

# Conversations That Make A Difference; Relationship Focused Practice

TRAUMA | RESONANCE | RESILIENCE



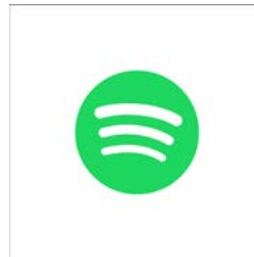
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Trauma Resonance Resilience

# INTRODUCTION

Relationship focused practice; Creating schools, services and systems that make THE difference.



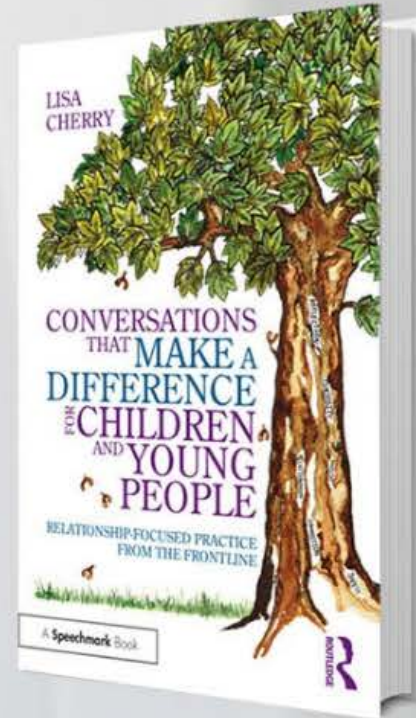
PROFESSIONAL



PERSONAL

ACADEMIC

*Reading*  
**THAT  
MAKES  
A  
DIFFERENCE**





Trauma Informed Education

A Model for Change



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## Project Aims

- Evaluate the early outcomes ‘The Innovation Project’, at Outwood Academy Hemsworth, Wakefield
- Examine the prevalence of trauma-informed programs in West Yorkshire educational settings that have committed to strengthening educational outcomes for vulnerable young people through attachment and trauma-informed methods
- Identify barriers and opportunities experienced in their implementation.

**In order to meet the project aims, the following Research Questions were explored:**

1. What can we learn from the Pilot Study in Wakefield?
2. Are findings from the Pilot Study transferable?
3. How prevalent are trauma-informed education settings in West Yorkshire?
4. What barriers and opportunities are compromising/promoting the vision of a trauma-informed West Yorkshire?

# Focus

Collated Reports and data offering context:

- Children and young people known to a social worker
- Exclusion data
- Children and young people and mental health
- Poverty
- Crime

## Evidence Base

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2015) supports incorporating attachment and trauma-informed programs on a whole school level, training administrators, teachers and staff to better respond to the socio-emotional, behavioural, and academic challenges faced by children and young people.

Schools and Further Education FE colleges have been instructed to act independently and implement their own trauma-informed and or mental health support programs for students in colleges and schools (Cortina, Linehan and Sheppard, 2021).

Universities provide mental health support and services to students, however, few have adapted to trauma-informed policies.

Early evidence suggests that the key areas of improvements in the early are:

- a greater understanding of challenges faced by pupils,
- improved pupil learning and emotional well-being,
- greater confidence and ability to address young people's adverse behaviours,
- reduced exclusions



## Evidence Base

1. A preliminary evaluation of 300 schools participating in the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Programme, showed that teachers were more effective in supporting vulnerable young people through emotional coaching and restorative practices because teachers understood student behaviour from an attachment, trauma and biopsychological perspective (Harrison, 2021). More than a third of the schools reported that “the training had a positive impact on vulnerable children’s engagement (97.4%), learning (92.0%), attainment (78.6%) and attendance (71.5%), as well as reducing the use of sanctions (81.2%)” (Working Paper 5, 2022).
2. A study in Wales that evaluated the impact of attachment awareness training on 64 educators in 4 pupil referral units, found that teachers felt more confident, aware and skilled to work with vulnerable youth with improved communication (Greenhalgh et al., 2020).

## Evidence Base

4. An attachment aware schools program involving 77 schools in Derbyshire County over the preceding five years found a positive shift in the school ethos, improved pedagogical practices and outcomes in learning and students' emotional well-being (Kelly, Watt & Giddens, 2020).
5. The Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) project involving 40 schools, in two different Local Authorities within the UK found that students improved academically in reading, writing and maths. Behaviourally, less students were excluded or faced negative repercussions. Educators and staff reported a greater ability to manage their own emotions and more confidence in addressing the emotions of students as a result of Emotion Coaching training (Rose et al., 2019).
6. An evaluation of the Leicestershire Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Programme which trained staff in 24 schools on attachment and trauma and emotion coaching found that senior leader commitment and support were vital to implementing a whole school approach and aligning school principles throughout administration, teachers and staff. Preliminary findings pointed to improved teacher-student relationships and student well-being as a result of enhanced confidence, knowledge, skills and attitudes when engaging with vulnerable young people (Fancourt and Sebba, 2018).

# Methodology

- Multi-methods qualitative design
- Purposive sample
- An open ended-survey (39 responses)
- A 30-minute semi-structured interview (9 interviews; 5 virtual schools, 3 spotlight schools, 1 pilot study)

## Findings

Findings from the survey and all interviews show that there are a range of experiences and outcomes amongst educational institutions in Wakefield, Leeds, Calderdale, Bradford and Kirklees. The majority of survey respondents (73.7%) represented trauma-informed educational settings with as much as 3 years or as little as 0-6 months of experience of program implementation. A little more than a quarter of respondents (26.3%) did not have trauma-informed approaches in their educational setting.

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## Findings

When asked the question in the survey, 'what has changed in your setting since having the training' and offered the choices of answer laid out below, the most significant changes on trauma informed trained educators were:

- a better understanding of the impact of trauma and adversity (84%)
- relationships that felt supportive for all those in the setting (84%)
- a better understanding of the impact of distress on adults and providing support eg. Supervision (64%)
- a better understanding of child development (60%)
- better mechanisms in place to reduce students' psychological distress and physiological arousal (53%)
- peer support (52%)
- voice, choice and empowerment for all members of community (32%)
- centralising co-regulation (28%)
- centralising safety (16%)

## Findings

Respondents were asked about changes they perceived for pupils that had occurred since their training. They reported:

- greater emotional management (65.4%)
- better communication (61%)
- improved pupil-staff (57.7%) and peer (34.6%) relationships
- reduced exclusions (30.8%)
- improved attendance (26.9%)

There were those who reported no improvements for pupils, however respondents who observed no improvements (23%) reported being involved in a trauma-informed programme for less than 6 months.

## Findings

A significant issue that was raised was **leadership buy-in**, reflecting a preference for behavioural over empathetic approaches and concern about the ability of staff to curb negative student behaviours if a relationship policy, or approach, replaced the behaviour policy.

*“For trauma informed approaches to work there has to be strong leadership.”*

AND

*“What has helped is there's been a shared understanding and that's really supported a leadership vision.”*

AND

*“The personalised approach sits within DFE guidance ...which means ensuring that behaviour management policies aren't discriminatory and moving towards having a relationship policy.”*

Other reported barriers include the potential for there to be frequent staff turnover which respondents felt could affect the consistency of levels of competency, knowledge and skills in the implementation of trauma-informed processes in schools.

## Findings

Educating parents/carers on trauma informed approaches to improve communication and align positive discipline strategies across home and school also was a barrier that was raised.

*“We need to be understanding of the experiences that the parents may bring into the schools and sort of the interactions that they have.”*

AND

*“We've had to work really, really hard (with parents) to explain that their children are communicating a need and we need to meet that need.”*

AND

*“We've had parents view our approach as rewarding bad behaviour by giving them a treat or so and so we've had to work really hard on that.”*



## Findings

While for some institutions there were fewer barriers to implementing trauma-informed practice, balancing the needs of the program with the current government policy (e.g. behavioural methods, national curriculum implementation) was perceived to create a competing priority.

*“No barriers to becoming aware and informed but barriers to implementing in that current external and government policy drives an alternative approach.”*

AND

*“We’re driven by the performance tables, by Ofsted results and constrained by funding and the way in which we're funded, we’re constrained by statutory guidance and having to jump through certain hoops.”*

AND

*“The curriculum doesn't let us respond. So when the children are coming in with trauma of any level, we restore and reset but unfortunately, the curriculum doesn't allow that because we still have to move through it.”*

## KNOWING

## DOING

# *A JOURNEY*

### *Understanding...*

- The impact of early relational adversity
- The neurobiology of relational impact
- The lived experiences of the children and the ongoing impact in their lives
- How the school experience can potentially traumatise and re-traumatise young people
- How language impacts children
- The impact of how trauma limitations are addressed in school
- That there are environmental adjustments required to support the education and development of children holistically
- That a few twilight training sessions does not make a school trauma informed

### *Changing...*

- Creating an aspirational system vs maintaining a system of disadvantage
- Ensuring that every school is a safe space for connection and emotional expression
- Focusing on long-term resilience and recovery
- Using diverse strategies to address individual needs of students
- Shifting the language of labels to one of compassion and positive regard
- Empowering educators to meet the needs of every child
- Promoting staff wellbeing
- Investing in consistent training of staff
- Investing in adult supervision (not counsellors) or coaching models, for all staff
- Investing in whole school approaches

## Pilot Study

- Against the backdrop of the ongoing implications and complications of managing Covid within education settings, including staff absences reaching over 26% during January 2022, much has been achieved within the Innovation Project.
- Recruiting and embedding new staff, sourcing and managing new interventions and the creation of an effective measuring tool, have commenced with some areas now fully embedded.
- It is vital that this foundation is built upon to continue the reduction in exclusions and absences which are two main goals of the project. By building on this initial work with such a driven workforce, sustainability and long term positive outcomes for the children and young people, the school and therefore the community, are achievable.
- The data collection created, completed and disseminated by the school, has enabled a thorough review of the positive outcomes achieved in such a short time frame. Because of this, the 'Innovation Project' has received further funding to sustain the program until the end of the school year.

## Spotlight Schools

There are many schools working in ways that can be described as ‘trauma informed’ and highlighting spotlight schools from 3 of the 5 district areas demonstrates the different ways that in how their integrated approach to trauma informed practices has improved student and staff well-being.

The immense knowledge and experience from the “brave leadership” of spotlight schools and participants of this study highlights opportunities for change to benefit new schools.

- A. <sup>•</sup> Spen Valley High, Kirklees
- B. Carr Manor Community, School Leeds
- C. Girlington Primary School, Bradford

## Spenn Valley High School (11-16 years)

**What** three things work really well in trauma informed approaches?

1. Our Relationship Policy
2. High quality and ongoing staff training
3. Aspirational and accessible curriculum that is well taught

**What three things have not worked so well?**

1. We don't always have the capacity to have the high quality reflection time which has arisen due to the impact of Covid absences
2. We have been unable to completely cease the use of suspensions
3. Investing in relationships can cause challenges with the ongoing staff absences due to covid

## Carr Manor Community School (4-19 years)

### What three things that work really well in trauma informed approaches?

1. Our core value is knowing the children well because it's in built
2. Staff open, taking time to know each other
3. Highly trained staff who can support staff in understanding. There are several key staff whose knowledge and understanding of trauma informed practice has greater depth and breadth. They support others with ongoing CPD. .

### What three things have not worked so well?

1. Being a school, having the pressures of political and curriculum drivers.
2. An ever-changing wider community. We can't change what's outside school gates, with the cultural makeup, the financial challenges families face. This is coming in all the time. That's always going to impact.
3. Making sure that everybody is on the same page at the same time. We do this well, but there's always going to be new staff who need to be inducted so that the overall approach remains coherent without commitment to relational /trauma-informed working.

## Girlington Primary School (2 – 11 years)

### What three things that work really well in trauma informed approaches?

1. Really careful thinking about transition points, whether it's just general transition coming into school, going to lunch, or bigger transitions, moving to new groups or moving schools
2. Embedding evidence-based approaches such as PACE and Kim's Flowers
3. Using calm boxes and calm spaces

### What three things have not worked so well?

1. It can be a challenge when staff move on right in the middle of getting going with something which means starting again with building those relationships and also with training
2. Budget and time constraints
3. We continually work on training our staff striving for staff expertise for whole school staff

## Barriers

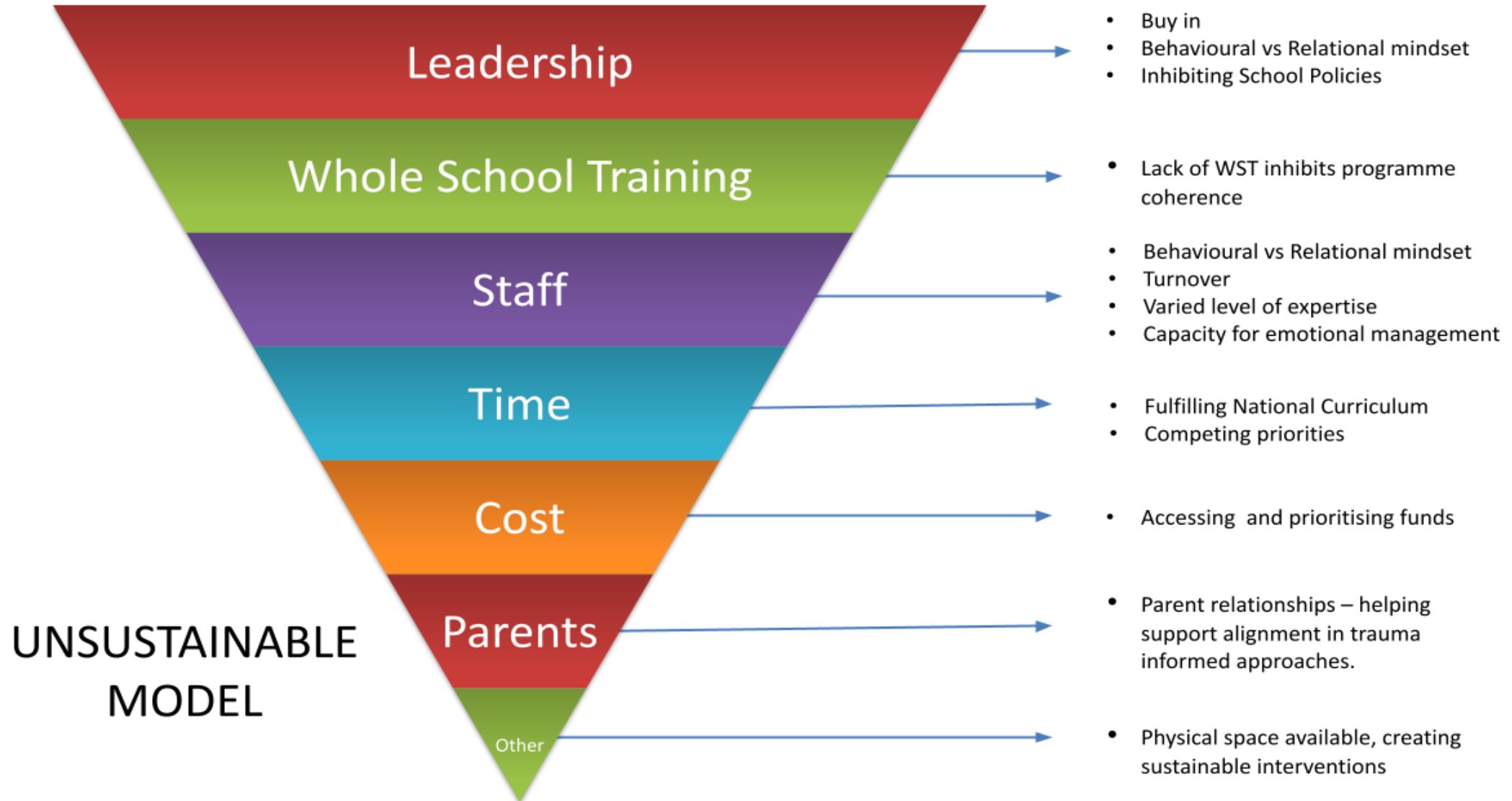
- The data collected in this research points to top levels of leadership with a **behaviourist** mindset, and who are **resistant** to embed relational policies, ultimately **prevent change** from occurring. However, it is important to **contextualise** this in external pressures, curriculum and funding to support thinking around how this barrier can be overcome if becoming a trauma informed setting is desired.
- When a whole school approach is **not supported**, an environment **of safety, security and trust is compromised**, creating **inconsistencies** in how adults relate to students.
- Staff in schools are the primary facilitators of trauma-informed practice in the day-to-day. If they **lack effective training**, and ongoing support and supervision, then managing the emotional climate that arises within daily interactions with trauma experienced pupils can increase the risk of **burnout**.
- **Staff turnover, staff sickness and difficulties in recruiting** new staff, interferes with the alignment of trauma informed staff competencies and requires continual training of new staff. Some amount of staff turnover is inevitable so contingency plans should be in place to plan for **sustainability** whereby every new member of staff might complete an **induction** session specifically about the trauma-informed approaches in place at the school, or even included in the recruitment exercise.

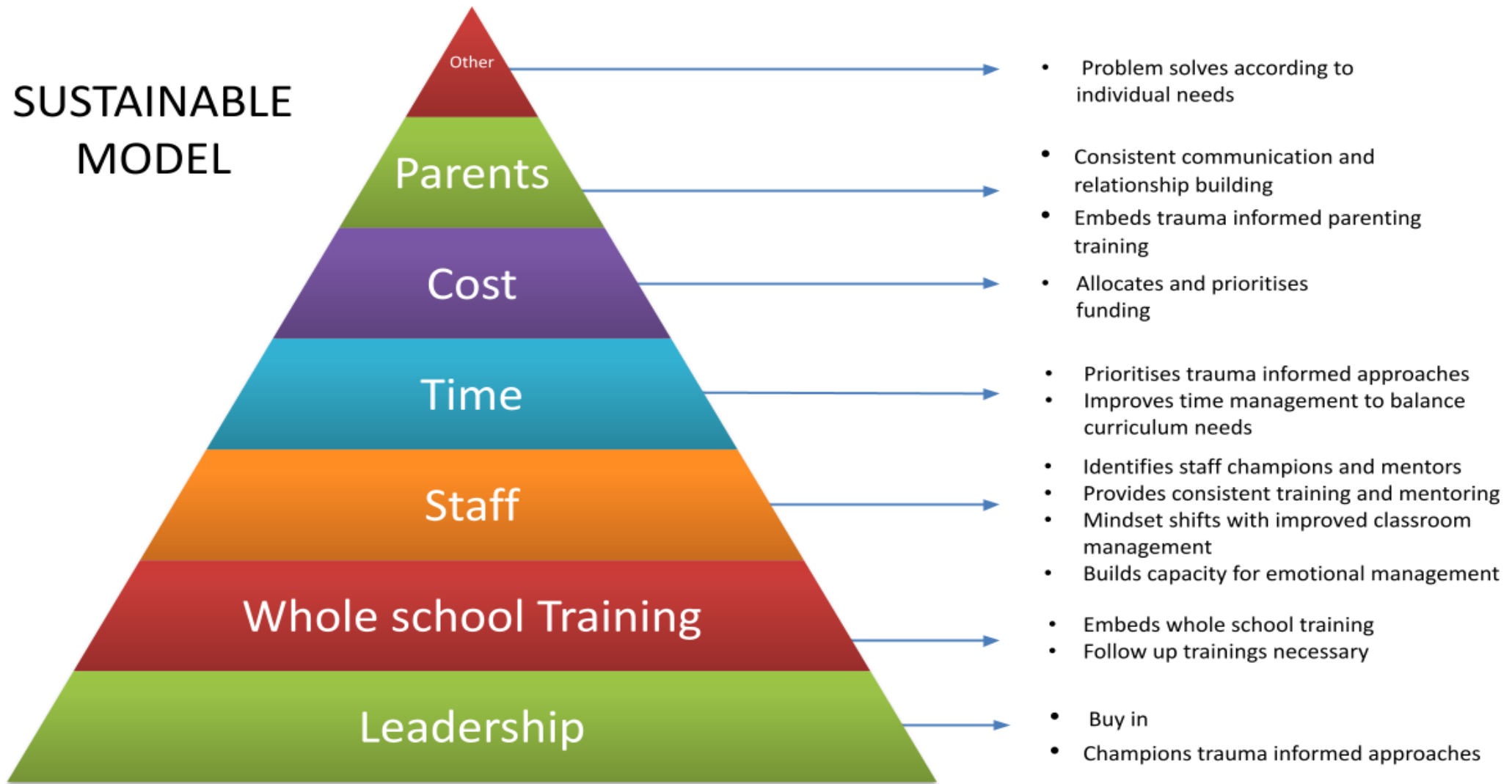


## Opportunities

- The most significant step is developing and building with a strong sense of **leadership** buy-in. These leaders will champion a **whole school** relational approach and allocate the **time** and **resources** needed for a sustainable program. This includes **training** for staff, identifying staff **mentors** to provide **supervision** to new staff, and **follow up training** to cultivate staff skills and competencies over time. The more competent and confident staff grow in facilitating the process, the greater the likelihood that **pupil-staff relationships** will improve as well, as observed by **experienced practitioners**. These include being clear on expectations, adapting **language** and experiencing **improved communication** and **emotional management**.
- Mindset shifts occur for all those working with the evidence, making it important to track the progress of the program and measure meaningful outcomes. **Coherency** across all levels, improves the likelihood that **parents/carers** can be better trained in trauma-informed practices, as they too adjust to **school practices** and expectations in time, thus strengthening and **aligning efforts** in both school and home. While there will always be diverse and individualised needs that must be met, a strong program enables more **effective problem solving** on an individual level.

## Barriers





## Limitations

- short time available to conduct the research with a broader audience
- the sample size of those who took part in the survey, the opportunity to run a pilot of the survey questions and to also collect our own data from the Pilot Study rather than use data that the school collected
- the capacity to include children and young people's voice of their experience of a trauma-informed school environment was not possible
- This study was not able to determine the number of trauma-informed education settings in the five local authorities due to limited response rate to the survey
- limitations in sample bias with self-selecting volunteers completing the survey and having an interview means that it has been less likely that we captured the views of those settings who aren't engaged in any trauma-informed work, or even those who might feel hostility towards the approach
- but the responses within the survey were 'rich' in that people took time to answer the questions more fully than expected providing plenty of data to analyse.

## Key Findings

1. The **implementation** of trauma-informed approaches in the education settings in the 5 regions of West Yorkshire **resulted in some form of benefit** to students and staff
2. The most common experience for teachers/staff was having a **greater understanding of how trauma impacts** the lives of vulnerable young people, having **greater confidence** in applying trauma-informed practices as a result of training and **improved communication** with students
3. Benefits to students as reported by teachers were **improved communication** and **relationships** between adults and young people and greater observed **emotional management** by teachers and students
4. Reduction in school **exclusions** and improved **attendance** was observed in schools running the TI program from 1-3 years, although more consistent tracking of evidence is needed by all schools
5. The most **significant barrier was School Leadership** buy-in and concern that a relational approach to student management would be less effective than a behavioural approach to discipline and risk management
6. Schools with **committed leadership** to TI approaches fared better with **positive discipline, lower exclusions and improved attendance**

## Key Findings

7. Barriers to effective implementation of TI approaches included teacher staff **levels of competency**, inconsistent training and staff turnover. The most significant concerns were **balancing curricular needs**, emotional management and meeting the emotional needs of students
8. While allocating time and **resources** to embed and sustain a TI approach was a concern, experienced schools **prioritised time and funding**, balancing the needs of the national curriculum with training and built in time to address individual student needs
9. **Emotion Coaching and restorative practices are necessary tools to a successful program, as understanding attachment and trauma is not enough to see improved outcomes**
10. The **whole school approach** to training is vital to program cohesion and positive outcomes

## Key Findings

11. There are a wide range of approaches to trauma informed training available to schools from a local authority level to external providers. However, it **does not appear in this research that type of trauma-informed training is a factor** in improved outcomes as long as there is a commitment to a **whole school approach**
12. The most significant changes to better implemented programs involved prioritising a shift to positive **language**, **restorative** discipline, **empathetic** relationships, staff **support** and a **whole school** approach
13. Support sessions and/or training for **parents/carers** is important for continuity of approach and to aid parents/carers to understand the school philosophy

## Areas for Consideration

- A better understanding of universal, targeted and specialist needs would help in prevention
- A response strategy with recommendations and options for the implementation of the WY trauma informed education workstream
- An agreed shared language between staff-staff, pupil-staff-pupil made explicit
- Create the HOW for educators that provide a visual representation of how this works in practice with the aim of building confidence
- Templates for policies that focus relationships at the heart of them
- A 'what works' database of evidence that details approaches
- An evaluation of secondary schools and the unique barriers and opportunities that they face when implementing trauma-informed programmes. Likewise for Further Education settings too.
- Support for schools to develop and design a research strategy to gather evidence about improvements after implementation of training programmes



## Recommendations

1. Consistent monitoring and reporting of the impact of TI approaches to build an evidence base of the outcomes for pupils and staff in education settings is needed
2. Local authority level support is important to influence buy-in to increase the number of schools with greater populations of vulnerable students to commit to trauma- informed whole school practices
3. School leadership acts as a gatekeeper to change and therefore a more targeted approach to educating school leaders of the benefits of trauma informed approaches is vital. Initiating training on a regional school leadership level can further support school leaders in the same region to share best practices and improve their programs
4. Policy level changes in schools, shifting from behavioural approaches to relational approaches are necessary to improve consistency in program and student outcomes
5. Follow up training is necessary to support teachers/staff to improve skills and competencies
6. Identifying teacher/staff champions to serve as mentors and provide adult supervision can strengthen program effectiveness and align staff competencies

## Recommendations

7. Identifying staff with a greater capacity to serve as youth mentors can provide a one-to-one support for vulnerable young people who can benefit from a close connection and stable relationship in the education setting
8. Strengthening relationships with the education setting and providers of services based in the community can build social capital and a stronger web of resilience for vulnerable young people and their safe places and people inside and outside of the setting
9. Identifying changes that can be made to the physical environment benefits all students and staff (eg.. more light, warmth, colour, quiet and comfortable spaces, etc)
10. “Knowing students well,” addressing their needs on an individual level without pathologising and shifting from a deficit mindset to strength-based, empowerment mindset supports confidence and esteem building for students. When staff focus and report on what students do well, this helps to foster more supportive environments and trusting relationships which ultimately benefit all students



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# Questions



The End