

Evaluation Summary Report: Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP) Year-Long Professional Development, Dunstan 2023 / 2024

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Executive Summary The year-long Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP) professional development programme in Dunstan provided a transformative learning journey for educators, culminating in a workshop on October 27, 2023. With 107 educators engaged in a full day training and 18 throughout the year, the programme emphasised sustained learning, cultural responsiveness, and the integration of relational neuroscience. The initiative significantly enhanced participants' confidence in implementing trauma-informed strategies, with 92% reporting measurable improvements in their practice. This report details the outcomes of the year-long programme, highlighting key learnings, systemic impacts, and actionable recommendations for scaling trauma-informed education in Aotearoa.

Introduction Trauma-informed education is increasingly recognised as essential for addressing the complex needs of learners impacted by trauma. The Dunstan TIP Spiral for professional development programme aimed to provide educators with a robust understanding of trauma, its effects on learning, and evidence-based strategies for creating safe and supportive environments. Over the course of the year, participants engaged in workshops, peer-to-peer learning, and practical applications, culminating in a capstone event designed to consolidate and extend their learning.

Methodology Evaluation data was collected through:

- Pre- and post-programme surveys capturing changes in knowledge, confidence, and implementation.
- Qualitative reflections from participants after each module on the beacon House online programme.
- Observational data from facilitators during workshops and follow-up sessions.
- End-of-year focus groups to assess long-term impacts and systemic changes.

This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive analysis of the programme's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Participant Demographics Participants included teachers, learning support coordinators, principals, and teacher aides from a diverse range of schools and kura. A significant proportion identified as Māori, reflecting the programme's focus on embedding Te Ao Māori principles into trauma-informed practices. One participant shared, "This programme has helped me align my teaching with both neuroscience and kaupapa Māori values, creating a more holistic approach."

Key Findings

1. Year-Long Learning Journey

- Participants valued the sustained nature of the programme, which allowed for deeper learning and practical application. "The year-long format gave us time to absorb, experiment, and reflect, which is often missing in shorter PD sessions," noted one attendee.

- A significant component of the learning journey involved completing Beacon House online modules. These modules deepened participants' understanding of trauma and provided foundational knowledge that was later applied in practical contexts. "The modules were eye-opening, offering insights that made the in-person sessions even more impactful," one teacher shared.
- The capstone full-day workshop brought together educators and schools from across the region, fostering a collective approach to trauma-informed practices. "This day was about building on our core group's learning and inspiring others to join the journey," reflected a school leader.
- One school integrated these learnings into a project to develop a sensory garden with support from NEX. This initiative not only provided a physical space for tamariki to regulate but also brought the community together. "The sensory garden has become a community project, with whānau, local businesses, and students contributing to its success," remarked one participant.
- Participants consistently emphasised the broader impact of the programme, noting its potential to create a regional network for trauma-informed practices. "Having schools working together on these strategies builds consistency and a shared vision for supporting our tamariki," shared one attendee.

2. Relational Neuroscience and Safety

- Educators emphasised the importance of understanding the brain's response to trauma as foundational knowledge. "Knowing how trauma affects the brain has completely shifted how I interpret behaviour in my students," shared one teacher.
- Strategies for building relational safety were widely implemented. "We've adopted consistent routines and relational check-ins, which have dramatically reduced behavioural escalations," reported a school leader.

3. Te Ao Māori Integration

- The programme's emphasis on cultural responsiveness resonated deeply with participants. "Using purākau and acknowledging whakapapa helps tamariki see themselves in their learning and feel valued," said one educator.
- Practical applications included incorporating karakia into daily routines and designing lesson plans that reflect local iwi narratives.

4. Practical Tools and Techniques

- Participants frequently highlighted the impact of practical tools such as sensory kits, mindfulness exercises, and co-regulation techniques. "Teaching students to regulate through breathing exercises and movement has been a game-changer," reflected one teacher aide.
- Creating calming classroom spaces was another key takeaway. "We've redesigned our learning environments to include quiet zones for self-regulation, and the results are remarkable," noted one participant.

5. Systemic Impact

- The programme catalysed changes beyond individual classrooms, fostering whole-school and regional approaches to trauma-informed education. "Our leadership team has adopted trauma-informed principles in policymaking and staff training," shared a principal.
- A core group of 15-18 dedicated educators consistently provided feedback to the NEX programme, shaping resources and strategies to reflect the unique needs of Dunstan's schools and communities. "Having our voices heard and seeing our input shape the programme made us feel like true partners in this journey," one educator reflected.
- The core group leader provided exceptional leadership skills of the teacher group in their role in inspiring deeper engagement and exploration of trauma-informed practices.
- This core group's commitment extended beyond their own schools, influencing practices across the region and within Kāhui Ako networks. "By sharing what we've learned with colleagues in other schools, we've begun creating a consistent approach to supporting tamariki," noted one participant.
- Participants also undertook Beacon House online modules, which deepened their understanding of relational neuroscience and trauma-informed strategies. "These modules provided a deeper theoretical foundation that we've applied directly in our practice," one participant reflected.
- One school developed a sensory garden with support from the NEX network, creating a physical space dedicated to self-regulation and emotional healing. "The sensory garden has become a haven for our tamariki, allowing them to reconnect and reset during the school day," noted a school leader. This project brought together the local community, with contributions from whānau, students, and local businesses, exemplifying the collaborative spirit of the programme.
- The capstone full-day workshop strengthened the regional network, showing how shared learning can amplify impact. "This day strengthened our regional network, showing how much, we can achieve when we collaborate," noted a senior teacher.

6. Barriers to Implementation

- **Time Constraints:** Many participants cited limited time as a barrier to implementing new strategies. "Balancing daily demands with this work is challenging, but the benefits make it worthwhile," shared one teacher.
- **Resource Gaps:** The need for high-quality, culturally relevant resources was a recurring theme. "We need more ready-made tools that reflect our local contexts," noted one attendee.

Participant Reflections

- "This programme has given me a deeper understanding of trauma and the tools to make a real difference in my students' lives."
- "The integration of neuroscience and cultural practices has transformed how I teach and how my students engage."

- "Seeing the collective impact of our learning across the school has been incredibly rewarding."

Recommendations

1. Expand Long-Term Professional Development:

- Continue offering year-long programmes to allow for sustained learning and systemic change.

2. Develop Resource Libraries:

- Create a centralised repository of culturally responsive, trauma-informed tools and templates.

3. Foster Collaborative Networks:

- Establish regional learning communities to share best practices and support ongoing professional growth.

4. Prioritize Leadership Development:

- Provide targeted training for school leaders to embed trauma-informed principles in policies and practices.

5. Support Educator Wellbeing:

- Integrate mindfulness and self-care strategies into professional development to sustain educators' resilience.

Impact

1. Expand Long-Term Professional Development:

- The group have continued the PD year-long programmes to allow for sustained learning and systemic change.

2. Develop Resource Libraries:

- Creation of a centralised repository of culturally responsive, trauma-informed tools and templates is underway.

Conclusion The year-long TIP professional development programme in Dunstan has significantly enhanced educators' capacity to support students impacted by trauma. By integrating relational neuroscience, cultural responsiveness, and practical strategies, the programme has fostered both individual and systemic transformation. Continued investment in sustained professional learning and resource development will be essential to scaling these outcomes and advancing equity in education across Aotearoa.