

Developed MAY 16, 2023

Executive Summary

Leveraging North Carolina's Assets to Prevent Child Trauma

April 26-28, 2023

Raleigh, NC

Organized by the [FRONTIER Program](#) at the UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

INTRODUCTION

“Leveraging North Carolina’s Assets to Prevent Child Trauma” (the summit) convened 150 in-person attendees and approximately 230 virtual attendees representing academia, community and state organizations, lived experience, philanthropy, legislative and agency officials, scientific research, educational systems, clinical practice, and others. The overarching goal of the summit was to identify common threads across constituent groups in North Carolina, each working to address child trauma, and determine how, together, we can co-create a statewide effort in community and policy spaces to tackle its sources and reduce its incidence. Organizers and participants agree this can be achieved by:

- sharing knowledge and experience about child trauma, its causes, and its prevention;
- bolstering community efforts through a shared understanding of trauma science;
- creating new relationships between individuals and organizations and strengthening existing relationships;
- illuminating the current landscape of child trauma prevention across North Carolina communities to help assess strengths and gaps; and
- beginning a process of generating policy recommendations to prevent child trauma.

WHAT IS CHILD TRAUMA?

Fully defining and describing child trauma would take several pages. In brief, child trauma is one or more disturbing events or ongoing experiences that overwhelm a child’s ability to cope and cause many types of long-lasting effects. Child trauma includes adverse childhood experiences such as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, domestic violence, parental incarceration, divorce or death of a parent, or mental illness in the home.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CHILD TRAUMA?

They may include effects on physical health, such as changes in brain development or gene expression, and/or effects on mental health, such as anxiety, depression, anger, irritability, and emotional dysregulation. People who have experienced child trauma are at higher risk for a range of unwanted outcomes in childhood and adulthood, such as difficulty maintaining healthy relationships, poor academic or job performance, substance use and abuse, and involvement in the justice system. The more trauma, the higher the likelihood of these negative outcomes. Protective factors, such as a positive relationship to an unrelated adult or access to mental health treatment, can mitigate the adverse effects of child trauma.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF CHILD TRAUMA?

Some types of child trauma are not easily prevented, such as a natural disaster or death of a parent. But many types of child trauma are a result of root causes that can be addressed, including structural racism, poverty, lack of basic resources such as food and housing, and lack of access to healthcare including care for mental health and addiction.

THEMES IDENTIFIED AT THE SUMMIT

Child trauma has myriad effects and solutions. Not every important idea could be shared at a two-day summit or in this executive summary, but below are a few of the themes that came up repeatedly.

Preventing child trauma and **addressing** child trauma to prevent long-term harm require:

- supporting parents to reduce economic stress with access to affordable housing, food, childcare, and dependable employment or income;
- addressing systemic root causes, including structural racism, health inequities, and economic stress;
- transitioning to trauma-informed practices in many settings, including families, schools, communities, child welfare system, healthcare, legislative, and criminal justice;
- interrupting the cycle by addressing trauma in children, adolescents, and young adults before they become parents;
- expanding access to mental health assessment and access for children and parents, including addiction prevention and treatment;
- educating people and organizations to change violent social norms and improve interpersonal relationships; and
- providing universal high-quality early childhood education.

Effective approaches for moving forward include:

- People with **lived experience** of child trauma must be part of developing policies and programs regarding child trauma.
- There is **no silver bullet**; preventing child trauma as a society requires a lot of pieces.
- Strategic **alignment and collective action** are critical; no one person, community organization, agency, foundation, nonprofit, or legislative body can do it alone.
- **Prevention and early intervention** are better than later intervention.
- **Sustainable funding** is needed to ramp up evidence-based prevention programs; these programs save society money in the long run.
- **Local organizations** and **philanthropy** can make a difference in communities and demonstrate effective strategies.
- **Advocacy** is an effective tool to institute trauma-informed policies at national, state, or local levels.

OVERHEARD

Speakers and attendees at the summit came from all over North Carolina (and some from out of state), representing almost every sector of society that relates to children and families. Below are a few quotes from speakers that give the general tenor of the gathering.

"I wanted to bring everybody together to co-create a statewide movement with constituent groups rallying around the same cause."

-Diana "Denni" Fishbein, director of Neuro-Prevention Research, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, UNC-Chapel Hill

"It is the beginning of the change we wish to see in our children's lives. We are making history."

-Vernisha Crawford, CEO of Trauma Informed Institute and founder of the BYE Foundation

"There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. There's so much happening across all these different sectors. Now is the opportunity to strategically align to make a bigger impact."

-Kelly Graves, director and cofounder of the Kellin Foundation

"There is power in local coalitions. When coalitions come together, it is an opportunity for lived experience to be highlighted, to engage neighbors to speak on what moves them. People know what's best for them."

-Safiyah Jackson, chief strategy officer, NC Partnership for Children

"I see trauma as a starting point, something that has happened that caused a reaction in your body. There is also healing that can happen. There are things we can do to help you heal."

-Ernestine Briggs-King, PhD, associate professor in the Duke Department of Psychiatry and the director of research at the Center for Child and Family Health

"If we say we're going to help children, we gotta start by helping parents."

-Kara "Kai" Sanders, lived experience

"We can't ignore the historical racial trauma that underlies a lot of the trauma that our kids and staff and other community members experience."

-Rodney Trice, deputy superintendent for teacher & learning, systemic equity, and engagement, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

"The best ideas come from folks having conversations and those rising up and becoming policy changes. I've seen it happen."

-Adam Sotak

"[During the summit], I would just scan the 150 faces in the crowd, wonderful humans, and [feel] the amount of potential and promise and hope that is held in each one of you. It filled my heart with hope for the future."

-Jesse Kohler, CEO, Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP)

NEXT STEPS

Next steps are the production of a series of articles on key topics raised during the summit, which will be posted on the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) website. We will also

work on a set of specific policy recommendations to share with the General Assembly, state agencies, and local officials. There will be webinars—we welcome the opportunity to work with some of you on specialized topics—meetings, and other follow-on activities. We also plan to create a task force comprised of a wide range of constituent groups and individuals to co-develop a statewide action plan for North Carolina for maximal impact.

CALL TO ACTION

Once we've posted the articles about the summit on the FPG website, we invite you and your organization to link to the articles and mention them in social media. If you're interested in participating in upcoming webinars, meetings, or the task force mentioned above, please contact us.

Thank you to our contributors: UNC Carolina Seminar Series; NCDHHS; SAMHSA; Smart Start; HopeStar; Child Trust Foundation; Duke Endowment; PCANC; KB Reynolds Trust; CTIPP; NPSC; and our coordinators, Wake AHEC.