

RAN Advice Forum Report

‘Trauma-informed training’

September 30, 2026

Introduction

1 Richard Harrison, RAN Chair, welcomed everybody to the Forum and introduced the presenter, Alyson Wylding, CEO of No5 Young People.

Presentation

2 Alyson began by setting out some ground rules for the session, to ensure that any of those attending who might themselves have experienced trauma would remain safe and in control of their participation and learning.

3 She went on to explain that ‘trauma-informed’ meant recognising the potential impact of past trauma on the way service users behaved when coming for advice or assistance to RAN member organisations, and taking a range of steps to increase the service user’s feeling of safety and their sense of being in control. The language advisers used, the questions they asked, the way in which they explained the advice process, the boundaries they set and the way in which they set them, and the pace at which they sought to explore the service user’s problems could all be important in ensuring that the service user remained within his or her ‘window of tolerance’, and was thus able to connect with the adviser, reflect, choose and problem-solve.

4 She pointed out that since every contact a service user had with an advice service could increase their trust of the service or make them feel less safe, the ‘trauma-informed’ lens was a powerful way of examining every aspect of a service’s organisation - how easy it is to make contact, how referrals are handled, and so on. She also suggested that while all the staff and volunteers in an advice service should be ‘trauma-informed’, there should be additional levels of training for those likely to have contact with people affected by trauma, or who were working with service-users with complex needs. The slides she used, circulated with this report, highlight key elements of the analysis in more detail.

Discussion groups

5 She asked the discussion groups to apply the ‘trauma-informed’ lens to their organisation, looking at one particular point in a service-user’s journey through their service, and as a result to identify something they would do in their next contact with a service-user, and something they would review in their organisation.

6 The discussion groups recognised the power and validity of the ‘trauma-informed’ approach and could readily identify service-users they were supporting who had been affected by trauma. But there was concern about how to reconcile the need to slow down and take time to sit with the service user with the funder-driven pressures to hit contact targets, and the risk of delays to later appointments with other service users. The groups also discussed how some service users have learnt manipulation techniques as a way of navigating institutions, and the need to ensure that the ‘trauma-informed’ approach didn’t have the unintended consequence of making advisers more vulnerable to manipulation.

During the plenary feedback Alyson pointed out that setting and holding consistent boundaries was a very important element in managing this risk and will empower delivery teams.

Conclusion

7 The Forum closed with the award of the RAN Quality Standard to Olly Keirle on behalf of Citizens Advice Reading, a short update on RAN's progress in implementing the recommendations of the Capstone Report and warm thanks to Alyson for a very well-presented and thought-provoking session.

Richard Harrison - Chair, Reading Advice Network