project SPARCS

Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress

2026 Project SPARCS Cohort

TCTY NORTH DAKOTA
TREATMENT COLLABORATIVE FOR TRAUMATIZED YOUTH

NORTH Dakota Be Legendary. | Behavioral Health
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

PROJECT SPARCS SITE APPLICATION PACKET

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TCTY NORTH DAKOTA TREATMENT COLLABORATIVE FOR TRAUMATIZED YOUTH

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Application Due Date: **April 15, 2026**
Acceptance Notification: April 27, 2026

Informational Meeting (Optional)
March 27, 2026
12:00 - 1:00 pm CST
Register Here!

SPARCS Kickoff Meeting
May 14 & 21, 2026
10:00 - 11:00 am CST

In-Person SPARCS Training
Session 1: July 29 & 30
Session 2: September 17 & 18

Virtual Implementation Calls
Bi-Weekly - Monthly
July 2026 - May 2027

Virtual Consultation Calls
Monthly
August 2026 - May 2027

ABOUT TCTY

Founded in 2006, the Treatment Collaborative for Traumatized Youth (TCTY) was established to advance the State of North Dakota's capacity to respond to childhood trauma. Our mission is to increase awareness of the effects of trauma on children and to equip professionals with evidence-based treatments that promote healing and recovery.

Since its inception, TCTY has trained hundreds of mental health professionals in the delivery of evidence-based trauma treatments for children experiencing posttraumatic stress symptoms. Using a learning collaborative model grounded in implementation science, each training is highly interactive and practice-oriented followed by ongoing consultation provided by certified trainers and TCTY staff.

In 2008, during the early years of TCTY, SPARCS trainings was implemented on a small scale. Learning collaboratives were completed, clinicians were trained, and SPARCS groups were conducted in outpatient and residential settings across the state. TCTY was excited to revitalize SPARCS in ND in partnership NDDHHS-BHD. Project SPARCS launched in 2024 to expand access to evidence-based mental health services in schools. The initiative equips clinicians and school staff with the training and tools needed to lead SPARCS groups for at-risk youth.

STATE PARTNERSHIP

Project SPARCS operates in partnership with the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services Behavioral Health Division (NDDHHS - BHD) and aligns with North Dakota's System of Care (SOC) efforts. This project is associated with North Dakota's System of Care Grant (SOC), funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), administered through the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services – Behavioral Health Division.

This partnership reflects a shared commitment to:

- Expanding access to school and community-based mental health services
- Reducing geographic and systemic barriers to care
- Prioritizing the integration of behavioral health services for youth and families in rural, urban, and tribal communities
- Strengthening sustainable local infrastructure for trauma-informed treatment

TCTY NORTH DAKOTA TREATMENT COLLABORATIVE FOR TRAUMATIZED YOUTH

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WHAT IS PROJECT SPARCS

A statewide initiative designed to strengthen systems of care for adolescents impacted by chronic stress and trauma.

Project SPARCS focuses on increasing access to high-quality, culturally responsive, evidence-based trauma treatment while building long-term implementation capacity within schools and community behavioral health systems in Regions III and VII.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Increase access to SPARCS groups for youth in rural, urban, and Tribal communities.
2. Train interdisciplinary treatment teams (mental health clinicians and school-based co-facilitators) to deliver SPARCS with fidelity.
3. Support implementation and sustainability of SPARCS groups through ongoing coaching, data support, and infrastructure development.

PROJECT SPARCS IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Project SPARCS has expanded access to SPARCS treatment in schools, residential facilities, and outpatient settings in Regions III and VII since the launch in 2024.

From May 2024 through December 2025, Project SPARCS has:

- Served 322 youth across 45 completed or ongoing groups
- Trained 78 mental health and school professionals in SPARCS delivery

Early clinical outcomes also demonstrate youth are benefitting from SPARCS in a variety of ways. Youth involved in Project SPARCS have shown reductions in trauma symptoms and improvements in coping, mood, and peer relationships. Both teachers and youth report enjoying the group and feeling like it is helping students cope and use skills.

project SPARCS YOUTH ARE SAYING

"SPARCS helps you understand feelings and what to do in certain situations"

"SPARCS let me know I'm not alone"

"Helped me be more calm during situations."

"SPARCS was Dope! The group is good for social anxiety and helps with coping skills. Every kid is treated equally and its good for bonding building"

"SPARCS helped me think more than act"

SPARCS Treatment Overview

ABOUT SPARCS TREATMENT

Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress

SPARCS is a manually guided and empirically-supported group trauma treatment designed to improve the emotional, social, academic, and behavioral functioning of youth (ages 12-21) exposed to trauma and chronic stress.

SPARCS is specifically designed for youth who may:

- Continue to live in stressful or unstable environments
- Struggle with affect regulation and impulsivity
- Experience difficulties in relationships
- Demonstrate avoidance, numbing, dissociation, or somatic symptoms
- Hold negative self-perceptions or hopeless worldviews

The model integrates cognitive-behavioral strategies, mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness skills, and meaning-making practices. SPARCS focuses not only on symptom reduction but also on strengthening coping skills, improving peer relationships, and building resilience.

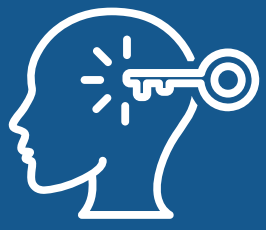
Treatment Goals: Help adolescents cultivate awareness, cope more effectively in the moment, enhance self-efficacy, connect with others and establish supportive relationships, & create meaning in their lives.

Key Treatment Components: Trauma Psychoeducation, Mindfulness, Problem-Solving, Meaning-Making, Communication, and Distress Tolerance.

Each SPARCS group consists of 16 structured sessions, typically delivered weekly over a semester (45–60 minutes per session).

SPARCS has been successfully implemented with at-risk youth in schools, juvenile justice, outpatient clinics, and residential programs in several states.

GOALS OF SPARCS



Cultivate Awareness

Cope More Effectively

Connect with Others

Create Meaning & Purpose

Why Project SPARCS

WHY PROJECT SPARCS IS NEEEDED

Youth across North Dakota face significant barriers to accessing mental health care, particularly in rural and tribal communities. School-based services reduce barriers such as transportation, stigma, and cost while increasing early identification and intervention.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that 17% of U.S. adults report four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), a level strongly linked to increased risk for depression, substance use, and suicide attempts. Project SPARCS data show participating youth have even higher levels of trauma exposure, with an average ACE score of 4.56 and extensive histories of adversity. Early outcomes demonstrate reductions in trauma symptoms and improvements in coping, mood, and peer relationships. Expanding access to SPARCS is critical to reducing risk and strengthening resilience among youth most impacted by chronic stress.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN PROJECT SPARCS

Project SPARCS focuses on implementing Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS) groups within school settings in Regions III and VII for students ages 12–21, using a collaborative team model that includes community clinicians and school personnel. Through Project SPARCS, TCTY will provide comprehensive support for schools interested in implementing SPARCS.

If you are interested in bringing SPARCS to your program, it is vital to understand the components involved in this learning collaborative and sustainability model first. **Interested sites will apply to join the 2026 Project SPARCS Cohort** (application link at the end of this packet). We encourage you to review this information packet carefully before applying.

Up to 10 school sites from Regions III and VII and Tribal Communities will be selected to participate in the 2026–2027 initiative. Priority will be given to sites that demonstrate the availability of a clinical and co-facilitator team, identified funding sources, and clear commitment from school administration or the governing body.

Video on the Success of SPARCS with At-Risk Youth in a School Setting

Project SPARCS Learning Collaborative & Sustainability Model

IMPLEMENTATION & SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

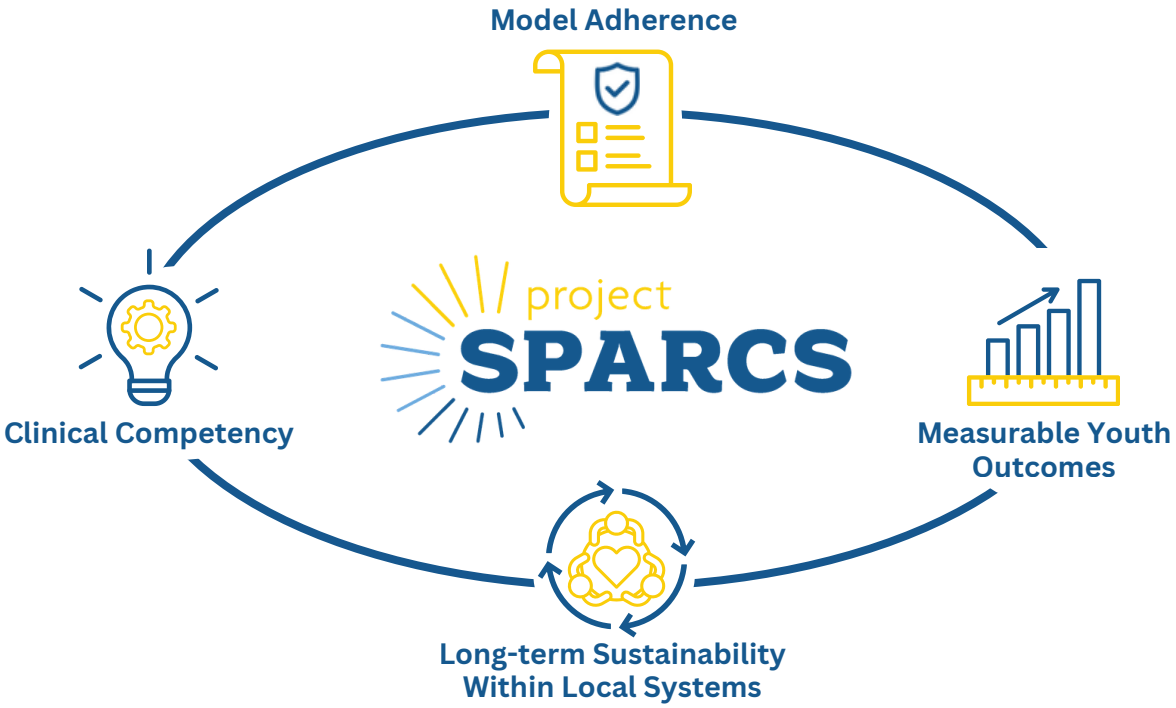
TCTY utilizes a structured learning collaborative approach to ensure high-fidelity implementation and strong outcomes.

The collaborative includes:

- Intensive in-person skill-based training
- Ongoing consultation with Certified SPARCS Trainers
- Fidelity monitoring and implementation coaching with assigned Implementation Lead
- SPARCS Group Supplies Starter Kit
- Comprehensive online training portal of SPARCS resources
- Peer learning across participating sites
- Continuous support from TCTY Project SPARCS Team
- Sustainability planning

This model emphasizes:

- Model adherence
- Measurable youth outcomes
- Long-term sustainability within local systems
- Clinical competency



Project SPARCS Support

SUPPORT PROVIDED THROUGH PROJECT SPARCS

As a Project SPARCS Site, you will receive support in a variety of ways. Below is a review of support provided for sites for the first year. Depending on project funding, some of these supports and advanced training may be provided in Year 2.

	Site Support Year 1	Site Support Year 2 *
Initial Training and Consultation with National Trainers	X	
Manual and Kit Materials (Group supplies, assessments)	X	
Student workbooks	X	X
Kit Refills (Group supplies, assessments)	X	X
Graduation supplies	X	
Resource Development	Resources developed as site needs. Access to portal	Resources developed as site needs. Access to portal
TCTY Implementation Support	14 Calls and intensive coordinator and data support	9 Calls and coordinator and data support
Advanced Training for Clinicians		X
Skills Training for Non-clinical staff		X

*Support for Year 2 is not guaranteed and is contingent on future funding

Site Considerations

Project SPARCS is implemented using a learning collaborative and team-based model within school settings. Strong administrative support is essential to ensure effective implementation and sustainability. Participation in Project SPARCS necessitates team dedication and commitment to sustainability.

SITE ELIGIBILITY & TEAM REQUIREMENTS FOR PROJECT SPARCS

1. Establish a SPARCS Team

- Minimum of one licensed clinician
- Minimum of one school-based, non-clinical co-facilitator (e.g., school counselor, social worker, behavioral support staff)
- An administrative leader to support the site's SPARCS program

2. Commit to the Full Learning Collaborative

- Learning Collaborative Participation Includes:
  - Attendance of both in-person SPARCS trainings
    - July 29–30, 2026 (Bismarck)
    - September 17–18, 2026 (Bismarck)
  - Participation in monthly consultation and implementation calls
  - Engagement in implementation coaching with assigned TCTY lead
  - Facilitation of two full 16-session SPARCS groups within the first year

3. Participate in Data Collection

- Data collection supports quality improvement, demonstrates impact, and strengthens long-term sustainability of SPARCS.
- Participating sites agree to share:
  - De-identified group attendance
  - Baseline and post-treatment symptom measures*
  - Satisfaction surveys*

*For Tribal Nations and Tribal-serving sites, all data elements, processes, ownership, and reporting will be discussed collaboratively prior to implementation. Project SPARCS is committed to honoring Tribal sovereignty, respecting local data governance policies, and ensuring transparency and mutual agreement regarding how data are collected, used, and shared.

Site Considerations

SITE RESPONSIBILITIES AND SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

While training tuition, lodging, and training-day meals are covered through Project SPARCS funding, participating agencies must plan for:

Financial Planning

- Additional expenses (i.e., mileage & per diem)
- Clinician and staff time for group facilitation (2-4 hours per week, outside of training)
- Sustainability beyond the first year (limited funding support will be available)

The goal of Project SPARCS is long-term sustainability and independent site capacity.

Estimated Clinician Cost for 1 Group	
16-week group with no insurance billing	$4,000 - 5,000
16-week group with insurance billed (additional non-billable clinician time)	$1,600 - 3,000

Infrastructure Support

Sites must provide:

- Dedicated space for group sessions
- Protected time for staff preparation, group facilitation, training, and consultation
- Scheduling support to allow students to allow students to attend consistently

Sustainability

WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS

Through the TCTY, state-funded SPARCS collaborative, schools and community clinicians have built strong partnerships, received high-quality training, and seen firsthand the impact of SPARCS for students affected by trauma. As grant funding ends, thoughtful sustainability planning helps ensure that this work does not disappear, but instead becomes embedded in school-based mental health supports.

Sustainability is not about replicating the grant model exactly. It is about maintaining access to SPARCS with fidelity, clarity of roles, and realistic planning around time, materials, and funding. Programs that plan early for sustainability are significantly more likely to continue delivering evidence-based practices over time.

Sustainability

WHAT NEEDS TO BE SUSTAINED

1. PEOPLE: TRAINED CLINCIANS & CO-FACILITATORS

SPARCS clinicians and school personnel spend an average of 2–4 hours per week (outside of training) facilitating groups, completing documentation, preparing for sessions, and conducting follow-up with students. When insurance is not billed, the cost of running a 16-week SPARCS group typically ranges from $4,000–$5,000 per group. When insurance is billed, additional non-billable clinician time is required, averaging approximately $1,600–$3,000 over the course of the group.

2. PROTECTED TIME

Time is one of the most important, and often underestimated, resources in sustaining SPARCS. Beyond the group sessions themselves, facilitators need protected time for preparation, documentation, and follow-up. Planning realistically for time commitments helps prevent burnout and supports high-quality group delivery.

School-based co-facilitators generally contribute time as part of their existing role and provide continuity, space, and school-based insight.

3. GROUP SUPPLIES

TCTY will provide an initial SPARCS supply kit, estimated at approximately $690. Replacement or refill kits for future groups are expected to cost about $200 to $400 per group. After the initial kit is provided, sites are responsible for securing funding to cover all future SPARCS supply costs, including replacement or refill materials.

4. PARTNERSHIPS

Strong sustainability depends on clear, written agreements between schools and clinicians or agencies. It is important to review the contracts or MOU's that need to be put in place.

Clear agreements protect students, schools, and clinicians; and reduce confusion over time.

Training Program & Participant Expectations

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING COLLABORATIVE TRAINING PROGRAM

This training uses the learning collaborative model, which includes multiple learning sessions, consultation, and implementation monitoring. This is not a single training event. Interested applicants should review and commit to all requirements. The purpose of the learning collaborative training program is to bring together a group of providers who have a common interest in serving children with trauma and to provide them with in-depth training and support to implement the evidence-based treatment with fidelity.

TRAINING SPECIFICS

- **Training Materials:** Clinicians will receive treatment materials, including the SPARCS clinician manual. Both clinician and co-facilitators will receive youth workbooks. Each site will also receive a SPARCS toolkit to support group implementation.
- **Clinician Roster:** Clinicians who complete all training requirements will be listed on the TCTY website roster.
- **Continuing Education:** CEU credits will be available for eligible participants.
- **Certificates:** Certificates of completion for the in-person training sessions and consultation calls will be issued once all minimum training requirements are met.

TRAINING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR FULL COMPLETION

1. In-Person Training

- Attend ***four days of in-person SPARCS training***, delivered across two sessions in Bismarck, ND, led by SPARCS Master Trainers
- Participate in active learning activities throughout the training

2. Consultation Calls

- Participate in monthly virtual consultation calls with SPARCS Master Trainers during the school year following the in-person training
- These calls will include review and discussion of participant-led groups and focused guidance on delivery of SPARCS treatment content
- ***Attend a minimum of 7 out of 9 scheduled 60-minute*** consultation calls.
  - At least 45 minutes of each call must be attended for it to count toward this requirement.
- Actively participate in each call by:
  - Providing an update on your site
  - Keeping cameras on
  - Engaging & contributing in discussion and actively listening

Training Program & Participant Expectations

TRAINING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR FULL COMPLETION

3. Implementation Calls

- ***Attend a minimum of 14 scheduled implementation meetings*** with your site's assigned implementation lead.
- The first call will occur before the first training session and then the meetings will be set according to team needs on a bi-weekly to monthly basis.
- Implementation calls are different and separate than the monthly consultation calls. The implementation lead provides guidance and support to school staff and clinicians to help them with the practicalities of implementing SPARCS with fidelity, strengthening student identification and referral systems, and sustaining the program over time.

4. Group Implementation Requirements

- ***Begin SPARCS groups by the second training*** in September
- Clinicians will conduct ***baseline & discharge assessments***
- Complete ***two SPARCS groups*** during the 2026–2027 school year
- ***Track participant attendance*** for each group session
- ***Submit monthly attendance data*** to TCTY by the 5th of each month
- School sites will ***submit pre and post assessment packets*** to TCTY
- ***Submit satisfaction surveys*** to TCTY

project SPARCS

SPARCS Facilitator Teams

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO ATTEND THE TRAINING

SPARCS is an empirically-supported *clinical trauma therapy* group designed to improve the emotional, social, academic, and behavioral functioning of adolescents exposed to trauma and chronic stress.

This project is a community-school collaboration. We are bringing together community clinicians with school partners to provide this clinical treatment in schools. SPARCS Facilitator Teams will be made up of a ***Clinician Facilitator and Co-Facilitators***:

- Clinician Facilitators must hold a clinical license to provide therapy
- Co-Facilitators can be case workers, social workers, school counselors, nurses, teachers, or interventionalists working with youth in schools, human service centers, or treatment programs

CLINICIAN

- Attend two learning sessions (2 days each)
- Attend 7 of 9 monthly Consultation Calls with SPARCS trainer
- Attend site specific Implementation Calls (bi-weekly to monthly)
- Lead a minimum of 2 SPARCS groups
- Administer Clinical Assessments and review trauma history
- Lead weekly SPARCS group
- Lead clinical content, especially more difficult components that deal with stress, trauma and safety
- Respond to any crisis/safety issues with clients and assess risk
- Safety plan with clients
- Communicate clinical needs with co-facilitators
- Complete clinical paperwork per agency policy (consents, treatment plan, and clinical notes)
- Collect and submit data to TCTY including attendance, satisfaction surveys and assessments

CO-FACILITATOR

- Attend two learning sessions (2 days each)
- Attend 7 of 9 monthly Consultation Calls with SPARCS trainer
- Attend site specific Implementation Calls (bi-weekly to monthly)
- Co-facilitate a minimum of 2 SPARCS groups
- Help Clinician administer surveys and questionnaires
- Work with school staff to identify and recruit students for group
- Work with caregivers to ensure school paperwork and consents for therapy group are completed
- After risk is assessed, help with safety issues per school policy
- Support weekly SPARCS group
- Communicate with clinicians about student issues/progress/updates
- Collect and submit data to TCTY including attendance, satisfaction surveys and assessments

SPARCS Year 1 Timeline

1. Acceptance Notification
April, 2026

Once the acceptance notification is received, sites will need to confirm the names and contact information of clinicians and co-facilitators. Sites team will then register for SPARCS training dates.

2. Project SPARCS Kickoff Meeting
May, 2026

Administrators & SPARCS site teams meet with the Master SPARCS Trainer & Implementation Lead and discuss the expectations and responsibilities of Project SPARCS.

3. Implementation Calls Begin
July, 2026

Site team members are required to participate in 14 calls with their Implementation Lead, with the first call taking place before the Session 1 training. Calls will continue after session 1 and start off every two weeks and progress to monthly the first year.

4. Session 1 In-Person Training
July 29 & 30, 2026

SPARCS site teams will attend the 1st learning session in Bismarck. The team will be provided with training materials, a SPARCS Kit, and all necessary supplies for each of the 16 sessions.

5. Consultation Calls Begin
August, 2026

Each team member is required to attend at least 7 monthly consultation calls with National Trainers.

6. First Group Begins
September, 2026

SPARCS site teams are expected to start their first group before session 2. During the first session, site clinicians will conduct baseline assessments. These assessments, along with tracking data, must be submitted to TCTY by the 5th of each month.

7. Session 2 In-Person Training
September 17 & 18, 2026

Site teams will attend the 2nd learning session in Bismarck.

8. Second Group Planning
December, 2026

Site teams will begin preparations for the 2nd group, including gathering refill supplies and identifying students to participate.

9. Complete First Group
January, 2027

Graduate the first group. Team clinicians will complete discharge assessments. Please ensure all discharge data is submitted to TCTY promptly.

10. Second Group Begins
January, 2027

SPARCS site teams are expected to start a second group. During the first session, site clinicians will conduct baseline assessments. These assessments, along with tracking data, must be submitted to TCTY.

11. Work on Sustainability for Year 2
April, 2027

Administrators & SPARCS site teams meet with Project SPARCS Director and the Site Implementation Lead and discuss the sustainability of the site's SPARCS program.

12. Second Group Ends
May, 2027

Graduate the second group. Team clinicians will complete discharge assessments. Please ensure all discharge data is submitted to TCTY promptly.

Training Logistics

DATES & TIMES

July 29th & 30th, 2026

Registration & Breakfast: 8:00-8:15 AM

Training: 8:15 AM - 4:30 PM

September 17th & 18th, 2026

Breakfast: 8:00-8:15 AM

Training: 8:15 AM - 4:30 PM

LOCATION

University of Mary

7500 University Drive

Bismarck, ND 58504

MEALS & SNACKS

A light breakfast, lunch, and snacks will be provided each day.

COST

Tuition for this training, lodging, and training day meals are covered by funding from ND SOC Grant and the ND Department of Health & Human Services Behavioral Health Division. However, participants and their agencies will be responsible for all transportation expenses and any meals not otherwise covered by the program.

If you need a scholarship to help cover these expenses, please contact TCTY.

TRAINING STIPENDS

School Professionals (not on contract) will be compensated for 16 hours of training time at $35/hour for the first training.

Private practice clinicians (not on contract) will be compensated for 16 hours of training time at $50/hour.

ACCOMODATION

TCTY will cover lodging at the Hampton Inn & Suites. If lodging is needed, email TCTY at tcty@sanfordhealth.org by June 15th so arrangements can be made on your behalf.

TCTY SPARCS Team

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State Partners

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Kelli Ulberg
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kulberg@nd.gov

SPARCS National Trainers

Eboni Lanier Jones, LCSW

Eboni Lanier is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in North Carolina with over 20 years of experience supporting children who have faced trauma. She provides mental health care using several proven treatment models, including TF-CBT, CPT, CRM, and SPARCS. As a Master Trainer in SPARCS, she trains clinicians across North Carolina and the country in schools, residential programs, and juvenile justice settings. Her work focuses on helping clinicians use effective treatment models and build their confidence as they support children and families. She is also certified in the Community Resiliency Model and teaches skills that help people strengthen their natural resiliency.

Donna Newberne, LCMHCS

Donna B. Newberne is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Supervisor and Clinic Director at the Center for Child and Family Health in Durham, NC. With over 20 years of experience, she supports children and families impacted by trauma and has supervised clinicians for more than 14 years. She provides outpatient services, guides a multi-disciplinary team, and serves as a Master Trainer for SPARCS, training hundreds nationwide. Donna enjoys helping adolescents build stronger coping and communication skills, supporting future mental health professionals, and spending time with loved ones, reading, cooking, and traveling in her RV.

Next Steps

TO APPLY

Via Desktop, Click Link:

CLICK HERE!

Via Mobile Device, Scan QR Code:

DATES TO REMEMBER

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CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

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TCTY@SanfordHealth.org

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