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# INTIT

*INtegrated Trauma Informed Therapy  
for Child Victims of Violence*

## Newsletter 3

April 30th, 2022



The project was supported by





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## Training Workshops Overview

Through collaboration of partners from Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Estonia and Germany a curriculum was developed in the INTIT project to train professionals and raise their awareness for the approach of trauma-informed care when working with children and youth who have experienced interpersonal violence.

Between February and July 2022 project partners conducted train-the-trainer seminars over the course of 3 days. On day one the training focused on definitions of trauma and its impact on an individual as well as societal level. Day one further dealt with the neurobiological changes that trauma could entail. On day two key principles of trauma-informed care were introduced. A particular focus was placed on multi-agency cooperation and child-friendly justice as integral principles of this approach. On day three key skills were communicated, ways towards professional satisfaction were highlighted and case studies were discussed through a trauma-informed lens.

## Training Needs

Prior to conducting the training, the training needs of various professional groups working with traumatized children and youth were identified through interviews and focus groups.

As it turned out, interviewees wished to learn more about the signs and symptoms of trauma and to gain more security in determining when to refer to specialized mental health services. They further mentioned the notion of a “common language” around trauma to facilitate multi-agency cooperation. In addition, professionals wished to improve their skills of child-centered communication and interviewing skills. Family judges wished to promote their ability to understand and interpret plausibility reports and evaluate their significance and reliability.

## Participants and Didactics

In all partner countries a significant interest to participate in the training was observed. All in all, about 120 professionals took part in the training. They represented the following professional groups: (juvenile) justice, child and youth welfare services, law enforcement, education, (mental) health, Barnahus staff and academia.

Due to COVID restrictions the training was conducted online in Spain and Germany. Cyprus, Estonia and Italy conducted their trainings during the summer months of 2022 and were able to hold in-person or hybrid seminars. While in person trainings brought along the obvious benefits of direct communication, online seminars allowed to reach an even wider regional range of professionals.



Multi-disciplinarity not only manifested itself in the constitution of participants but was also reflected in the professional backgrounds of the various trainers introducing a wide range of expertise and perspectives on working with trauma.

### **Challenges of Acting Trauma-Informed**

In the course of the training participants described their insecurities around trauma and obstacles to acting trauma-informed. For one, the knowledge of trauma – and the capacity to speak about trauma – often seems to be predominantly associated with clinical professions. Other professions have expressed their fears of triggering, hurting, damaging or influencing a child or youth when addressing their potential trauma.

In addition, integrated and trauma-informed care is often hampered by different professional mandates which leads to a “pillarization” of services and self-referential systems.

Participants representing the judicial sector claimed that they are oftentimes the last piece in the chain of care – with limited time spent with the child to properly identify his or her needs. Furthermore, there seems to be an assumption that judicial proceedings with their mandate of impartiality leave “limited space for empathy”.

Obviously, extensive court proceedings in child abuse cases as they could be observed in all partner countries do not cater to a trauma-informed objective.

Finally, a heavy workload, staff shortages and high turnover facilitates burn out and compassion fatigue which stands in the way of providing trauma-informed services.

### **Feedback and Lessons Learned**

The 3 day training highlighted the significant interest among professionals to improve their knowledge of trauma-informed care.

The evaluation reports demonstrated that participants greatly appreciated the multidisciplinary of the training which led to a better understanding of different mandates and the limitations of what each professional group can and cannot do.

They also highlighted the high level of expertise of the trainers – amongst them acclaimed national trauma specialists with both strong theoretical backgrounds as well as practical work experience. These trauma experts teamed up with professionals from the social services sector in the teaching process overcoming the “hierarchy of professions”.



On a contents level participants appreciated the introduction to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) studies and to the neurobiological aspects of trauma – both of which were deemed highly beneficial in extending the knowledge base of non-clinical professionals. The theoretical input was complemented with case studies and practical exercises promoting key skills for acting trauma-informed on an individual as well as on an organizational level. On several occasions there was a fascinating discussion between colleagues, trying to mutually find the best solution to the cases presented. In the end, the training provided confidence and security around interacting with children with adverse childhood experiences – for all professionals including those with a non-clinical background.

Learning and talking about trauma can be emotional and potentially triggering also for those professionals providing services for children and youth. The pilot during the INTIT project demonstrated that sufficient time for discussion and a focus on self-care must therefore be important elements of the training.

### **Project Outcomes and Next Steps**

After the completion of the training cycle national awareness raising events and further multi-agency meetings were held.

It became clear that the training set an important stage for introducing a multi-agency and trauma-informed approach to servicing children who have been subjected to violence. Participants stressed the importance to secure dissemination and sustainability beyond the end of the INTIT project. Amongst some of the direct project outcomes were the following: a TV interview on INTIT that promoted the visibility of the Barnahus in Cyprus; an interprofessional roundtable in collaboration with the Council of the Order of Social Workers (CNOAS) in Italy which developed an “Interprofessional Consensus Document for Integrated Interventions for Protection, Advocacy, and Treatment of Developmental Age Relations”; inspiration for complementary projects in Italy to improve the capacity of professionals working with children with a migration background exposed to violence; commitment to adopt INTIT’s curriculum for further training of judges, police and NGOs in partner countries.

All partners have disseminated the training material and the supporting handbook to participants and other interested parties. While some participants already started using the training documents in their respective institutions others felt that they needed more training to teach others. The project with its training and awareness raising seminars provided a platform to strengthen the visibility of trauma-informed services in all partner countries.



## Recommendations – Improve TIC Services and Expand Training for Professionals

Apart from raising awareness for trauma-informed services in partner countries the project also allowed to identify gaps in existing protocols of service delivery. Amongst the recommendations to foster trauma-informed services were the following:

- Professionals dealing with child abuse cases require both more specialist training as well as refresher training.
- To implement trauma-informed care in specific settings training should be conducted on a local level (rather than regional or national) to bring together stakeholders within the same geographical scope.
- Trauma-informed thinking needs to be extended to the whole organisation or system=> to reach this objective “somebody needs to do it” and take the initiative.
- The successful Barnahus model should be replicated more widely – not only geographically but also with respect to the target groups served.
- For lasting trauma-informed care there is a need for medium- and long-term professional follow up of children after they leave the Barnahus or residential care facilities.
- The infrastructure for video-recorded judicial interviews in child abuse cases needs to be expanded.

## Country Focus – Germany

In Germany, the train-the-trainer workshops were conducted between February and April 2022. Due to COVID restrictions the training was exclusively conducted online and brought together 40 professionals from the fields of social services, (family) justice, childhood house, (mental) health, education, law enforcement and migration support services. Participants gathered from four Northern German states (Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Niedersachsen, Berlin). Initial concerns if a trauma-informed classroom could be created in a digital format did not manifest itself since the didactics were interactive, allowed for breakout sessions and gave participants from different professions room to present:

*“I thank you for this great training, which I would very much like to see continued. The subject of trauma-informed care needs to be further promoted and established. I very much enjoyed sitting (online) with other professional groups and have drawn great benefits from it.”*

*(Family Judge Germany)*

The training coincided with two significant legislative changes in Germany. In 2021, the Act to Combat Sexualised Violence against Children introduced mandatory qualification requirements for family and juvenile court judges as well as juvenile prosecutors.



Henceforth, these professional groups are required to proof their knowledge of developmental psychology and child-friendly communication. The training highlighted the dilemma felt by judges who need to revisit the potentials acts of violence experienced by the child to reach their verdict. At the same time they want to avoid retraumatization through their investigation and sought support from participants of other professions of how to communicate trauma-informed in a judicial hearing without being suggestive.

Also in 2021, the new Child and Youth Empowerment Law was passed with a strong focus on participation of youth, parents and families. This objective is in line with the key principle of “empowerment, voice and choice” of a trauma-informed-care approach and requires youth welfare services to place the child’s perspective at the center of decision making. Participants of the training self-critically observed a certain parental bias both in child welfare services as well as in judicial proceedings – a circumstance which will be addressed by this law.

The new legislation also promotes a closer cooperation between child welfare services and family/custodial courts. Participants view this as a chance to raise awareness amongst judges for the impact of neglect on a child’s development.

They appreciated that the training specifically drew attention to this important type of abuse which is less visible than physical abuse but equally as detrimental. In fact, as a result of the INTIT project the Ministry of Justice of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany committed to adopt INTIT’s curriculum on Trauma Informed Care and hold a two day training for family judges in March 2023.

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