level. OTRP staff facilitated sessions on a variety of trauma-related topics, including: the Virginia HEALS Trauma-Informed Model of Service



Delivery and Toolkit, Work-Life Balance, Resilience in the Workplace, and Best Practices for Engaging Voices of Lived Experience. In addition to presenting at several statewide conferences, including the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Improvement Program Judicial Conference and the Virginia Association of School Social Workers Conference, OTRP staff presented at national conferences such as the National Juvenile Justice Conference and the National Governors Association's Health and Human Services Institute.

Public Awareness and Education

» Support for Trauma-Informed Community Networks

In 2021, the Virginia General Assembly allocated \$1 million of American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery fund to support **Virginia's Trauma-Informed Community Networks** (TICNs). The OTRP dedicated a portion of these funds to the Greater Richmond Trauma-informed Community Network (TICN) to develop and implement a statewide community awareness campaign and offer education and professional development on trauma and resilience.

Another significant portion of this funding was dedicated to the Healing-Centered Organization (HCO) initiative, which provides funding and support to five local agencies within TICNs in an assessment, strategic planning, and implementation process on becoming healing-centered both internally (with their workforce) and externally (with the children, families, and individuals they serve). The process of assessment, planning, and implementation will be shared out with other agencies and organizations participating in local TICNs for the purpose of shared learning and replication.

Participating agencies in the HCO Initiative are Crater Health District, New River Valley Child Advocacy, Resources, Education, and Services (CARES), Greater Richmond Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN), United Way of Southwest Virginia, and United Way of the Virginia Peninsula.

In 2021, the Virginia General Assembly allocated \$1 million of American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery fund to support Virginia's Trauma-Informed Community Networks (TICNs).

» Resilience Week

During the month of May 1 - 7, 2023, Governor Glenn Youngkin issued a proclamation commemorating Virginia's 3rd Annual Resilience Week. During Resilience Week, the OTRP focused on the statewide theme, *Rest, Reconnect, and Recharge*, and utilized various social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, to showcase events and messaging taking place during the week throughout the Commonwealth.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP) at VDSS is taking proactive steps to support and promote resilience in the DSS workforce. As noted in this report, the Research and Planning team at VDSS is currently analyzing the Vicarious Trauma Focus Group Project transcripts and will be working with the OTRP team to identify themes, write a report of findings and recommendations, and drive further quantitative research.

The OTRP acknowledges the urgency of this need for workforce support and, simultaneous to the analysis of focus group data, is actively engaged in the process of exploring best practices, models, and strategies, as well as resources that may be available, for providing needed support around vicarious trauma. The OTRP has prioritized the planning and implementation of a framework for worker support in the coming year.

In the pursuit of growing a trauma-informed culture at VDSS, the OTRP is diligently working to develop essential training modules covering the Fundamentals of Trauma, Trauma-Informed Practice/Policy, Vicarious Trauma, and Trauma-Informed Supervision. As part of ongoing efforts to infuse and sustain trauma-informed and healing-centered knowledge and skills, these modules are envisioned to become a part of onboarding and ongoing training for all VDSS staff. This commitment to training will enhance the capacity of all VDSS staff to deliver high-quality services to children, families, and communities.

Through these forward-thinking actions, the OTRP is shaping a future where the DSS workforce receives the necessary support and training to effectively mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma. With a strong commitment to trauma-informed practice and policy, the agency is poised to foster a resilient and healing-centered culture, benefiting both their workforce and the individuals and families they serve.





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