

Toward a

TRAUMA-INFORMED,

RESILIENT, and

**CULTURALLY-
RESPONSIVE**

Alaska



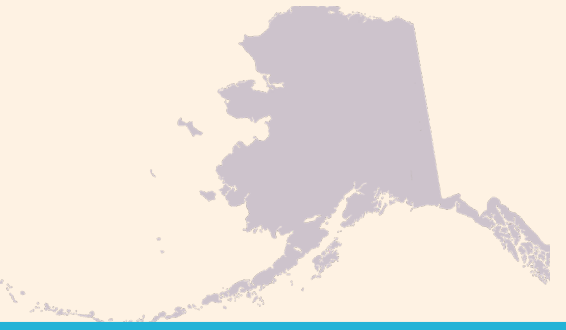
ALASKA
RESILIENCE
INITIATIVE

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by Andrea Blanch, PhD Campaign for
Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice

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ARTICLES

The Alaska Approach to Trauma and Resilience



Alaska is among a handful of states that have taken a comprehensive, cross-systems approach to trauma and resilience. Alaska's effort is unusual in comparison with most other states in its emphasis on historical and ongoing systemic trauma, intergenerational solutions, integration of healing and equity, culturally-based interventions, and institutional reform.

A few examples of Alaska's accomplishments include:



“Acknowledging truth and healing from and transforming trauma together — tribes, state and local governments, and non-profits — will build stronger working relationships and result in healthier communities.”

Lisa Wade,
Council Member and Health,
Education and Social Services
Division Director, Nay'dini'aa Na'
Kayax (Chickaloon Native Village)

- **The collection and dissemination of statewide data on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** was collaboratively funded by nonprofit organizations, tribal health, philanthropy and state government. Led by the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and the Alaska Mental Health Board, results have been used to increase awareness of the impact of childhood trauma on a variety of economic, health and social outcomes.
- **Building on years of efforts by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** and the Alaska Association of School Boards, the state Board of Education is now prioritizing the development of trauma-informed, culturally-responsive classrooms.
- **The Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact of 2017** recognizes the right of Alaska's children to grow up in safe environments, acknowledges the impact of historical trauma, cites the importance of traditional cultural practices in healing, and encourages collaboration between Tribes and Tribal Organizations and the Office of Children's Services to provide services close to home and by people who families trust.
- **The Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force** recommendations emphasize upstream trauma prevention efforts as well as improved treatment and recovery supports.
- **The Alaska Resilience Initiative (ARI)** was selected by the Health Federation of Philadelphia as one of 14 pilot projects nationwide demonstrating innovative trauma-informed approaches. ARI has brought people together across sectors and across the state, and has strengthened a network of and facilitated the development of local resilience coalitions in Ketchikan, the Mat-Su Valley, Juneau, Fairbanks, Seward, and the Southern Kenai Peninsula.
- **Several state agencies**, including Division of Behavioral Health, Office of Children's Services, Division of Juvenile Justice, Division of Public Health and Department of Public Safety have implemented widespread trauma training or incorporated a trauma approach in their work.
- **Vigor Shipyards Ketchikan** offers resilience-building practices to staff daily to counter the impact of high stress work environment.
- **The state legislature** established in Senate Bill 105 that it is Alaska state policy to acknowledge and take into account the science of trauma and resilience.



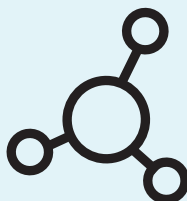
Senate Bill 105 Establishes a Framework for Broad Trauma-Informed Systems Change

The language adopted by the legislature during the 2018 session in Sec. 47.05.060 is based on decades of research showing that trauma and toxic stress, particularly in early childhood, affect the developing brain and can have significant consequences for health and well-being in adulthood. The bill's language also [acknowledges the importance of family and community](#) in buffering the impact of toxic stress and promoting resilience.

What does it mean to be “trauma-informed”?

When an individual, agency or setting is “trauma-informed,” they realize how widespread trauma is, recognize the signs and symptoms, respond by including a trauma perspective in policies and practices, and resist unintentionally re-traumatizing clients or staff.

Unlike delivering trauma treatment, which usually requires a trained professional, [anyone can become trauma-informed.](#)



“It helped me communicate in a more effective way rather than outbursts of feelings.”

Scott Jackson,
on Vigor Alaska Shipyard’s
resilience-building program

TAKING THE NEXT STEPS IN ALASKA

Traumatic events are extremely common. A 2013 survey of Alaskan adults found that 64% had experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), 23% had four, and 11% had five or more – higher than five comparison states.¹

When you consider traumatic experiences in adulthood, rates are even higher. In a national survey of almost 3,000 U.S. adults, 90% reported having experienced at least one traumatic event; the majority reported multiple events.²

Whether you focus on health and human services, the natural environment, the arts, or business, if your work involves people, you already encounter the impact of

trauma. If you serve a particularly vulnerable population, you are also at risk for experiencing “secondary traumatic stress,” sometimes called “vicarious trauma.”

[You might be wondering: Isn’t responding to trauma a matter for mental health professionals?](#)

What can my organization do? Just learning some basic information about trauma can often improve performance and make the work environment better for everyone. Changing organizational culture to reflect an understanding of trauma is referred to as becoming “trauma-informed.”³



BY THE NUMBERS

CORRECTIONS



As many as of female inmates have experienced sexual or inter-personal violence. Up to **90%** have ACE scores of **5 OR MORE**. **34%** of male inmates have histories of childhood physical abuse. ¹

PUBLIC HOUSING



Public housing residents are **2x** as likely as others to experience gun violence. They also experience **HIGH LEVELS** of historical and ongoing systemic trauma. ²

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



Suicide is the **2nd** leading cause of death among college students. Higher ACE scores are strongly associated with **LIFETIME** suicide attempts and earlier age of first attempt. ³

VETERANS



Estimates of PTSD among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are as high as **20 to 30%**. Depression, anxiety and substance abuse often co-occur; ACEs are a **SIGNIFICANT PREDICTOR** of both PTSD and depression among veterans. ⁴

LAW AND THE COURTS



In one study, **63%** of criminal, family and juvenile court judges reported symptoms of secondary **TRAUMATIC STRESS**. ⁵

PUBLIC SAFETY



ALL law enforcement officers, including Fish and Game wardens, work in potentially traumatic conditions. **POOR SLEEP QUALITY, HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS, AND ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE** have been associated with trauma in these professions. ⁶

Benefits of Becoming Trauma-Informed

HELPS US TO VIEW PEOPLE AND PROBLEMS DIFFERENTLY.

Once we understand the root cause of a problem, new solutions emerge. Whether you are a preschool teacher working with a troubled child, an airline executive developing a policy for handling difficult passengers, or a local government official developing a disaster response plan, [being trauma-informed can help.](#)



HELPS US TO ALLOCATE RESOURCES MORE WISELY.

Now that we know adult health care costs are largely driven by preventable events in childhood, we can develop a [strategy for containing costs.](#) The same principle holds true in many other sectors.

IMPROVES EFFICIENCY.

No-show and drop-out rates often decrease when a trauma-informed approach is implemented. Staff and client satisfaction increase, and staff turnover decreases. Trauma-informed approaches [emphasize safety](#) for staff as well as clients, and in some settings, staff injuries and workers' compensation claims decrease.

MAKES SERVICES MORE COST-EFFECTIVE.

People with complex trauma histories often use multiple, deep-end services at a high total cost to the system. Providing coordinated trauma-informed services can change utilization patterns and result in [significant overall savings.](#)

PROVIDES A COMMON BASIS FOR COLLABORATION.

Interagency collaboration can be difficult if systems are working at cross-purposes. The science of trauma and resilience provides a [common framework](#), making it easier for different sectors to work together.

“The Division of Juvenile Justice implemented Trauma Informed Care training for all staff in 2013. Since then, the division has seen a reduction in the number of youth restraints and room confinements and an improvement in youths’ feelings of safety.”

Kelly Manning

Social Services Program Officer,
Division of Juvenile Justice

How will addressing trauma change what we do?

When people understand the impact of trauma, recognize the signs, and respond in a manner that is guided by trauma-informed principles, [two important things happen – staff become happier and more productive, and services become more effective.](#)

Staff are the common denominator across all agencies and sectors. Trauma-informed approaches benefit all staff, but they are essential for staff who have experienced trauma. Rates of lifetime trauma among staff are often equal to rates in the clients they serve. In addition, while some jobs are riskier than others, all workplaces can be sources of traumatic experiences. Common sources of job-related

trauma include workplace bullying and discrimination, overload, persistent job insecurity, job-related accidents, or fear of an active shooter event. Trauma-informed workplaces coach workers in how to respond to traumatized clients and support them in developing their own resilience and self-care skills.

When staff satisfaction increases, so do client outcomes. Trauma-informed approaches have been shown to improve outcomes in educational settings, health and mental health care services, child welfare and juvenile justice programs, job training programs, and a wide variety of other service settings.

Six Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach ³

SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative

SAFETY

Staff and clients feel physically and psychologically safe

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Organizational operations and decision-making are transparent and promises are kept

EMPOWERMENT

Fosters a belief in resilience, builds on strengths, supports growth

PEER SUPPORT

Values experience; engages peers to work together on issues of common concern

COLLABORATION

Promotes shared decision-making and partnership

HISTORY, GENDER, CULTURE

Uses an equity lens; addresses inequalities

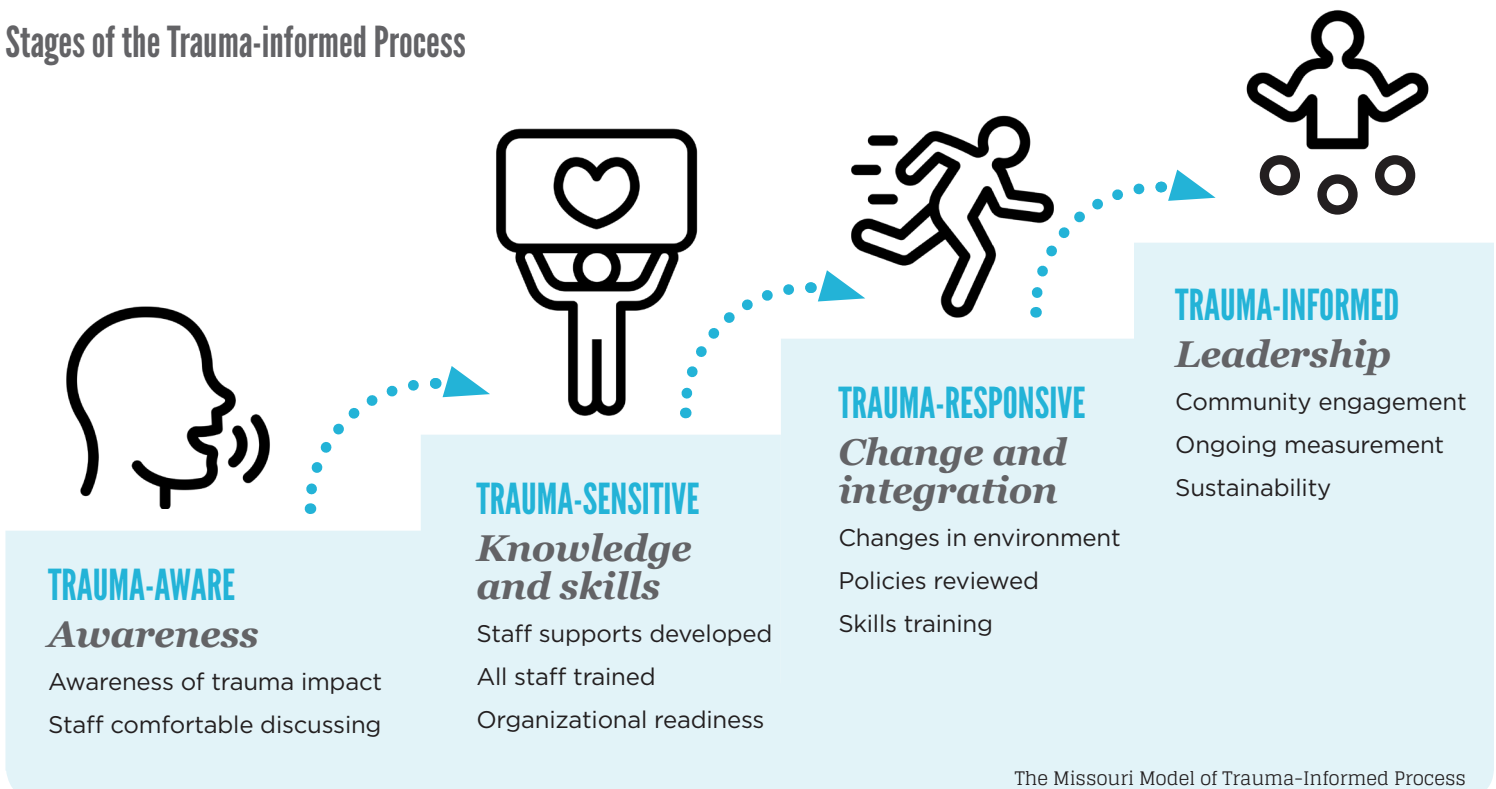
What do we need to do to better address trauma?

The first step in addressing trauma is to become aware of how it affects your organization, system or community. As people begin to recognize that their “difficult” clients and colleagues may in fact be responding to trauma, they may begin to see new possibilities for responding.

What happens next depends on the setting. An organization that chooses to become fully trauma-informed will likely make changes in all aspects of agency functioning. However, not all organizations need or are ready to embark on such a significant change process.

Thinking about trauma-informed change as a developmental process allows you to decide how far and fast you want to move. If you are unsure about whether to proceed, take a few small steps and then assess need and readiness to go further.

Stages of the Trauma-informed Process



Sharing Different Approaches to Change

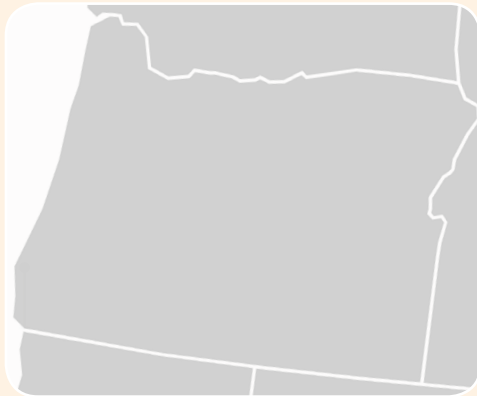
There is no single national repository of expertise, in part because so much innovation is happening locally. Most states, communities and organizations share their experience and their materials freely. Many of Alaska's innovations have already been recognized:

- The state's work has been featured on ACEsConnection.com.
- A decision-making tool developed by **Raising Our Children with Kindness Mat-Su** and adapted for statewide use is being considered by the **Philadelphia ACEs Task Force** and featured in an upcoming national toolkit.
- Alaska's juvenile justice work is being featured on **Youth.gov**.
- The Alaska Resilience Initiative curriculum has been requested by **multiple states and localities** because of its emphasis on social justice.

The new legislation provides Alaska with the opportunity to weave together existing initiatives at the state and local levels, increasing the uptake of successful approaches, spurring the development of innovation, and shining a national spotlight on Alaska's work.

Every state that has embarked on this journey has faced the challenge of integrating state and local efforts across multiple sectors, and every state has responded differently. While Alaska will forge its own approach, the examples below may suggest useful strategies.

WASHINGTON



Highlights

- Built on legislation pre-dating trauma movement
- Initially coordinated by statewide Family Policy Council
- Local citizens make resource allocation decisions
- Self-Healing Communities (SHC) model developed
- Significant reduction of social problems and costs
- Ongoing commitment to using evaluation data in building effective practice

Learn More > Robert Wood Johnson Foundation : "Self-healing Communities"⁴

1987

Youth Violence Reduction Act passed

1992

Legislation established Family Policy Council

2000'S

Community development approach implemented

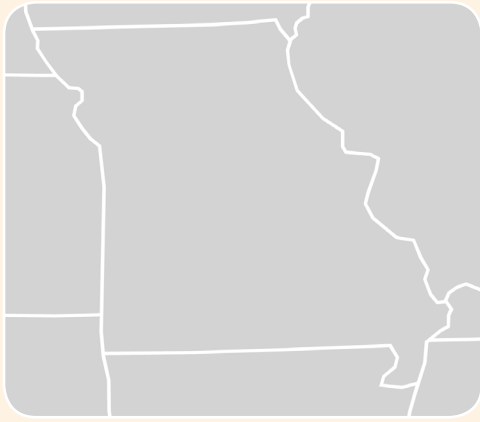
2009

ACE questions added to BRFSS

2016

Data show decrease in social problems in counties using SHC model

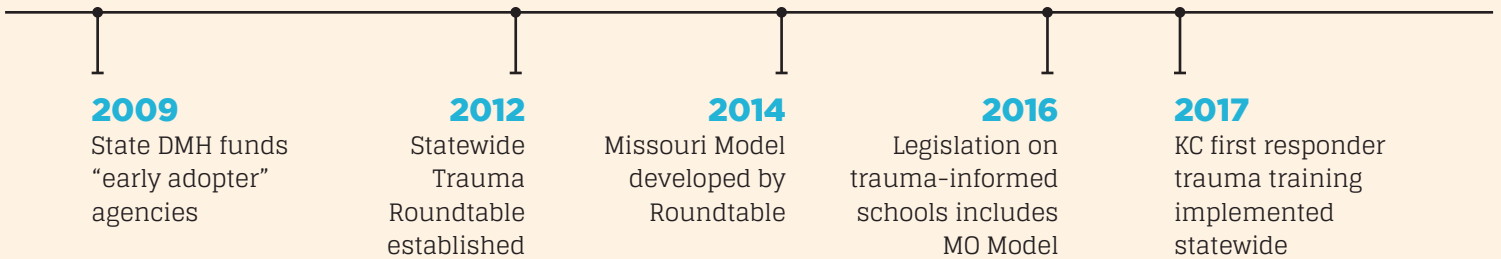
MISSOURI



Highlights

- State invested in selected providers to test new approach
- Began with children’s services, moved to other sectors
- Multi-agency roundtable serves as state’s “think tank,” developing framework for change and policy guidance
- State supported learning communities in education, health care
- Community efforts emerged as statewide interest grew
- Local innovations picked up for statewide implementation

*Learn More > Missouri Department of Mental Health: Trauma Informed Care*⁵



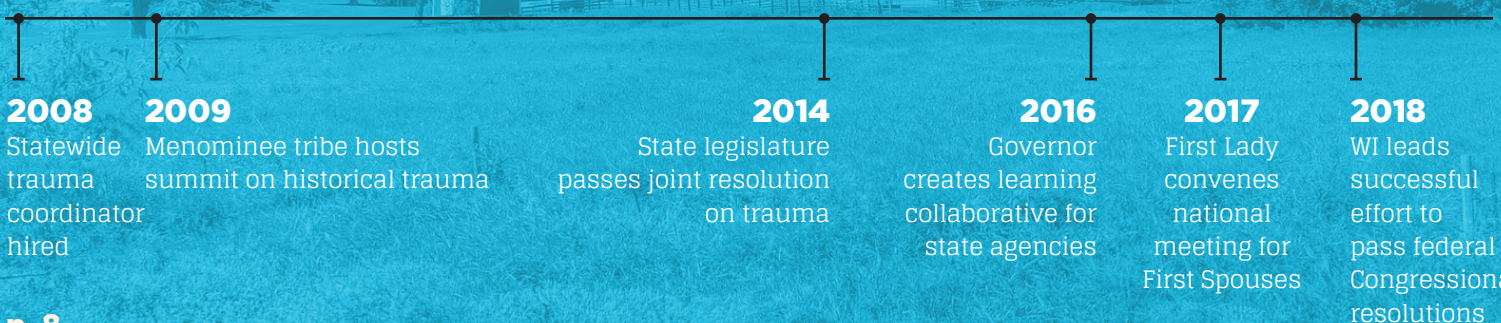
WISCONSIN



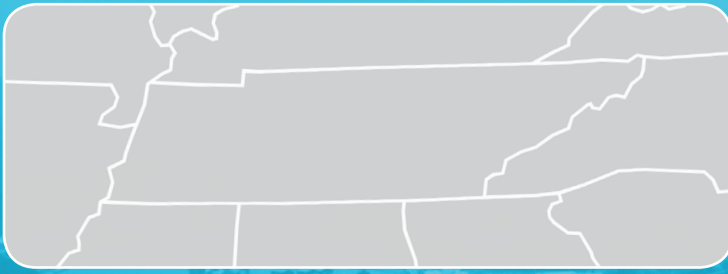
Highlights

- Menominee tribe first in nation to adopt a comprehensive trauma-informed approach
- First state to pass joint resolution on child trauma
- Initially involved seven state agencies, others joined later
- Emphasized importance of service recipients in change process
- Implemented through county-based interagency change teams
- Many agencies saw significant outcomes in first few years

*Learn More > ACES Too High News: “Wisconsin aims to be first trauma-informed state; seven state agencies lead the way”*⁶



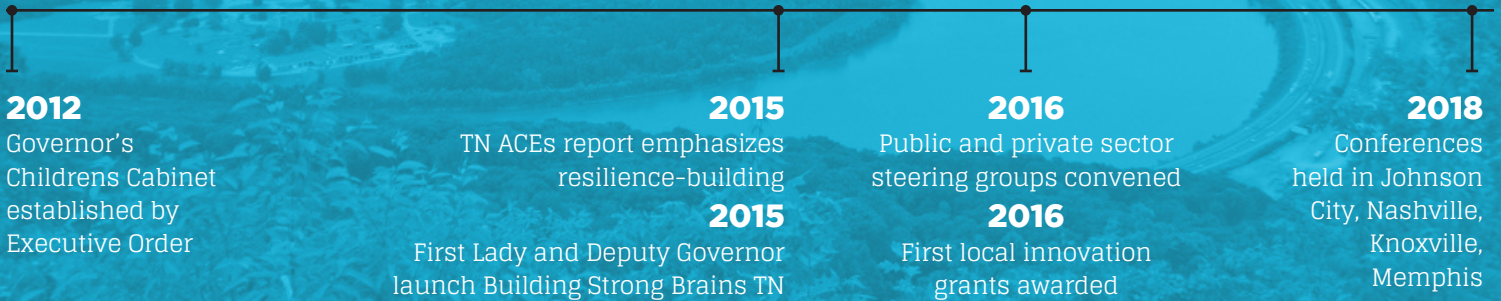
TENNESSEE



Learn More > *Tennessean: “Tennessee looks to change culture on childhood trauma” (2017)*⁷

Highlights

- Public-private partnership with funding from foundations and state
- Focus on preventing toxic stress and trauma by investing “upstream”
- All child-serving agencies asked by Governor to participate
- Used citizen input to determine how to explain trauma and resilience to public⁸
- Over 100 health, education, business and government leaders trained to use communications toolkit



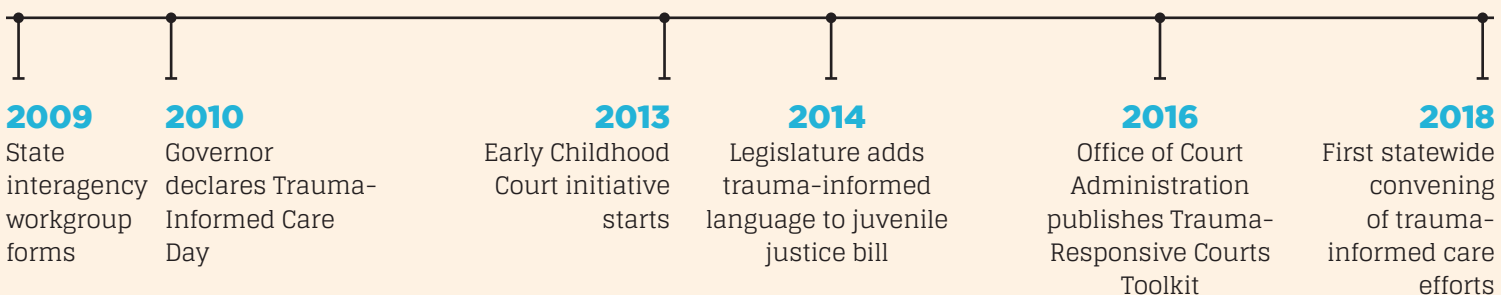
FLORIDA



Highlights

- Voluntary workgroup of state agencies promoted internal change
- Cross-sector trauma collaboration emerged early in Tarpon Springs, Gainesville, Miami
- Currently, 22 Circuit Court judges are implementing trauma-informed dependency courts
- Juvenile justice first service system to embrace statewide change
- Colleges and Universities played key role in local and statewide efforts

Learn More > *“Creating a Trauma Informed State: A Showcase of Florida’s Cutting Edge Trauma Initiatives” (2018)*⁹



OUTCOMES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES



FLORIDA

In the first few years:

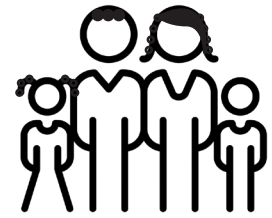
- Gainesville **reduced arrests of African American youth** by over 50%
- Gainesville also significantly **reduced child abuse**



WISCONSIN

In the first few years:

- Menominee tribe **reduced teen births** from 20/year to fewer than 5/year, and saw a significant **drop in high school substance use**
- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation **voluntary attrition rate decreased** from 21% to 3%



WASHINGTON

After a decade, one county reported:

- **Teen births decreased** by 62%
- **Infant mortality decreased** by 43%
- **Youth suicide decreased** by 98%
- **Youth violent crime arrests decreased** by 53%
- **High school dropout rate decreased** by 47%

Conclusion

Regardless of your department or agency, you are already encountering the consequences of trauma on a daily basis. Implementing trauma-sensitive, resilience-building practices will help employees, improve outcomes, and save money.

Recognition is spreading that addressing trauma is smart for business as well as good for people. This past year, a resolution endorsing trauma-informed approaches passed both the U.S. House and Senate unanimously, and trauma-related provisions were included in bills addressing a wide variety of issues. Alaska is poised to play a leadership role as these efforts grow and spread.

Some Ways to Get Started

- Host an introductory training for agency staff
- Allocate staff time for interagency collaboration and learning about trauma
- Ask agency staff about how trauma affects them
- Contact ARI to connect with statewide resources



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Sharing Different Approaches to Change

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ALASKA RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

an initiative of
alaska children's trust

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THIS REPORT

is produced and funded by the Alaska Resilience Initiative. Mobilizing Alaska to end child maltreatment, intergenerational and systemic trauma through healing and strategic advocacy.

LEARN MORE & GET INVOLVED

The Alaska Resilience Initiative (ARI) is a network of nonprofit, tribal and state government organizations, schools, faith groups, businesses, community coalitions, and individuals working together collectively. Join us!

www.akresilience.org