

How the COVID-19 Pandemic has Impacted
the Behavioral Health Landscape:
A Provider-Side Assessment

Published
May 2021

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Grant Background + Aims

A trauma-informed behavioral health continuum of care is among the most urgent and important priorities for Athens-Clarke County, for the Northeast Georgia region, and for the state of Georgia as a whole. The mission of Resilient Georgia is to “lead a state-wide coalition to develop a closely-aligned and trauma-informed public and private network working toward a united vision to create a birth through 26 year old integrated behavioral health system.” In 2019, Resilient Georgia partnered with the Pittulloch Foundation to offer four regionally-focused grants to various community organizations across the state of Georgia that would begin in January 2020 and end in December 2021. The goal of these grants was to support the five key priorities of Resilient Georgia by increasing the statewide capacity for and awareness of trauma-informed care. These priorities are as follows:

- Promote coordinated trauma-informed practices across systems.
- Advance workforce through recruitment, education, and development.
- Build awareness and a common language/understanding about adversity and resilience.
- Advocate for policy and systems change.
- Create a sustainable model for the organization and the movement.

Four cornerstones of institutional support will ensure the stewardship and success of this funding to improve birth to 26 trauma-informed practices in the Northeast Georgia region: 1) Athens Area Community Foundation; 2) Athens Wellbeing Project; 3) Envision Athens; and 4) University of Georgia. Together, these partners developed five specific [strategic] aims which align with both the priorities of Resilient Georgia and the unique needs of the region. These aims are as follows:

Aim 1: Provide service providers with evidence-based training that builds capacity for youth aging out of juvenile justice services. Specifically, providers will be trained to provide relevant education, prevention, and support related to prevention and treatment of substance use.

Aim 2: Incorporate trauma-informed care into the supportive services for people living in recovery and foster care families. For youth living in recovery and/or foster care, critical support is needed for service providers to build capacity and provide trauma-informed care.

Aim 3: Provide trauma-informed training and capacity building to two-generation partners providing services to homeless and transitional youth. Recent evidence shows that significant gains in wellbeing and resilience are associated with two generation approaches to wrap-around services and care provision--meaning that providing support to both parents and children simultaneously is more likely to result in better outcomes for youth across time.

Aim 4: Offer Screening Brief Intervention (federal, evidence-based training), and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and other related trainings to Emergency Departments, local indigent care clinics, and pediatric practices in Athens-Clarke and contiguous counties. SBIRT has a significant evidence base and the federal agency Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has provided a grant to UGA faculty to provide training on administering SBIRT.

Aim 5: Engage in a community behavioral health needs assessment and utilize data to address critical gaps for Athens and the five contiguous counties with a focus on birth to 26 years of age. Using data from the Athens Wellbeing Project, health care providers, and secondary data sources, this grant will support the development of a regional needs assessment to inform the opportunities and challenges for building a behavioral health infrastructure that is trauma-informed, and expanding the awareness of trauma-informed care across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.