



2025

TRAUMA-INFORMED NONPROFITS

A Guide for Becoming a Trauma-Informed
Nonprofit Organization

 ResilientGEORGIA

What Does it Mean to be a Trauma-Informed Nonprofit?

Being trauma-informed means that a nonprofit organization understands the widespread impact of trauma and actively works to create environments that promote healing, safety, and empowerment. Trauma can stem from a wide range of experiences that are deeply distressing, harmful, or threatening. It often affects individuals emotionally, psychologically, and physically.¹ For nonprofits, this includes recognizing how both individual trauma, such as abuse or violence, and systemic trauma such as racism, poverty, or discrimination, can influence how people think, feel, and interact with services.

A trauma-informed nonprofit integrates this understanding into all levels of operation: from leadership and policy development to workplace culture, service delivery, and staff support. It operates with a conscious awareness that many people engaging with its services may carry unseen burdens, and that this reality must shape how the organization functions.

By embedding trauma-informed principles into organizational policies, leadership practices, and daily interactions, nonprofits can build cultures rooted in trust, equity, and resilience. This guide supports nonprofits in cultivating environments where healing and well-being are prioritized for everyone involved, regardless of the organization's size, structure, or mission. Being trauma-informed is not a one-time training or checklist. It is an ongoing, organization-wide commitment to building compassionate, equitable systems that promote healing and belonging for everyone the organization touches.



Why it Matters: Becoming Trauma-Informed

Nonprofits often serve communities and individuals who have experienced trauma. Becoming trauma-informed is not a trend or a buzzword; it's a critical transformation in how organizations fulfill their missions, treat their people, and create lasting impact.

Trauma isn't limited to a single event. It can be complex, ongoing, and affect every aspect of a person's health, behavior, and ability to engage with services. When nonprofit organizations fail to recognize trauma, they may unintentionally retraumatize clients or staff, further deepening harm rather than facilitating healing.²

By being trauma-informed, nonprofits strengthen their services and outcomes. A trauma-informed nonprofit delivers services in ways that prioritize safety, trust, and empowerment. This increases engagement, reduces barriers to participation, and helps people feel respected and heard. As a result, programs are more effective, and the outcomes are more sustainable, especially for individuals who have historically been marginalized or underserved.

According to **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, any nonprofit organization can provide services following a trauma-informed framework by incorporating six principles of trauma-informed care. According to SAMHSA those principles include:

1. safety;
2. trustworthiness;
3. peer support;
4. collaboration and mutuality;
5. empowerment, voice and choice; and
6. cultural, historical, and gender issues

It also protects and empowers staff. Nonprofit staff are often on the frontlines of human suffering, which can lead to burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and organizational turnover. Trauma-informed organizations recognize this risk and intentionally build structures that support staff well-being, resilience, and retention. When staff are cared for, they can better care for others.

Ultimately, being trauma-informed builds deeper trust between nonprofits and the people they serve. It shifts the organizational culture from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" and beyond that, to "How can we walk alongside you in healing?" This shift transforms services into spaces of connection, restoration, and hope.

Examples of Trauma-Informed Initiatives and Nonprofits

Athens–Clarke County Library – Trauma-Informed Library Transformation (TILT) - The Athens Regional Library System, supported by the University of Georgia’s School of Social Work, is Georgia’s first specialized trauma-informed library. It embeds social work interns, trains staff, and revamps policies and program design to support vulnerable patrons through trauma-sensitive outreach, environments, and services.

Georgia Center for Child Advocacy (GCCA) champions the needs of sexually and severely physically abused children through prevention, intervention, therapy, and collaboration. Through a collaborative effort to promote healthy outcomes in Georgia, GCCA equips adults and youth with awareness, prevention education, and resources to act.

Resilient Georgia is a statewide coalition that promotes trauma-informed care by coordinating cross-sector partnerships, training, and policy initiatives aimed at preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and building resilient communities. Through its network of **regional coalitions**, it supports schools, healthcare systems, and nonprofits in integrating trauma-responsive practices across Georgia. The **Resilient Georgia Training Roadmap** is an interactive platform designed to help you discover the trainings that best suit your needs and those of your organization. It features nonprofit-specific offerings and provides options across various levels of competency.

Mediation Center of the Coastal Empire, Inc is committed to making conflict prevention and resolution services accessible through strong community partnerships and the power of volunteerism. Its robust training programs include General Civil Mediation, Domestic Relations Mediation, Specialized Domestic Violence Mediation, Probate Mediation, and Guardian ad Litem training. The Center also offers Community Mediation and De-escalation Training to equip volunteers and professionals with practical tools to navigate and resolve conflict effectively.

Wellspring Living provides recovery services for survivors of sexual exploitation. Staff are trained in trauma-informed interviewing, service delivery, and crisis de-escalation. Their programs emphasize survivor leadership and empowerment in program design.

Training Resources for Nonprofits



TRAUMA-AWARE

- **Connections Matter Georgia** offers in-person and virtual training to help nonprofit organizations and communities build strong, caring relationships that promote resilience, healing, and a supportive organizational culture. The training covers trauma, brain development, and the power of human connection, offering practical tools to create trauma-informed environments that enhance staff well-being, engagement, and retention.
- **GSU Child Welfare Training Collaborative Recognizing and Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress** educates various helping professionals on Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and its impact. Participants will learn how to assess STS symptoms in themselves and others, explore factors that help protect professionals from the negative effects of STS, and discover strategies to help cope.
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing: Trauma-Informed Care Training** is a webinar that explores ACEs influence bio-psycho-social development and offers guidance on using neurobiologically informed, culturally responsive assessment and intervention strategies for complex cases. The content is divided into six short modules including topics such as trauma and the brain, intervention approaches, and self-awareness.



TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

- The **Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** is a trauma-informed training that teaches simple, body-based skills to help individuals regulate stress and restore emotional balance. Rooted in neuroscience, CRM focuses on how the nervous system responds to trauma and offers practical tools to return to a resilient state. Nonprofit staff can use CRM to support both their clients and their own well-being, fostering healthier, more resilient organizations.





TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

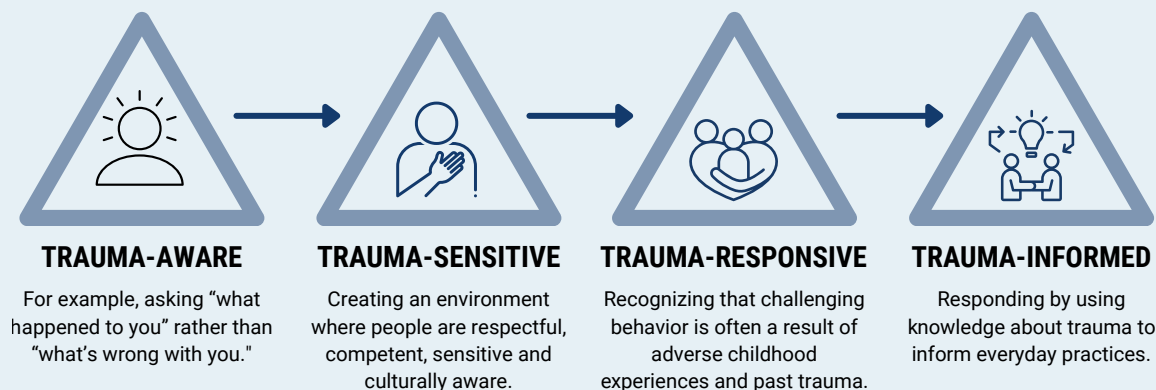
- **Center for Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC)** helps professionals fostering a culture of self-care and emotional resilience among employees. By teaching individuals to manage stress and difficult emotions with kindness, this training can enhance employee well-being, reduce burnout, and improve workplace morale, leading to more motivated and productive teams. It's especially beneficial for leaders and teams in high-stress environments, promoting a supportive, compassionate work culture.



TRAUMA-INFORMED

- **Community Resilience Initiative Trauma-Informed Professional Certification** is designed for both beginners and seasoned nonprofit professionals looking to deepen their trauma-informed knowledge.
- **The Doering Institute for Trauma-Informed Nonprofits** offers trauma-informed care training specifically tailored to the needs of nonprofit organizations, helping staff and leadership create safer, more responsive environments for both clients and employees. Their approach focuses on long-term cultural change by integrating trauma-informed principles across all levels of the organization. With practical tools and expert guidance, nonprofits can build resilience, reduce burnout, and improve service outcomes.

The trauma-informed approach is a continuum that progresses through stages. The stages of becoming trauma-informed are:



Additional Support for Nonprofits

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline can be utilized for mental health support, accessing free, confidential assistance 24/7 via call, text, or chat. This service connects individuals with trained counselors who provide emotional support, stress management strategies, and referrals to local mental health resources, helping court professionals manage the challenges of their work and maintain personal well-being.

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) in Georgia offer many types of behavioral health services, with a focus on providing 24-hour crisis care, evidence-based practices, care coordination with local primary care and hospital partners, and integration with physical health care.

Community Service Boards (CSB) also provide a large range of behavioral health services – from crisis stabilization and substance detoxification to counseling and peer support services.

The Georgia Family Support Network (GFSN) helps nonprofits strengthen services for families by offering training rooted in nationally recognized quality standards, peer learning, and evaluation tools. Through evidence-based standards, peer collaboration, and access to evaluation resources and funding opportunities, GFSN helps organizations enhance their impact and align with best practices statewide.

Understanding Trauma-Informed Facilitation - Nonprofit leaders often lead and facilitate a wide range of experiences from training, workshops, and volunteer programs. Trauma informed facilitators recognize the impact of trauma on learning, growth, and healing in group settings. This recognition of trauma helps facilitators plan for the emotional needs of participants.



What Can We Do Now?

1. Promote the implementation of an organization-wide policy that prioritizes a trauma-informed approach to training. As a first step, the **Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment** by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network can help organizations identify areas for improvement.
2. Take a **Connections Matter Georgia** training as an individual or bring the training to your faith community to learn how connections can improve resiliency and prevent re-traumatization. Nonprofits can greatly benefit from this training to better understand how trauma manifests in their communities and to enhance their support for those in need. For more resources tailored to nonprofit settings, visit the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap**.
3. Consider starting a book study on **What Happened to You** by Oprah Winfrey and Bruce Perry to learn more about trauma and healing. **Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, Georgia Essentials for Childhood**, and **Georgia Center for Child Advocacy (GCCA)** and other partners have developed this **Discussion and Resource Guide** that can help guide your conversations.

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2023). Practical guide for implementing a trauma-informed approach (Publication No. PEP23-06-05-005). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep23-06-05-005.pdf>

² James, I. (2023, November 13). Unmasking the silent impact of trauma in nonprofits. Blue Avocado. <https://blueavocado.org/community-and-culture/workplace-trauma/>





FOR MORE TRAUMA-INFORMED RESOURCES, VISIT [RESILIENTGA.ORG](https://resilientga.org)

Questions or feedback?
Contact info@resilientga.org.

