

# Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

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[See table of contents](#)

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## Article abstract

In order to undertake liberatory memory work, engage effectively with communities and individuals, and centre people rather than records in their work, archival organizations must be aware of trauma and its effects. This article introduces the concept of trauma-informed practice to archives and other memory organizations. Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach for organizations that acknowledges the pervasiveness of trauma and the risk and potential for people to be retraumatized through engagement with organizations such as archives and seeks to minimize triggers and negative interactions. It provides a framework of safety and offers a model of collaboration and empowerment that recognizes and centres the expertise of the individuals and communities documented within the records held in archives. Trauma-informed practice also provides a way for archivists to practically implement many of the ideas discussed in the literature, including liberatory memory work, radical empathy, and participatory co-design. This article proposes several areas where a trauma-informed approach may be useful in archives and may lead to trauma-informed archival practice that provides better outcomes for all: users, staff, and memory organizations in general. Applying trauma-informed archival practice is multidimensional. It requires the comprehensive review of archival practice, theory, and processes and the consideration of the specific needs of individual memory organizations and the people who interact with them. Each organization should implement trauma-informed practice in the way that will achieve outcomes appropriate for its own context. These outcomes can include recognizing and acknowledging past wrongs, ensuring safety for archives users and staff, empowering communities documented in archives, and using archives for justice and healing.

# Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment<sup>1</sup>

## Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

KIRSTEN WRIGHT AND NICOLA LAURENT

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**ABSTRACT** In order to undertake liberatory memory work, engage effectively with communities and individuals, and centre people rather than records in their work, archival organizations must be aware of trauma and its effects. This article introduces the concept of trauma-informed practice to archives and other memory organizations. Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach for organizations that acknowledges the pervasiveness of trauma and the risk and potential for people to be retraumatized through engagement with organizations such as archives and seeks to minimize triggers and negative interactions. It provides a framework of safety and offers a model of collaboration and empowerment that recognizes and centres the expertise of the individuals and communities documented within the records held in archives. Trauma-informed practice also provides a way for archivists to practically implement many of the ideas discussed in the literature, including liberatory memory work, radical empathy, and participatory co-design. This article proposes several areas where a trauma-informed approach may be useful in archives and may lead to trauma-informed archival practice that provides better outcomes for all: users, staff, and memory organizations in general. Applying trauma-informed archival practice is multidimensional. It requires the comprehensive review of archival practice, theory, and processes and the consideration of the specific needs of individual memory organizations and the people who interact with them. Each organization should implement trauma-informed practice in the way that will achieve outcomes appropriate for its own context. These out

<sup>1</sup> The authors thank Dr. Cate O'Neill for her comments on an earlier draft of this article, and two anonymous reviewers whose comments greatly helped us refine the article.

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**RÉSUMÉ** Pour entreprendre un travail de mémoire libérateur, s'engager réellement auprès des communautés et des individus, et placer les gens au centre de leur travail plutôt que leurs documents, les archives doivent être conscientes des traumatismes et de leurs effets. Cet article amène le concept d'une approche tenant compte des traumatismes pour les archives et les autres organismes de mémoire. L'approche tenant compte des traumatismes est une approche fondée sur les forces pour les organismes qui reconnaissent le caractère envahissant des traumatismes ainsi que le risque et le potentiel pour les gens d'être traumatisés à la suite de leur implication auprès des archives et qui cherchent à minimiser les déclencheurs et les interactions négatives. Elle fournit un cadre sécuritaire et offre un modèle de collaboration et d'émancipation qui reconnaît et met de l'avant l'expertise des individus et des communautés documentées dans les archives. L'approche tenant compte des traumatismes fournit également une façon pour les archivistes de mettre en pratique de nombreuses idées mises de l'avant dans la littérature, notamment le travail de mémoire libérateur, l'empathie radicale, et la co-création participative. Cet article propose plusieurs secteurs où une approche tenant compte des traumatismes pourrait être utile dans les archives et pourrait mener à des pratiques archivistiques tenant compte des traumatismes, lesquelles entraînent des améliorations pour tous: les utilisateurs, les employés et les organisations de mémoire de manière générale. La mise en œuvre d'une pratique archivistique tenant compte des traumatismes est pluridimensionnelle. Elle requiert une révision complète des pratiques, théories et processus archivistiques et une considération des besoins particuliers à chacune des institutions de mémoire et aux individus qui interagissent avec elles. Chaque organisation devrait mettre en œuvre une pratique tenant compte des traumatismes de la façon qui lui convient pour atteindre ses propres objectifs. Ces objectifs peuvent être, entre autres, de reconnaître et admettre des torts passés, de garantir la sécurité pour les utilisateurs et les employés des archives, de redonner le pouvoir aux communautés documentées dans les archives, et d'utiliser les archives pour la justice et la guérison.

Trauma exists everywhere. It is embedded within archives, the archival profession, and archival practices. Trauma-informed archival practice provides a framework for responding to the trauma within archives and enacting change.

For archival organizations to provide the best service for their users, and safe environments for their staff, they must be aware of trauma and its effects. Archives have long been aware of the potentially traumatizing records within their collections, but only recently have the effects of access and processing on staff and users become apparent. Now, while discussions of trauma are so prevalent in society, is a pivotal and necessary moment for archives to recognize and respond to the trauma in archives. The traumas many people are currently experiencing are in addition to other traumas, many of which result from living in and under a settler-colonial, capitalist, patriarchal state.

We (the authors) want to acknowledge that even having the space to write an article about trauma and trauma-informed practice at this current time<sup>2</sup> speaks to our own privilege and to the benefits we receive from this colonial, capitalist society as white, middle class, tertiary-educated women with full-time (albeit contracted) work.<sup>3</sup> We want to acknowledge that not everyone will, can, or should have the capacity to respond and to enact this practice.

Archives both create and document trauma. Records can provide evidence of human rights abuses, discriminatory and damaging government policies, and the surveillance and control of citizens, among other issues. People accessing these records, and those processing and providing access to them, may be affected by their contents – particularly if the records document themselves, their families, or their communities. People may also be traumatized by the ways organizations or individuals provide access to these records; the ways the records have been arranged and described; and the information withheld from the records through redaction or other processes related to third-party privacy.

2 This article was written in 2020, which saw a global pandemic, devastating natural disasters including bushfires across Australia and the United States, Black Lives Matter demonstrations across the world following the death of George Floyd (and many others) at the hands of police, and the surfacing of trauma on a global scale.

3 We are both white settlers with European heritage, living and working on the unceded and stolen lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, in what is now known as Victoria, Australia. We work on the Find and Connect web resource ([www.findandconnect.gov.au](http://www.findandconnect.gov.au)), which provides information about the history of out-of-home "care" in Australia, and it is through working with people who grew up in out-of-home "care," and the support services in this area, that we learned about trauma-informed practice.

As Gould and Harris discuss, key to undertaking liberatory memory work is understanding the combined roles of trauma, accountability, and healing to work toward justice.<sup>4</sup> If archival work is not liberatory, it may become “oppressive or irrelevant,”<sup>5</sup> uphold dominant power structures, and lead to further marginalization and disenfranchisement. Having a greater understanding of the effects of trauma and of how to prevent or address retraumatization and working with people to lead to their empowerment are key tenets of trauma-informed practice. Memory organizations can use trauma-informed practice to do liberatory memory work, engaging with past wrongs, and working with affected communities to move toward healing.

Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach (as opposed to a deficit discourse<sup>6</sup>) that recognizes that trauma has life-long and serious effects, which may be at the centre of difficult interactions people have with organizations or services. Trauma-informed practice seeks to reduce the likelihood of stressful interactions and retraumatization by implementing a framework that is appropriate to the needs of trauma survivors. The principles of trauma-informed practice – safety, trust and transparency, choice, collaboration, and empowerment – can be used to improve services and processes across organizations, regardless of what work these organizations do. While trauma-informed practice started in mental health and related fields, it is now recognized as a useful framework across a variety of professions and situations.<sup>7</sup>

This article proposes a model of trauma-informed practice for archives and other memory institutions. This practice enables organizations to be more aware of the needs of all staff, volunteers, donors, and users of their collections,<sup>8</sup>

4 Chandre Gould and Verne Harris, “Memory for Justice” (n.p.: Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2014), 4, [https://www.nelsonmandela.org/uploads/files/MEMORY\\_FOR\\_JUSTICE\\_2014v2.pdf](https://www.nelsonmandela.org/uploads/files/MEMORY_FOR_JUSTICE_2014v2.pdf).

5 Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris, “Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 285, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435625>.

6 William Fogarty, Melissa Lovell, Juleigh Langenberg, and Mary-Jane Heron, “Deficit Discourse and Strengths-Based Approaches: Changing the Narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing” (n.p.: The Lowitja Institute & National Centre for Indigenous Studies, 2018), <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/resources/Cultural-and-social-determinants/racism/deficit-discourse-strengths-based>.

7 For example, a trauma-informed approach was used by Australia’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 1, Our Inquiry* (Sydney, NSW: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), 24, 272, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/our-inquiry>.

8 In this article, we have used the term users to refer to all those who engage with archives as external clients,

ensuring that everyone connected to the archives remains as safe as possible and providing techniques and options for responding if people do not feel safe. We suggest that it can be used to implement the ideas and concepts around liberatory memory work, archival justice, and people-centred archives and to change how the archival profession thinks – not only about archives but also about the archival work being done.

Trauma-informed archival practice provides a framework for assessing and critically examining the ways the archival profession may be failing to meet the needs of users or staff, and it offers practical actions to take to provide a better service for everyone. This in turn means that archives and other memory organizations can work toward the aims of liberation, justice, and healing, which are essential to all.

## What Is Trauma?

Trauma<sup>9</sup> is an emotional response to a deeply distressing event or series of events; it may lead people to feel helpless and overwhelmed, diminish or alter their sense of self, and reduce their ability to respond to challenges or other issues they encounter.<sup>10</sup> Particularly if the trauma is experienced in childhood,

whether they identify as researchers, students, donors, or others. Likewise, we have used the word *staff* to refer to all who work within archival organizations, including staff, volunteers, and students.

- 9 This article focuses on concepts of *trauma* and *trauma-informed practice* to frame our discussion. We are using these words and concepts as they are commonly used, so readers can identify what is being covered and the terms to use if they want to look for further resources. However, it is important to acknowledge that framing issues in terms of trauma is not what some people want. Identifying someone as traumatized may have negative connotations and may result in people being pathologized and in medical, rather than social, frameworks being used. For a discussion of social and medical models of trauma, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures, Series Q* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 44–48. Others have objected to the use of *trauma-informed* because they feel it is too general and may mean that the people they are interacting with still do not have a good understanding of their unique experiences. There are specific histories and traumas relating to the communities documented in records held by different archives, and it is important that those working with the records and the communities understand these histories. Using terms like *trauma* and *trauma-informed* may not be the best way to describe these issues within an archival setting, and it may not adequately address the needs of the communities documented in the records. We hope that there will be more discussion about what these ideas mean within the archival profession and that more specific and useful language will be developed in time.
- 10 Elizabeth K. Hopper, Ellen L. Bassuk, and Jeffrey Olivet, “Shelter from the Storm: Trauma-Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings,” *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal* 3, no. 2 (2010): 80–100.

the effects can be long lasting and complex.<sup>11</sup>

Trauma may be experienced by individuals and by communities. If they are not provided with opportunities to heal from their trauma, individuals or communities may also pass it on to others around them, leading to intergenerational trauma.<sup>12</sup>

Situations that may result in trauma are extremely varied, as are people's reactions to these. Events do not need to threaten life or safety, or result in physical harm, to cause ongoing and serious traumatic effects. The trauma someone experiences after being directly involved in a traumatic event is "defined by the sensory impressions the person receives at the time of the traumatic experience."<sup>13</sup> These people may later experience flashbacks or triggered responses, which cause them to relive the traumatic event(s) and which may make it difficult for them to heal.

In contrast, vicarious or secondary trauma<sup>14</sup> is the trauma experienced by those who, while they are not present at a traumatic event, are exposed to traumatic material or otherwise exposed by working with survivors of trauma. As Gordon notes, "the traumatic content takes the form of the information provided and its meaning."<sup>15</sup>

A key risk factor for vicarious trauma is the cumulative effect of exposure: the more someone is exposed, the more vulnerable they become.<sup>16</sup> The effects

11 Jenna Bateman, Corinne Henderson, and Cathy Kezelman, "Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: Towards a Cultural Shift in Policy Reform across Mental Health and Human Services in Australia, a National Strategic Direction" (position paper and recommendations of the National Trauma-Informed Care and Practice Advisory Working Group, Mental Health Coordinating Council, Rozelle, NSW, 2013), 8, [https://www.mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ticp\\_awg\\_position\\_paper\\_\\_v\\_44\\_final\\_\\_07\\_11\\_13-1.pdf](https://www.mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ticp_awg_position_paper__v_44_final__07_11_13-1.pdf).

12 The Healing Foundation, "Intergenerational Trauma," *Healing Foundation* (blog), 2018, <https://healingfoundation.org.au/intergenerational-trauma/>; Rob Gordon, "Thirty Years of Trauma Work: Clarifying and Broadening the Consequences of Trauma," *Psychotherapy in Australia* 13, no. 3 (2007): 17; Bateman, Henderson, and Kezelman, "Trauma-Informed Care and Practice," 16.

13 Gordon, "Thirty Years of Trauma Work," 15.

14 While the terms *vicarious trauma* and *secondary trauma stress* were coined at different times, they are now used mostly interchangeably. In this article, we will use the term *vicarious trauma* to refer to this type of indirect trauma, which archives workers may experience. See for example Tend Academy, "Defining Vicarious Trauma and Secondary Traumatic Stress," Tend, 2020, <https://www.tendacademy.ca/resources/defining-vicarious-trauma-and-secondary-traumatic-stress/>.

15 Gordon, "Thirty Years of Trauma Work," 15. Note that Gordon discusses informational trauma, which, in this context, is the same as vicarious trauma.

16 Michelle Noon in Australian Society of Archivists, "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives: Online Course," Australian Society of Archivists, 2020, <https://www.archivists.org.au/events/event/a-trauma-informed-approach-to-managing-archives>.

of vicarious trauma may also be amplified for people who do not have support or a way to manage their symptoms. Vicarious trauma in the workplace is common among first responders and those working in mental health or allied fields; however, it is now recognized that vicarious trauma can be experienced by anyone – including archivists and other memory workers.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of how the trauma is caused, people may experience symptoms – emotional, physical, or psychological – as a result.<sup>18</sup> How and when people may experience symptoms of trauma varies substantially from person to person. People may also develop “extreme coping strategies” to deal with their symptoms of trauma.<sup>19</sup> It is now understood that trauma is pervasive and widespread; as much as 90 percent of the population is estimated to have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives.<sup>20</sup>

- 17 Blue Knot Foundation, “Vicarious Trauma,” Blue Knot Foundation, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Resources/Information/Understanding-terms-trauma-and-abuse/What-is-Vicarious-Trauma>; Zoe Morrison, “‘Feeling Heavy’: Vicarious Trauma and Other Issues Facing Those Who Work in the Sexual Assault Field,” *ACSSA Wrap: Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault* 4 (September 2007), <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/archived/4058>; Columbia Journalism School, “Self-Study Unit 1: Journalism and Trauma,” Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, February 5, 2009, <https://dartcenter.org/resources/self-study-unit-1-journalism-trauma>; Nicola Laurent and Michaela Hart, “Emotional Labour and Archival Practice – Reflection,” *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists* 15 (2018): 13-22.
- 18 Blue Knot Foundation, “Complex Trauma and Mental Health,” Blue Knot Foundation, 2018, <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Resources/Information/Understanding-abuse-and-trauma/What-is-complex-trauma/Complex-Trauma-and-mental-health>; Laurie Ann Perlman and Lisa McKay, *Understanding and Addressing Vicarious Trauma* (Pasadena, CA: Headington Institute, 2008), [https://web.archive.org/web/20200807113207/https://www.headington-institute.org/files/vtmoduletemplate2\\_ready\\_v2\\_85791.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20200807113207/https://www.headington-institute.org/files/vtmoduletemplate2_ready_v2_85791.pdf); Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*, Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, no. 57 (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207201/>.
- 19 Bateman, Henderson, and Kezelman, “Trauma-Informed Care and Practice,” 9.
- 20 Roger Fallot and Maxine Harris, *Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care (CCTIC): A Self-Assessment and Planning Protocol* (Washington, DC: Community Connections, 2009), <https://www.theannainstitute.org/CCTICSELFASSPP.pdf>.



## Trauma-Informed Archives Are People-Centred Archives

Ideas of centring people and relationships (rather than records) and recognizing all powers and positionalities involved in archives are not new. We suggest that trauma-informed archives can also centre the needs of the individuals and communities most affected by the records.

There has long been acknowledgement and discussion in the literature about the need to shift the focus in archives away from records and custodians and toward the people documented in the records. The recognition of archives' power and their potential for trauma – and the need to shift that power to those whose lived experiences are recorded in, or excluded from, the records – has been a key element of these discussions. This can be seen across the archival literature, in a variety of contexts.

The idea of archives as sites of power – power that is continually “negotiated, contested, confirmed”<sup>21</sup> – has been a mainstay of the literature for some time. Much has also been written about the need for archives and archivists to give up some of their power and work in a more open and collaborative way.<sup>22</sup> The principles of trauma-informed practice resonate strongly in these discussions.

Those working with community archives have long recognized that key archival concepts (such as provenance) must be re-examined to centre the subjects of the records, not just the creators or custodians of the records.<sup>23</sup>

- 21 Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628>.
- 22 See, for example, Gould and Harris, “Memory for Justice”; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 171–85, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435620>; Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009); Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, Eric Ketelaar, Melissa Castan, and Lynette Russell, “Resetting Relationships: Archives and Indigenous Human Rights in Australia,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 39, no. 1 (2011): 107–44, <https://publications.archivists.org.au/index.php/asa/article/view/10125>; Jessica Tai, “Cultural Humility as a Framework for Anti-Oppressive Archival Description,” in “Radical Empathy in Archival Practice,” ed. Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O’Neill, and Holly Smith, special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3 (2020), <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/120/75>; Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 221–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435623>.
- 23 Jeannette Bastian, “Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Postcustodial Role for a New Century,” *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 76–93; Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9, no. 1–2 (2009): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-009-9105-2>.

Additionally, participatory and co-design approaches to records frameworks and systems are now being explored.<sup>24</sup>

We must also acknowledge, and hold up as exemplars, the long-standing advocacy and work around Indigenous access to records and archives. This work has highlighted and discussed the need for Indigenous communities to be at the centre of decisions around who can appropriately hold and provide access to records. Additionally, it has been recognized how Indigenous knowledges and reinterpretations of records held in institutions can lead to community empowerment and healing; as well as the need for archival organizations to genuinely and collaboratively engage with the Indigenous communities recorded in their collections.<sup>25</sup> Important work has also been done in relation to Indigenous agency and self-determination and in recognizing Indigenous knowledges and rights to the records held by institutions.<sup>26</sup>

- 24 Gregory Rolan, Joanne Evans, Rhiannon Abeling, Aedan Brittain, Elizabeth Constable, Matthew Kelemen, and Ella Roberts, "Voice, Agency, and Equity: Deep Community Collaboration in Record-Keeping Research," *Information Research* 24, no. 3 (2019), <http://informationr.net/ir/24-3/trails/trails1803.html>; Elizabeth Shepherd, Victoria Hoyle, Elizabeth Lomas, Andrew Flinn, and Anna Sexton, "Towards a Human-Centred Participatory Approach to Child Social Care Recordkeeping," *Archival Science* 20, no. 4 (2020): 307–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09338-9>.
- 25 Some examples are Sue McKemish, Shannon Faulkhead, and Lynette Russell, "Distrust in the Archive: Reconciling Records," *Archival Science* 11, no. 3–4 (2011): 211–39, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-011-9153-2>; Brett Loughheed, Ry Moran, and Camille Callison, "Reconciliation through Description: Using Metadata to Realize the Vision of the National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 5–6 (2015): 596–614, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2015.1008718>; Martin Nakata and Marcia Langton, eds., *Australian Indigenous Knowledge and Libraries* (Sydney: University of Technology Sydney ePress, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.5130/978-0-9802840-1-0>; Jennifer R. O'Neal, "'The Right to Know': Decolonizing Native American Archives," *Journal of Western Archives* 6, no. 1 (2015), <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol6/iss1/2>; First Archivist Circle, "Protocols for Native American Archival Materials," Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, 2007, <https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN), "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services," ATSILIRN, 2012, <https://atsilirn.aiatsis.gov.au/protocols.php>; Evelyn Wareham, "'Our Own Identity, Our Own Taonga, Our Own Self Coming Back': Indigenous Voices in New Zealand Record-Keeping," *Archivaria* 52 (Spring 2001): 26–46; Shannon Faulkhead, "Negotiated Methodologies," in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, ed. Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemish, and Andrew J. Lau (Clayton, VIC: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 479–515, <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/31429>; Isabel S. Schellnack-Kelly, "Decolonising the Archives: Languages as Enablers and Barriers to Accessing Public Archives in South Africa," *Archives and Manuscripts* 48, no. 3 (2020): 291–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2020.1815064>.
- 26 Kirsten Thorpe, "Transformative Praxis-Building Spaces for Indigenous Self-Determination in Libraries and Archives," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, January 23, 2019, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2019/transformative-praxis/>; Mick Gooda, "The Practical Power of Human Rights: How International Human Rights Standards Can Inform Archival and Record Keeping Practices," *Archival Science* 12, no. 2 (2012): 141–50,

The introduction of affect theory to archives has been accompanied by a move to recognize the emotional and personal aspects of archival work and their effects on our decisions and ability to achieve a more just archival practice.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, Caswell and Cifor, in discussing radical empathy and feminist ethics of care in archives, have highlighted the need to centre affective care “about and for and with subjects.”<sup>28</sup> Others have expanded upon these concepts by applying and extending them in different scenarios.<sup>29</sup>

Empowering people and communities is at the heart of liberatory memory work, which “is premised on the need to work with the past, to insist on accountability, to acknowledge and address pain and trauma, and to reveal hidden dimensions of human rights violations.”<sup>30</sup> Enacting liberatory memory work

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-011-9166-x>; McKemish et al., “Resetting Relationships”; J.J. Ghaddar, “The Spectre in the Archive: Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Archival Memory,” *Archivaria* 82 (Fall 2016): 3–26; Livia Iacovino, “Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Records of Indigenous Australian Communities: A Participant Relationship Model of Rights and Responsibilities,” *Archival Science* 10, no. 4 (2010): 353–72, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-010-9120-3>; Sandra Littletree, Miranda Belarde-Lewis, and Marisa Duarte, “Centering Relationality: A Conceptual Model to Advance Indigenous Knowledge Organization Practices,” *Knowledge Organization* 47, no. 5 (2020): 410–26; International Council on Archives Expert Group on Indigenous Matters, “Tandanya Adelaide Declaration” (ICA Indigenous Matters Summit, Adelaide, South Australia, October 25, 2019), <https://www.ica.org/en/icanaa-indigenous-matters-summit>; Jennifer R. O’Neal, “From Time Immemorial: Centering Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Ways of Knowing in the Archival Paradigm,” in *Afterlives of Indigenous Archives: Essays in Honor of The Occom Circle*, ed. Ivy Schweitzer and Gordon Henry (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2019), 45–59, <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/facoa/3983/>.

- 27 Marika Cifor, “Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 7–31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9261-5>; Marika Cifor and Anne J. Gilliland, “Affect and the Archive, Archives and Their Affects: An Introduction to the Special Issue,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9263-3>; Anne J. Gilliland, “Moving Past: Probing the Agency and Affect of Recordkeeping in Individual and Community Lives in Post-Conflict Croatia,” *Archival Science* 14, no. 3 (2014): 249–74, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9231-3>; Jennifer Douglas and Allison Mills, “From the Sidelines to the Center: Reconsidering the Potential of the Personal in Archives,” *Archival Science* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 257–77, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9295-6>.
- 28 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives,” *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23–43.
- 29 Holly A. Smith, “Radical Love: Documenting Underrepresented Communities Using Principles of Radical Empathy,” *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists* 15 (2018): 10, [http://www.ncarchivists.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/jsnca\\_vol15\\_smith.pdf](http://www.ncarchivists.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/jsnca_vol15_smith.pdf); Gina Watts, “Applying Radical Empathy to Women’s March Documentation Efforts: A Reflection Exercise,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 45, no. 3 (2017): 191–201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2017.1373361>; James Lowry, “Radical Empathy, the Imaginary and Affect in (Post)Colonial Records: How to Break out of International Stalemates on Displaced Archives,” *Archival Science* 19, no. 2 (2019): 185–203, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09305-z>.
- 30 Gould and Harris, “Memory for Justice.”

“supports resilience, healing, and justice.”<sup>31</sup> It also acknowledges the emotional aspects of the work and the risk of vicarious trauma for archivists and other memory workers.<sup>32</sup>

The literature is clear about the need to centre people and relationships – for archivists and archival organizations to give up their power and to collaborate with communities. However, it appears that many archives’ day-to-day practices need to adapt in order to meet these ideals. While there are great initiatives and examples of collaborative work, co-design, and true partnerships, these often occur only on specific projects or with particular types of records, rather than as part of a wholesale shift across the way archives work, engage with communities, or provide access.<sup>33</sup> This must change.

For archives workers, there have also been important discussions about the demographics of the archival profession. People outside dominant groups – including disabled, LGBTIQ+, Indigenous, First Nations, and Black people, and people of colour – have spoken out about feeling unsafe and/or unsupported when working in archives.<sup>34</sup> They have shared the significant levels of emotional

31 Gabriel Daniel Solis, “Documenting State Violence: (Symbolic) Annihilation and Archives of Survival,” *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 2, no. 1 (November 29, 2018): 7, <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.28>.

32 Gould and Harris, “Memory for Justice.”

33 It is important to note, though, that there are many examples of excellent practice. See, for example, Kimberly Christen, “Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation,” *American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 185–210, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.74.1.4233nv6nv6428521>; Documenting the Now, “Documenting the Now,” DocNow, 2020, <https://www.docnow.io/>; Lae’l Hughes-Watkins, “Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, article 6 (2018), <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol5/iss1/6>; McKemish, Faulkhead, and Russell, “Distrust in the Archive”; The University of Texas at Austin, “Human Rights Documentation Initiative (HRDI),” University of Texas Libraries, 2020, <http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/hrdi>; Genevieve Weber, “Gratitude in the Archives,” *Garland Magazine*, December 1, 2019, <https://garlandmag.com/article/gratitude-in-the-archives/>.

34 Kirsten Thorpe, “Ethics, Indigenous Cultural Safety and the Archives,” *Archifacts*, no. 2 (2018): 33–47; Kirsty Fife and Hannah Henthorn, “Marginalised in the UK Archive Sector” (presentation, Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland Annual Conference, Manchester, UK, August 31, 2017), <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1amC986jYrFa-Umbt8gJSEFim32l47XVOmklzo-p4Y/edit>; Nathan Sentance, “Diversity Means Disruption,” *Archival Decolonist* [-o-] (blog), September 27, 2019, <https://archivaldecolonist.com/2019/09/27/diversity-means-disruption-2/>; Jass Thethi, “Creating Spaces for People like Me in Special Collections,” *Intersectional GLAM* (blog), May 20, 2019, <https://intersectionalglam.org/2019/05/20/creating-spaces-for-people-like-me-in-special-collections/>; Kirsten Thorpe, “The Dangers of Libraries and Archives for Indigenous Australian Workers: Investigating the Question of Indigenous Cultural Safety,” *IFLA Journal*, January 20, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035220987574>.

labour they have had to expend and the challenges they have experienced.<sup>35</sup> This has led some to form their own safe spaces of support at conferences, events, and online,<sup>36</sup> and some have left the profession.<sup>37</sup> This is a significant and critical issue that the sector must come to terms with if it is serious about overcoming past wrongs and undertaking liberatory memory work.<sup>38</sup>

Much has been written about how and why organizations acquire new materials, again with an emphasis on centring the people to whom the materials relate. Institutions' collecting can be driven by many factors, including the need to demonstrate their relevance or to appeal to funders, rather than because the materials are a good fit for the organization.

Concerns about motivations for collecting were raised in 2020, when many memory institutions issued call-outs asking people to send them material so they could build "COVID collections." This is problematic, as Tansey discusses, asking why so many libraries and archives feel compelled to "go out and document every traumatic event that comes along."<sup>39</sup> Collection call-outs of this nature commonly result in collections that do not represent the totality of people's experiences (insofar as any collection can represent a full experience).<sup>40</sup> Additionally, it is unclear what rights (if any) the people who contribute to these collections have to the material.

35 Chaitra Powell, Holly Smith, Shaneer' Murrain, and Skyla Hearn, "This [Black] Woman's Work: Exploring Archival Projects That Embrace the Identity of the Memory Worker," *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.25>; Thorpe, "Transformative Praxis-Building Spaces for Indigenous Self-Determination in Libraries and Archives."

36 See, for example, Bergis Jules, "Confronting Our Failure of Care Around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives," *On Archivy*, November 12, 2016, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/confronting-our-failure-of-care-around-the-legacies-of-marginalized-people-in-the-archives-dc4180397280>; We Here official website, accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.wehere.space>; Stefanie Martin, Tamara Rayan, and Moska Rokay, "45 Years Later: The First BIPOC Forum at ACA," *Off the Record* 36, no. 3 (2020).

37 Jarrett Drake, "I'm Leaving the Archival Profession: It's Better This Way," *On Archivy*, June 26, 2017, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/im-leaving-the-archival-profession-it-s-better-this-way-ed631c6d72fe>.

38 Renee Saucier, Stefanie Martin, Moska Rokay, and Tomoko Shida, "Dismantling White Supremacy in GLAMs and GLAM Education [Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums]," *The IJournal* 4, no. 3 (2019): 11–20, <https://thejournal.ca/index.php/ijournal/article/download/33075/25442>.

39 Eira Tansey, "No One Owes Their Trauma to Archivists, or, the Commodification of Contemporaneous Collecting," *Eira Tansey* (blog), June 5, 2020, <http://eiratansey.com/2020/06/05/no-one-owes-their-trauma-to-archivists-or-the-commodification-of-contemporaneous-collecting/>; Cvetkovich also notes that "trauma histories are frequently taken up as national urgencies." *An Archive of Feelings*, 36.

40 Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 63–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631>.

Institutions' decisions about what they do and do not collect go far beyond merely choosing not to collect the records of particular societal moments and, again, point to memory institutions' continuing role in upholding colonialism, patriarchy, and whiteness through their collecting practices.<sup>41</sup>

It is also important for collecting organizations to be ethical in terms of what and how they collect and to ensure that the collecting practice itself does not lead to greater harm for the people involved.<sup>42</sup> As Collier et al. highlight, "ethical memory work" must centre and protect the people at the core of the issue being documented.<sup>43</sup> This again points to the need for frameworks; relationships; and a deep consideration of trauma, ethics, and cultural requirements on the part of collecting organizations.<sup>44</sup>

Caswell also reminds us not to forget the positionality of the archivist in this process – in terms of both the skills and lived experiences individual archivists can bring to the acquisition process and also the perspectives they bring in determining what should be acquired.<sup>45</sup>

Utilizing a framework of trauma-informed practice will not suddenly resolve the systematic inequalities, unethical practices, and injustices within the archives profession. However, it will mean acknowledging wrongs perpetrated on people from marginalized groups, working to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all workers, and recognizing and utilizing staff positionalities and strengths.

41 Rose Barrowcliffe, "#BlackLivesMatter and Archives in Australia," *Indigenous Archives Collective* (blog), June 17, 2020, <https://indigenearchives.net/2020/06/17/blacklivesmatter-and-archives-in-australia/>; Kelvin L. White, "Race and Culture," in Gilliland, McKemish, and Lau, *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, 352–81, <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/31429>; Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

42 Bergis Jules, "Surveillance and Social Media Archiving," *Documenting DocNow*, October 4, 2016, <https://news.docnow.io/surveillance-and-social-media-archiving-7ea21b77b807>.

43 Zakiya Collier et al., "Call to Action: Archiving State-Sanctioned Violence Against Black People," *Sustainable Futures*, June 6, 2020, <https://medium.com/community-archives/call-to-action-archiving-state-sanctioned-violence-against-black-people-d629c956689a>.

44 Lisa P. Nathan, Elizabeth Shaffer, and Maggie Castor, "Stewarding Collections of Trauma: Plurality, Responsibility, and Questions of Action," *Archivaria* 80 (Fall 2015): 89–118.

45 Michelle Caswell, "Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, published ahead of print, August 25, 2019, <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/113>.

## What Is Trauma-Informed Practice?

Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach that recognizes the effects of trauma on the ways people may interact with organizations or services and is designed to minimize the likelihood of retraumatization. It was first articulated by Harris and Fallot, who worked within mental-health service delivery and became interested in using trauma theory in designing and evaluating service systems as well as in one-on-one interventions with clients.<sup>46</sup>

Harris and Fallot note that there is a difference between clients receiving treatment for trauma (through therapeutic or other approaches) in a “trauma-specific” service, and an organization becoming “trauma-informed.”<sup>47</sup> One of the benefits of trauma-informed practice is that it can be implemented in any organization, regardless of the organization’s primary function. Trauma-informed practice is also not designed to replace any therapeutic approaches with trauma survivors.

Trauma-informed practice does not change *what* the mission or functions of an organization are. Instead, it changes *how* those functions may be provided, reducing the likelihood of stressful interactions and the effects of any previous trauma on people. Trauma-informed practice acknowledges that every interaction someone has – no matter how small – may be positive or negative. Positive interactions of all kinds can help us heal. Negative interactions may take healing further out of our reach and worsen existing emotional and psychological problems.<sup>48</sup>

A trauma-informed approach recognizes the diverse needs of individuals and communities who have experienced trauma and understands the environments, behaviours, and inputs that may be triggering for them. Trauma-informed practice provides a framework to make a service or organization safe and empowering for both users and staff – a space that supports people on their paths toward healing.

<sup>46</sup> Maxine Harris and Roger D. Fallot, “Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System: A Vital Paradigm Shift,” *New Directions for Mental Health Services* 2001, no. 89 (2001): 3–22, <https://doi.org/10.1002/yl.23320018903>.

<sup>47</sup> Harris and Fallot, 3–22; Carolyn Knight, “Trauma Informed Practice and Care: Implications for Field Instruction,” *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47, no. 1 (2019): 79–89, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-018-0661-x>.

<sup>48</sup> Blue Knot Foundation, “Trauma-Informed Care and Practice,” September 7, 2020, <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Workers-Practitioners/For-Health-Professionals/Resources-for-Health-Professionals/Trauma-Informed-Care-and-practice>.

Importantly for archives, trauma-informed practice moves away from a view of organizations and professionals as the sole “experts” and instead recognizes the expertise, knowledge, and power that each person brings and provides a safe environment for staff and archives users alike.

## Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice is based on five principles first articulated by Harris and Falot and later expanded, discussed, and codified in different settings. While some discussions of trauma-informed practice describe them slightly differently or articulate additional areas, the five principles of safety, trust and transparency, choice, collaboration, and empowerment form the foundation of trauma-informed practice.<sup>49</sup>

The first and most important principle is **safety**. Trauma-informed practice places an emphasis on and works toward building safety for all – staff, users, donors, and volunteers.<sup>50</sup> This is because, if someone is not safe, the other principles do not matter and cannot be enacted. A key aspect of safety is reducing, as far as possible, the chances that someone will be retraumatized while interacting with an organization or service. While physical safety is perhaps the first thing people think of, the principle of safety also includes emotional and cultural safety.

Cultural safety is about creating “an environment which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, training all staff in cultural competencies and safety is also vital.

In ensuring that everyone is safe, it is important to recognize what elements of an organization’s practice may cause people to feel unsafe. These may relate to its physical location, building, or environment (for example, survivors of

49 See, for example, Harris and Falot, “Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System”; Falot and Harris, “Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care (CCTIC)”; Blue Knot Foundation, “Trauma-Informed Care and Practice”; Hopper, Bassuk, and Olivet, “Shelter from the Storm.”

50 Hopper, Bassuk, and Olivet, “Shelter from the Storm,” 132.

51 Robyn Williams, “Cultural Safety – What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 23, no. 2 (1999): 213–14, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-842X.1999.tb01240.x>.



institutions may not feel safe in buildings where they spent time in “care” as children). But it may also relate to the context of the organization (for example, if it is government run or associated with a particular religious organization), its processes or ways of interacting with potential users or donors, or the ways it describes its materials or services. Additionally, service relationships and power dynamics within organizations may unwittingly reproduce abuse dynamics and lead to further harm.<sup>52</sup>

At its core, the principle of **trust and transparency** is focused on the trustworthiness of people and organizations’ actions; it means they do what they say they will do and are open about the processes and steps needed to achieve an outcome. Trustworthy people and organizations are clear about the boundaries and scope of what is possible and do not overpromise in attempts to avoid disappointing or upsetting requestors. Trust may take a long time to develop, and acting in a consistent and transparent manner goes a long way in building that trust.

The principle of **choice** means that, wherever possible, services are tailored so they are driven by people’s preferences and expertise about what is most appropriate for them, even if some of the options are less convenient to the organization. In line with the principle of trust and transparency, it also requires being open when a person’s choices cannot be accommodated and a process must be done in a specific way.

Part of providing choice is also considering consent – communicating clearly about what users are consenting to, ensuring they are able to provide free and informed consent,<sup>53</sup> and understanding that consent can change over time.<sup>54</sup> Issues of consent are particularly important where the people involved have already been the subjects of non-consensual surveillance and recordkeeping and may naturally have questions about new records that may now be created about

52 Harris and Fallot, “Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System,” 9; Bateman, Henderson, and Kezelman, “Trauma-Informed Care and Practice,” 9.

53 Terri Janke and Maiko Sentina, *Indigenous Knowledge: Issues for Protection and Management* (Sydney: IP Australia, Commonwealth of Australia, 2018), <https://www.terrijanke.com.au/indigenous-knowledge>.

54 There are many cases within archives where consent was provided in the context of the expected use of the material at that time, with no understanding of the subsequent uses now possible due to the Internet and digitization of archival collections. See for example T.L. Cowan and Jasmine Rault, “Onlining Queer Acts: Digital Research Ethics and Caring for Risky Archives,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 28, no. 2 (2018): 121–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2018.1473985>; Julie Botnick, “Archival Consent,” *Acid Free*, no. 8 (2018), <https://www.laacollective.org/work/archival-consent-by-julie-botnick>.

them: how are they to be kept, who will have access, and will they be shared?<sup>55</sup>

Lee and Toliver highlight the usefulness of thinking of “consentful” rather than “consensual” practices, to reflect the holistic nature of the ongoing consent process, rather than a one-off interaction.<sup>56</sup> Their work on consentful technology highlights the imperative to consider issues of consent in the digital space and the need to make consent an ongoing engagement.

Implementing the principle of **collaboration** may represent a significant shift in practice for some organizations. The principle of collaboration means that, rather than working *for* someone, the staff member instead works *with* someone. This supports a fundamental tenet of trauma-informed practice: to recognize that the people being assisted are equal partners in the process.

Harris and Fallot discuss the generic nature of professional expertise: professionals have expertise that generally applies to all who use a service. In contrast, the person approaching an organization has very specific expertise, knowing about “[their] own responses, [their] needs, and [their] history better than anyone else does.”<sup>57</sup> It is critical that this expertise is recognized and utilized in collaboration with the user.

On an organizational level, working collaboratively also means including people from relevant communities on advisory or governance boards and facilitating and enabling co-design work wherever possible.<sup>58</sup>

55 For example, in Australia, some survivors of abuse are reluctant to participate in the National Redress Scheme over fears about how their privacy will be maintained and who their private information will be shared with. See, for example, Frank Golding, “Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme” (Submission 9, March 30, 2020), 13–14, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=dcdcbc2c-f74d-4129-8fc2-644f78ea1a11&subId=679854>; Care Leavers Australasia Network, “Redress Is Not an Insurance Claim: CLAN’s Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme” (Submission 17, October 30, 2020), 16–18, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=5bcd0610-dd5d-4f6a-b3d6-035833bb7c87&subId=680271>.

56 Una Lee and Dann Toliver, *Building Consentful Tech* (n.p., 2017), 6, <http://www.consentfultech.io/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Building-Consentful-Tech.pdf>.

57 Harris and Fallot, “Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System,” 20.

58 In order to ethically engage with community groups, organizations should establish processes to ensure reciprocity; compensate those who participate (either by employing them or otherwise providing remuneration); and ensure that the people they collaborate with (e.g., when engaging with community organizations) are authorized to speak on behalf of their community. See, for example, National Health and Medical Research Council, *Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities: Guidelines for Researchers and Stakeholders* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2018), <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities>; Rolan et al., “Voice, Agency, and Equity.”

**Empowerment** means acknowledging and validating people's skills and strengths and utilizing these in collaboration with them. Again, this can be done on both individual and organizational scales. When the other trauma-informed principles are applied, people can feel empowered and affirmed, which leads to more positive interactions and more healing.

As Harris and Fallot note, a key aspect of moving toward trauma-informed practice is "adopting a universal assumption of inclusion":<sup>59</sup> that is, providing the same level of trauma-informed service to all, regardless of whether or not the service provider is aware that a particular person has experienced trauma. This is important not only because anyone can experience trauma but also because people should not have to self-identify as members of a particular cohort in order to receive this level of service. We suggest that implementing trauma-informed practice is a way for organizations to improve their services for all who use them and also for their staff.

Trauma-informed practice requires that all participants in an interaction, not only the person who is positioned as user, are safe. Therefore, trauma-informed practice acknowledges both the potential for those assisting others to experience vicarious trauma and the need for appropriate boundaries between staff and users. Organizations that want to move toward implementing a trauma-informed model need to see vicarious trauma as an organizational issue that must be addressed like any other occupational health and safety issue.

It is also critical to note that utilizing these principles, even to their fullest extent, does not guarantee that trauma reactions will never occur. Instead, it creates a way of working that should minimize the possibility of causing harm and a framework for responding if someone is triggered. When we consider the known trauma contained within records and archives, it is clear that archives and other memory organizations can benefit from implementing trauma-informed practice.

59 Harris and Fallot, "Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System," 10.

## Trauma and Archives

Despite widespread knowledge that records and archives are key sites of trauma, explicit discussions about trauma, archives, and archivists have only occurred recently in the relevant literature, conference papers, presentations, and in-person discussion spaces.

While trauma and archives remains a new area of study, it may also be the case that publishing in academic literature is not well suited to reflections on archivists' personal experiences of trauma or on the difficult work involved in giving this voice. More informal styles of writing, including blogs and newsletters, have seen archivists share their experiences of trauma.<sup>60</sup> Speakers have also created safe spaces at conferences for in-person sharing of reflections and experiences.

Presenters have shared that relationships, vulnerability, and support have all been key to introducing this topic into the archival profession. Methods such as panel sessions, round-table discussions, and joint presentations have all been used to address trauma experienced in archives.<sup>61</sup> Topics have included emotional work and the emotional labour of archivists; the need for training, support, and resources to prepare archivists and to build capacity within the

60 See, for example, Wanett Clyde, "The (Unexpected) Emotional Impact of Archiving," *Witness* (blog), August 6, 2015, <https://blog.witness.org/2015/08/the-unexpected-emotional-impact-of-archiving/>; Rebekah Mitchell, "Opportunities for Strengthening Mental Health and Resilience in Archival Work," *Off the Record* 36, no. 3 (2020); Melanie Delva, "A Journey of Truth – Melanie Delva, Diocese Archivist," *Saint Martin's Anglican Church Blog* (blog), August 21, 2016, <https://www.saintmartins.ca/blog/a-journey-of-truth-melanie-delva-diocese-archivist>.

61 See, for example, Anna St. Onge, Rebecka Sheffield, and Melanie Delva, "Emotional Labour in the Archives: Glimpses into Practice" (round-table discussion at the Association of Canadian Archivists Annual Conference, Montreal, Quebec, June 2–4, 2016); Michaela Hart and Nicola Laurent, "Emotional Labour and Archival Practice" (paper presented at Diverse Worlds, the 2017 National Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, Melbourne, Victoria, September 26–27, 2017) "Session 4B – Addressing Separation Loss and Trauma (ASA-ITIC 2017)," YouTube video, posted by "AusArchivists-TV," November 29, 2017, <https://youtu.be/RWZNGrxGs44>; Wendy Duff, Henria Aton, and Meghan Shields, "Challenges Faced by Archivists Working with Sensitive Records" (paper presented at the Archival Education and Research Institute, Liverpool, July 8–12, 2019); Anna Sexton, "Working with Traumatic Records: How Should We Train, Prepare and Support Record-Keeper?" (paper presented at the Archival Education and Research Institute, Liverpool, July 8–12, 2019); Michaela Hart and Nicola Laurent, "Building a Trauma-Informed Community of Practice" (paper presented at the Archival Education Research Institute, Liverpool, July 8–12, 2019); Nicola Laurent, Jennifer Douglas, Michaela Hart, and Proscovia Svård, "Designing a Trauma-Informed Archive (and Archivist)" (panel at Designing the Archive 2019 Conference, Adelaide, South Australia, October 21–25, 2019); Jennifer Douglas, Genevieve Weber, Taryn Jones, Melanie Delva, Anna St. Onge, Elizabeth Bassett, Noah Duranseau, and Erin Suliak, "There's Something We Need to Talk About: Uncovering and Supporting Archivists' Emotional Work" (panel and workshop at Association of Canadian Archivists Annual Conference, 2020 Vision: Seeing Archives Differently, virtual conference, June 10–12, 2020).

profession to enact trauma-informed archival practice; and the need to reduce the risk of vicarious trauma.

This more formal dialogue has influenced the informal conversations that happen in these spaces, amplifying the effects of single presentations and creating a community for those who have listened and shared in response. The positive reactions from participants in these conversations have highlighted the need for more work across academia, in practice, and in archival education so that trauma and the impact it can have on archivists and users is recognized as a fundamental issue.<sup>62</sup>

These concepts are starting to move into academic research and literature. The first (and, to date, only) quantitative study to specifically address the trauma archivists face comes from Canada, where a survey on secondary trauma and archivists was conducted. The resulting article provided statistical evidence to conclude that “more open and inclusive dialogue on the emotional and potentially traumatizing aspects of archival work”<sup>63</sup> is needed. Highlighting the universal nature of this issue, Laurent and Hart’s recent position paper calls for a global community of practice to support people in enacting trauma-informed archival practice.<sup>64</sup>

In 2019, Thorpe and Willis wrote a powerful article sharing their personal experiences as archivists who had previously worked with “archives of trauma.” They reflect on the ongoing impact of working with and providing access to records that were “deeply racist and often contained within them atrocities and crimes against humanity,”<sup>65</sup> in contexts that provided limited support or thought for their well-being as staff. They also discuss the influence of these experiences on their later work to support Aboriginal self-determination in archives.

62 Nicola Laurent and Michaela Hart, “Emotional Labour and Archival Practice – Reflection,” *Journal of the Society of North Carolina Archivists* (2018): 13-22; Jennifer Douglas, “There’s Something We Need to Talk About,” *Hard Feelings: On the Intimate and Emotional Dimensions of Archival Work* (blog), June 4, 2020, <https://blogs.ubc.ca/hardfeelings/2020/06/04/aca-2020/>.

63 Katie Sloan, Jennifer Vanderfluit, and Jennifer Douglas, “Not ‘Just My Problem to Handle’: Emerging Themes on Secondary Trauma and Archivists,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 22, <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol6/iss1/20>.

64 Nicola Laurent and Michaela Hart, “Building a Trauma-Informed Community of Practice,” *Education for Information* 37, no. 1 (March 12, 2021): 27-32, <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-190363>.

65 Kirsten Thorpe and Cassandra Willis, “Aboriginal Histories in Australia Government Archives: Working with Records of Trauma,” *Acid Free*, no. 10 (2019), <https://www.laacollective.org/work/aboriginal-histories-in-australia-government-archives/>.

Professional associations have also created resources to support practitioners in addressing and responding to trauma experienced in their work. Anecdotal evidence strongly supports the need to develop practical tools that can be used immediately by archivists; archivists who have experienced trauma while working felt that they had nowhere to seek advice and support. This is compounded by the fact that almost none of these topics are explored within archival education; new graduates are unprepared for the emotional and traumatic aspects of archival work.<sup>66</sup>

To assist practitioners, the Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland (ARA) has released emotional support guides for archivists dealing with emotionally troubling or challenging situations.<sup>67</sup> The Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) has created an online course, *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives*, which covers vicarious trauma, trauma-informed practice, trauma-informed archival practice, and strategies for implementing this practice into day-to-day work.<sup>68</sup>

Users of archives may also be significantly affected by records, and this can be exacerbated for those who are the subjects of the records they are accessing or who identify as members of that community.<sup>69</sup> Archives have been described both as repositories of hope and as places where people “are profoundly disap-

66 Jennifer Douglas, Elizabeth Bassett, and Noah Duranseau, “A Change in the Narrative,” *Hard Feelings: On the Intimate and Emotional Dimensions of Archival Work* (blog), September 4, 2020, <https://blogs.ubc.ca/hardfeelings/2020/09/04/a-change-in-the-narrative/>; Nicola A. Cooke, Kellee E. Warren, Molly Brown, and Athena N. Jackson, “It Starts at Home: Infusing Radical Empathy into Graduate Education,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, published ahead of print, October 4, 2020, <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/123>.

67 Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland, “Emotional Support Guides,” 2017, <https://www.archives.org.uk/what-we-do/emotional-support-guides.html>.

68 Australian Society of Archivists, “A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives”; Nicola Laurent and Kirsten Wright, “A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives: A New Online Course,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 48, no. 1 (2020): 80–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2019.1705170>.

69 Judith Etherton, “The Role of Archives in the Perception of Self,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 27, no. 2 (2006): 227–46; Gracen M. Brilmyer, “It Could Have Been Us in a Different Moment. It Still Is Us in Many Ways: Community Identification and the Violence of Archival Representation of Disability,” in *Sustainable Digital Communities*, ed. Anneli Sundqvist, Gerd Berget, Jan NolinKjell, Ivar Skjerdingsstad, Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 480–86, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43687-2\\_38](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43687-2_38); Nathan Sentance, “The Need for Reclassification of First Nations Original Material in Memory Institutions,” *Archival Decolonist* [-o-] (blog), September 29, 2017, <https://archivaldecolonist.com/2017/09/29/the-need-for-reclassification-of-first-nations-original-material-in-memory-institutions/>.

pointed, even shocked and sometimes re-traumatised.”<sup>70</sup> Russell has discussed how, “for many Aboriginal researchers, working in an archive and encountering what they regard as both racist and incorrect observations can be traumatising and distressing.”<sup>71</sup> Archivists and users alike bring their lived experiences to archives and the records they see. No one can predict what records people will find traumatic, but everyone should recognize the affective nature and the potential trauma within any records.

Understandably, the work discussing archives and trauma has so far focused primarily on the trauma and emotions experienced by archivists in the course of undertaking their work. As the recent publications have noted, even acknowledging that archivists may experience trauma as a result of their work is new for many. This work is extremely important: archivists must be safe in order to do their work. However, we suggest that it is necessary to broaden the notion of trauma in archives to encompass not only the trauma experienced by those working in archives but also the trauma that may be experienced by users of archives, and to use trauma-informed practice to address these.

## Applying Trauma-Informed Practice to Archives

Trauma-informed practice provides an opportunity for archives to create the space for liberatory memory work to be undertaken. It does not dictate how processes and practices should occur but provides a framework within which to rethink archival work for each and every interaction.

As Gould and Harris note, “there can be no blueprint for how people work with their pain and their trauma. Individuals, families, and communities find healing in their own way. The challenge is to create the spaces they need in order to find healing.”<sup>72</sup> There is no single approach to healing, implementing trauma-informed practice, or collaborating with affected communities. A trauma-informed response must be unique to each organization and to the communities it works with, creating the needed spaces for the work to happen and healing to occur.

70 Frank Golding, “The Care Leaver’s Perspective,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 44, no. 3 (2016): 160–64.

71 Lynette Russell, “Affect in the Archive: Trauma, Grief, Delight and Texts. Some Personal Reflections,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 46, no. 2 (2018): 200–207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2018.1458324>.

72 Gould and Harris, “Memory for Justice.”

The model of trauma-informed practice can provide guidance to archives or other memory institutions that wish to change the way they work. The principles can be applied across all areas of archives work, and trauma-informed practice can assist those who might not know where to start or who might feel too overwhelmed at the scale of change needed or have only minimal resources. While organizations should start with the fundamental principle of safety, trauma-informed practice can be applied in a staggered approach that overcomes these concerns.

All aspects of an archive's work can be assessed using a trauma-informed lens, and this analysis can be used to make improvements. By utilizing existing assessment tools,<sup>73</sup> identifying current processes that fall under the "trauma-informed" umbrella, and committing to working genuinely with affected communities and individuals, organizations can begin to implement change across a number of areas.

As noted earlier, not even fully implementing the principles of trauma-informed practice will mitigate the risk of trauma reactions from either users or staff. Instead, organizations should expect and plan for trauma reactions. They can respond in various ways, including by having quiet spaces where people can get away from the records; by enabling the archives user to have a support person with them while accessing records; and, for staff, by providing training and support around mental health, self-care, and vicarious trauma.

This section uses the principles of trauma-informed practice to consider how archives might change their existing practices and protocols to move toward becoming trauma-informed organizations. These suggestions are not exhaustive and may not work in all settings; rather, they are offered both to provide a starting point for critical examinations of different aspects of an archives' work and to highlight the small changes that can make a move toward trauma-informed practice possible.

73 See, for example, Fallot and Harris, "Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care (CCTIC)"; Blue Knot Foundation, "Trauma-Informed Care and Practice"; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884 (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), 11–16, <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidance-for-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884>.



## Safety

Providing a framework for archives to safely engage with all members of society can help make archives more accessible, empowering places. It is essential to remember that many people documented in archival records had no choice about being observed – or about those records becoming part of an archive.<sup>74</sup> This relates to their lack of agency as a result of the policies that led them to be documented in the records in the first place.

Organizations must provide cultural safety training and implement culturally competent practices. Given that they hold records that document Indigenous or First Nations communities under the control and surveillance of governments, many archives chronicle years of intergenerational trauma. It is imperative that both staff and users are culturally safe.<sup>75</sup> This means the organization must be aware of the cultural protocols associated with different records, ensure the correct access provisions are in place, and provide spaces for healing. Organizations must also ensure that Indigenous staff are not automatically and unquestioningly treated as conduits between the organization and Indigenous archives users (or as the “experts” on or representatives for all Indigenous matters) and that their emotional labour is recognized.

Here are some examples of how the principle of safety may be implemented in an archives setting:

- Consider first impressions when people arrive at the archives building: Make it clear where people have to go and what they have to do, and create a welcoming and friendly area. Present information in simple language (and in all relevant languages).
- If your organization is not accessible to all, have a process for using alternate venues that offer the same resources and support as if someone were in the archives.

74 Henrietta Fourmile, “Who Owns the Past? Aborigines as Captives of the Archives,” *Aboriginal History* 13, no. 1 (1989): 1–8; Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, “Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 93–109, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9255-3>.

75 Thorpe, “The Dangers of Libraries and Archives for Indigenous Australian Workers.”

- Provide notices in catalogues, finding aids, and guides to inform people that the contents of particular records series or groups may be offensive or cause distress so that people are aware of cultural safety issues.<sup>76</sup>
- Do not withhold access (either completely or via in-document redaction) because records contain upsetting or offensive content. However, ask each person if they wish to receive a warning.
- Consider how records are described and the language used,<sup>77</sup> ensuring that descriptions do not uncritically reproduce the language of the records.
- Embed into your organization training that encompasses cultural safety and competency, diversity and inclusion, and vicarious trauma and support; and create safe spaces for people from marginalized communities to come together. Be proactive, not reactive, in creating a physically, culturally, and emotionally safe workplace for staff and users.
- Ensure that all staff undertake training and further reading to increase their knowledge and understanding of safety, including what that means for them and for others.
- Normalize discussions of, and support for, trauma, vicarious trauma, self-care, and mental health more broadly so staff feel safe bringing up issues and know they will be supported when doing so.

<sup>76</sup> For example, in Australia, it is common practice to provide a warning if there are names or images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away. Cultural protocols may also mean that material is available only to members of specific language groups, only to men, or only to women.

<sup>77</sup> Kirsten Wright, "Archival Interventions and the Language We Use," *Archival Science* 19, no. 4 (2019): 331–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09306-y>.

## Trust and Transparency

In moving toward trauma-informed practice, it is also important for archives to acknowledge and respond to the fact that many people and communities see them as untrustworthy institutions, in some cases due to previous negative experiences.<sup>78</sup> These experiences may have been related to records (for example, an institution may have denied that records existed or may have prevented them from having access) or to the functions that the organization performed or the records document (for example, responsibility for the removal of children from their families). It is the organization's responsibility now to prove that it is trustworthy, rather than to expect that these individuals or communities will overcome their distrust by themselves.<sup>79</sup> Building trust will take time; it is not something an organization should expect to happen immediately.

Archives must not require requestors to disclose or discuss their trauma or the trauma in the records as a prerequisite for acquiring materials or understanding a collection. People should not be made to feel unsafe or required to tell or repeat their stories in order to be treated with respect or to be provided with a trauma-informed service. Some people may want to share their experiences; if so, there need to be frameworks and protections in place for both the person sharing their story and the person hearing it. But others will not want to share, and, in line with the principles of trauma-informed practice, this choice should be affirmed.

Acting in a trustworthy manner means being open about the reasons for processes and about issues that archives may have historically not wished to discuss.

Here are some practical suggestions for implementing trust and transparency:

- Explain why archives building access and security processes are the way they are. Have this information readily available and provide it directly if needed.

78 McKemish, Faulkhead, and Russell, "Distrust in the Archive," 218; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004), 257–58, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Completed\\_inquiries/2004-07/inst\\_care/report/index](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index); Gudmund Valderhaug, "Memory, Justice and the Public Record," *Archival Science* 11, no. 1–2 (2011): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-010-9110-5>; Michael Jones and Cate O'Neill, "Identity, Records and Archival Evidence: Exploring the Needs of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants," *Archives and Records* 35, no. 2 (2014): 110–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2014.951032>.

79 Cooke et al., "It Starts at Home."

- If records have been lost or destroyed or there are gaps in the collection, be open about this. Where possible, explain why and how this happened, even if this means acknowledging poor recordkeeping practices of the past.
- Publish time frames that indicate when you will respond to records requests, and meet these. If you cannot meet these timelines, contact the requestor and explain why.
- Critically assess any records request forms. Do not make records access contingent on someone's ability to complete all parts of the form or having multiple forms of identification.
- Acknowledge past wrongs, and be open about the work that is happening now to redress these (even if the work itself is happening behind the scenes).
- Acknowledge that staff are key to creating a trusted and transparent organization, and take measures to ensure they are supported in this work.
- Be open about digitization and digitized records, including by providing information about what is not available online and why.
- Likewise, provide explanations of archival standards and processes and how and why your organization follows these.
- If acquiring new material, work collaboratively with the people who hold the records to determine what rights they have to the material, what the protocols are for access and description, and how these issues are to be discussed in the future. This should all be documented

in an agreement that acknowledges that the arrangements may change over time.

### Choice

Archives traditionally have been process-driven organizations, particularly regarding records access, and they can be intimidating for people who are not familiar with using them or with the jargon and “performances”<sup>80</sup> required. Part of making memory institutions more trauma-informed, less-intimidating organizations is to give people more choice in their interactions.

In some cases, a process must be done in a certain way, and it will not be possible to give someone a choice. In that case, it is important to explain why. As discussed earlier, free, informed consent is also paramount; it helps to codify the choices someone has made as well as to solidify trust.

Here are some suggestions for enacting the principle of choice:

- Provide a place where people can go to step away from the records. Ensure that there are places people can access records in private.
- Engage or employ community representatives, giving them choices about how to describe and display the records relevant to them and their lived experience, including what information will be provided to the general public and what information is suitable only for members of that community.
- Ask a requestor where and how they would like to receive their records and the information around them. This may include discussing how content warnings will be communicated; providing records in a particular format; and identifying what contextual information they want, where the records will be accessed, and who they want with them when they access the records.

<sup>80</sup> Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance.”

- Provide communities and individuals with choices about how they want to work or engage with your organization. If something is not working in the relationship, do not pressure them to continue if they do not want to.
- Where possible, give staff choices about how and when they work on potentially traumatic collections, noting that what is traumatic for one person may not be for someone else, and adjust work practices accordingly.

### Collaboration

Collaboration is key both in undertaking trauma-informed work and in centring people, communities, and relationships in archives work. For many archival organizations and archivists, this may require significant cultural changes, including changes to attitudes, processes, and ideas about ownership. These may be difficult shifts for archives staff, given how much the ideas of “professionalism” are entangled with ideas of “expertise,”<sup>81</sup> but they can lead to the building of relationships and, over time, trust.

The principle of collaboration also means memory institutions and their staff acknowledging the inherent and unquestioned power that they have over the people hoping to access the records; and deliberately giving up some of that power as part of the collaborative process.

Here are some steps that could be taken to move toward collaborative work:

- Collaborate with community representatives to identify the best materials to provide in the archives foyer, reading room, and online site, to ensure that people feel welcome and safe when visiting.

81 Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “New Frameworks for Community Engagement in the Archive Sector: From Handing Over to Handing On,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 59–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250903441770>.

- Work with relevant communities to develop records descriptions – both to enhance existing records descriptions and to create new, culturally appropriate descriptions.
- Work with relevant communities to develop culturally appropriate access protocols and to ensure that these are documented, understood, and applied.
- Ensure that people from the communities documented in records in your collections are part of governance or advisory boards.
- Ensure that, where possible, staff are able to work together on potentially traumatic materials so that the risk of trauma for each individual is reduced.
- If acquiring new materials, consider the power differential between the community or individuals who have the records and the organization that wishes to acquire them.

### **Empowerment**

In becoming trauma-informed organizations, archives must work to empower people so that they are confident and supported in their engagements with the archives, treat them with dignity and respect, and take their actions and wishes seriously.

Here are some examples of actions leading to empowerment:

- Acknowledge people's rights to access the records you hold. Start from a position of wanting to work with them to provide as much information as you can rather than from a position of denying or limiting access.

- Display any relevant apologies your organization has made for past practices and any statements your organization has made in support of creating a safe, inclusive, and representative archive.
- In summarizing or providing information about the records, use phrases such as “the records state” or “the records suggest,” rather than presenting the information in the records as irrefutable fact.
- Work to undertake physical or digital repatriation of relevant records back to communities, to be managed by them.
- Acknowledge people’s rights to do with the records as they wish, even if you do not agree with these actions. This might mean that some records are destroyed and others are repatriated, or that access to some records is limited and other records are shared on social media.
- Empower staff to share their voices and feel safe in bringing their lived experiences, positionalities, and perspectives to all of their work.
- If acquiring new material, critically consider whether your organization is the best place to hold the materials or if you are collecting materials for the sake of collecting and continuing to perpetuate dominant power structures.

While there are a number of actions organizations can take to become more trauma informed, considering structural issues is also important. It is imperative that the profession is diversified and that people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences are employed. However, people must be properly and fully supported by their organizations, which must work to ensure individuals are not viewed as token representatives of their communities. Staff members must



also not be put in situations where they need to undertake emotional labour by informally educating other staff members about their communities. The archival profession has been unsafe for a number of people and communities, and it is important that organizations acknowledge this and actively work to overcome it. Archives and memory institutions must move forward inclusively and with greater awareness of the needs of their users and staff.<sup>82</sup>

## Staff and Trauma

A fundamental step for achieving change is recognizing that archivists may be traumatized through working on or providing access to records. Archivists may also need to respond to people who are encountering trauma while looking at records, and they may experience trauma themselves as a result.

Acknowledging the effect of trauma on staff is key to archives implementing trauma-informed practice. Staff are always at risk of having their work affected by direct trauma as everyone brings their lived experiences to their roles. All staff are also at risk of vicarious trauma. However, staff from marginalized communities, particularly those documented in the records, are at a higher risk of being retraumatized.

Staff must be supported and given time away from the materials, and they must receive confirmation that the issues they are facing are real and respected. Organizations should also ensure that staff are given time to engage in healing practices, including therapy if it is needed, and to undertake self-care activities. This support in turn makes organizations appear more trustworthy to staff, leading to a culture of greater safety and support for all – something that is needed particularly in settings like archives, which may offer fewer opportunities for resolving trauma than other areas where vicarious trauma may be experienced.

People working in counselling or therapy roles may find their own traumas reduced as they see their clients move past traumas or come to points of acceptance or resolution. Others may find resilience through observing others' resilience and growth. However, when trauma is tied to records, which generally

82 The National Archives, "Inclusive Reopening Survey Results and Interpretation," The National Archives, August 21, 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/inclusive-reopening-survey-results.pdf>; Tonia Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.42>.

are not changed or altered, and when people's outcomes are not known (for example, if someone experiences a trauma reaction while accessing records and does not return to the archives), it may be harder to process and resolve these feelings and issues.<sup>83</sup>

Sometimes, archivists and users may experience trauma because there are no records, either because of past neglect or previous disposal practices. Archives staff have also discussed feeling that they may not "deserve" to feel trauma, given the traumas that archives users have experienced.<sup>84</sup> Identifying and acknowledging vicarious trauma experienced by staff in no way takes away from the trauma experienced by users. Preparing for trauma in staff is a critical component in establishing trauma-informed practice in archives.

Enacting trauma-informed archival practice will take time, patience, and understanding. We need to create space and time for relationships to develop, for training to be implemented, and for policies and practices to be reviewed and changed. For many organizations, a cultural shift must occur.

## Conclusion

The surfacing of multiple traumas on a global scale, as has been seen in 2020 and 2021, has confirmed the necessity of introducing trauma-informed practice to archives. We urge all archives and memory organizations to consider this framework and implement its practice. Additionally, issues of trauma, trauma-informed practice, and mental health more broadly must be normalized. What this normalization looks like may differ in different organizations and contexts, but it will lead to greater understanding and support.

The elements of trauma-informed practice make it a useful model for archives and other memory organizations. While ideas of trauma and emotion in archives are beginning to be discussed in the literature, we are also very aware of the need for practical ways to utilize trauma-informed practice within memory institutions to help support users, staff, and the organizations themselves.

It is imperative that memory organizations consciously and deliberately engage in liberatory memory work to empower the communities who are represented in

<sup>83</sup> Michelle Noon in Australian Society of Archivists, "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives."

<sup>84</sup> Sloan, Vanderfluit, and Douglas, "Not 'Just My Problem to Handle.'"

archives' collections, create opportunities to heal from past wrongs, and engage in social justice work. This can only be done through acknowledging and addressing the trauma present in archives – in the records and collections but also in the actions and processes of memory organizations.

A key aspect of trauma-informed archival practice is for archivists and other memory workers to acknowledge the power they hold (both individually and through the organizations they represent) and to be prepared to give up this power in order to truly collaborate with the individuals and communities who are documented in the records. This means a fundamental change in ideas of ownership, custodianship, access, and use of archives.

It is also clear that more work must be done within archival education to ensure that archives students are aware of trauma, liberatory memory work, and people-centred archives, more broadly. Expanding archival education to include discussions of trauma, past wrongs done by memory organizations, reparative work being done today, and what is needed for the future will also ensure that students are aware of the importance and necessity of undertaking liberatory memory work and working toward healing and justice. Understanding these concepts and issues should be as central to archival work as knowing how to process collections or undertaking arrangement and description.

Advocacy, a critical component in publicizing and normalizing these issues, can be done at all levels. Existing literature, resources, and training materials can assist with advocacy, and we hope that, in time, many more resources and publications will be available. Having more content about trauma-informed archival practice will also help people have difficult conversations about trauma and consider how practices can be changed. While it is important for individuals to feel empowered to advocate about these issues within their workplaces, there is also a critical role for professional associations and significant archival organizations to play in advocating and educating about trauma.

Trauma-informed practice can help us enact change by providing a framework that centres people and communities, creates inclusive archives, and supports archivists to improve archives for all.

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**BIOGRAPHY** Nicola Laurent is the Senior Project Archivist on the Find and Connect web resource, University of Melbourne. Nicola holds a Master of Business Information Systems professional degree from Monash University and completed a semester of study at Simmons College, Boston. Nicola advocates for trauma-informed archival practice and discusses the impact of vicarious trauma on archivists. With Kirsten Wright, she developed A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives and the Out-of-Home Care Records Toolkit, online training courses for the Australian Society of Archivists. Nicola has previously published and presented on topics including trauma-informed archival practice, vicarious trauma, emotional labour, broken links, content rot, interactive timelines, and engaging with community. Nicola is President of the Australian Society of Archivists and the New Professionals Programme Coordinator for the International Council on Archives.