

DTAA

Connections & Community



Development Trauma Action Alliance Spring 2019 Newsletter

The DTAA began in 2017 with a group of about 40 passionate and committed people from a variety of sectors and agencies, both professionals and people with lived experience. It's been an exciting and busy year. Our main goals this year were to raise awareness and increase knowledge about developmental trauma and engage stakeholders across sectors, and with lived experience.

DTAA Webpage & Resources

Thanks to our Messaging Committee and our Knowledge Base Committee, we created a DTAA webpage on the ACO's website. The webpage contains a curated list of developmental trauma resources which we hope you will find to be useful whether you are someone with lived experience, a parent, a teacher, a family doctor, a pediatrician, a child welfare worker, a mental health professional, or someone working in the justice system. There are videos, books, articles, info-graphics and other great materials that help to explain the importance of early brain development and the impact of adversity on lifelong health. The DTAA's resources site can be found at www.adoption.on.ca/developmental-trauma/resources

Ontario Roundtables

In the Fall of 2018, we launched the first phase of our **Healing Childhood Trauma Together campaign** across the province. With the input of our Stakeholder Engagement Committee and other members, our Campaign Committee planned a 2-hour DTAA "Roundtable" community conversation where we would do a one-hour presentation about the importance of using a developmental trauma perspective, followed by a community discussion.

We held 10 roundtables and met over 250 people through in-person roundtables in North Bay, London, Barrie, Ottawa, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Kingston, and Peterborough and through two virtual roundtables.

Our presentation about developmental trauma and our hope that it can be used as a lens or perspective to help better understand and support children, youth, adults and families and communities who have experienced it resonated very well with roundtable participants, both those with lived experience and those who support them. We received some wonderful comments about how helpful this knowledge was to them. We also witnessed people coming together in their communities to work together to find effective ways to spread the knowledge.

For more information about the Roundtable discussions please see our Roundtable report now available on our webpage at: www.adoption.on.ca/developmental-trauma/campaign

Youth Journey Mapping

In addition to talking with and hearing from over 250 adults, we wanted to hear what young people with lived and living experience thought. We formed a Youth Engagement Committee who developed a "Journey Mapping" process for youth, based on human-centered design principles. The journey mapping process enables us to talk to youth about developmental trauma in a safe and comfortable manner. We are in the process of meeting with interested youth about their ideas for how the future could look and feel.

We will continue to connect with our Roundtable and Journey Mapping participants in the coming year.

Adult Mental Health

*Dr. Robert Maunder, Psychiatrist,
Mount Sinai Hospital, Professor, Consultation and
Liaison Psychiatry, Adult Psychiatry and
Health Systems*

I was honoured to be invited to speak to the Ontario District Branch of the American Psychiatric Association about the impact of developmental trauma on adult health. The effects of early life adversity on mental health are well known but many healthcare providers are not aware that childhood adversity increases the risk of physical disease and often interferes with getting the best healthcare. We had a good discussion about how psychiatrists can contribute to the rest of medicine by increasing awareness and helping our colleagues to become more comfortable discussing this topic with their adult patients. The talk was called "Childhood Adversity, the Medical Risk Factor that Hides in Plain Sight: It's Time for Psychiatry to Transform Medicine."

Children's Health/Paediatrics

*Dr. Sonia Menard, Paediatrician,
Markham Stouffville Hospital & Children's Aid
Society of Toronto*

I took on the task of presenting at Grand Rounds in the community hospital I work at because I want to start increasing awareness about trauma and toxic stress.

I talked about different forms of stress, the ACEs study, the impact of toxic stress on brain development, chronic disease, and life expectancy as well as epigenetic changes. I talked about the fact that this affects healthcare providers in all fields of medicine. I explained that these patients' maladaptive behaviours are based on a need for survival and that they are, therefore, merely ways of coping. That if we only focus on the life habit or disease state itself, we are putting a Band-aid on the issue and not dealing with the root cause of these behaviours. We ended with the viewing of the short film titled "Remembering Trauma" that gives us a look into the life of a young adult from childhood to the present time, working through misdiagnoses and polypharmacy that just "numb the feelings, but don't make things better" and finally ends with a trauma-informed approach to healing from trauma.

The audience was very interested and engaged and many suggested this become a "way of being" throughout the institution. The door is open to further the dialogue, which is often the first step toward creating positive change. The brain has plasticity that we can take advantage of to reshape it. It sometimes takes years of work; it always takes human connections.

Child Welfare

Dr. Wendy Manel, Psychologist, Trauma-Informed Practice Lead, Toronto Catholic Children's Aid Society

The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CCAS) has identified Trauma-Informed practice as one of its key service priorities. We are excited to share that our journey to becoming a Trauma-Informed Organization is underway. For this initial stage, the focus has been on awareness-raising and foundational knowledge-building. To this end, over the past few months, over 600 staff (direct service and support staff), caregivers, and volunteers participated in an introductory learning event. The event included information about the impact of toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences on brain architecture and the subsequent impact on social-emotional development, resiliency, and the principles of trauma-informed practice. All 600 participants were also introduced to the term Developmental Trauma. As part of the training, participants had the opportunity to play the brain architecture game to help reinforce the concepts included in the learning event. The learning event has been very positive and people are really excited about CCAS' trauma-informed journey!

Policing/Justice

*Detective Constable Tom Knowles,
Toronto Police Service*

Adopting my daughter opened my eyes to the impact of developmental trauma and how understanding it is essential in dealing effectively with all people. In policing we regularly encounter people who have experienced trauma at all stages of development and into adult life. A proper understanding of DT would allow us to serve our communities more compassionately and more efficiently, and to that end, I would like to see DT become a part of training for all police officers. I have approached the Toronto Police College with a view to incorporating DT into its curriculum, and I look forward to seeing it become a part of the courses offered there.

DTAA Vision:

A province that provides every child and every person with the necessary supports to heal from early adversity and developmental trauma, and realize their full potential.

Through the DTAA and our Connections & Community newsletter, our goal is to highlight the importance of relationships and community in what is ultimately, a very human issue. Our connections with one another, with our communities, and with our own past, present and future are all key to healing, and preventing, developmental trauma.

Other Initiatives to Embed Brain Science Knowledge Across Sectors

During 2018, the DTAA became aware of the **Alberta Family Wellness Initiative** (AFWI). The AFWI, with the support of the Palix Foundation, mobilizes knowledge about early brain development and its connection to lifelong physical and mental health, including addiction across sectors. Their website has a wonderful collection of videos suitable for everyone about topics such as brain architecture and brain resilience. They also offer a free online course called The Brain Story Certificate for those interested in learning more about the brain science.

A group of DTAA members is currently taking the course together and talking through its implications on our work. Others may be interested in doing the same within their agencies, professional fields or as part of support groups. See more information about the AFWI online at <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/>

Three DTAA members had the opportunity to attend a 2-day **"Brain Lab" sponsored by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use & Addiction** (CCSA) and the AFWI in Ottawa. Attendees were able to hear from a number of professionals from various sectors primarily in Alberta about how they are embedding the AFWI's Brain Story into their agencies and work. We were then tasked with developing action plans in small groups and individually (see below) to embed the Brain Story into our work and agencies. Plans are underway to continue this work as a group over the next two years with CCSA's continuing involvement.

Education

Cathy Lethbridge, Principal of Well-Being, Simcoe County District School Board

At Simcoe County District School Board, some staff including Educational Assistants, Social Workers and Child and Youth Workers are expanding their learning by participating in the AFWI's Brain Story online course. The learning aligns with our board's strategic priorities under the pillar of Well-being. We are beginning to incorporate some of the AFWI resources into our Trauma-Informed Practice professional development for staff. Our Mental Health and Well-being team is working with our community partners at the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and the Simcoe Muskoka Opioid Strategy as well.

Adoption & Permanency

Kathy Soden, Manager, PACT program, Adoption Council of Ontario

At the Adoption Council of Ontario, we plan to develop a webinar series using some of the brain science videos developed by the AFWI as well as other key resources to help pre-adoptive and adoptive families and the professionals who work with them better understand the impact of early life adversity on children and help families learn how best to support their healing.

Children's Mental Health

Karen Moore, Clinical Director, Open Doors for Lanark Children & Youth

At Open Doors for Lanark County Children & Youth:

- All our clinical staff are taking the AFWI's Brain Story training. We have focused our clinical in-service agendas for the next 3 months to this curriculum to look at how we change/inform our practice based on the learnings of the Brain story.
- We have set up meetings with our clinical partners in addiction and adult mental health to look at how we can introduce the concepts of the Brain story with them and look to see how we can have a county movement to the work.

Questions? Comments? Or to **Get Involved:** devtrauma@adoptontario.ca

For more info about developmental trauma and the DTAA

www.adoption.on.ca/developmental-trauma

Let's Heal Childhood Trauma - Together



DTAA MEMBERS:

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