

Maine Youth Thriving (MyT)

Maine's Statewide Professional Learning Series for Trauma-informed Care

Performance period 10/2023–12/2025

Professional learning that supports educator understanding of children's social-emotional development, stress responses, and resilience is a critical component of building a robust system of comprehensive services for Maine's young children, and particularly the adults who care for them and support their learning.

Maine Youth Thriving (MyT) is Maine-based organization focused on the provision of statewide professional learning designed to strengthen educator understanding of how stress, trauma, and resilience affect children and adults in educational settings, and to support practices that promote positive experiences for children. Building on earlier work conducted under the name Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN), MyT implemented professional learning with support from the Maine Department of Education (DOE) through the Preschool Development Grant–Birth to Five Renewal (PDG-R).

This report presents **findings from outcome-focused assessment activities** conducted in fall 2025 as part of PDG-R grant. Drawing on diverse data,² the report examines the MyT Professional Learning initiative with respect to the following PDG-R outcome areas:

- **Impact**, including shifts in educators' understanding of adverse and positive childhood experiences, strengths-based practice, and compassion fatigue, as well as early evidence of application in practice.
- **Communication and cross-sector coordination**, including statewide reach across sectors and settings.
- **System building**, including a statewide shift toward strengths-based, PCE-informed practice in early childhood education.
- **Supports and access**, including the impact of using multiple training formats on participation, adaptations made in response to participation data and feedback, and statewide geographic reach.

Data sources for this report include pre- and post-training surveys across five training offerings (N=828 responses from 542 unique respondents), a Train-the-Trainer post-survey (N=28), post-training surveys from certified trainers' sessions (N=80), follow-up survey and email responses of past participants (N=30), an interview with MyT facilitators Meg and Delvina, an interview with state lead Renee Reilly, and monthly initiative reports.

Over the grant period, MyT facilitators delivered more than 60 training sessions through virtual, in-person, site-based, and conference formats, reaching approximately 1,820 educators across all 16 Maine counties. The initiative offered two core trainings: **The Impact of Experience**, which introduces research on adverse and positive childhood experiences and strengths-based reframing strategies; and **Compassion Fatigue and Resilience Strategies**, which focuses on helping educators recognize the signs of compassion fatigue and develop self-care practices. In Year 3, the initiative introduced a

Train-the-Trainer program, preparing two cohorts of 28 educators to deliver MyT content in their own communities.

The initiative adapted its design over the grant period in response to participation data and facilitator feedback. *The Impact of Experience* was originally offered as a two-part series—How Adverse Childhood Experiences and Positive Childhood Experiences Impact Healthy Child Development (Part I) and A Framework for Implementing Positive Childhood Experiences to Support Healthy Child Development (Part II)—and was later consolidated into a single training when facilitators observed that participants often attended only one session and missed essential content. In Year 3, the state also reduced the frequency of offerings and introduced minimum attendance thresholds in an effort to concentrate participation into fewer, larger sessions.

Data collection was integrated into implementation to support evaluation. Post-training surveys were administered at the conclusion of each session to assess participant-reported knowledge gains, relevance of the content to their work, usefulness for practice, and perceived impact on children and families. In addition, a follow-up survey was administered approximately six to twelve months after participation to gather information on whether and how educators reported applying MyT concepts in their ongoing practice. The sections that follow examine findings across four PDG-R outcome areas: impact, communication and cross-sector coordination, system building, and supports and access.

MAINE YOUTH THRIVING (MYT) FEATURES

Professional learning grounded in public health research on adverse and positive childhood experiences.

Focus on strengths-based, PCE-informed practice across two core trainings

- **The Impact of Experience**—understanding ACEs and PCEs and applying strengths-based strategies
- **Compassion Fatigue and Resilience Strategies**—recognizing compassion fatigue and building self-care practices

Approx. 1,820 participants trained statewide across all 16 Maine counties

Over 60 virtual and in-person sessions offered across the grant period, including standalone trainings, site-based sessions, and conference presentations

Reached a **mixed-delivery audience**: Head Start/Early Head Start (36%), public schools (35%), center-based and family child care (14%), and other settings (15%)

Participants included teachers (40%), educational technicians and teaching assistants (23%), administrators and directors (10%), and other roles including family service staff, counselors, behavioral health professionals, and coaches (25%)

Train-the-Trainer program with stipends to support participation and delivery of community-based trainings

What was the impact of the learning series?

To ensure that PDG-R professional learning investments are effective and sustainable, it is essential to understand their impact on educators who participated in these opportunities. The state lead and MyT facilitators described the intended outcomes of the trainings in complementary terms: changing educators' mindsets from a deficit focus on adversity to an action-oriented emphasis on positive experiences, and helping educators see that the relational work they were already doing has long-term impacts backed by research

The MyT professional learning trainings were designed to support the following **intended outcomes**:

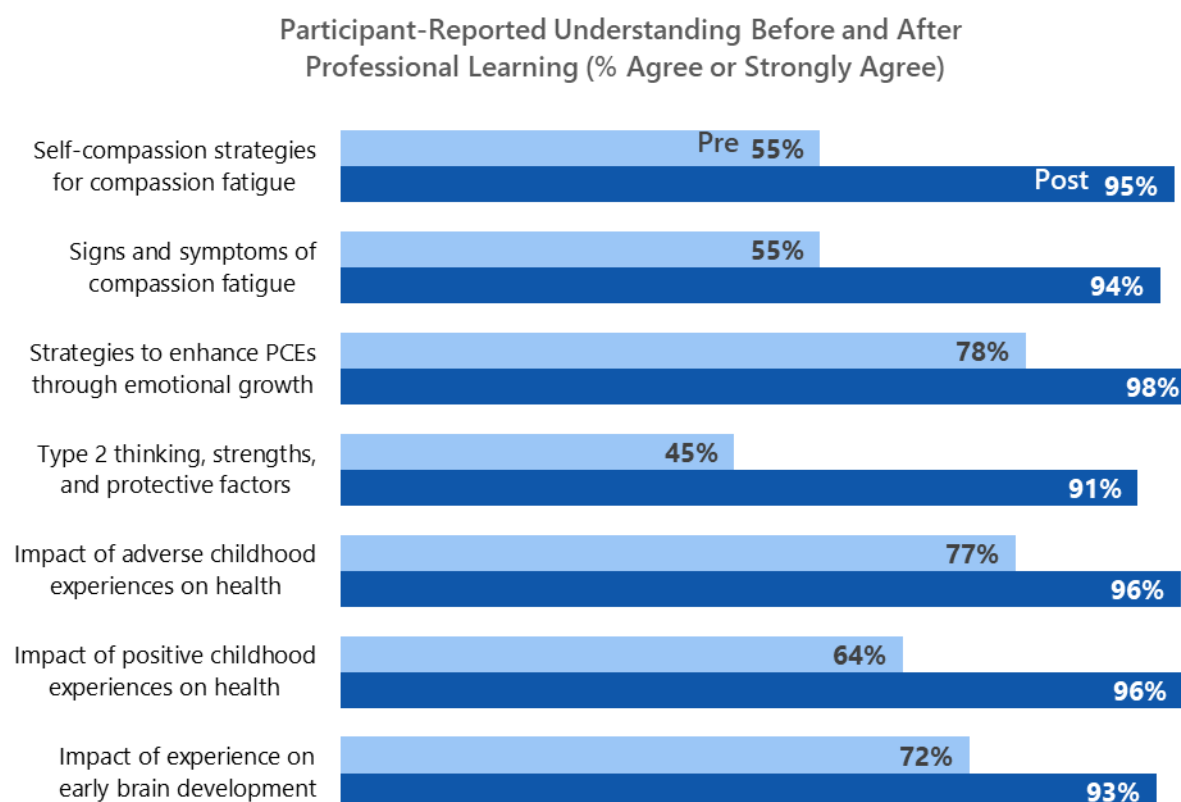
- **Increased understanding** of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) and their role in children's development.
- **A shift toward strengths-based approaches** that prioritize positive experiences over deficit-focused responses.
- **Increased intentionality** in applying PCE strategies in daily practice with children.
- **Recognition of compassion fatigue** and knowledge of self-care strategies to support educator well-being.

Pre- and post-training survey data from 828 respondents across five training offerings—representing 542 unique participants out of approximately 1,820 trained—indicate substantial gains in self-reported knowledge among survey respondents across all measured areas (Figure 1). Results reflect matched pre- and post-training survey responses; Ns vary slightly by item due to incomplete responses.

Across all training offerings, pre- to post-training data show gains in every measured outcome area. The largest shift was in Type 2 thinking—a reframing approach that helps educators pause reactive responses and interpret children's behavior through a strengths-and-protective-factors lens—rising from 45% to 91%.

Figure 2 presents self-reported understanding across seven outcome areas, comparing pre- and post-training results.

Beyond knowledge gains, participants across all training offerings and respondents to both survey instruments consistently rated the training content as highly relevant to their work (88–100%), useful in changing practice (86–100%), and impactful for children and families (88–98%).

Figure 1: Pre- and Post-Training Participant-Reported Understanding.

Understanding ACEs and PCEs

Participants entered the trainings with moderate familiarity with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) but considerably less understanding of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). As the chart shows, the most notable shift was in PCE understanding—an increase of 32 percentage points.

As one facilitator described, participants often arrived with a foundation in ACEs but had not encountered the concept of PCEs: "It's really nice to hear that this is actually really important, and that I'm already intuitively doing some of that."

The training helped educators recognize that many everyday relational practices are supported by research linking positive childhood experiences to long-term health and well-being. While these practices were familiar to many participants, fewer had encountered the term "positive childhood experiences" or its research base; informal polls showed recognition of the term increasing from near zero to roughly 25–35% of participants over the grant period.

For some participants, increased awareness translated into shifts in daily practice. One follow-up respondent, a direct service provider, described how the PCE framework reshaped her daily interactions

"I have breakfast duty every morning. I've made connections with every single student who walks into the cafeteria. I'm the first face that greets them each day,

and I interact with them in a way that shows them I'm interested in them as a person both at but also outside of school."

She noted that the training changed not what she does but why:

"Although my behaviors haven't changed much, the intentionality with which I do them has increased."

Another follow-up respondent, a classroom-based educator, described a similar shift:

"Using the role of PCEs in our classroom has been beneficial to us and the children . . . there is a way to help them overcome the adversities they have faced."

Strengths-Based Practice and Type 2 Thinking

The MyT framework introduces "Type 2 thinking," a reframing approach that asks educators to pause reactive responses to children's behavior and instead interpret what they observe through a lens of strengths and protective factors. The **46-percentage-point gain** in self-reported understanding of this area—from 45% to 91%—was the largest across all measured outcomes. Eighty-eight percent of respondents also rated Type 2 reframing strategies as **useful for changing their practice**, suggesting that the concept resonated not only as new knowledge but as something applicable to their work.

Qualitative responses reflect this shift: participants described learning to:

"listen to the story the behavior is telling"

"focus less on reactive practices and more on cultivating positive experiences"

"stop always expecting the same challenging behavior from the same child"

The state lead described this reorientation as the initiative's central value, connecting it directly to workforce sustainability: when educators lack tools to respond constructively, they burn out and leave the field, creating cycles of turnover harmful to children and programs.

Compassion Fatigue and Educator Well-Being

The Compassion Fatigue and Resilience Strategies training focused on helping educators recognize the signs of compassion fatigue—distinct from general burnout—and develop self-compassion and self-care strategies to sustain their well-being in the classroom. Addressing educator well-being is critical to workforce retention; without tools to manage the emotional demands of their work, educators are more likely to leave the field, creating cycles of turnover that affect children and programs.

Pre- to post-training survey data show that this topic produced some of the largest gains across all MyT training offerings. Among survey respondents, self-reported understanding of compassion fatigue increased by 39 percentage points, and knowledge of self-compassion strategies increased by 40 percentage points.

Facilitators noted that while most educators entered the training familiar with the term "compassion fatigue," many conflated it with burnout; the training helped distinguish between the two.

Participants who responded to a post-training follow-up survey described concrete changes in practice:

"I call on my co-teachers to swap out when I feel overwhelmed—that support network is what helps me."

"I am inserting moments to breathe during my day."

Others described identifying "glimmers" as a technique for rewiring negative thought patterns.

Facilitators reported that participants consistently wanted more time with this content: "Folks left being like, nobody's really spoken to me about this before." The state lead confirmed that no comparable training exists in Maine's professional learning landscape—a unique contribution of the MyT initiative.

Impact of the Train-the-Trainer Experience

At the end of its second year, MyT introduced a Train-the-Trainer (TTT) model to expand the initiative's reach beyond what two facilitators could deliver directly and to build distributed training capacity across the state.

Table 1: Figure 1: Train-the-Trainer (TTT) Cohort and Certified Session Outcomes.

	TTT Cohorts	Certified Sessions
Participants	28	>80
Sessions	2 cohort series	10
Counties represented	Statewide recruitment	9
Rated quality/relevance highly	84%	98%
Felt prepared to deliver	75%	NA

Eight certified trainers went on to deliver a total of ten community-based sessions—two trainers facilitated multiple sessions—reaching participants across nine counties. Based on post-session survey responses (n=80), 98% of respondents rated the content as relevant to their work, consistent with findings from the direct-delivery trainings.

Facilitators noted that TTT participants also began applying the framework in their own practice during the cohort experience—even though the program was designed to prepare them to train others. As one facilitator observed,

“The goal was really to share this information, to understand it and share it with others. But they were reporting back that they were using the tools themselves.”

Facilitators reflected that the "trainer" framing may have been too narrow, noting that not all graduates were comfortable leading rooms of adults but were nonetheless championing the work in their own settings. As one facilitator put it, future iterations might reconceptualize the trainer role as one of leadership or advocacy—"ambassadors" rather than trainers—better capturing the range of ways participants carried the framework forward.

What communication and cross-sector coordination was involved?

MyT professional learning was implemented in partnership with the Maine Department of Education, which served as the coordinating and overseeing agency for training logistics, recruitment, and scheduling. Recruitment and delivery were intentionally designed to engage educators across public schools, Head Start, child care, and other early childhood settings, reflecting the mixed-delivery nature of Maine's early learning system.

The state lead described the content as relevant to anyone working with young children, regardless of setting, and facilitators noted that mixed groups enriched discussions by bringing different professional perspectives into the same room.

MyT facilitators presented the Impact of Experience and Compassion Fatigue content at the annual MDOE summer summit and other statewide venues. These events served as both professional learning opportunities and venues for introducing the MyT framework to educators outside the initiative. The initiative's cross-sector reach also extended beyond traditional early childhood settings—one TTT graduate delivered sessions at a martial arts educators' conference, reporting afterward that participating instructors had shifted their focus from the performance of the martial arts to the success of the child.

How has MyT contributed to building a strong statewide early learning system?

The evaluation team examined whether the initiative strengthened the early learning system by building statewide training capacity, contributing to a shared professional vocabulary, and positioning the work for sustainability beyond the grant period.

The MyT initiative contributed to system building by establishing ACEs, PCEs, and compassion fatigue as a shared, strengths-based framework that could be applied across roles, settings, and professional learning contexts. By grounding relational practice and educator well-being in public health research, the initiative helped normalize a common language around resilience, protective factors, and stress, supporting greater coherence across the mixed-delivery early childhood system¹ and alignment with

¹Mixed delivery early care and education (ECE) is the coordinated effort to support early childhood services and programming across a range of settings to help meet the varied needs of children and families.

other professional development efforts. As noted by state leadership, addressing compassion fatigue is foundational to sustaining the workforce, particularly in a field where educators experience chronic stress and turnover pressures.

The Train-the-Trainer (TTT) model functioned as a system mechanism intended to extend this framework beyond direct delivery. While the model had limitations in terms of formal training reach, it supported a multi-tiered approach in which trained educators acted as local carriers of the framework—sharing concepts through trainings where feasible and through leadership, peer exchange, and informal diffusion within programs and communities. One TTT graduate's subsequent enrollment in the Regulated Classroom TTT illustrates this alignment—**educators building on the MyT foundation with complementary PDG-R professional learning content**. In this way, the system-level contribution of TTT lies less in scale and more in expanding pathways for uptake and integration over time.

Together, these findings suggest that MyT made early system-building contributions by expanding facilitation capacity and shared language. Continued impact depends on future coordination, funding, and adaptation.

In what ways did the design of MyT facilitate participation, and what improvements were suggested?

MyT reached approximately 1,820 educators across all 16 Maine counties over the grant period. The evaluation team examined what design features supported that reach and what factors limited it.

The initiative used multiple delivery formats to maximize access—virtual sessions, in-person regional trainings, site-based sessions within schools and programs, and conference presentations at statewide venues. Facilitators noted that each format served a different purpose: site-based sessions felt most practice-oriented, smaller virtual sessions often produced deeper engagement, and conference presentations introduced the framework to broader audiences. The introduction of the Train-the-Trainer model in Year 3 added a further access pathway, extending the initiative's geographic and sector reach through locally delivered sessions in nine counties.

The initiative also adapted its design in response to participation patterns and feedback. The Impact of Experience, originally a two-part series was combined into a single training. In Year 3, the state reduced the frequency of offerings and introduced minimum attendance thresholds to concentrate participation into fewer, larger sessions. At the time, the adjustment was reasonable given concerns about overall return on investment. However, based on facilitator accounts, this adjustment reduced the number of educators reached overall, as ECE professionals typically attended based on schedule availability rather than planned enrollment. No comparative attendance data were available at the time of this report.

Facilitators identified one notable gap in access: the absence of translated materials. They recommended developing resources in languages other than English to better serve Maine's growing multilingual workforce. This access barrier is not unique to MyT and may apply to other PDG-R professional learning initiatives as well.

Looking ahead, there is additional development work to be done, including creating a family-focused version of the training—identified by the state lead as a natural extension that was not implemented during the grant period.

What did we learn?

- **Consolidated delivery supports completion.** Combining the two-part Impact of Experience training into a single session reduced attrition and ensured participants received the full ACEs-to-PCEs arc.
- **Naming existing practice increases intentionality.** Many educators were already using PCE-aligned strategies; connecting these practices to a research base increased awareness and purposeful application rather than introducing entirely new behaviors.
- **Addressing compassion fatigue is foundational to workforce sustainability.** Educators consistently identified this content as highly resonant, and pre-/post-training data showed the largest gains in this area.
- **Train-the-trainer models benefit from flexible facilitator roles.** While not all TTT graduates led formal trainings, many carried the framework forward through leadership, modeling, and informal sharing within their settings.
- **Professional learning is strengthened through coordination.** MyT complemented other PDG-R initiatives, illustrating how aligned offerings can reinforce learning across domains of educator practice.
- **Scheduling flexibility mattered more than session size.** Efforts to reduce the number of offerings and impose attendance thresholds did not increase participation and were associated with lower overall reach.
- **Access gaps remain.** Materials were available only in English, potentially limiting participation among multilingual educators, and a family-focused version of the training, identified as a logical extension, was not implemented during the grant period.

Summary

The Maine Youth Thriving initiative addressed a foundational challenge within Maine's early childhood system: equipping educators to support children's healthy development while supporting their own well-being in a profession marked by chronic stress and turnover. Participants reported substantial gains in understanding ACEs, PCEs, and compassion fatigue, with 88% rating the content as useful for changing their practice. The Train-the-Trainer model extended reach across nine counties at a quality level consistent with direct-delivery sessions, and follow-up responses describe educators applying strengths-based strategies in their daily interactions with children.