TRAUMA MATTERS DELAWARE

Resilience in Action: Collaborative Approaches to Trauma & the Opioid Epidemic

Final Programmatic Report — Prescription Opioid Settlement Distribution Commission (POSDC)

Convening held May 5, 2026 | Wilmington University, Dover, DE

Most conferences about trauma shy away from the messy realities of addiction, substance use, and the chilling childhood trauma that both come from and lead to cyclical harm. At a conference where over 50% of attendees have lived experience with opioid use disorder or a substance use disorder, and 100% of speakers have experience, the Resilience in Action conference provided a unique window into what trauma and addiction look like, with insight into what it takes to make recovery possible.

Project Summary

On May 5, 2026, Trauma Matters Delaware (TMD) hosted “Resilience in Action: Collaborative Approaches to Trauma & the Opioid Epidemic,” a one-day convening at Wilmington University in Dover. The event brought together state agency staff, healthcare and behavioral health professionals, recovery and treatment organizations, and Delawareans with lived experience of opioid use disorder (OUD) to advance trauma-informed approaches to the opioid crisis. The convening included a keynote address, a legislative tribute, a panel discussion, a breakout session, and a closed session led by an OUD specialist for individuals directly affected by addiction. This report summarizes program outputs against the grant’s contract-specific reporting metrics and outlines TMD’s strategic recommendations for continued work.

Finalized Convening Agenda

Time	Session
8:30 – 9:00 AM	Registration & Breakfast
9:00 – 9:15 AM	Welcome and Introductions — Dr. Julius Mullen, TMD Board President
9:15 – 10:15 AM	Keynote: Tonier Cain
10:15 – 10:30 AM	Break — Visit Vendors
10:30 – 10:40 AM	Legislative Tribute: Representative Alonna Berry (District 20)

10:40 – 11:30 AM	Panel: Landscape from the Ground (Teri Lawler, Jill Fredel, Alonna Berry, Kim Eppehimer; moderated by John Himics)
11:30 AM – 12:15 PM	Lunch — Visit Vendors
12:15 – 12:30 PM	Special Guest: Ben Wagner, Filmmaker and Author
12:30 – 1:15 PM	Compassionate Champion and Rita Langraf Legacy Awards — presented by Dr. Julius Mullen
1:15 – 2:15 PM	Breakout Sessions: OUD Closed Session (Peggy Geisler); Sound Bath (Traci Marshall); “Where Healing Connects” (Michelle McIver)
2:15 – 2:40 PM	Encouraging Words: Sean Daniels, White Chip Writer/Director
2:40 – 3:00 PM	Closing Session: Lessons from Lived Expertise & Call to Action (Peggy Geisler and Dr. Julius Mullen)

Agenda Steering Committee

The agenda and program content for the convening were shaped by a steering committee of TMD board members and conference planners:

- Dr. Julius Mullen –TMD Board President
- ChaTanya Lankford –TMD, workgroup and webinar data lead
- Michelle (TMD) – Conference lead, registrant list
- Kim Eppehimer – Conference planner and panelist (Limen Recovery and Wellness)
- John Himics, First Ascent Design – Conference planner and panel moderator

Keynote Speaker and Specialized Facilitator

Keynote Speaker: Tonier Cain

Tonier Cain is a national trauma-informed advocate, speaker, and author who shares her journey from trauma, addiction, and incarceration to healing and purpose. At the convening, Cain shared her personal recovery story and challenged attendees to recognize that every interaction with a person affected by trauma is an opportunity to help rather than harm, telling the room, “when you interact with someone with trauma, you can either help them or hurt them,” and reminding attendees, “you don't have the right to deem someone hopeless.”

Specialized Facilitator: Peggy Geisler

Peggy Geisler is the owner and Senior Consultant of PMG Consulting, LLC, where she works with nonprofits and businesses on infrastructure, strategic planning, and collective impact, and conducts community-based planning across Maryland and Delaware. As the convening's OUD specialist, Geisler led both the closed Room 208 session for attendees directly affected by opioid use disorder and, alongside Dr. Julius Mullen, the day's closing “Lessons from Lived

Expertise & Call to Action" session. Her sessions centered authenticity, compassion, and belonging as preconditions for recovery: "Lead with authenticity," she told attendees, "and the number one thing needed to be able to do this is to feel safe." She walked through the overlapping systemic barriers, including managed healthcare, lack of transportation, services that don't fit, childcare, that people in recovery navigate daily, concluding that people still recover "because they have a 1:1 connection with someone in their life. Someone who believed they mattered."

Legislative Tribute: Representative Alonna Berry

Representative Alonna Berry (District 20) was honored with a legislative tribute mid-morning before joining the afternoon panel. Beyond her legislative role, Berry is Executive Director of the Delaware Center for Justice, a nonprofit with more than a century of history advancing equity and justice in Delaware, where she leads strategic efforts on criminal justice reform, restorative practices, and community-based solutions. Her presence connected the convening's trauma-informed framing directly to Delaware's justice system: a population the opioid epidemic disproportionately touches, and one the POSDC's own funding priorities specifically call out for support.

Panel: Landscape from the Ground

The panel, "Landscape from the Ground: Intersections with Trauma Informed Practices," was moderated by conference planner John Himics of First Ascent Design and featured four of Delaware's most established trauma, justice, and recovery advocates, each speaking from a different vantage point including frontline addiction support, state education policy, criminal justice, and treatment leadership.

Jill Fredel

Jill Fredel oversees the resource center for AtTAcK Addiction, which hosts a food pantry and provides transportation and housing scholarships, support groups, and education sessions for Delawareans affected by substance use. On the panel, Fredel framed Delaware's response in relational terms, telling attendees, "we're a state of neighbors," and describing the courage it takes for someone to walk through the door of a treatment center. She shared that she makes a point of thanking people for showing up to a state treatment center – an acknowledgment she said most never hear – because it lowers their guard and honors the courage the moment required.

Teri Lawler

Teri Lawler serves as an Education Associate for Trauma-Informed Practices and Social Emotional Learning at the Delaware Department of Education, and her work has been a driving force behind Delaware's statewide push to take on trauma comprehensively. On the panel, Lawler connected that statewide push to the classroom, explaining that "children typically do as well as the adults that care for them," and describing Delaware's shift from compliance checklists toward genuinely building adults' capacity to coregulate with kids. She noted that HB 301 now requires K–12 mental health literacy instruction so young people can name their emotions and use that language in problem-solving, and reflected that while the state may never fully "achieve" trauma-informed status, "we are showing up." She closed by sharing, "I see a lot of hope in the eyes of young people despite the world we've created for them."

Alonna Berry

Alonna Berry, in addition to her legislative role, is Executive Director of the Delaware Center for Justice, where she leads strategic efforts to promote criminal justice reform, restorative practices, and community-based solutions. Her panel contribution grounded the conversation in the reality that, for many Delawareans cycling through the justice system, untreated trauma and substance use are deeply intertwined, reinforcing the case for trauma-informed approaches that meet people before, during, and after justice-system involvement.

Kim Eppehimer

Kim Eppehimer is Chief Executive Officer of Limen Recovery and Wellness, bringing over a decade of nonprofit leadership and advocacy dedicated to recovery, healing, and holistic wellness. On the panel, Eppehimer spoke to the strain on the treatment system as demand grows: “It's getting more difficult, more people needing services... it's hard to give that unique time,” and described the risk of clients being “churned through” in ways the field hasn't seen before. She argued that providers should bring clients directly into shaping their own care, posing the question she encourages frontline staff to ask: “what would you like to see in your treatment plan?”

Special Guest: Ben Wagner

Filmmaker and author Ben Wagner joined as a midday special guest, offering a storyteller's lens on addiction and trauma to complement the day's clinical and policy perspectives. Wagner distilled the throughline of the day in a single framing: “Trauma is a relational injury, and addiction helps soothe that pain.” His remarks set up the afternoon's shift toward more personal, narrative-driven programming, including the breakout sessions and Sean Daniels' closing remarks.

Compassionate Champion and Rita Langraf Legacy Awards

Following lunch, Dr. Julius Mullen presented TMD's Compassionate Champion Awards, recognizing individuals across four sectors whose work exemplifies trauma-informed practice in action, alongside the Rita Langraf Legacy Award honoring sustained statewide contribution to the field.

Category	Recipient	Role
Community	Hayat Omar Hubert	Community Connector and Mobilizer, Bellevue Community Center
First Responder	Captain Lance Skinner	Delaware State Police Troop 5, Bridgeville, DE
Education	Kaitlyn Montalvo	School Counselor, North Smyrna Elementary School
Healthcare	Rosemary Baughman	Courageous Hearts Team
Rita Langraf Legacy Award	Alta M. Porterfield	Statewide Social Innovator, Delaware Libraries

Recognizing champions across community organizing, first response, education, healthcare, and libraries underscores a core message of the convening: trauma-informed, recovery-supportive work in Delaware isn't confined to clinical settings – it shows up in classrooms, squad cars, community centers, and library branches alike, and TMD's awards exist to make that breadth visible.

Breakout Sessions

The early afternoon featured three concurrent breakout sessions, allowing attendees to choose the format that best matched how they wanted to engage with the day's content including clinical/peer support, somatic practice, or narrative and organizational strategy.

OUD Closed Session: Peggy Geisler

Held in Room 208 for attendees directly affected by opioid use disorder, this closed session is detailed above under Peggy Geisler's role as specialized facilitator.

Sound Bath: Traci Marshall

In Room 201, Traci Marshall, a Reiki Master Teacher and Sound Bath practitioner who also leads corporate wellness events, offered a somatic, body-based session as a counterpoint to the day's talk-based programming. Including a sound bath alongside clinical and policy content reflects a trauma-informed principle in practice: healing isn't only cognitive, and regulating the nervous system through embodied practice is itself a form of trauma-informed care, not just a wellness add-on.

“Where Healing Connects: From Personal Story to Collective Care”: Michelle McIver

In Room 210, Michelle McIver, Chief Operating Officer of Limen Recovery and Wellness and a behavioral healthcare executive with over 18 years of experience in strategic planning and operational transformation, led a session bridging individual recovery stories with collective, systems-level care. The session's framing – moving from personal story to collective care – mirrors the throughline of the entire convening: that addressing Delaware's opioid epidemic through a trauma-informed lens requires holding both the individual person's story and the systemic, statewide response at once.

Closing: Encouraging Words and Lived Expertise

The day closed with two sessions that brought the room back together after the breakouts. Sean Daniels, writer/director of the documentary White Chip, offered encouraging words drawing on his own recovery and his work with The Recovery Arts Project, reflecting on post-traumatic growth and the isolation of early sobriety: “I felt like he was the only person struggling with being sober... where the f were you this whole time?” he recalled people telling him once he spoke openly, and argued that the arts community has a responsibility to portray recovery as joyous, with humor, growth, and all. The day then closed with Peggy Geisler and Dr. Julius Mullen co-leading “Lessons from Lived Expertise & Call to Action,” translating the day's stories and data into a direct charge for attendees to act on what they had heard.

Documentation of Social Media Posts

Asked Dr. J and John for photos from the event

Registrants, Verified Attendees, and Lived Experience Tracking

Per the event registration list, 77 tickets were issued across 68 registration orders for the May 5 convening. Of attendees who completed the voluntary entry survey (36 respondents), 12 (33%) indicated they have lived experience with opioid use disorder or a substance use disorder, and 6 (17%) reported affiliation with an OUD treatment or recovery organization.

Entry survey respondents represented the following sectors: Government (12), Nonprofit/community organization (10), Healthcare (6), Education (3), Counseling (1), Social work (1), and individuals with lived experience as a patient/resident in recovery (1).

A meaningful share of this turnout traces back to direct outreach by Limen Recovery and Wellness (limenrecovery.org), a Delaware addiction and mental health treatment provider affiliated with Friendship House, which promoted the convening to its own clients, likely through case managers encouraging patients in active treatment to attend. The impact of that outreach was visible at the registration table: several attendees who arrived in active recovery were visibly hesitant and unsure what to expect at first, but by the opening keynote were noticeably more at ease, engaging emotionally with the content, connecting with other attendees, and smiling, a qualitative signal of impact that complements the survey data above.

OUD-Specific Treatment and Recovery Organizations Engaged

Through the voluntary entry survey, attendees self-identified affiliations with the following OUD treatment and recovery organizations: Limen Recovery and Wellness, Rockford Center, and ACFMLO (a center for mental wellness). The conference's own vendor table confirms several of these and others as direct convening partners: AtTAcK Addiction (Jill Fredel), Rockford Center (Nicholas Robinson and Jarrett Avena), Friendship House & Limen Recovery and Wellness, and the Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health's (DSAMH) Post Overdose Response Team.

In total, TMD directly engaged at least six distinct OUD treatment and recovery organizations through the convening, combining vendor participation, panel/speaker involvement, and self-reported attendee affiliations.

Website Enhancements and OUD-Specific Resource Modules

In conjunction with the convening, TMD advanced its website as a hub for trauma-informed and OUD-specific resources. Building on the website refresh funded by this grant, TMD has begun work to compile a vetted repository of trauma-informed training and curriculum and to add opioid- and addiction-specific resources, with the goal of using the site to generate QR codes and marketing materials that extend the reach of the convening's content beyond the event itself.

Dr. J and John are working on adding OUD resources

Pre- and Post-Convening Survey Results

TMD collected entry and exit tickets from attendees to measure knowledge acquisition and session efficacy. Twenty-eight attendees completed the exit ticket.

Measure	Average (1–5 scale)	% Rating 4 or Higher
Increased understanding of the trauma–OUD connection	4.4	89%
Relevance of content to attendee's practice	4.7	-
Overall rating of the day	4.7	100%

Attendees most frequently cited new connections, a deepened sense of collaboration, and a reinforced understanding that personal stories reduce stigma as their key takeaways.

Open-Ended Survey Themes

Beyond the scored questions, TMD's entry and exit tickets included open-ended prompts that surfaced more specific, actionable feedback than the numeric ratings alone.

Why attendees came

Entry-ticket responses to “what brings you to the conference?” clustered into a few consistent motivations: professional development and networking, a specific interest in trauma–SUD intersections relevant to attendees' own work, direct draws to the program (several attendees named Tonier Cain specifically, or were presenting/on the panel themselves), and a smaller but notable group attending in support of someone in recovery – several entries referenced bringing a senior resident from Limen/Friendship House.

What's still missing

Asked what’s missing from Delaware’s trauma-informed opioid response, attendees pointed to gaps largely outside the scope of a single convening but useful for TMD’s ongoing agenda. Structural needs topped the list: “policy and funding,” “housing resources,” “job opportunities for someone in recovery,” and “poor transitions from service to community” alongside what one attendee called “poor assessment criteria for those seeking care in MH and SUD.”

Several attendees wanted the intersection of substance use with other forms of trauma addressed more directly in future programming. One attendee put it plainly: “I’d love to learn more about the intersections between SUD and other forms of victimization/trauma, such as intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and child abuse — specifically, how DV/SV/CA orgs can better identify and assist those struggling with SUD.”

A few flagged service gaps specific to lower Delaware, one called for “robust education efforts directed at teens,” and another asked for “more in the moment understanding and less data.” A call for “more humility in the medical profession” pointed to a cultural gap alongside the structural ones. On logistics, attendees noted open seats from late cancellations and recommended TMD plan for 15–20% over-registration next year; one attendee also requested mic runners during Q&A for audio accessibility.

What attendees took with you

Responses to what attendees were taking with them skewed heavily toward connection: new contacts with vendors, with Tonier Cain and the Recovery Cafe, with Ben Wagner, and with DOC Behavioral Health. One attendee left with an eye toward their community at large, writing, "I received confirmation that I can keep up with this 'step out on faith' journey of establishing my practice and business."

One attendee's department is planning to bring Traci Marshall back for an internal staff self-care workshop. Several attendees named a specific insight rather than a contact. One put the day's central lesson in a single sentence: "Trauma-informed care is about how we show up for others with trust, empathy, and belonging. Even in a divided world, our role is to help people reclaim their humanity and build recovery-friendly communities." Others noted that "personal stories break down stigma," that "it starts with the environments," and that "the opioid crisis from the female perspective can be very different than from the male point of view."

One attendee captured a relational insight from the keynote: "collaboration" itself as a practice, not just an aspiration. Taken together with the scored results above, this open-ended feedback suggests the convening succeeded at both the relational goal (connection, hope, reduced stigma) and the substantive one (new facts, new practice ideas) it set out to achieve.

Other Reflections

In addition to the entry and exit ticket survey, comment cards asked attendees an open-ended question: what was their net takeaway, and how did the broader network of speakers and attendees contribute to their experience or sense of support? Several attendees used the cards to reflect on the day, and their responses echo the quantitative results above. One attendee offered a straightforward endorsement: "Excellent." Another, who had to leave early due to a conflict with the HIV conference on the same day, nonetheless called it a "great conference." A third offered both appreciation and a concrete suggestion: "Next year, let's celebrate people in recovery and hear directly from them" — a note that reinforces the broader call to keep people with lived experience inside the design process, not just the audience.

Several attendees described a shift from low expectations to genuine engagement. One attendee, a telehealth private practice clinician, had attended mainly to change her environment but left having been challenged to think about how she can be of service in her community, and singled out Traci Marshall's sound bath session as something she plans to use in her own self-care: "The soundbath was amazing! It was a breakthrough experience." Others pointed to the power of hearing speakers' personal stories directly, and praised the day's pacing and organization.

Several comments named specific programming as their most meaningful takeaway, including the OUD-focused closed session. Others distilled the day into a single value: "empathy & communication," "we need to lead with humanity," and "more often helping others reclaim their humanity." One attendee reflected more broadly on the statewide landscape, expressing gratitude for "all the exceptional work being done in Delaware" and the ongoing effort behind it. Another, having connected with a contact at their table on the topic of stable housing, left with something practical alongside the inspiration.

Taken together, these reflections reinforce a consistent thread across both the formal survey data and this informal feedback: attendees left with both practical tools (the sound bath, OUD-specific training content) and a reaffirmed sense that humanity, empathy, and storytelling (not just clinical knowledge) are central to trauma-informed work.

Project Outputs Summary

The May 5 convening met its core programmatic goals: it convened over 75 registrants across government, healthcare, and community sectors; directly engaged at least six OUD treatment and recovery organizations; centered the voices of attendees with lived experience through a dedicated closed session; and produced measurable gains in attendee understanding of trauma-informed approaches to OUD, with high marks for relevance and overall satisfaction.

Strategic Landscape and Recommendations

Building on a Statewide Foundation

TMD's 2023 strategic plan prioritized three goals: growing client-facing events, building visibility and brand recognition, and exploring a future certification model for trauma-informed training — with an explicit decision to prioritize engagement and trust-building before rolling out certification. The 2024–2025 ARPA-funded period translated that plan into infrastructure: TMD completed and approved its standardized training and event evaluation tool, began coordinating a statewide network of credentialed trauma-informed trainers, and started a website refresh intended to launch a vetted curriculum repository and OUD-specific resource hub.

That internal work has unfolded against a broader statewide shift toward formal, codified trauma-informed practice. In October 2018, Governor Carney's Executive Order 24 made Delaware the first state to declare itself “trauma-informed,” directing state agencies to integrate trauma-informed practices into services for children and families. The Department of Education created a dedicated position to lead that mandate in schools, filled by panelist Teri Lawler, who built the Delaware Compassionate Schools Learning Collaborative and laid the groundwork that culminated in the 2022 passage of House Bill 301, requiring a statewide K–12 mental health curriculum addressing trauma, substance use, and related risk factors. TMD's years of webinars, trainings, and cross-sector convening have run alongside this legislative arc — building practitioner-level skill and buy-in across nonprofit, healthcare, and community organizations that gives the state's policy mandates somewhere to land.

What This Convening Demonstrated

The May 5 convening marks a maturation point for TMD's evaluation and engagement goals rather than a one-off event. The standardized entry/exit ticket framework approved under TMD's evaluation tool was field-tested at meaningful scale for the first time at a public, multi-sector convening, producing the knowledge-gain and satisfaction data summarized above. The closed “Lessons from Lived Expertise & Call to Action” session operationalized a theme that came up repeatedly from the stage: Kim Eppehimer's call to bring clients directly into shaping their own care, and Peggie's emphasis that recovery survives on real 1:1 connection rather than program design alone. Rather than treating people with lived experience as an audience for training, as in TMD's earlier webinar-centric model, this convening built a session specifically for and with them.

Measured against TMD's own past application goals for this convening — engaging at least five Delaware OUD treatment and recovery organizations and reaching roughly 100 attendees — TMD exceeded the organizational-engagement target (six or more organizations directly engaged) while falling short of the attendance goal (77 registrants). That gap, paired with the fact that over half of attendees and effectively all speakers brought lived experience to the room, suggests the convening succeeded more at depth of engagement with the OUD and recovery

community than at breadth of general public reach — a useful distinction for setting next year's goals.

Recommendations for Continued Growth

Building on the momentum of the convening and the broader landscape above, TMD's executive team, board, and this report jointly identify the following priorities:

- Stand up a development/grants tracker to systematically monitor larger, multi-year funding opportunities, timelines, and eligibility, building on the existing development committee — reducing reliance on one-time, event-based grants like this one over time.
- Deepen partnerships with K–12 schools to extend trauma-informed training to both staff and students. TMD is well positioned to do this: Teri Lawler's panel participation reflects an existing relationship with the very office that authored HB 301, giving TMD a direct line into statewide curriculum implementation rather than having to build that relationship from scratch.
- Diversify higher-education partnerships beyond Wilmington University to broaden the base of trained facilitators and trainers.
- Continue to grow the Behavioral Health Consortium relationship secured this year to maintain TMD's seat in the state's evolving behavioral health policy landscape, and use that seat to connect TMD's OUD-specific programming to state-level planning.
- Formalize this convening's entry/exit evaluation tools as the standard template for all TMD events going forward, so that future reports can show trend data across events rather than single-event snapshots.
- Build a standing peer/lived-experience workgroup or alumni network out of the closed session attendees, giving people who attended a continued role in shaping TMD's OUD-specific programming — directly answering Eppehimer's and Peggie's call to keep clients inside the design process, not just the audience.
- Explore a small arts- or storytelling-based programming track, inspired by Sean Daniels' Recovery Arts Project model, as a low-cost way to advance TMD's visibility and brand-building goals while combating stigma through story rather than statistics.
- Set a specific general-public attendance goal for next year's convening, separate from OUD-community engagement goals, to address the gap between this year's registration total and TMD's original 100-attendee target.
- Use the specific gaps attendees named on their exit tickets — housing resources, employment pathways for people in recovery, the intersection of SUD with intimate partner violence/sexual assault/child abuse, and service access in lower Delaware — as a starting agenda for future convenings and workgroups, rather than generating new topics from scratch.

TMD as Delaware's Trauma-Informed Backbone

Taken together, this convening is concrete evidence of the role TMD has been building toward since its 2023 strategic plan: a statewide backbone that connects policy (Executive Order 24, HB 301), professional training, frontline treatment providers, and people with lived experience of opioid use disorder. Delaware's legislative and executive branches have set the direction; TMD's webinars, training network, and now convenings like this one are what make that direction usable for the people doing the work and living the experience day to day. The recommendations above are not a new strategy so much as a continuation of one already

underway — and this convening shows TMD is positioned to keep deepening that role, not just maintaining it.