REAL STORIES TOOL KIT

Get inspired by NCWWI's Multimedia Collection, Real Stories From the Field.

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute
LEARNING, LEADING, CHANGING

Learn about leaders in agencies and universities who took an innovative approach to improving organizational culture, supporting the child welfare workforce, and achieving better outcomes for the families they serve. Then, bring together colleagues/staff, students, and/or community members for rich discussions about innovative workforce development initiatives.

Who should use this tool kit?

This tool kit is designed for all people involved in child welfare programs and their partner organizations. Here are some ideas:

Managers | To inspire staff to move through change by seeing the stories of how other organizations managed change.

Training and Professional Development Staff | To encourage deep discussions about relevant program topics.

Supervisors | To stimulate ideas about how changes might impact them and the people they supervise.

University Partners | To motivate partnerships with child welfare programs; to offer as a guide to new students about partnerships and change implementation.

How to use this tool kit:

Use it for:

- All staff meetings
- Unit meetings
- Training events (virtual or in-person) – for example, supervision training, virtual manager training
- Online training (embed links into your online modules)
- Lunch & Learns

To ensure discussions are productive, prepare using these steps:

Before the discussion:

1. Determine the desired outcome/goal of the session.
2. Select a Real Story that will inspire discussion on how to reach the desired outcome. To assist with this process, each Real Story includes a list of the topics covered.
3. Select the key themes that will move staff toward the desired outcome.
4. Determine the starting prompt for the discussion - either one you came up with on your own or one selected from the discussion starters provided for each story.
5. Set and execute a plan for scheduled discussion(s).
6. Ask participants to review the Real Story before the discussion. Provide discussion questions in advance to promote reflection and application to current work, ask participants to bring their own questions, and/or ask them to identify the most important point(s) presented. This reflection prior to coming together will allow for deeper conversation.

During the discussion:

1. View, rewatch, listen, or read the Real Story to ensure it is fresh in participants' minds.
2. Explain the goal of the conversation and share the discussion prompt.
3. Assign a person to record responses.
4. Use open-ended questions to deepen the conversation and help participants think critically. Remember to give adequate time for participants to reflect and respond before speaking again.
5. Debrief the conversation.
6. Determine next steps.

After the discussion:

Several NCWWI products are available on ncwwi.org to support your work after the discussion, these can be found in the list of related products for each Real Story. These include our:

- Leadership Competency Framework and Leadership Tool Kit
- NCWWI's Workforce Development Framework
- Free online courses, 1-page summaries, infographics, and recorded webinars
- NCWWI's comprehensive resource library including: websites | reference and resource lists | reports/papers | overviews/summaries | tools/guides/manuals | curricula/training materials | webinars/presentations | videos and podcasts | eLearning modules | competency models

URL | http://bit.ly/2zDasHl
VIDEO LENGTH | 9:32

VIDEO

TITLE

Learning, Leading, and Changing: How Workforce Development is Transforming Child Welfare

OVERVIEW

For decades, the approach to workforce issues in child welfare was crisis-driven. Workers were not sufficiently supported, and states struggled to meet outcomes. In 2008, this began to change when the Children's Bureau funded the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI). By bringing together tribes, states, agencies, and universities in partnership, NCWWI has transformed the child welfare field by developing purposeful interventions that have brought the workforce to the forefront of sustainable change.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Retention
- Practice Supports
- Workforce Development Planning

THEMES

- The workforce is our greatest asset.
- Child welfare programs must invest in a strong, committed, and diverse workforce to achieve their outcomes.
- Child welfare work is taxing, so we must pay close attention to the people who are doing the caring.
- Workforce development is so much more than addressing practice issues. An organization must combine the best of training, ongoing learning opportunities, just-in-time tools and information, resource sharing, and partnerships for sustainable change.
- Differentiating between leadership and management creates a powerful shift in workers.

HOW TO USE

Show at a kick-off meeting for an initiative to improve workforce development.

Integrate into leadership training and use for discussion.

Feature at a Lunch & Learn for supervisors and managers.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What does your child welfare program currently do to support the workforce?

What are your program's workforce challenges?

What information do you need to address workforce issues?

What relationships do you need to address workforce issues?

How are racial equity issues addressed in your organization?

What does positive organizational health look like at your program?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Workforce Development Framework
Workforce Development Framework, Part 1
Workforce Development Framework, Part 2
Why the Workforce Matters Infographic

URL | http://bit.ly/2DtKfKb
VIDEO LENGTH | 8:41

VIDEO

TITLE

Leading Through Understanding the Role of Life Stories

OVERVIEW

Understanding the personal journey—or context—that leads people to a career in child welfare is an important part of being an effective leader. This story explores how the former director of Missouri's Children's Division shaped his leadership style around understanding workers' life stories.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Community Context
- Cultural Responsiveness
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Retention
- Practice Supports

THEMES

- Leading in context means understanding people's life stories and how this impacts their motivation and interactions.
- It can't just be a job; there has to be a sense of a personal mission for staff to endure the challenges, become resilient, and be determined to get to that end result—the program's mission.
- Approach families and workers from a place of curiosity. Understand where people are coming from by understanding their stories.
- Avoid a cookie-cutter approach to case planning; instead, individualize case practice by understanding context and the impact of trauma. To do this, amplify the voices of children, families, and workers.
- Upper management should invest in spending time on the frontline by shadowing workers.

HOW TO USE

Integrate into leadership training and use for discussion.

Feature at a Lunch & Learn for supervisors and managers.

Use in coaching and ask coachees to discuss how the video inspires them.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What has led you to choose this work?

How does your organization communicate the importance of mission? How does your organization tie its mission to staff's personal missions?

What opportunities do you have to listen to others' stories (colleagues, children, families, etc.)?

What have you learned from listening to others' stories? How have others' stories impacted your work? What leadership competencies do you use when listening to others' stories?

From whom do you or your organization need to hear more stories?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Respect & Worker Retention
Coaching to Support Solution-Based Casework in Child Welfare
Understanding Trauma-Informed Practice
Supportive Supervision

URL | https://vimeo.com/265213576
VIDEO LENGTH | 7:27

VIDEO

TITLE

Changing Supervision Lenses: Zooming in and Out

OVERVIEW

Effective supervisors must zoom in and out to get the full picture of any situation. Twan Stokes from the Indiana Department of Child Services wanted to do something about the big issue of retention, and she did it by zooming in and developing a mentor appreciation day. Learn more about her leadership journey and how it started when she participated in NCWWI's Leadership Academy for Supervisors.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Retention
- Supervision
- Recruitment and Selection
- Work Conditions and Benefits

THEMES

- Effective leaders switch between a micro and macro perspective.
- Getting on the balcony helps leaders see the whole picture.
- Little interventions, like showing appreciation for mentors, can make a big positive difference in an organizational environment.
- Positive organizational environments create a culture of health and wellness.
- When staff receive leadership training, it can inspire new ways of thinking that inspire them to facilitate change at their organization.

HOW TO USE

Show at an all-staff meeting and break people into discussion groups.

Integrate into foundation/core supervisor/manager training and use for discussion.

Feature at a Lunch & Learn for supervisors and managers.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What did "getting on the balcony" mean in this Real Story?

The Real Story discussed how people can get into silos. What leads to silos and how can you break them down?

The Real Story makes a point about micro and macro perspective, why is it so hard to have both?

When you "zoom" out at your organization, what are the workforce development–related issues at your organization?

When you "zoom" in at your organization, what workforce development interventions could be implemented to address issues?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Get on the Balcony
Learning & Living the NCWWI Leadership Model
Organizational Environment

URL | http://bit.ly/2DxN0KH
VIDEO LENGTH | 10:58

VIDEO

TITLE

Transforming Missouri's Child Welfare System

OVERVIEW

The Missouri Children's Division faced big challenges prior to 2014. Too many children were in out-of-home care, child welfare workers approached practice inconsistently, and the state was plagued by high staff turnover rates. This is the story of how the division collaborated on a workforce excellence project to design and implement a new practice model to address these issues.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Practice Supports
- Workforce Development Planning Process

THEMES

- A compliance-based culture is typically incongruent with an emphasis on good practice, as a good practice approach may require more time, with less emphasis on meeting a deadline or achieving a "number."
- When addressing organizational culture, start with an assessment to find out what is really happening at the organization, this is similar to using an in-depth assessment to guide service delivery for families. This is called the "parallel process" and should be just as appropriate for the organization to understand their issues.
- Practice models offer common values, beliefs, and skills to wrap service delivery and program culture around.
- Distributive leadership happens when everyone at the organization engages in the change process.
- Through participation in leadership academies, participants learn how to actively engage people throughout the system in implementing the organizational change initiative, creating widespread momentum, developing shared philosophies, and ensuring distributive leadership.
- Use implementation science to guide the rollout of any significant organizational change to ensure its success.
- Organizations need widespread buy-in for real change to occur.
- Engage with universities, youth, families, and community partners to influence organizational culture and to provide additional support for change.

HOW TO USE

Show at a kick-off event for a workforce development initiative.

Integrate into foundation/core supervisor/manager training and use for discussion.

Feature at a Lunch & Learn for supervisors and managers.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What was learned during this project that might inform work in other jurisdictions that don't have the benefit of NCWWI services?

The Real Story highlights the use of distributive leadership. What do you understand about this approach to leadership and can you give examples of how this workforce excellence project used distributive leadership?

How did this project lay a foundation for implementation of the practice model across the whole state?

What can this project in Missouri teach us about change?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

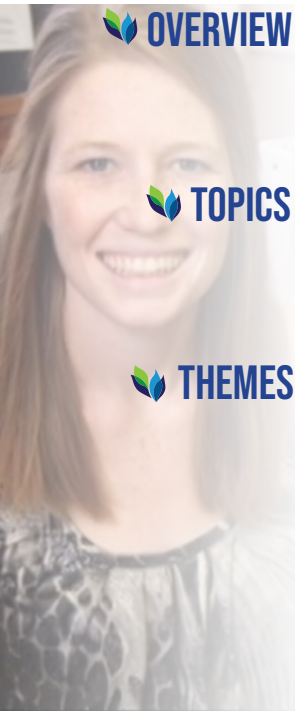
Implementing Change
Emotional Intelligence for Leaders
Organizational Social Context
Organizational Support and Turnover Intention

URL | http://bit.ly/2DyWwNL
VIDEO LENGTH | 7:14

VIDEO

TITLE

A New Frontier for Child Welfare in Rural North Dakota



OVERVIEW

As an MSW student at the University of North Dakota, Skye Albert received a NCWWI traineeship that sent her to work in a rural part of the state that was facing a child welfare crisis. Skye not only tackled the unique challenges facing the county but inspired her MSW program to rethink how they prepare students to work in the field.

TOPICS

- Community Context (rural social work)
- Education/Professional Development
- University-Agency Partnerships
- Leadership
- Practice Supports
- Work Conditions and Benefits (technology and resilience)

THEMES

- Stories can inspire change.
- Seeds for a career in child welfare can be planted early and then lead to a mission-driven career.
- Rural social work presents a unique set of challenges, requiring innovative approaches. University partnerships can foster resilience, provide robust preparation through training and coaching, and support effective practice changes.
- Creative use of technology can connect social workers in rural areas.
- Distributive leadership includes encouraging students to lead as well.

HOW TO USE

Show at a new-student orientation at a social work program.

Share during a field supervisor orientation and discuss.

Feature at a university-agency partnership meeting and discuss.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

On a personal level, how have your experiences led to your current career path?

How can organizations use personal stories to help recruit and keep a committed workforce?

How can you inspire resiliency among students and/or staff?

What are the challenges for a rural workforce? What can schools of social work do to support a rural workforce? What can small, rural programs do to support their workforce? What are the unique challenges in an urban setting?

How could some of the approaches mentioned in this Real Story be implemented at your organization? What are the possibilities? What barriers need to be overcome?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Rural & Tribal Child Welfare

Technology Supports Practice Improvements

Worker Resilience

URL | https://bit.ly/35OB7kg
VIDEO LENGTH | 7:40

VIDEO

TITLE

Weaving Together Agency Staff Around Organizational Change

OVERVIEW

Cherokee Nation Indian Child Welfare faced big challenges in moving their program forward. NCWWI signed on to assist, and to do so, NCWWI had to change the way they operated, too. They faced these challenges together to make a difference for children and families.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Community Engagement (with Tribal Nations)
- Cultural Responsiveness
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Retention
- Practice Supports
- Workforce Development Planning Process

THEMES

- Effective workforce development requires a comprehensive approach.
- Leaders need buy-in from all staff to effectively lead change.
- When implementing any organizational intervention, it must be adapted to fit the cultural context.
- When partnering with American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN)–serving organizations, take time to develop mutual respect and be especially mindful of the significance of the community context and historical perspective.
- Basket weaving offers a moving metaphor for how to inspire organizational change in some AI/AN–serving organizations.

HOW TO USE

Show at an all-staff meeting and break people into discussion groups.

Integrate into foundation/core supervisor/manager training and use for discussion.

Feature at a Lunch & Learn for supervisors and managers.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Nikki Baker-Limore talks about the Cherokee Nation suffering from significant stress due to top leadership turnover. What can organizational leaders at all levels do to mitigate stress when there is change in top leadership?

Identify the specific strategies the NCWWI project and Cherokee Nation Indian Child Welfare used to engage and get buy-in from their workforce.

Basket weaving is a metaphor used throughout this Real Story to illustrate the work of the Cherokee Nation leadership. Review and summarize how this metaphor illustrates the work of these leaders to bring about change.

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Cultural Openness

Trauma-Informed Practice with American Indian/Alaska Native Populations

Reducing Disparities through Indigenous Social Work Education

URL | http://bit.ly/2DALDed
VIDEO LENGTH | 5:14

PODCAST

TITLE

When Preparation Meets Opportunity

OVERVIEW

Anne Graham, a child welfare middle manager from New Hampshire, developed a much-needed change initiative during her participation in the LAMM. Although her project addressed a serious gap in worker pre-service training, it took several years for her to influence and enact change. This story explains how her preparation met the opportunity and she realized her goal.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Leadership
- Education/Professional Development
- Recruitment, Screening, and Selection

THEMES

- Leading in context means understanding people's life stories and how this impacts their motivation and interactions.
- Change requires inspiration, dedication, and persistence.
- When implementing change, navigate the internal and external political environment.
- Adaptive leadership means knowing when an issue requires a different way of thinking about the problem and addressing it in creative ways.
- Persistence means hanging onto your vision and knowing when to take advantage of opportunities.
- When addressing change, be mindful of the implementation drivers that can make or break an initiative.

HOW TO USE

Include in orientation packets for new supervisors.

Integrate into foundation/core supervisor/manager training and use for discussion.

Feature at a Lunch & Learn for supervisors and managers.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Give some examples of how Anne used specific Adaptive Leadership principles in implementing change.

Competing priorities and lack of influence were barriers to implementing the planned change. Anne waited for the right opportunity to implement this change. It was said during the podcast that "Success happens when preparation meets opportunity." Identify how Anne was prepared to use the opportunity when it presented itself.

How was implementation science used to support Anne in implementing her change initiative? Give specific examples.

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Change & the Roles People Play

Organizational Leadership

Beyond Child Welfare Education & Training: Pennsylvania's Dynamic University-Agency Partnership for Transfer of Learning, Quality Improvement, Organizational Effectiveness

Specialized Education & Training

Transfer of Learning

URL | https://bit.ly/3kqFR3R
VIDEO LENGTH | 45:37

PODCAST

TITLE

Child Welfare Scholars

OVERVIEW

When state and local child welfare agencies collaborate with schools of social work, the results can benefit both parties by properly preparing future—and current—child welfare professionals and helping ensure curricula remains topical and relevant to the current needs of the field. This podcast, developed in collaboration with the Child Welfare Information Gateway, showcases a NCWWI university-agency partnership between the University of North Dakota Department of Social Work and the North Dakota Department of Children and Family Services. The Child Welfare Scholars program funds BSW and MSW trainees who are current members of the child welfare workforce. The goal is to help social work students grow their leadership and practice skills, help meet the increased child welfare demands of the state, and provide direct feedback to the university to shape its curriculum.

TOPICS

- Data-Driven Decision-Making and Continuous Quality Improvement
- Education/Professional Development
- University-Agency Partnerships
- Leadership
- Evidence-Based Practice

THEMES

- Offer students the opportunity for practical, meaningful internships that make a real difference in practice and can inspire students to stay in the child welfare field.
- Students can become teachers by asking thought-provoking questions, resulting in new connections that contribute to change.
- Data provides the fuel that drives meaningful change.
- Seeing the impact of research efforts increases student motivation.

HOW TO USE

Listen to it during a child welfare practice class and discuss.

Share with stipend students as inspiration.

Share with field supervisors and suggest they listen to it with their students.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What do you think led to these students' success in sharing data and facilitating change?

Identify an issue in child welfare where data-driven decision-making would be useful.

Identify a research question and the types of data that would be useful for addressing the issue.

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Using Data
Cohort Effect
Educational Preparation
Specialized Education & Training

URL | http://bit.ly/2DxMH2v
VIDEO LENGTH | 1 page PDF

PDF
ARTICLE

TITLE

For a Missouri Field Support Manager, it's all About Relationships

OVERVIEW

Dana Jones, a Field Support and Training Manager in Missouri, was facing high staff turnover rates and an over-stressed child welfare system in her region. Through the Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM), she developed a change initiative that has made a big impact on worker satisfaction and, ultimately, outcomes for children and families.

TOPICS

- Change Implementation
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Retention
- Work Conditions and Benefits
- Workforce Development Planning Process

THEMES

- By focusing on relationship-building, program leaders can improve organizational climate and retention.
- Investing in people through multiple retention strategies can help staff withstand the fluctuations of child welfare work.
- Compliance-oriented programs rarely lead to a positive organizational climate and can negatively affect retention.
- Good leaders will connect with all levels of the workforce to understand and implement change.
- Sometimes staff resistance shows up as oppositional behavior and masks deeper issues, which requires honest examination to understand root causes.
- When organizations expect workers to be available for emergencies or other after-hour work events, they should, in turn, offer schedule flexibility to their staff.
- Focusing on an employee's positive attributes can be more effective than focusing on negative ones. When unsuccessful in changing an employee's behavior, good managers change their reaction to that behavior.
- When the workforce feels involved and respected, they are more likely to stay in their jobs and gain the skills and confidence to work more effectively with families.

HOW TO USE

Provide this case study to new managers and supervisors as inspiration.

Discuss at a supervisor/manager Lunch & Learn.

Discuss at a workforce development committee meeting.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

In what ways can you develop relationships in the workplace?

What conditions does relationship-building require?

In addition to flexibility and positive relationships with supervisors, what other workplace conditions would help support your professional development?

Can you identify additional outcomes of investing in staff retention?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Respect & Worker Retention
Turnover Intention Predictors
Emotional Intelligence for Leaders
Organizational Support & Turnover Intention

URL | https://bit.ly/2Nk8zEX
VIDEO LENGTH | 4:16

VIDEO

TITLE

How Practice Models Offer Practice Support in Child Welfare

OVERVIEW

Indiana Department of Child Services returned to their core values and mission by rallying around their practice model. A practice model helps guide the work of child welfare programs and acts as a practice support, providing a road map for the workforce of the program's core principles, values, and related skills.

TOPICS

- Practice Supports
- Vision, Mission, and Values
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture and Climate

THEMES

- Organizations can easily lose their way if they don't consistently revisit the program's mission, vision, and values.
- As a practice support, practice models can unite staff by articulating the program's values, beliefs, and skills.
- Programs should engage in periodic check ins to make sure they are attending to their practice model.
- Use of practice models can support workforce development and improve outcomes for children.
- Leaders should go out in the field and connect with staff.
- Practice models support family engagement and staff engagement within the organization.

HOW TO USE

Show the video when rolling out a practice model or reinvigorating the use of the program's practice model.

Integrate the video in supervisor and manager training.

Show the video at a Lunch & Learn about your program's practice model.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

To what extent does everyone know about the practice model and integrate it into their approach when working with families?

How does the child welfare program use the program's practice model to inspire staff?

How does this program's use of a practice model compare to the one portrayed in the video?

What does the program's practice model say about how we engage with families?

How does our practice model inform interactions between staff?

How does this program keep the attention on the practice model?

What does this program need to do more of to keep the focus on the practice model?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Creating a Supportive Community Context
Citizen Involvement in Child Welfare
Strategic Planning
Meaningful Family Involvement

URL | https://bit.ly/3iWJApn
VIDEO LENGTH | 10:03

VIDEO

TITLE

Partnerships as a Pathway to Change

OVERVIEW

This Real Story explores the Connecticut Department of Children & Families' connection with the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work and how the partnership strengthened their workforce. As told by the people who lived it, the partnership improved diversity in the workplace, strengthened social work curricula, and enhanced the relationships between the agency and school for improved placements and transition to work. Their partnership paved the way for a pathway to change and improved outcomes for children and families.

TOPICS

- Education/Professional Development
- Recruitment and Selection
- Retention
- Community Engagement

THEMES

- Partnerships between universities and child welfare programs can foster change.
- University students can bring diversity and new perspectives to the child welfare program.
- Master's degree curriculum and agency practice should align.
- A diverse workforce should reflect the children and families served.
- Clients can connect more easily to workers who look like them in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc. and this can result in better outcomes for children and families.
- University learning should connect to on-the-job realities.
- Students who have field placements in the child welfare program can experience smoother transitions to permanent positions.
- Peer-to-peer mentoring programs can be helpful in building confidence as workers transition to permanent positions.
- The university partnership has resulted in change for both entities.

HOW TO USE

Show during the orientation session for new stipend students.

Show to program field placement supervisors during a preparation meeting.

Feature at a joint meeting between program and university staff to provide inspiration.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What was the change that happened as a result of the partnership?

How does your program engage with your university partners? For university partners, how do you engage with the child welfare program?

In what ways do you support each other?

The video talks about the importance of diversity in the workforce so that clients see workers who share the same race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.; to what extent is this true at your program?

In what ways could you increase diversity in your workforce?

What changes could a university-agency partnership offer?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

University-Agency Partnerships
Realistic Job Previews
Simulation Labs for Child Welfare Training and Education
Educational Preparation

URL | https://bit.ly/3cum1C4
VIDEO LENGTH | 9:55

VIDEO

TITLE

Addressing Trauma Through a Culture of Resiliency

OVERVIEW

Trauma is real for both families and child welfare staff and can impact people in unique ways. Child welfare programs can address it by creating a culture of resiliency through multiple, culturally responsive strategies, such as offering trauma education, building relationships, encouraging self-care, and creating restorative spaces.

TOPICS

- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Organizational Culture and Climate
- Retention
- Supervision

THEMES

- Trauma impacts children, families, and workers.
- Organizations must proactively develop a culture of resiliency.
- A culture of resiliency starts by understanding trauma and its impact.
- Relationships can build trust that will help mitigate trauma.
- Trauma can trigger a worker's own experiences with trauma.
- Organizations that support workers with compassion and empathy offer a model to workers who can then use that model to engage with families.
- Safe spaces provide places for staff to decompress, debrief, and rejuvenate.

HOW TO USE

Show at an all-staff meeting and break people into discussion groups.

Integrate into manager/supervisor/foundation/core training.

Feature at a supervisor/manager Lunch & Learn.

Show and discuss at a workforce development committee.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What have you done to understand trauma?

How have you seen trauma impact children, families, and colleagues at the program?

Susan spoke about the amenities and activities available in the mitigation room, what would you put in a mitigation room?

What does this program do to support a culture of resiliency?

What could the program do differently? What are the steps for making that happen?

RELATED NCWWI PRODUCTS

Understanding Trauma-Informed Practice
Secondary Traumatic Stress
Resilience & Burnout
Organizational Culture & Retention