

# Activity: Clarify Your Focus



This tool was developed by POAH in partnership with Design Impact as part of a larger effort to make housing more trauma-informed. To learn more about POAH's work and see how this exercise might fit into your own organization's efforts to become more trauma-informed, visit POAH's Trauma-Informed Housing Toolkit at: [traumainformedhousing.poah.org](https://traumainformedhousing.poah.org)

## Purpose

POAH identified eight opportunity areas for implementing trauma-informed housing. Consider these a place to start. Use this assessment activity to identify the opportunity area(s) most aligned with your goals and challenges.

## Assessment Activity

1. Read through POAH's opportunities for becoming trauma-informed.
2. Which three opportunities feel the most important to address within your organization?
3. Which three opportunities feel like you can most successfully tackle at this time? Where is there already momentum?
4. If you were to address one opportunity, what would it be? What do you think the impact would be if you were able to become more trauma-informed in this way?

## Encourage Community Care

### How might we encourage community care at our organization?

#### **Characteristics**

- Our staff express feelings of burnout through their words, actions or performance.
- Staff often find themselves in a position of caregiving beyond the boundaries of their role. This may sound like “I am the only one they can rely on”, “If I don’t do it, it won’t happen” or “No one can do this job but me.”
- Our programs are often one-sided, where staff play role of provider and residents play role of recipient. There is little involvement from residents in program design.

## Redefine Leadership

### How might we support resident and staff leadership and ownership over rules, policies, processes and spaces?

#### **Characteristics**

- Power is concentrated among a small number of decision makers in our organization.
- We offer staff and residents the opportunity to share perspectives but ultimately make decisions that we deem are best, even if counter to their feedback and requests.
- We value the perspective of staff who have the most formal training or seniority. We prioritize professional training over lived experience, such as the lived experience of being a resident in our community or a frontline staff at our organization.

## Strengthen Workplace Collaboration

### How might we create environments that encourage our staff to work together?

#### **Characteristics**

- Our staff often face barriers or resistance (from their peers or from leadership) when trying to work collaboratively across departments (such as Property Management and Resident Services).
- Our team does not have the time or the organization’s support to slow down.
- Our organization prioritizes staff outputs and deliverables rather than collaborative processes that invite many perspectives.

## Organizational Support for Staff Burnout

### How might we create organizational-level support for staff to prevent burnout?

#### **Characteristics**

- Our staff are reporting mental, physical or emotional exhaustion.
- Our staff report that their relationship with their supervisor is a source of stress.
- Our staff are leaving the organization because they no longer feel like they can manage the stress and obligations of their role.

## Prioritize Healing

How might we give staff and residents opportunities to process and heal from their traumas?

### **Characteristics**

- Our staff is not adequately trained to listen and respond to trauma their colleagues or residents face.
- We do not have partnerships or external resources we can bring in to support our staff and residents as they face trauma.
- Staff report or express symptoms of secondary trauma, vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue from their work.

## Address Community Trauma

How might we acknowledge and respond to events and experiences outside of our properties/organization that can recreate trauma for staff and residents?

### **Characteristics**

- Our residents live in communities where violence is pervasive.
- Our residents live in communities that are gentrifying.
- Our residents represent communities that have suffered at the hands of oppressive systems.

## Communicate Dignity and Belonging

How might our interactions, processes and rules reinforce dignity and belonging?

### **Characteristics**

- Our rules and procedures tell staff and residents what they can't do, not what they can do.
- Our communication materials and styles don't consider different cultures, races and religions.
- Our communication is often complex.
- Our communication is one-sided.

## Design Trauma-Informed Spaces

How might our physical spaces support healing and foster resilience?

### **Characteristics**

- Design decisions are made by a small group of staff, with little to no resident input.
- Our office spaces are windowless, sparsely furnished and/or offer little to no visibility from the main entrance.
- Our common spaces are primarily designed to manage risk and limit social activity, such as by removing outdoor furniture, locking courtyard or amenity spaces, or offering little exterior lighting.