STRENGTHENING THE HEALTHY START (HS) WORKFORCE & ADVANCING EQUITY IN HS COMMUNITIES:
Trauma-informed, Resilience-Oriented and Equitable Care (TIROE) Whitepaper

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BACKGROUND

To support the 101 federal Healthy Start (HS) programs, the **HS Technical Assistance and Support Center (TASC)** at the **National Institute for Children's Health Quality (NICHQ)** provides ongoing TA, training, and support to HS grantees. Throughout the 2019-2024 HS grant cycle, the TASC worked in partnership with Dr. Linda Henderson- Smith — a consultant of ATC Consulting, LLC and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing — to develop a framework that intentionally infuses equity into traditional trauma-informed care (TIC) principles and practices. This framework targets the intersection between structural inequities and was shared with the HS grantees through several innovative offerings, including a Trauma-informed, Resilience-Oriented and Equitable Care Community of Practice (TIROE CoP), the Power Podcast for Justice series, and most recently, the TIROE Whitepaper.

INTRODUCTION

Due to historical trauma (e.g., slavery, forced relocation and assimilation) and structural inequalities (e.g., racial and economic segregation), HS communities are disproportionately impacted by trauma in the form of racism and discrimination, lack of affordable housing, community violence, etc. In recent years, this complex trauma has been exacerbated by multiple widespread crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation's ongoing racial injustice, and social and political unrest worldwide. In response, the TASC and Dr. Henderson-Smith facilitated the TIROE CoP from April 2021–February 2022 with a group of ten HS grantees.

In an effort to share the TIROE framework with the broader HS community, the TASC and Dr. Henderson-Smith created the **Implementing Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented, & Equitable Care in Healthy Start Whitepaper**. This whitepaper synthesizes key takeaways from the CoP and was designed to support HS grantees in adopting and implementing TIROE principles and practices in an effort to strengthen and enhance service delivery, improve consumer and staff engagement and retention, and advance equity within their communities. The whitepaper can serve as a valuable resource for all MCH programs, as TIROE principles and practices can be applied in diverse settings from community-based organizations to primary care offices.

TIROE WHITEPAPER CORE COMPONENTS

Foundations of TIROE

Cultivating a TIROE culture begins by developing a shared understanding of key terms and definitions around trauma, resilience, and equity.

The "Key Elements of TIROE Care" are based on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) values of TIC:

1. **Safety**
2. **Trustworthiness & Transparency**
3. **Peer Support**
4. **Collaboration & Mutuality**
5. **Empowerment, Voice & Choice**
6. **Cultural, Historical, & Gender Issues**

TIROE builds upon these values by incorporating an equity lens, which encourages programs to grapple with how and why oppression continues to play out in programs and agencies that are staffed with good, well-intentioned people. With this lens, TIROE care ensures the experiences, realities, and needs of families of color are understood and actively addressed.

TIROE Leadership

Leadership requires the ability to mobilize resources to bring about change and galvanize people to adapt their behavior.

The "Seven Domains of TIROE Care" provide a blueprint for successful leadership:

DOMAIN 1 Early Screening & Comprehensive Assessment of Trauma
Screening that is respectful, routine, culturally relevant and sensitive, and revisited over time

DOMAIN 2 Person-Driven Care & Services
Actively engaging recipients of services to meaningfully participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of efforts

DOMAIN 3 TIROE Workforce
Training staff to deliver services that are effective, efficient, timely, respectful and person-centered, while acknowledging that service providers also have histories of trauma

DOMAIN 4 TIROE Evidence-Based & Emerging Best Practices
Equipping the workforce to deliver research-informed treatment services designed to address the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, substance use, and physical problems associated with trauma

DOMAIN 5 Safe & Secure Environment
Fostering an environment that is trusting and healing, and examines and changes policies, procedures, and practices that may unintentionally cause distress and may re-traumatize individuals

DOMAIN 6 Community Outreach & Partnership Building
Recognizing that individuals are part of and affected by a larger service system (e.g., housing, education) and working to ensure all parts of the system are aware of and invested in TIROE principles

DOMAIN 7 Ongoing Performance Improvement
Using data to track, measure, and analyze performance improvement in order to inform leadership and staff on areas for improvement and guide the process of sustainable change

Core Implementation Team

The Core Implementation Team (CIT) is the vehicle that drives a program's adoption of TIROE principles, leading all planning and implementation efforts. Its success is dependent on having representation from staff across the program and the overall organization. CIT members should be strong communicators who are motivated and empowered to implement change.

Suggested participants include:

Leadership is responsible for fostering a safe environment in which the CIT can thrive, which involves supporting cultural humility, utilizing strategies for cross-cultural communication, and fostering collaborative engagement.

- >> **Program Lead (e.g., Project Directors)**
- >> **Quality Improvement Lead**
- >> **Care Provider Lead (e.g., Case Manager)**
- >> **TIROE Champion (e.g., Mental Health Provider)**
- >> **Individuals with Lived Experience (e.g., Consumers)**

Organizational Self-Assessment

The organizational self-assessment (OSA) is designed for programs interested in improving their policies, practices, and social and physical environment.

The OSA guides programs through a self-reflective process to identify where and how TIROE principles are already embedded within the program/organization and assesses program readiness for implementing additional TIROE principles.

The questions help guide decisions around what to:

1. **Keep** 2. **Improve or Change** 3. **Start** 4. **Stop**

Ideally, the OSA should be completed once the CIT has been formed, but before the members are educated in TIROE principles and leadership support has been secured. Programs can then build upon the results of the OSA to create an action plan for implementing new practices.

Partnership Building

Adopting TIROE principles requires sharing the vision with the broader community — not just program and organizational staff — and building strategic partnerships.

Partnerships have the potential to increase awareness about TIROE, create alliances among organizations that might not normally work together, and promote consistency in the community's approach to issues. Partnerships with other organizations take time and effort, but if managed well, they allow organizations to share and coordinate responsibilities.

KEY ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS:

A Shared Purpose: Carefully consider the compatibility of the partner organizations' purpose and goals, the value added by partnering, and expectations around each organization's participation.

Flexibility & Willingness to Collaborate: Once partners have been identified, it is important to acknowledge the structures already in place and identify which new structures the partnership may require.

Complementary Strengths: Begin by clarifying expectations, roles and responsibilities, and available resources and strengths. All partners are accountable and should be afforded equal opportunity for participation.

Agreed Upon Boundaries: A simple, written memorandum of understanding (MOU) can help articulate partnership agreements and help organizations negotiate differing work styles, organizational structures, and management structures.

Sustainability

Implementing TIROE principles does not have a completion date.

Once programs move from being trauma aware to operating with a TIROE culture, the efforts they have made must be sustained. This is a fluid process that must be proactively nurtured and supported through a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process. Additionally, there are a number of potential challenges to TIROE sustainability, which must be addressed on a continuous basis.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:

- >> **Staff expectations that change would occur quickly**
- >> **Leadership turnover and need for continuous staff buy-in**
- >> **Energy ebbs and flows**
- >> **Workload constraints**
- >> **Need for funding and coordinating resources**
- >> **Continuous data collection and reporting on concrete outcomes**

CONCLUSION

In addition to recognizing the impact that trauma has on communities, TIROE aims to harness the power of resilience and equitable care to support communities in healing and thriving. The TIROE Whitepaper provides a foundation for HS programs — and other MCH programs — to implement TIROE principles to improve engagement with communities, mitigate the risk of staff burnout, and enhance the well-being of staff and consumers. To further your education around TIROE principles, scan the QR codes to read the TIROE Whitepaper and listen to the TASC's Power Podcast for Justice. We hope these resources support you in strengthening and enhancing your workforce's capacity to address complex trauma, promote equity, and provide TIROE care to communities.

Read the TIROE Whitepaper:

Listen to TASC's Power Podcast for Justice:

HEALTHY start TA & SUPPORT CENTER

NICHQ National Institute for Children's Health Quality