



The Office of Trauma
and Resilience Policy

Annual Report

SFY2026



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trauma-informed and resilience-focused policies understand how trauma affects people and works to create safe, supportive systems that help prevent further harm and support healing. They also help individuals, communities, and organizations build resilience, adapt and thrive.

The Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP) provides leadership within the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to put these practices into action across the agency. By coordinating policy, training and collaboration across divisions, the OTRP helps build a culture that strengthens resilience, supports well-being, and improves outcomes for the communities that DSS serves.

During state fiscal year 2026, the OTRP continued to expand its impact across Virginia.

Key Accomplishments During State Fiscal Year 2026:

- **Training and Technical Assistance:**
 - Delivered workshops and presentations to more than 1,900 service providers, policymakers, and human services professionals across Virginia.
- **Workforce Resilience:**
 - Expanded Community Resiliency Model® (CRM) training for VDSS and LDSS staff and secured funding for a peer support line to reduce vicarious trauma and strengthen workforce well-being.
- **Science of Hope:**
 - Grew VDSS's culture of hope by training additional Hope Navigators, growing the network to 69 across the agency.
- **Lived Experience Engagement:**
 - Advanced Virginia's lived experience strategy by transitioning from the Community of Practice to the Lived Experience Advisory Network (LEAN), strengthening representation, equity, and workforce development.
- **Virginia HEALS Resource Hub:**
 - Redesigned and expanded the Virginia HEALS website with new resources, tools, and e-learning modules to support trauma-informed practices.
- **Cross-System Leadership:**
 - Supported the reconvening of the Trauma-Informed Leadership Team (TILT) to strengthen collaboration across child and family-serving state agencies.

WORKFORCE WELL-BEING

Building a skilled, resilient, and thriving workforce is a leading priority for the OTRP. Over the past year, the OTRP has taken significant steps to ensure that social services workers have meaningful pathways to enhance their well-being, engagement, and perception of support. The OTRP engaged with VDSS and Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) staff and community organizations through workshops and technical assistance, services that are being expanded and refined through pilot programs and research.

VDSS Support

Science of Hope

The **Science of Hope** is an evidence-based, trauma-informed framework that teaches the measurable skills people and organizations need to create a better future. Hope is understood not as a feeling but as a cognitive process—setting meaningful goals, identifying practical pathways to reach them, and sustaining the motivation to move forward.

Research shows that hope improves well-being, job satisfaction, and workplace culture. Integrating hope-centered practices into organizational programs and leadership strategies builds systems that are more collaborative, resilient, and equipped to navigate challenges with clarity and purpose.

In April of 2026, the OTRP hosted the third VDSS Hope Navigator training, bringing the total number of Hope Navigators to 69 across 17 divisions and all agency portfolios. As members of the Hope and Resilience Transformation Team (HARTT), these employees use the Science of Hope to help their teams set and reach their goals, and strengthen their willpower needed to act.



Hope Navigators are connectors and champions who keep hope-centered practices active and visible across VDSS. Through the HARTT, the OTRP is embedding hope into VDSS office culture, strengthening the workforce, and supporting the agency's mission.



Training and Technical Assistance

Increasing awareness of the OTRP as a technical assistance (TA) resource at VDSS was a priority this year. The office used internal communication channels to share a menu of TA options that the OTRP offers to agency divisions and staff as well as access to a form to request support from the office.

The OTRP reviewed all VDSS legislative reports before they were submitted to the General Assembly, and applied a trauma-informed and hope-centered lens to ensure the reports' language aligned with agency values and best practices.

The OTRP supported and collaborated with staff across VDSS divisions and programs, including the Division of Child Support Enforcement Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES) grant team, Public Affairs, and the Hotline team in the Division of Family Services. The OTRP's TA included reviewing materials, reports, and communications, and providing recommendations to strengthen messaging and engagement.

Over the course of the year, the OTRP provided **Community Resiliency Model®** (CRM) Wellness Skills Workshops and **Vicarious Trauma** trainings to state agency staff, some of which were open to all employees and others which were division-specific, totaling **137 VDSS staff participants**.

Vicarious Trauma: An Overview is a workshop developed by the OTRP in response to the unique challenges of human services professionals. It explores the effects of secondary exposure to trauma, how it impacts individuals and organizations, and how to mitigate these impacts, both individually and organizationally.

The Community Resiliency Model® (CRM) is an evidence-based model created by the Trauma Resource Institute. It concentrates on building resiliency-focused communities and teaching skills to reset the nervous system after experiencing trauma or chronic stress. The OTRP facilitates CRM workshops to teach DSS employees skills to restore their resiliency while working in positions that experience high rates of vicarious trauma.

LDSS Support

Workforce Support

Child welfare employees may experience vicarious trauma in their roles, which often leads to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and high rates of turnover. The OTRP emphasizes the widespread benefits of workforce retention and engagement, including increased permanency and positive outcomes for children, youth, and families and cost savings to local departments and the Commonwealth.

The OTRP makes evidence-informed recommendations for programs, policies, and practices to mitigate vicarious trauma in the DSS human services workforce. From 2023 to 2025, the OTRP partnered with the VDSS Office of Research and Planning (ORP) and a graduate student at the University of Virginia's Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy to research vicarious trauma in this population, their formal and informal coping strategies, and the efficacy of frameworks for mitigation at an agency level.

In 2025, the OTRP collaborated with the ORP to conduct a study on the [cost of turnover](#) using the entry-level Family Services Specialist I (FSS I) position as its sample population.

The study compared the training and salary costs of FSS I employees to the cost of implementing the OTRP's proposed strategy, a Child Welfare Workforce Support Program. The report showed that training costs for this one set of workers alone exceeds the cost of the program. Years of research led the OTRP to develop recommendations to support the human services workforce.

The proposed program has three components:

Peer Support Line

Supportive phone line for employees experiencing stress and exposure to traumatic events at work. Its workers (retired or otherwise) will have experience as local social services employees.

Community Resiliency Model®

Statewide implementation of an evidence-based model that teaches skills to regulate the nervous system after stress or trauma.

Critical Incident Response

Statewide implementation of an evidence-based model that teaches skills to regulate the nervous system after stress or trauma.

Community Resiliency Model® Workshops



In partnership with the VDSS Division of Local Training and Development, the OTRP offered monthly CRM workshops to LDSS staff. These sessions were open to employees in any role across all 120 local departments. **484 LDSS workers** participated in workshops from July 2025 to April 2026.

Each session reached full capacity and a waiting list within hours of being announced. These monthly workshops paused in May so the OTRP could devote their efforts to a CRM pilot program.

The OTRP's CRM pilot was conducted in four LDSS in Planning District 16 (Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, King George, and Caroline) and is being evaluated by a team at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VT IPG). It is examining two research questions:

- 1. Is there a difference in learning and utilization between CRM delivered virtually and CRM delivered in-person?*
- 2. Is there a difference in learning and utilization when all staff in a locality have been trained in CRM versus only a few staff in a locality?*

To answer these questions, OTRP staff facilitated three in-person CRM workshops (32 participants) and three virtual CRM workshops (127 participants) in May and June. Participants completed surveys immediately after the workshop, and again at 30 and 90 days post-training; the OTRP will hold focus groups with participants in the coming months. The VT IPG will analyze the survey results and data from the focus groups. The 159 workers trained through this pilot will help determine the content and delivery of future CRM sessions for LDSS workers.



Committed to expanding VDSS's capacity to support state staff, the OTRP sponsored four individuals to complete the 40-hour CRM Teacher course and additional requirements to earn credentials. Two Enterprise Learning and Development and two State Programs staff successfully became certified **CRM Teachers** in the spring of 2026. They are already teaching CRM skills to teams throughout the agency.

In addition to facilitating CRM workshops for LDSS, the OTRP staff are developing a training program for staff to become **CRM Guides**. These guides will help others notice and understand their nervous system responses and introduce them to CRM skills they can practice in everyday situations. CRM Guides are not certified to deliver the full CRM curriculum, but they will fulfill an important function in the Child Welfare Workforce Support Program. The OTRP envisions the Peer Support Line staff being trained as CRM Guides so they can incorporate their skills in conversations with workers experiencing trauma and stress.

The Trauma Resource Institute, the nonprofit organization that created CRM, has developed modified curricula to help people cope after natural disasters and critical incidents caused by humans. Because family services workers may encounter traumatic incidents such as child fatalities and workplace violence, CRM teachers at VDSS are trained on this model. When the Child Welfare Workforce Support Program is established, this model will be used to aid workers statewide.



LIVED EXPERIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Lived Experience (LEx) is the knowledge a person gains from their own life, background, and personal story. It comes from firsthand experiences—such as being part of systems like child welfare, mental health care, or education—rather than from formal training or professional roles. Engaging people with lived experience in shaping policy and practice adds insight and depth, better ensuring that programs and services are more fair, practical, and effective.

Evolution of Lived Experience Engagement in the OTRP

The OTRP has long been committed to ensuring LEx voices meaningfully shape decisions, programs, and policies. For the past several years, the OTRP convened and facilitated Virginia’s Lived Experience Community of Practice (LEx CoP), a group made up of those who convene or facilitate state-level LEx advisory groups and councils with the purpose of sharing ideas, resources, and best practices. In April of this year, after identifying shared goals and priorities and clarifying processes for getting policy and practice input from members of the various LEx groups they represent, the OTRP and the CoP members agreed to transition the CoP into a Lived Experience Advisory Network (LEAN).

LEAN maintains the same purpose as the LEx CoP, but now under a new model designed to elevate trust, peer support, thought partnership, and co-design opportunities. Since making this shift, the group’s participation and focus has improved, helping LEAN progress towards its goals.

In August 2025, the OTRP and the LEx CoP (now LEAN) formalized the group’s top goals. Collectively decided through LEAN members’ questionnaires and feedback, these priorities guide the OTRP as its staff carry out LEx expansion, representation, and best practices across Virginia.



Lived Experience Engagement Goals

LEAN Goal	Description	OTRP's Action
Representation in Decision-Making	Secure LEx seats on all major statewide policy councils or advisory boards; establish ongoing support for LEx representatives.	Virginia Management Fellow Bowen Monroe-Mihailoff wrote an issue brief on the importance of LEx voices on state boards and councils. It recommended changes to Virginia Code to include people with LEx on boards and compensate them for their time.
Equity in Engagement	Ensure diversity in LEx engagement statewide (e.g., rural voices, racial/ethnic groups, LGBTQ+, disability communities); create a diversity checklist.	The ORP and the OTRP created a Diversity Survey which will be distributed to members of the LEx advisory groups that participate in the LEAN. The OTRP will analyze the results to determine next steps.
Strengthen the Workforce	Promote equity and recognition for peer and LEx roles by partnering with state agencies to set minimum standards for training, pay, and career pathways.	The OTRP researched compensation and pay ranges for different roles that people with LEx may have across agencies.

BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Virginia HEALS Website

This year, the [Virginia HEALS](#) microsite underwent content expansion and design overhaul as it migrated to VDSS's new content management system. The OTRP created a new layout for the site and a marketing campaign to bring resources to a wider audience and raise awareness about resources to support trauma-informed policy and practice.

The office worked with summer intern Amanda Liu, a Carnegie Mellon University graduate student, to implement the layout and content strategy. The new site launched on October 10, coinciding with World Mental Health Day, and featured sample social media posts, email templates, and images.

The office invited leaders from over 100 internal and external stakeholder groups to utilize these promotional materials and help spread the word about the microsite's valuable resources.

Many of the Virginia HEALS tools have been available for years, but the newly developed resources and website helped increase the program's visibility and accessibility. While the OTRP's initial work focused primarily on trauma-informed service delivery to support children and families, the featured e-learning modules, guides, and customizable templates on the website are helpful to a much larger and broader group of human services professionals.

"Many people go through trauma. But the people and groups that help—like teachers, child-serving groups, courts, and other community groups—often work by themselves... Virginia HEALS helps bring these groups together, so families can get the right support faster and with less stress."



Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery

The Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery supports human services organizations and workers across systems (child welfare, behavioral health, education, etc.) in providing trauma-informed services. The page has tools that can help organizations evaluate and enhance their proficiency in providing trauma-informed care, engaging families, and identifying and accessing their community's resources.

The **Community Resource Mapping** [facilitation guide](#) and [e-learning module](#) offer detailed instructions for a dynamic exercise in identifying and linking communities' existing strengths.

The **Family Engagement** [guide](#) and [e-learning module](#) provide front-line workers with strategies for including young people and their families in decision-making, as well as program- and system-level approaches that can improve the family engagement process for all.



E-learning modules, downloadable PDF guides, and many more resources are available on VirginiaHEALS.com



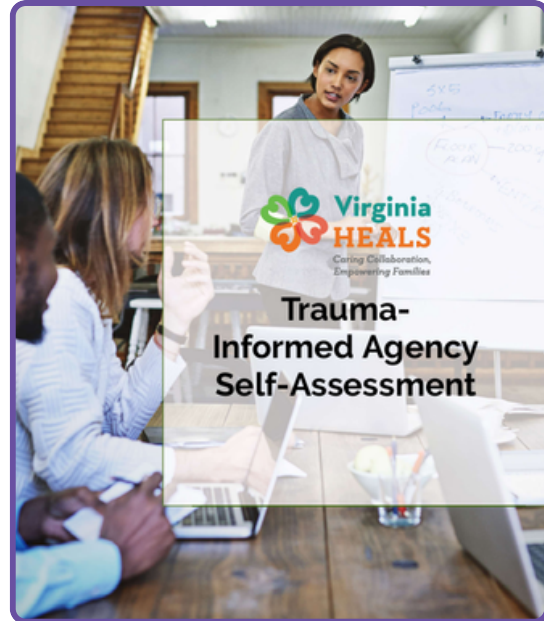
The **Referral and Response Protocol** includes detailed [instructions](#) for reviewing and enhancing connections across organizations so children and families impacted by trauma receive high-quality and relevant support. Lastly, Virginia HEALS includes two e-learning modules on **screening for trauma**: one is specific to the [Screening for Experiences and Strengths](#) (SEAS) tool for children and young adults, and one is for general [trauma-informed screening](#) best practices.

Healing-Centered Organizations

A healing-centered and trauma-informed organization works to help people by focusing on their strengths and what they need to feel better. It also understands that people heal best when they feel connected to their culture, work together with others, and when the causes of harm in their lives and communities are fixed. The Healing-Centered Organizations (HCOs) page focuses on the well-being of agency staff, raising awareness that changes to policy, practice, and organizational culture are a journey, and that teams should routinely assess and seek opportunities to make improvements.

The [Trauma-Informed Agency Self-Assessment](#) allows organizations to rate and reflect on their current level of trauma-informed performance across 10 domains (e.g., Policy, Engagement, and Cross-System Collaboration) and see where they can make improvements. Assessing trauma-informed best practices will look slightly different depending on the organization. In addition to offering this tool, there is also a list of system-specific resources in the assessment's appendix.

Leaders and staff can use other [resources](#) on the page to develop and implement a plan to become more healing-centered, including a [Strategic Plan](#) worksheet. Consisting of simple prompts, this guide ensures the organization's healing-centered and trauma-informed goals and implementation plan are clear. The site also lists common ideas to include in [plans for change](#), including external resources for training, employee wellness, community outreach, and more.



Lived Experience Engagement

The newly developed Lived Experience Engagement webpage includes many [tools and guides](#) for agencies who want to form a lived experience advisory group. Resources for [group facilitators](#) cover best practices for recruiting individuals with lived experience, planning for the group's success, leading effective meetings, and more. The page also offers downloadable slide decks that can be used to train and prepare group facilitators and members for their roles. These slides are unbranded templates, meant to be used as a starting point for any organization who wishes to download and use them for their own groups.

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION



New Resource: Trauma-Informed Workplaces Toolkit

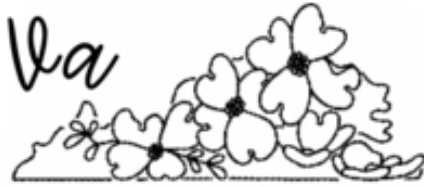


This month, the OTRP would like to highlight an important resource from the Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy and Practice. The [Trauma-Informed Workplaces Toolkit](#) provides educational concepts and practical strategies to support teams in cultivating more trauma-informed workplaces. It is essential to recognize that trauma-informed changes require commitment from team members across all roles—no one requires an advanced education or special degree to make an impact as a changemaker. The toolkit has also been added on the Healing-Centered Organizations resource page of the recently refreshed [Virginia HEALS website](#). Have a look around, if you haven't had the chance!

The OTRP releases a [monthly e-newsletter](#), typically consisting of 2–3 articles. These pieces offer resources related to trauma-informed and hope-centered practices, information and training announcements, and highlights from the OTRP, VDSS, or other state or national organizations.

Resilience Week Va

MAY 1-7, 2026



Since 2020, Virginia has celebrated **Resilience Week** during the first week of May. The Greater Richmond Trauma-Informed Community Network launched Resilience Week seven years ago and continues to promote resilience in personal lives, families, work, and community across Virginia each year. This year, the OTRP chose Workforce Well-Being as the theme for Resilience Week. The office shared resources and information on the VDSS intranet and other internal communications platforms and wrote an article that was featured by the Department of Human Resource Management's e-newsletter for state agency leaders. The office also submitted a request for a Resilience Week [proclamation](#), which Governor Spanberger signed.

LOOKING AHEAD

TILT Reconvening

Early in 2026, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources Marvin B. Figueroa reconvened the state Trauma-Informed Leadership Team (TILT) to strengthen how children, youth, and families access support across the Commonwealth. The group, made up of leaders from child- and family-serving agencies and staffed by the OTRP, will focus on improving the way children move through systems when they need behavioral health services, strengthening coordination among agencies, and expanding trauma-informed and prevention-focused practices statewide.

This next phase of TILT's work will focus on practical, measurable improvements, such as clearer transitions between systems, identifying and reducing barriers to timely care, establishing performance measures, and improving how behavioral health supports are organized and connected for youth who must navigate multiple systems. By aligning efforts across agencies and systems, TILT aims to support more consistent, family-centered responses and promote better outcomes for Virginia's children and youth.

Community-Based Provider Support

The OTRP staff spent the spring of 2026 engaged in a collaborative planning process with the Office of Community and Volunteer Services to convene the inaugural Community of Practice (CoP) of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) at VDSS. Over the course of the next year, the first cohort of CAAs will work together to identify community resources and strengthen referral and response practices for children, families, and individuals impacted by trauma. Agencies will receive technical assistance and support focused on community resource mapping, referral and response protocols, and strategies for advancing trauma-informed, resilience-focused, and healing-centered practices.

LDSS Workforce Support Programming

The OTRP recently received funding to support statewide implementation of a peer support line. The line will be available to staff in all LDSS across the Commonwealth Monday-Friday 7 AM-7 PM and will be managed and staffed by people with lived experience as a local DSS worker. The new OTRP team members will receive CRM Guide training so that they can play a supportive, skills-based role to help callers regulate their nervous systems as needed.





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[www.dss.virginia.gov/trauma-and-
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