



2022 Urban Library **Trauma Study**

Final Report



Urban Library Trauma Study

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The Urban Library Trauma Study is a partnership between the New York Library Association, Urban Librarians Unite, and St John's University.



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Introduction

This report was birthed in trauma. The idea came from the researcher's experiencing trauma in their own library work and looking at how it was impacting them as managers. As they talked with friends and colleagues across the library profession, their experiences were chorused back to them as people shared their own experiences and long term impacts. The initial grant application was written as COVID-19 hit New York and just days before our libraries shut down. The study was delayed and redesigned due to the pandemic. At the same time we saw entirely new areas of trauma as COVID-19 disrupted entire swaths of our society, libraries included.

The origin of this study was library trauma from before the pandemic, but any study of this kind has to be reflective of the time of its creation. We witnessed entire systems within our profession crack and often fail. We saw the worst in ourselves and the best in others, and the other way around, and back again. Fundamental structures of trust in our institutions were tested and a glaring light was shone on endemic injustices in how our colleagues of color are treated.

This study was designed, researched, and written by and for frontline urban public library workers. We spoke from a common core of trauma and shared experiences. These shared experiences were essential to the trust needed for many of these incredibly raw conversations. People throughout the study spoke to the importance of seeing others like themselves, that they were not alone, that what happened to them was not their fault, that their experiences mattered.

As we spoke with library workers during the study we realized that nobody had recorded the full scope of the problem. It is literally an issue throughout people's entire professional lifetime from grad school through to retirement. Over the course of two years we had dozens of conversations with urban library workers from cities of all types and sizes from across the United States. This study is the result of their shared lived experiences. So often in the course of the study participants told us that they thought that they were the only ones experiencing a difficult event or having a particular stressor in their library. This document is a testament that they are not alone.

If awful things have happened to you while you worked in libraries we are sorry that those things happened to you. It wasn't your fault. It could have happened to anyone and unfortunately it probably has. We can work to make things better together. Thank you for reading this report and for being engaged in the work of making our libraries safe, better, and happier places to be for everyone.

Please note, portions of this report can be difficult to read. The Survey and Focus Group sections contain raw and difficult images and experiences. Please pace yourself.

Methods

The end goal for this study was to build a framework for addressing and mitigating workplace trauma for library staff, so we worked to organize the study in a way that would center the experiences and perspective of affected staff. We chose design thinking as the most appropriate method for intense community involvement.

Design thinking is a community and user focused process for problem solving. It is best used for addressing ambiguous problems, as well as complicated problems with a lot of stakeholders who aren't necessarily acting in predictable ways. Trauma in library work is absolutely an ambiguous problem, there is no one solution to it, and addressing it will need to involve the work of a wide variety of stakeholders.

We committed to developing a study based loosely on the principles of emancipatory research, and structured it using design thinking methods. This allowed us to set up the study in a way that allows for meaningful codesign, and centering the experiences of public facing urban public library workers. Library staff are the experts on their own experiences, and by ensuring that their voices were the main driver of the study we ultimately created more meaningful solutions.

The design thinking process is broken down into five stages; understand, define, ideate, prototype & test, and implement.

Understand - The first stage of the design thinking process is gaining an understanding of the issues at hand and finding ways to empathize with the affected community. This often includes research, interviews, and surveys.

Define - The define stage is where participants decide which problems they want to address. What is the actual problem? Is it deeper than just an adverse event? How many stakeholders are there? Who are they? What is the underlying world view that allows these conditions to exist?

Ideate - In this stage, participants come up with as many ideas as possible, and then begin to narrow it down. Think of it like throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks. If you want to have anything sticking to the wall at the end, you'll need to throw a lot of spaghetti.

Prototype & Test - Here, participants build very simple prototypes of their ideas, then test them with their colleagues and users, seeking feedback on how they can be changed and improved.

Implement - The prototypes that seem most feasible, and best meet the defined needs, are then implemented. This remains an iterative process with many opportunities for feedback and change.

The study was organized in four phases; a literature review, survey, focus groups, and national forum. The first three phases combined to be our “understand” stage of the design thinking process, and were intended to provide supporting information to the forum participants. These materials were provided to the participants in written form and during a virtual pre meeting where they could ask questions or clarify their understanding of the research done to that point.

The fourth phase was a three day design sprint that comprised the next three stages of the design thinking process; define, ideate, and prototype & test. During the forum in March 2022, participants worked in teams to build the ideas that form the basis of the recommendations. As they followed the process, they arrived at a consensus around which problems they would most like to solve, created a large number of ideas, narrowed those ideas down, created basic prototypes, and tested them with their colleagues. Those prototypes are the posters you will see later in the report.

The last stage in the design thinking process is implementation, and that comes next. Using the prototypes from the forum we have created a series of recommendations for moving forward to create a new professional culture. A culture that is based in meaningful staff involvement, praxis over theory, and real models of community care.

Literature Review

Introduction

The perception of public libraries as quiet places where people read in silence has caused problems for library workers. First, there is a lack of awareness of the reality that while libraries are open public spaces and create the social infrastructure needed to have a society, this creates opportunities for stress and trauma. Second, the perception of libraries as quiet silent spaces of study leaves libraries with a lack of resources and solutions for the trauma that can come with working with the public.

The Urban Library Trauma Study aims to create a practical framework for mitigating trauma in the urban public library workplace. This is accomplished by involving public service library workers in a multi-day forum where they used the information put together from this literature review, surveys and focus groups to inform their work. This literature review serves two purposes - it looks at the scholarly work already done in the area of library science, while also looking at research on this topic in similar fields so that participants can draw from those resources in exploring how to address the issue of workplace trauma in libraries.

Approach to the review

While the library science field has started to look seriously at trauma in public library work, the scholarship around the issue is not as deep as in related fields. This literature review looks at resources in the library science field while also drawing from related fields like health care, education and social work. In addition to looking for scholarly articles on the topic of trauma in the workplace, we also collected and analyzed news stories about potentially traumatic events in public libraries.

Themes

Several themes arose during the review of the literature. First, it reinforced that which our lived experiences had already shown to be true - libraries have a problem. There is indeed a documented issue of staff trauma in public library work. It exists, and needs to be acknowledged. Furthermore, there is no systemic approach to solutions. A broad look at the literature finds piecemeal attempts to solve burnout and trauma through self care, boundaries, and mindfulness. The area of trauma informed library services comes closest to acknowledging the depth of the problem, but even then mostly addresses it in the context of providing a new paradigm of service to the broader community.

The themes we identified during our review of the literature include;

- The existence of trauma in public library work
- Self care and mindfulness
- Deescalation
- Mission creep and vocational awe
- Institutional responsibility
- Secondary traumatic stress (STS)

Findings and Conclusions

Key Takeaways

- Every person has a right to a safe workplace, yet public librarians are not given these protections (Jordan, 2014) (Ettarh, 2018).
- Societal issues like homelessness (Dowd, 2018), racism (Helm, 2015), violence (Green, 2005), and homophobia (Felice, 2019) are part of the public library landscape and they must be acknowledged (Reynolds, 2010) (Hallquist, 2011).
- Witnessing and experiencing violence is increasingly becoming the norm in public libraries (Green, 2005) (Cullen & Hayes, 2012) (deGrandpre & Wang, 2017) (Skipworth, 2020) (Bell, 2018).
- Librarians are being forced to do the work of social workers and they are developing secondary traumatic stress (STS) as a result (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2011) (Center for Advanced Study in Child Welfare, 2012) (Becker & McCrillis, 2015) (Jordan, 2014) (Mele, 2016) (Ford, 2019).
 - This stress and trauma is leading to burnout in librarians (Lindén, Salo, & Jansson, 2018) (Peet, 2021).

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

To expand, secondary traumatic stress “...also known as secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, or vicarious traumatization, is beginning to be recognized in some disciplines and professions as a significant occupational hazard” (Sloan, Vanderfluit, & Douglas, 2019, p. 1). STS has been primarily associated with nurses (McGibbon, Peter, & Gallop, 2010) and social workers (Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, 2012), but in recent years there has been an increased discussion of STS and librarianship (Lindén, Salo, & Jansson, 2018). Current research on STS and libraries is fragmented and in deep need for future study. This is likely due to the lack of awareness of STS and how it appears in the field and is a major hole in the literature.

How other fields are approaching Secondary Traumatic Stress

It is vital to examine how other fields like medicine and social work are dealing with secondary traumatic stress, to inform how libraries may deal with it going forward. While these fields differ from librarianship, they share a similar form of trauma due to the nature

of dealing with people, serving communities, and lacking resources. But what makes these fields more able to deal with trauma than libraries? The social services industry has a strong infrastructure around STS and has strong ties to clinical and therapeutic psychological frameworks (McGibbon, Peter, & Gallop, 2010) (National Association of Social Workers, 2013). Burnout is a notable cause of high turnover in the social work field, so there is also an incentive for the industry to acknowledge and address this phenomenon (Knuckey, Satterthwaite, & Brown, 2018), but this same awareness does not currently exist in libraries. While literature connects library issues to social work and draws the connections needed to show how STS protocols are useful/critical for library workers (Sloan, Vanderfluit, & Douglas, 2019), there is still a hole in the literature. This gap fails to account for the fact that urban libraries provide a lot of services for free that are not available anywhere else and whether that represents critical, fundamental gaps in the social safety net.

How the issue specifically affects library workers

“The first step in dealing with a problem is to identify the parameters” (Jordan, 2014, p. 303). The stressors present in libraries such as excessive workload and deteriorating facilities can be solved with very little effort (Jordan, 2014). “The more challenging tasks are some of the most common and highest-ranked stressors: problems with managers, problems with co-workers, and the workplace environment. Addressing and solving these problems will mean that some people have to acknowledge their actions are causing stress to others, and then to be willing to change those actions” (Jordan, 2014, p. 304). Additionally, the precarity of the job market must also be acknowledged as a form of trauma (Hahn, 2019).

When the stress librarians feel goes unaddressed and untreated there are high incidences of burnout (Jordan, 2014). Compassion fatigue is another major issue for librarians.

“Compassion fatigue affects those who enter the helping professions, including librarianship, precisely because these are the people most likely to put themselves in the place of others, to feel compassion and empathy for those they help” (Katopol, 2015, p. 2). “Burnout is not a condition which will reverse itself quickly or easily. Librarians experiencing this problem may need professional help to get past it, from an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a qualified therapist” (Jordan, 2014). Others believe that issues related to burnout and compassion fatigue can be solved by librarians having a space to vent to people that are empathetic to their experiences and lessening duties at home (Katopol, 2015).

“I’m Not a Social Worker”: An Information Service Model for Working with Patrons in Crisis proposes a framework for reference librarians to identify and serve the information needs of patrons in crisis.

“The model presented in this article seeks to provide support for relevant reference work by identifying specific strategies for interactions with patrons in crisis situations. The underlying assumption is that relevant reference work serves individuals more effectively than refusing their information needs. The ambiguous

region between librarianship and social work needs to be embraced as a means of helping high-need patrons. Information-and-referral programs are useful, but they are not complete services. Each strategy in this model helps individual librarians find their own patron-centered service outcome” (Westbrook, 2015).

In this article introduces the tension within librarianship of serving persistently under-served populations while specifically not being trained for addressing trouble outside the immediate realm of information services. As evidenced by many anecdotal news stories, homelessness plays a large part in difficult situations which arise in public libraries, and *The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness: An Empathy-Driven Approach to Solving Problems, Preventing Conflict, and Serving Everyone* provides several useful tools in navigating these situations. Because homelessness is exacerbated in urban areas, this text is especially useful for urban public libraries and their staff, to ensure library staff are well equipped to handle the complex issues that arise alongside homelessness. As can be found in many of the news articles describing traumatic events in public libraries, the opioid epidemic has a large part to play in the security (or lack thereof) of the public library. *Libraries and the substance abuse crisis: Supporting your community* provides helpful information for staff that are navigating this issue, which is especially prevalent in urban environments. This includes directly addressing library security, helping staff to better understand addiction and how it functions, and organizational approaches to this issue.

The case for trauma protections for urban libraries

To date, there has not been any attempts to validate reasonably abundant anecdotal evidence describing traumatic violence in libraries quantitatively and on a large scale, based on our preliminary review of available resources. However, we did find sources that, when looked at together, corroborate what cannot currently be confirmed more scientifically. For example, Saulny & Culotta's 2009 New York Times article connected increased crime and friction in libraries with the economic recession. This article not only speculates about the relationship between material conditions in communities and increased usage and tension in libraries, but also made explicit that the American Library Association does not track incidents in libraries. Neither do crime statistics. What is the viability for the tracking of incidents in libraries through a participating network of institutions/librarians? Does the industry even want these statistics to exist?

Lynn Westbrook's 2015 article in *Library Quarterly* outlined a framework for reference librarians serving patrons in crisis and draws from social work practice. To set up her framework, she begins by examining librarianship's historical treatment of structural issues affecting patrons' lives. In this she cites literature that argues for expanded understanding of libraries' roles and services, research on common troubles faced by library users (e.g. homelessness). Additionally, she refers to the activities of the ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table in the 1990's regarding hunger, homelessness, and poverty. If patrons are so

broadly understood to be navigating traumatizing circumstances, then extreme trauma is ever present in the library even prior to a major incident.

Patricia Katopol's 2015 article, "Enough Already: Compassion Fatigue", touches on building support mechanisms for library workers experiencing compassion fatigue, both in leadership and those reporting to them. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick in 2021 published a qualitative study on low morale in public librarianship, which provides quotes of participants' narratives that in some cases detail traumatic events. While these are framed as examples of various kinds of abuse experienced in libraries, it fails to specifically address trauma or trauma response. Rather, it centers discussion around measures that react to abuse, including greater collaboration with the social work field, rather than looking at the root issue - trauma.

Finally and perhaps most obviously, the recent prominence of literature recommending the application of a trauma-informed approach to librarianship is one of the strongest arguments promoting the need for rigorous trauma responsiveness in libraries from an organizational perspective. Social work literature frequently refers to the well-established phenomenon of "vicarious trauma" and documents its damaging effects. Explicitly connecting the dots between library literature's stated need for a trauma lens and the social work field's acknowledgment of the risks of vicarious trauma is one of the most important things this study can accomplish.

Survey

Introduction and Process

The ultimate goal of the survey was to collect information that could be used by forum participants to inform ideas for potential solutions to the issue of workplace trauma in urban public libraries. The survey questions were drafted to draw out the broader trends of adverse experiences and trauma in libraries, while also eliciting descriptions of events and impacts on public service staff. Questions were selected for the survey based on preliminary results from the literature review and the lived experience of the researchers. All questions on the survey were optional.

The survey was distributed as a google form between August 7 and September 29, 2021. In an attempt to reach as many people as possible, the survey was distributed via Urban Librarians Unite's social media platforms, the state library and associations listservs that we had permissions to post on, sent to the ULU mailing list and posted on ULU's website. We received 568 responses, of which 435 were from urban public library staff.

Once the survey responses were collected, research fellows filtered out rural, suburban, academic, school and special library responses as out of scope. While those libraries are also exposed to many of the same issues, this study is narrowly focused on urban public libraries. We then coded the responses to the narrative questions to allow them to be quantified and shared more easily, and redacted identifying information in the narrative responses. The research fellows then created data visualizations of the responses to each question.

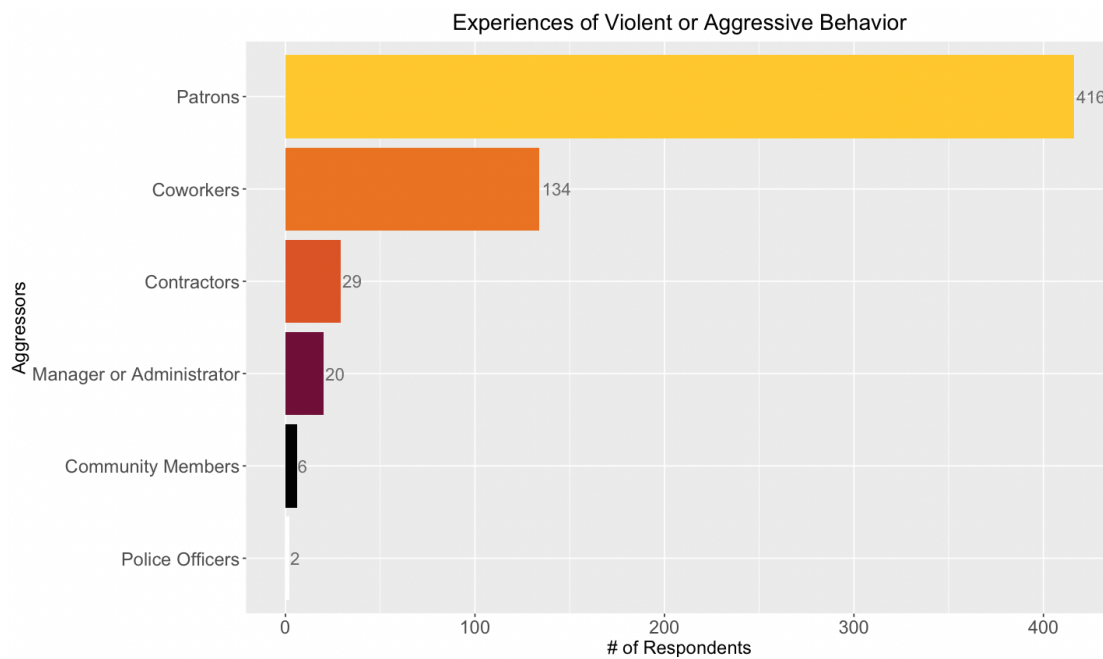
Survey Questions and Results

We have created a document of the survey data presented as summaries and visualizations which you can use to start getting a broad idea of the scope of the issue. Both the survey questions and visualizations are available in the appendices of this report. Trauma in urban public libraries is a complex issue that is difficult to fully measure in a survey, so we used the survey results to inform our focus group facilitation where we were able to go more in depth on the issues presented in the survey.

Summary of the Data

Survey respondents represented a wide spectrum of urban public library workers from pages to executive directors, with half of the responses coming from librarians. Responses were predominantly from individuals who self-identified as female (78%) and they came from all across the United States. Respondents were also generally well-established in their fields (with the majority of respondents having worked in libraries for at least 5-10 years) and they overwhelmingly indicated that, in general, they feel daily stress at their libraries.

In terms of how physically safe respondents feel at their library workplaces, responses were almost evenly split between feeling not at all safe in their libraries and feeling very safe in their libraries. The majority of responses (68.5%) indicated that the library worker had experienced violent or aggressive behavior at their libraries from patrons, but a significant percentage of responses (22%) indicated that they experienced violent or aggressive behavior from their coworkers.



Question 9: Experiences of violent or aggressive behavior

Respondents frequently said that they felt supported by their colleagues during difficult work situations, and that many of their colleagues had shared their own workplace trauma experiences with them at some point. Survey data indicated that traumatic experiences happened frequently for many respondents, and that many of the incidents involved verbal abuse, physical assault or abuse, or harassing or inappropriate behavior. When these situations arose, respondents were most likely to receive help from their coworkers, security personnel, or police. Although a majority of libraries do offer some sort of workplace mental health resources (64%), only 20 respondents out of the data set of 435 specifically indicated that they had actually utilized any available resources.

When asked to describe workplace trauma in the library in their own words, responses centered on fear, danger, violence, aggression, mental illness, and noted the frequency of these events. When asked to describe what would help respondents to better address workplace trauma, responses revolved around creating a supportive environment at work, addressing staffing issues, providing training and education for workers, and increasing the

overall safety and security of their buildings. Of the 255 respondents who chose to describe a specific traumatic experience, they once again described experiences involving verbal abuse, physical assault or abuse, harassing or inappropriate behavior, situations relating to drugs or alcohol, sexual assault or harassment, secondhand trauma experiences, or situations involving a person's mental health.

Themes

Analysis of this survey did not aim to draw decisive conclusions from the data – that was what our hope was for the collaborations that would arise during the forum. However, after analyzing over 400 surveys from urban public library workers across the country, there were certain themes that stand out. What was surprising about the survey responses was that although many of the incidents of trauma in the library were directly related to larger culture issues that stem from *outside* of the library (e.g., racism, sexism, substance abuse, etc.), the trauma that was incurred by many respondents was often a result of how the situation was handled *inside* of the library. Respondents frequently described situations where staff were not supported during or after an incident, where they were made to feel forgotten, neglected, were not believed by managers or administrators, where they were frustrated by the lack of communication and understanding, or the inconsistent or unequal application of policies and procedures. The predominant themes of survey respondents revolved around library power dynamics (e.g., communication between organizational levels, decision-making power, administration being out of touch with everyday library work, etc.), having (or not having) a supportive work environment (e.g., support from management, administrators, and coworkers, space to speak openly and honestly, incident debriefing, proper training and education, etc.), addressing staffing issues (particularly by increasing the number of staff and security personnel), and creating worker-centered library policies and procedures (e.g., streamlined and equally applied incident reporting, timely follow-up to incident reporting, quicker resolutions to worker complaints or concerns, etc.).

Respondents reported feeling that library administrations would not back them up and support them in stressful situations or harassment. In some cases, respondents reported that their experiences were downplayed or overlooked. In one such case a respondent reported that a patron had aggressively approached a staff member while drunk on multiple occasions shouting at them, the response from their director was as follows,

“What was totally astounding was that after this, the library Director was angry at ME, and told me that every customer deserves a "fresh start every day" and that if I had only stood there and talked to him instead of walking away, the man wouldn't have been angry. He told me it was "poor customer service" to walk away! I was still technically on my dinner hour when this happened, so I was excused "this time" but

admonished that I had to serve this man in the future.”

- Survey Respondent 66

Several respondents reported being expected to deal with weapons in the library as though it was a normal event. They expressed feeling unsupported by library administration, which triggered long term effects for the workers.

“I’ve had a teen patron pull a gun on me and physically assault a colleague. I felt like it wasn’t taken seriously by library administration. I still have nightmares about it two years later.”

- Survey Respondent 131

“We have had multiple patrons come in with weapons, everything from large sticks to guns and knives. We try to call the police as little as possible so that everyone feels comfortable in using the Library, but when this sort of thing happens we need to protect staff and other patrons. Frontline staff are having these very disturbing confrontations, and at the same time are getting push back from the Library Administration about calling the police. We need to support our staff better in these situations and not make them feel like they did something wrong for calling the police to remove someone with a weapon after they have asked the patron to leave and they have refused.”

- Survey Respondent 359

Some survey respondents reported experiencing long-term stress from not having the power to help patrons or meaningfully intervene in dangerous situations.

“I responded to an overdose at the library, which I had trained to do on my own time. There was narcan on site for security officer use which I administered. I also called our security dispatcher for back up. The security officer who arrived was aggressive with me and the person who overdosed. Afterwards he followed up to complain that I was interfering by continuing to interact with the person who overdosed after he arrived. The narcan was then removed from all buildings without onsite security because non-security staff were not authorized to use it. I felt competent to handle the emergency response but completely traumatized by the institutional response.”

- Survey Respondent 204

“Once there was a naked man in the bathroom. He was an older gentleman who must have had a medical situation and found himself covered in feces. He was trying to clean himself off. At the time, there was a security guard stationed in our building. The security guard asked the man if he needed medical attention, but he declined. When I wanted to call, I was told that I wasn’t legally allowed to..”

- Survey Respondent 84

It can also be stressful not to be able to assist with regular patron needs outside of a violent or medical context. Respondents reported experiencing second hand trauma in communities with high needs and low resources.

“Even though the physical events towards us are traumatic, we also experience second hand trauma through the lives of our patrons. We witness our community members struggle through poverty, homelessness, drug abuse, mental illness, and oftentimes we do not have the resources to help them. As a library staff members it can be stressful to not be able to help patrons in need and even more stressful to punish patrons for something beyond their control (i.e. asking them to leave for the day because they are carrying too much luggage, sleeping on property, or causing a disturbance due to mental illness).”

- Survey Respondent 93



Question 16: What are the three things that would help you in your place of employment when it comes to avoiding, experiencing or dealing with workplace trauma?

A supportive environment was one of the most frequently identified supports that would help with traumatic events. 19% of respondents said that it would be helpful, and yet it's not the current reality. While respondents reported being supported by their immediate colleagues, many respondents reported feeling unsupported by upper administration. This

was also identified in the responses to question 13 on the survey. 83% of respondents reported receiving support from a colleague during a tough situation at work, and only 11% stated that colleagues were not supportive.

“Based on my position, I am often the one who is called in to deal with the difficult situations. When this happens, other staff step in to 1. Control any crowd that may be forming 2. Call law enforcement when needed 3. Check in with me afterwards to make sure I'm ok.”

- Survey Respondent 84

“Having the administration acknowledge it. Many times things happen to staff and admin ignores it and doesn't share any information to help others avoid it or words of comfort. “ - Survey Respondent 105

Conclusions

As noted in the literature review, libraries have a problem with stressful events and how we handle them as institutions and as a profession. While the existence of libraries and the dedication of librarians alone will not be able to stop endemic cultural problems such as racism, sexism, and homelessness, it is clear from the survey responses that there is plenty that can be done internally within libraries to reduce the traumatic impact that library work has on library workers. If libraries were to choose to tackle any one of these predominant themes, it is very likely that the trauma experienced by public library workers would be greatly diminished - even if the root causes of the traumatic events themselves may be uncontrollable.

Focus Groups

Introduction

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue of workplace trauma in urban public libraries we followed up the survey with a series of focus groups. The focus groups enabled us to have conversations that dove more deeply into the areas of concern raised by the survey.

Process

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated moving the focus groups onto Zoom rather than holding them in person. Researchers facilitated 6 focus groups during the week of September 27th, 2021 with a total of 58 participants. Each focus group was conducted by video conference and was approximately one hour long. Participants were drawn from a diverse array of libraries, including Albany Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, LA County Libraries, Las Vegas Clark County Library District, Leroy Collins Leon County Public Library, Lexington Public Library, Madison Public Library and Queens Public Library. They also represented a variety of job titles, including librarians, middle management, clerical staff, and security officers.

Traumatic experiences at work are a sensitive topic and often difficult to talk about. Given that, the impersonal nature of video conferencing presented a particular challenge. We decided to focus on creating a psychologically safe environment for participants so they would feel and be safe while sharing their experiences. Creating that space was a priority in all stages of the focus group preparation and facilitation. While organizing the focus group cohorts, we took advantage of the video conferencing format to separate staff from supervisors at their institutions as much as possible. We also requested that administrations at participating libraries allow for a private space for staff and an hour off the public service desk immediately following the session. We have since been informed that this time was not always provided.

Prior to the focus group sessions each participant received a care package in the mail. The care package included a squishy fidget, notebook, pen, tea and chocolates. The package was a big part of building the shared experience and an acknowledgement of the difficulty in talking about these issues. We observed participants using the squishy fidgets during the sessions and several reported that they had already eaten the candy.

Video conference meetings can feel very impersonal and disconnected. To help mitigate that feeling we made a point to acknowledge the distance that video conferencing creates at the start of each session. We also requested that participants keep their cameras on so that we could monitor the emotional states of each participant and make adjustments to our

facilitation if needed. Each session included a few empty breakout rooms that participants could use if they needed a few minutes alone away from the main meeting. These breakout rooms were used a few times during the sessions.

Following the focus groups we made calls to individual participants who seemed like they might need support. We have also kept the recordings, transcripts and notes private, and will continue to do so in the future.

The questions and flow of the focus groups were designed to help build a deeper understanding of the trends we observed in the survey answers and to draw out potential areas to be addressed. The questions for each session followed a pattern of; getting to know each other, building rapport, taking a tour through a process or event, and reflecting on what we had discussed or heard during the session. The reflection time during the groups was very helpful in bringing up ideas for future improvement. The facilitation guide is available in the appendices.

Following the focus groups, researchers processed the notes and focus group recordings by going through each group and writing down individual ideas and statements on Post It notes. Each focus group session was given a different color and was grouped together. Once each individual idea was collected on a Post It note, there were approximately 350 notes. Ideas that were written down by both researchers were marked with a dot sticker.

After we had covered every wall in the office with Post It notes we sorted them into broad categories and documented how they were grouped. Then the notes were broken down and sorted into more granular categories in a second round which was also documented. Because each focus group had its own designated color you can clearly see where ideas repeated across cohorts. The Post It notes are the only raw data we are providing from this part of the research in order to protect the confidentiality of participants. The notes from the second round of sorting are available in the appendices.

Initial findings

Each of the focus groups was an intense and emotional experience. Library workers self selected to participate in the focus groups, and in the survey, were likely to have experienced an adverse event at work. An overarching theme of the group was the feeling of helplessness and being alone. Many participants reported thinking that the event they experienced was only happening to them and feeling like they should be able to manage their feelings about it without external support.

Trauma was consistently reported across the focus groups and the commonalities and shared experiences between individuals at different institutions and across different focus groups was often stark. Sexual harassment is rampant, particularly with patrons but not exclusively. Participants reported harassment from colleagues, supervisors, and board

members as well. Racial abuse is common and often tacitly tolerated by white colleagues and management. Both of these situations represent a gap in current best practices. There are no practical and widely disseminated guidelines or standards for addressing these issues in the public library workplace.

Societal failures encroaching on public libraries have created a new level of stress. As the social safety net has been dismantled and underfunded libraries have been left to pick up the slack without the appropriate resources to do so. The stress this is placed on library workers has not been matched by a commensurate increase in institutional support or cultural change in the profession.

For the purposes of this study we will be framing our findings in three categories: external issues, organizational culture, and individual issues.

External Issues

Many of the stressors reported by focus group participants were external. While many participants see libraries as an important tool for community good, they also reported that the needs of the community causes stress. In many cases the need of the community exceeds the resources available, leaving staff unable to assist patrons in the way they would like. Communities with intense needs for social services pass those needs off onto library workers as a matter of course. One participant remarked that “we are the only therapy they (patrons) can afford”. Social workers are in high demand and are seen as an effective first step in addressing the broader issues that libraries are being asked to address. There was some discussion about mission creep, but not in every focus group session.

Additionally, there was a noted difference between high need patrons and abusive patrons. Many urban library users bring their trauma through the doors and those individuals can present unintentional challenges to staff. While they can take extra effort these individuals are not the cause of the majority of trauma. The issue of intention gets involved when we go from high-need to abusive patrons. Many abusive patrons are well aware of the societal power structures they are abusing when they mistreat staff. Participants felt that this intentionality is a big part of the feelings they had about events after they occur.

In discussing their interactions with the public, one participant referred to what they called “endemic incivility.” Another referred to a “culture of casual cruelty.” As service workers, library staff are expected to provide excellent customer service in the face of racist and sexist abuse. The philosophy of “The customer is always right “ has caused a lot of damage to library workers. An inability to set appropriate and consistent boundaries because of institutional policies, culture, and support leave staff vulnerable to abuse. Participants reported feeling on alert and not knowing when the next instance of abuse would come or from where. This feeling has been exacerbated during the current pandemic crisis when you never know which patron is going to come in and not want to wear a mask. There is no social

or personal fallout to being rude to a library employee and people often avail themselves of the free space to vent. Staff regularly experience huge responses to small annoyances as a way for patrons to transfer aggression to a perceived safe space without consequences. Recent mask enforcement conflicts have only exacerbated these issues with library staff experiencing constant daily stress around patron masking. Library workers often have a great deal of responsibility without the power necessary to support or enforce the decisions they make as part of these responsibilities.

A significant number of participants of color reported receiving racist abuse. In many cases, they were referred to with racial epithets like the n-word. These staff felt like they were expected to endure this abuse without consequences for the patrons or community members inflicting it upon them. In one case a Black staff member reported being told “you should be used to this” as though being referred to as the n-word was something she should brush off and move on from. Participants who had experienced racial abuse also reported not feeling supported by their colleagues or administration. They reported a lack of policies regarding racist abuse and often had to continue helping the patron who had abused them in accessing library resources.

Sexual harassment toward library workers, particularly women, was shown to be extremely common. This harassment in our focus groups ranged from being constantly asked out on dates, to patrons exposing themselves. One participant talked about being a young woman and being expected to ask male patrons visibly watching porn to move to computers out of line of sight from the children’s program, and that she was then expected to help get the patron set up on the other computer. The prevailing professional attitude is that this is just part of the job. This harassment can come from all levels including management and the board. Another focus group participant reported repeated low level harassment from a board member even after she brought it to the attention of administration. While patrons watching porn in the library is not the only form of harassment library workers face, it is a frequent one. Indeed, people watching porn in the public library has become a cultural joke. Staff from multiple areas of the country expressed that confusion about the legal requirements around patrons viewing porn in public libraries when it has directly contributed to the harassment of library staff.

There were noticeably high levels of branch, neighborhood, and community loyalty from library staff who serve high-need, high-risk communities. This creates an apparent feedback loop of both primary and secondary trauma. Their convictions fuel their engagement, which motivates further opportunities for trauma in communities which, by their very nature, present high levels of stress and trauma. Economically disadvantaged communities which are experiencing higher than average rates of crime and poverty create a background of trauma for library workers whose branches serve these communities. Some participants reported that getting to and from work can be an exhausting process even before they open the door to the public. These branches often do not get as much attention

or resources for their physical plant. The branch/admin disconnect can be particularly pronounced since admin may not visit these library locations as often as others and as such may be unaware of issues there, particularly with buildings, resources, and physical plant.

Organizational Issues

A consistent theme throughout the focus groups was a lack of trust. This lack of trust seems to go in both directions, from front-line staff to administration, and from administration to frontline staff. In many ways it seems that frontline staff and administration aren't having the same conversation. This was exacerbated by working conditions during COVID. Some staff saw themselves and their colleagues expected to return to the library while library leadership continued to work from home.

There is a greater need for general responsiveness from library management and administration around these issues. Staff want to see things happening after an incident. They want to feel the validation of having their experience heard. "Nobody did anything", was a common sentiment from staff who experienced trauma in the workplace. These sentiments were negatively reinforced when events which could have been avoided were repeated at other locations or with different workers because no actions were taken on behalf of management. Inactive administration can cause a secondary level of trauma as staff feel that the organization is disengaged from their negative experiences. Decisionmakers are often seen as isolated and complaints about the "Ivory Tower" were common. If leadership is infrequently present in the branches then when they do come out staff can feel judged and put on the spot. Libraries are less safe when there is a lack of communication between admin, staff, and security.

Incident reports, as typically done, are ineffective as a response to staff trauma. Filling out an incident report causes both professional stress and forces staff to reexperience trauma as they try to summarize it to fit into a few paragraphs for their boss to read. Training on these reports is inconsistent, and are often one of many new forms and responsibilities that staff encounter suddenly when they get a promotion to first tier management. Staff seldom interact with this form except when they are under stress responding to an emergency. Staff are typically trained to keep incident reports fact based and so these documents can miss nuances of perceived threat or emotional responses by all parties involved. When that happens staff feel their genuine lived reality diminished.

Institutions use incident reports in different ways. Some staff feel discouraged from submitting incident reports either by branch level management or by higher administration. Not filling out an incident report was seen as an easy way of sweeping a security incident under the rug. If there is no incident report, was there ever an incident at all? Incident reports are often not widely shared. In many cases they go to management only. They are not always shared between branches and when that is the case patrons are free to repeat problematic behaviors across different library locations. In some cases patrons

accrue ban after ban as they lose privileges at one branch to immediately go to another library in the same system and engage in the same patterns of disruption and harassment. Staff also felt that the “three strikes, you’re out” rule is enforced inconsistently. If nobody is keeping track of patrons racking up incident reports then nobody ever knows if they have two strikes already or five.

Many focus group participants reported a lack of communication after a stressful or traumatic event. This contributed to a feeling of loneliness and that they were supposed to handle this stuff on their own. As institutions, libraries should work to enact procedures that contribute to a community and culture of care. At a basic level this could look like calling a branch to see if staff are okay after an incident report was received. Staff reported needing to talk to someone after an event happened and not having anyone available to speak to.

Library policies around trauma and security are seen as disconnected from the reality of front line staff. They take a long time to craft and implement and if they are a reaction to a given situation or event then they are often too late to be of substantive use. There is often a sense that policies are written to protect the institution and administration often at the expense of the staff. Participants wanted more decisive policies that offered them more clarity about what their options were in a given situation regarding banning a patron, calling the police, or closing and locking the library doors. Staff would like a greater say in how policies are made and have better transparency in why decisions were made. Not all policies are perceived to be equally enforced.

Another consistent theme in the focus group sessions was workplace bullying. As shown in the survey many participants reported having abusive interactions with supervisors and co-workers. One reported being told that they had to continue to work with the person who had verbally abused them because if they refused then they were being insubordinate. Often participants discussed feeling as though supervisors and administrators just didn't want to deal with the conflict brought up by workplace bullying.

Internal Issues

Library staff have created a culture of normalization around traumatic events. Participants were unanimous in their feelings that they are expected to go through this kind of experience and that it is all part of the job. Getting a full time library job is often such a difficult and time consuming process that people are loath to speak up for themselves for fear of putting their hard won job at risk. Some library staff feel so lucky to have finally gotten a job that they will put up with anything. There was discussion of how this is both a point of pride and pain in the profession, particularly in the urban public sub specialty. “Street librarianship” is valued but also exhausting. People didn’t want to complain about “things that everyone goes through on the job.”

This normalization leads to gaslighting, hypervigilance, and burnout. Staff reported being told that incidents “weren’t that bad”, that “it’s what we signed up for” and “it’s just another beautiful day at the public library”. They hear this from supervisors but also from one another and from the larger community at large. Police do not consider library events emergencies even when there are drunk and disorderly patrons because “how dangerous could the library be?” If staff are constantly on the lookout for the next awful thing then they begin to expect awful things all the time and hypervigilance sets in. This feeling of always being on guard makes interactions with patrons and other staff challenging and contributes to burnout. Once staff are burnt out it is often impossible to reset their engagement with the work and their community. Transfers to other locations, moves away from direct public service, and people leaving the institution or the profession are often the only solutions.

There is a deeply felt disconnect between frontline staff and library administration. Participants were distrustful of the power structures of organizational hierarchy. Even when staff were offered opportunities for giving anonymous feedback they avoided it for fear that it was not truly anonymous, an assumption that proved true in the experience of one focus group participant. Human Resources was not seen as helpful and the general perception was that they are there for the organization not the workers. Library administrators were similarly seen as being motivated by serving the institution and the board over the staff. People felt that they would love to be as well cared for and highly-thought of as the patrons are. Library power structures were seen as wanting to cover their ass first and foremost and anything unpleasant that could be swept under the rug would be. Administrators were seen as having the power to do whatever was needed to fix the library, indeed the community, if they were so motivated. While this is obviously not accurate there are numerous instances where better oversight from administration would be invaluable. Keeping track of repeat offenders and outstanding bans would show a commitment to practical security in libraries. There was one participant who shared an experience where a traumatic experience for a colleague could have been avoided had administration been more transparent and followed through with a problem patron.

Staff were not routinely given time to decompress after traumatic events. While most library institutions offer some kind of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) support, these were rarely recommended at the point of trauma when a given incident happened. The vast majority of respondents in the focus groups were aware of EAP offerings but did not make use of them no matter what level of trauma they experienced at work, often out of concern that it would get back to their chain of command. Library workers feel at risk after traumatic events for fear that what happened was their fault. More kindness, empathy, and support are needed for staff after significant traumatic events.

Solutions

Participants in the focus groups agreed that they need time to decompress and move on from traumatic events. They want to have processes in place for them to take time for

mental health and for that to be genuinely accessible at point of need. We documented a constant pressure on front line staff due to staffing issues, meaning that staff often cannot take time to recover from an event without causing significant disruption in library service including potential closures. Participants felt that their experiences were dismissed and unaddressed by library administrations. In many cases there was little follow-up or time off to recover, and staff reported returning to the service desk immediately following an intense stressful event. When staff needed time off after a clearly traumatic event like an assault they were almost universally required to use their earned vacation or sick leave. One participant reported that they have mental health days, but are required to schedule them in advance. They suggested that systems should be put in place to make the process of taking time to recover easier and more transparent.

Empathy and emotional intelligence were considered the two most effective ways to respond to trauma in the library workplace. Participants suggested that these skills should be cultivated at all levels of leadership and practices must be put in place to support them. If reaching out to call after a bad incident is not second nature then it should be part of the procedure. It was noted that it is important that when checking to see if someone is alright to remember that the answer might be that they are not and there may be more follow up needed in days and weeks to come. It is also important to not micromanage staff reactions to immediate stress and trauma. Library workers interviewed for this study reported getting immediate phone calls after a traumatic event to tell them how they should have handled it better.

Traumatic experiences take a considerable toll on staff and it is crucial that their organizations recognize this and take it seriously. Staff need to know that these problems are taken seriously and that their organization has their back. Focus group participants who had follow up, felt heard, and saw an institutional response reported considerably lower lingering trauma from difficult events. One participant said “trauma is what happens after.” Another participant talked about how after her institution did a particularly good job of responding to an awful experience she didn’t feel any residual trauma at all and had very effectively moved on with her life thanks to the support she received.

There were examples of good library leadership in the groups. People felt that administrators who are reactive and engaged in the safety of their staff are good at their jobs. It meant a lot to participants when managers acknowledged staff’s experiences and feelings and made space for recovery with time away from the desk and programming to recharge. Administrators should realize that staff carry trauma home from work. One participant described a situation she was involved in at work that led to her being called to court as a witness. Her director, whom she did not know or work directly with, showed up and sat with her in the court all day. This was lauded by the participants of that focus group and one of the best leadership responses to trauma that was reported in the study.

Training was a commonly discussed topic. People want more training, but they have suggestions about what that training should entail. Participants wanted practical training which has direct application to their work. Mental health first aid, de-escalation, and cultural competency were all in high demand. There was a sense that staff were getting training to hypothetically prepare for things that nothing could prepare you for. Training focused in trauma work and security were seen as valuable however imperfect it may be. There was a general observation that library school does not prepare library workers for any of these aspects of the work. Anecdotal observation from this study suggests that this lack of training and the disparity between the theory and practical reality of public library work contributes to early career burnout.

Staff were looking for toolkits they can apply immediately to problem situations. They want to know what to do in various high stress situations to take care of the problem without having to make a response up on the fly. They also want tools to process incidents after they happen. They asked for useful guidance on handling trauma both ongoing in their workplace and what they bring home to their personal and family life as a result of the work they do in the library every day.

There is little formal support for trauma in the larger library community at this time. While it is a growing topic of professional conversation there is little by way of working responses or structures in place. Unions are not seen as engaged in this work nor are the professional organizations in the field. There were no practices reported to be in place for persons entering the field with pre-existing trauma.

These changes will take time and a commitment from leaders at all levels of libraries. Time and budgets are seen as the hallmarks of where organizations put their priorities. These issues will not be fixed quickly or patched easily. It will take a cultural change in the profession at every level to address these core issues of library work.

Trauma Is

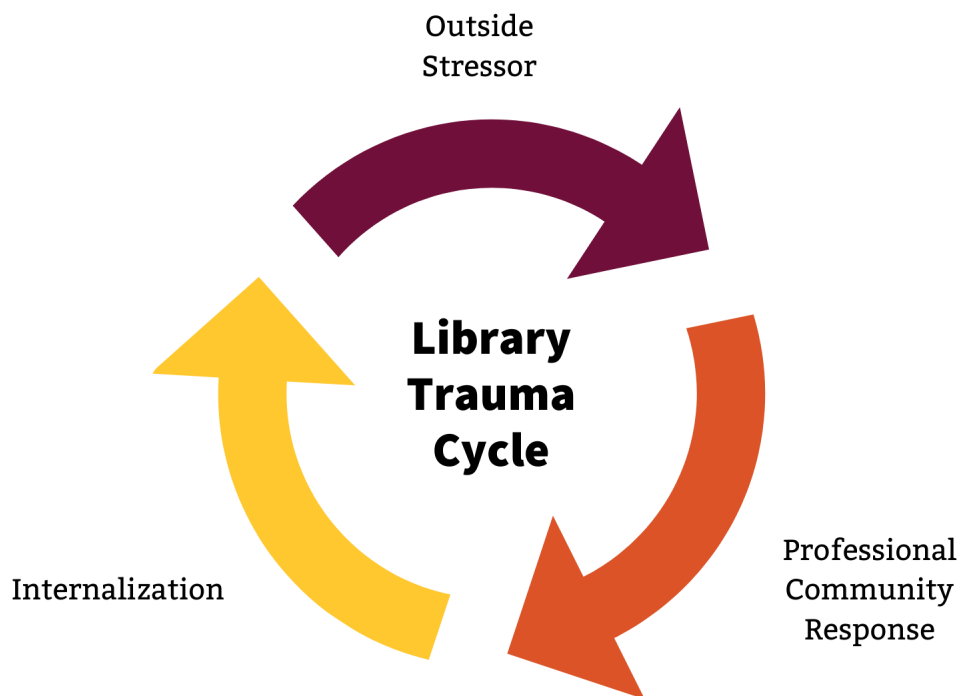
We asked focus group participants the question, “When we say trauma in regards to work, what does that mean to you?” All of the responses below are directly taken from the focus group sessions.

- after the event has happened
- a whole jambalaya of stress & worry
- lack of processing attributes
- aggression/sadness overload
- undermines my ability to do my job
- dark jokes about a patron coming back with a gun
- can't let go of it and it leads to insecurity
- long term impact
- sticks with you
- evokes a bad experience
- anything I have to process a week later
- lasting worry
- reliving old wounds that were never healed properly
- an interaction that leaves an emotional scar
- stuff that one carries & doesn't process in healthy ways
- can't get past it
- deteriorating your ability to work safely and effectively
- the numbness is upsetting
- people who are resigned
- giving up
- emotional effects and being helpless to change it
- disturbing that it doesn't bother you over time
- numbness that deteriorates your ability to tell if danger is present
- events that leave me demoralized & helpless
- disappointment & distrust
- makes me feel alone
- how people talk to us
- verbal abuse, emotional abuse
- daily confrontations & constant stress
- interactions gone wrong
- a drunk person with a knife who will not leave the library
- a major event or incident
- “I got a good right hook to the chin I'm told”
- anticipating bad things
- high alert
- something unexpected that they don't have the training or experience to deal with
- an event that disrupts the nervous system & kicks in “fight, flight, or freeze”
- unknown confrontation: what will happen next?
- uncertainty
- something unexpected & out of context
- today is the day I will be assaulted
- an act with ongoing disruption
- anticipating bad things
- high alert
- a space of fear
- fear
- always being afraid and with good reason
- if there's a solution then it's not traumatic
- things go unresponded to with no support

- a bad experience without a conclusion
- the environment & neglect of my people
- layered effect
- stacked: community, patrons, staff
- stacked trauma
- expected to take it on the chin & ride it out
- it's acceptable to have all this
- secondary trauma
- mastering traumatic events
- witnessing what other people are going through
- carrying the burden of others
- not being able to help
- public needs not being met
- limited ability to help
- 3 strikes you're out never being tracked or enforced
- slurs with no recourse
- microaggressions
- white oversight/solidarity issues
- systemic racism & barriers
- cops showed up the next day
- police took 30 minutes to respond
- emotional manipulations & verbal abuse
- after the event happens

Library Trauma Cycle

The Library Trauma Cycle is a model for understanding how library staff experience traumatic situations in the workplace and how that trauma is perpetuated or resolved. The cycle was created based on an analysis of survey and focus group data. In our analysis of that data we identified a common set of experiences, feelings and responses existing across library and staff titles.



Library Trauma Cycle Model

The Library Trauma Cycle has three stages;

1. **Outside stressor** - An adverse event external to the staff member. This can be a variety of types of event, including, but not limited to, assault, sexual harassment verbal abuse, racialized abuse, witnessing violence, workplace bullying, witnessing or assisting with a health incident, and secondary trauma like being faced w/patrons who have intense needs the staff member is unable to meet.
2. **Professional Community Response** - The response or lack of response from your coworkers, supervisor, administration, and professional community.

3. **Internalization** - Without support, many library workers begin to feel as though the events are their own fault, or that they are alone in their experiences. They then hold on to the stress and bring it into their next patron or coworker interactions.

So we have a model for how these events can progress. Now what? The thing about a cycle is that it can spin on forever, or it can be broken. Each of the three distinct stages in the Library Trauma Cycle are an inflection point at which the cycle can be broken.

If the initial event doesn't occur, then the cycle can't start. As a facility that is radically open to the public, the public library will always have an inherent risk of stressful events. However, since much of the verbal or physical abuse stems from society's failure to care for vulnerable people, if there were adequate community resources for mental health care, jobs, food access, and community to lessen loneliness, perhaps there would be fewer such events. In the case of abuse or harassment from coworkers, if the institution creates an environment where that behavior isn't tolerated it would be less likely to happen. Given the amount of societal influence here the outside stressor stage is the stage that the library as an institution has the least control over.

In the professional community response stage, the impact of that response can also either break or continue the cycle. The library field has a longstanding culture of pretending that things are ok, accepting abusive behavior in the name of public service, and staff "earning their stripes". This culture leads to staff having their experiences dismissed or inappropriately normalized. This stage is the part of the cycle with the most opportunity for positive systemic impact. Study respondents indicated that when they received support from colleagues and supervisors, they didn't have the same lingering effects. By implementing collective care practices, we can break the trauma cycle at this stage and avoid moving on into the next.

The internalization stage provides another opportunity for interruption. While relying on the individual staff to engage in self care is not a substitute for a systemic approach, it can help. If affected staff have easy access to professional support, or engage in self care practices, hobbies, or other wellness activities they can resolve their stress and avoid bringing it into their next interactions.

Having a mental model to understand how library workers experience traumatic events and vicarious trauma at work is vital to creating effective solutions. As we move forward with those solutions and tools, we can hold this cycle in our minds, looking for the places where we can best interrupt it.

Forum

The Urban Library Trauma Forum was held on March 9- 11, 2022 in Brooklyn, New York. Thirty five participants, organizers, and volunteers gathered to work through the design thinking process to create practical solutions for issues surrounding trauma in library work. We designed the forum, activities, and schedule in a way that we hoped would both meet the needs of the study and be as emotionally safe as possible for the participants while also being energizing and motivating.

Participant selection

The most important factor in the success of the forum was the work, life experiences, and knowledge of the participants. As such, it was vital to ensure that the plurality of forum participants were public facing library workers who were solution driven and willing to spend 3 days of their time working on an emotionally difficult topic.

We drafted and shared the forum call for participants in January 2021. The call for participants was shared through the Urban Librarians Unite email list, social media like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and through the state association listservs we were able to access. We also invited several of the focus group participants to attend. Forty two library workers responded, and we selected twenty eight participants based on a combination of factors with a goal of creating a broadly representative team with the potential to work well together. To meet that goal, we looked at job title, geographic location, ethnicity, and the applicants' narrative answers on the form. The cohort was made up of librarians, clerical staff, security, programming staff and a few administrators. Participants came from a variety of cities, including NYC, Syracuse, Philadelphia, Seattle, Pima County, Denver, Anchorage, and Lexington.

Preparation

In order to help the forum participants be fully informed about the topic and have them all start from a similar baseline we created a preparatory packet for them. This packet can be found in the appendices. All of the participants received preparatory materials detailing the results of the first three stages of the study a month ahead of the forum. The packet also included hotel and travel information, a description of the forum process, reflection questions and suggested readings from the literature review.

A week prior to the forum we held a virtual pre-meeting to allow the forum participants to meet each other and ask questions about the research. During the pre meeting we introduced participants to each other by having them work together in groups to design the perfect breakfast sandwich using Jamboard. We then presented the basics of the research

and introduced the Library Trauma Cycle and allowed time for questions about the research, travel and the process of the forum.

During the forum

Icebreakers and Community Building

Each of the ten volunteers received a facilitation guide binder with a detailed schedule and instructions for all of the activities. On the first day of the forum we allowed for a soft beginning to the forum, hosting informal icebreaker activities. As participants arrived we handed out their participant packets and had them settle in and start the ULU Bingo card. We also set up large posters for a Headlines from the future activity in which participants wrote headlines that would be possible if the forum was a success.

Once most of the participants arrived we broke into teams and started off a game of the floor is lava. Each team worked together to cross the floor from shape to shape while dodging flying tissue paper lava balls. Both the schedule and topic were intense so we wanted to intentionally spend time on community building activities to help the group get to know each other.

Before we began the discussion and idea creation portion of the forum we went over our community agreements and participant, Casey Landau, led us through an introductory exercise where we introduced ourselves and shared our access needs for the day. This exercise was a major part of creating the cohesive cohort. It helped us to set the tone of the forum and be open about our individual needs as we moved through the process.

Developing a shared understanding

Continuing the understand phase of the design thinking process, we introduced a dialogue about the readings with the whole group around the research done up to this point in the study. Participants then broke into small groups to identify as many issues from the research as possible and write them out individually on Post Its. They were asked to examine the research while considering the following questions.

- What are the problems introduced?
- What are the needs it recognized?
- What was missing?

The groups then clustered and narrowed their notes, combining those with similar or duplicate ideas. They then engaged in a democratic selection process to select the ideas they felt most engaged with so they could report back to the whole group. When they came back to the larger group, we asked each team to share back, but this time categorizing their ideas into the categories of Internal, External, Organizational, and Other/Outlier.

As the issues were introduced, each individual participant determined if they were

- An expert in this area and want to do the work to develop the prototype
- An expert in this area and want to remain an ally from a distance
- Not an expert in this area and want to work to develop the prototype
- Not an expert in this area and want to remain an ally from a distance

For each of the categories, each participant decided which area they wanted to focus on. Once everything was categorized into Internal, External, Organizational, and Other/Outlier, those who self-selected to be in each one sifted through all of the ideas and started pulling themes. As themes were revealed, teams determined what theme they wanted to focus on, whether their group needed to be split into two groups, and whether they needed to combine more than one theme. The next morning the teams gathered together to decide on their structure and names before moving into the next stage, defining the problem.

Defining the problem

As part of gaining a full understanding of the issue of trauma in library work we did an iceberg model exercise. The iceberg model provides a framework for looking at a problem in its entirety. Each participant was given a blank worksheet of the iceberg to think through the underlying system and structures surrounding a stressful event at work. The top of the iceberg above the water is the event itself. This is where participants wrote in the acute event they wanted to analyze. Then below the water they looked at the patterns and trends causing that type of event, underlying structures supporting those trends, and finally the mental models holding it all up.

Multiple participants, across groups, looked at the issue of patrons coming to the library with needs that a library is not set up to meet. In these models the patterns and trends included the defunding of social services leaving the library as the last place for patrons to attempt to get help. Underlying structures included capitalism, Reagan-era ideas around social services, and the lack of affordable housing. The mental models included dehumanization of people in need, racism, sexism, and, again, capitalism.

In one example, a participant analyzed a few types of abusive incidents, including having a stapler thrown at them. The patterns and trends included abusive patrons returning and repeating behavior, colleagues leaving, and short staffing as a result of staff leaving. Underlying enabling structures included a three strikes rule for banning that was rarely followed, a divide between the branches & central library, and a lack of addressing issues. The mental models supporting the iceberg were the idea that library work is easy, that librarians are quiet and harmless, and the idea that as a public servant abuse is to be expected.

This activity allowed participants to think deeply about all of the aspects of our work and structures that provide the scaffold holding up the traumatic events and patterns.

How Might We...

The How Might We... exercise allowed us to identify portions of a larger issue to then focus on. This exercise allows us to think about what might be possible and create a design challenge to get there. The “How” assumes that solutions exist, it enables us to be optimistic. “Might” is a freeing concept, it means that the idea doesn’t have to work and the concept may be wrong, but that is ok. “We” means we are working together to come up with a collective solution to the ideas we identify.

Examples of How Might We Statements

- How might we restructure management/staff relationships?
- How might we give staff more agency that relates in action?
- How might we make an MLS worth having?
- How might we support staff after traumatic events?
- How might we create a staff trauma team?
- How might we listen and respond to stakeholders equitably?

We then used some of these “how might we” statements as a basis for the idea generation activities. We asked that participants choose a few to solve for in the next series of activities.

Idea generation

The idea generation portion of the forum consisted of several ideation exercises. We used the crazy 8s, bad idea, and social innovations pathways methods with a goal of coming up with as many ideas as possible. Once participants came up with ideas we narrowed them down into a few for each team to work on.

Crazy 8s - The crazy 8s exercise is designed to help draw out as many ideas as possible in a very short amount of time. We had participants choose one HMW (how might we) per exercise sheet, set the timer for 8 minutes, and had them write down as many ideas as they could in that time. We did this exercise three times, alternating with the two other exercises.

Bad Ideas - The bad ideas exercise was meant to help participants come up with ideas they would probably not write down otherwise. To do this exercise, we allocated five minutes for participants to write down all the absolute worst solutions to their HMW that they could think of on cartoon trash cans. Sometimes participants can come up with fabulous ideas that they might have felt insecure about in another exercise structure.

Social Innovations Pathways - The social innovations pathways exercise was intended to help generate ideas based on the type of resources and expertise that are available for the project along with the scale of the intervention. The worksheet is set up as a nine square grid where the y axis represents the scale of engagement from stand-alone interactions to cultural change. The x axis represents the range of expertise from the solo designer to a cross sector group. This exercise is more complex so we gave it around ten minutes.

After finishing the exercises we had participants transfer their ideas over to Post It notes for the next step. All of the handouts from our exercises are available in the facilitation guide in the appendices.

Idea Selection



Forum participants clustering and sorting their ideas
Photo credit - Brynna Tucker

The next stage in the ideation phase of the design thinking process is narrowing down the ideas that the groups want to prototype. Working within groups, participants put all of their idea post-it notes up on the wall. They then worked together to cluster similar or duplicate ideas. Once the ideas had been grouped the teams evaluated each idea (using dot stickers), based on three criteria.

- Red - how well does this idea meet the need?
- Green - how novel is the idea?
- Yellow - is it feasible in three years?

The groups then chose their top three ideas based on how well the ideas meet all the criteria.

Prototyping

The teams took each of their three ideas and created basic prototypes of them using the idea canvas handout. The idea canvas was designed to provide space to think through all the elements of the project so that the groups could have a good idea of what is feasible and a solid basis for moving on to the prototyping stage. Each canvas provides space for identifying the project and a team. The teams also had space to create a logo, identify the specific problems they were solving for, space to list stakeholders and decision makers, resources needed, and potential challenges. There was also space for a sketch of the idea.

Project Name: Library Trauma Support
Team Name: Hard Left Turn
Team Members: Khrya / Sam / Andrea / Virginia / Heather / Kate / Em

Problem Statement:
 How might we provide a platform (national + local level) to support library workers experiencing trauma

Idea: Create support networks:
 Local = monthly support group (county/regional)
 National = online + remote forum

Stakeholders:
 Who is it for? All library workers, Community
 Who are the decision makers? Admins / Boards, Policymakers, Organizational Stakeholders, Library Workers

Resources Needed: Funding, Volunteers/Mediation, Communications/Tech, Trauma Experts, Copiersation, Independently Sustainable, Peer Uniminated Steering Comm.

Potential Challenges: Maintenance/Sustainability, Physical Space, Money, Lack of Support, Burn Out, Secondary Trauma, Time, Getting Buy-In/Trust, Longevity, Equity/Inclusion

Sketch of Idea:
 Local: Trauma Meeting / Circle (Healing)
 National: website, Join Us! We talk about Trauma, Zoom, Workshops, Forums, Blog Posts, Tips

Urban Library Trauma Study
www.urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults

Idea Canvas - Library Trauma Support by Hard Left Turn

The Hard Left Turn team created a very thorough idea canvas for their Library Trauma Support idea. They wanted to solve the issue of a lack of support for staff experiencing trauma by creating a platform for peer support. They identified needed resources like funding, trauma experts, and volunteers. They also point out challenges like sustainability, time, and getting buy-in and trust.

Once the teams completed their idea canvases they repeated the dot exercise within their groups to choose the most feasible project for the feedback stage.

Feedback



Groups soliciting feedback on their idea canvases

After the groups completed their idea canvases we moved into our feedback sessions. The groups were paired together to present their ideas and receive feedback then rotated through with different groups. One person in each group was designated to record the prototype feedback, looking at the positive things that were working, any negative feedback for things that needed work or development, and recommendations for change or improvement.

Poster Prototypes

On the third day of the forum participants began creating their posters using the feedback from the previous day. They then presented their posters and ideas to the full group and answered questions about their projects.

Closing

To close out the forum we engaged in a group reflection and conversation, giving us an opportunity to check in with ourselves and our colleagues at the end of an intense experience. We asked how their idea of trauma had changed or solidified, what they planned to take back to their own library, and if there were any other thoughts that they would like to express. We then formally closed the forum.

The ULTS Forum was an intense, high-energy space where participants were expected to remain hyper engaged and create large amounts of intellectual output in a very short period of time. ULU made great efforts to support our participants making choices for high quality food, accommodations, and meeting space. Participants used these spaces to churn out

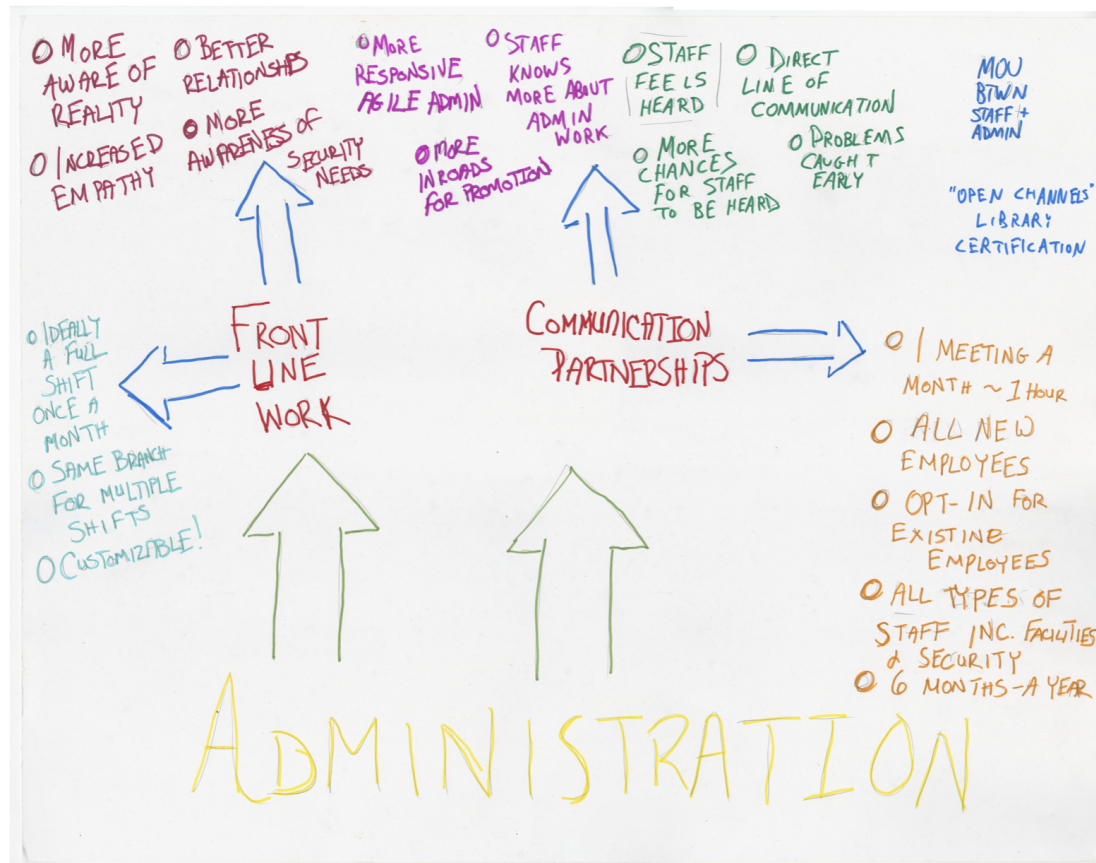
massive amounts of creative thought about a wide variety of practical aspects of trauma in public libraries.

A huge amount of mental work was done at a very fast rate and most participants felt exhausted and mentally wiped out at the end of day three as they were heading home. Forum participants are going to be an important cadre of innovators as the practical applications of this work begin to spread more widely. Many of the participants have continued to keep in touch with each other through the Slack channel we set up. We hope these conversations continue, enabling the work to go on.

Ideas

Open Channels

Team Name: Badmin to the Bone



Open Channels poster

Description

This group tackled the disconnect that can be found between administration and frontline staff by creating programs for embedded administration and open communication. First, open communication channels can be formed by bringing administrators into locations to do regular frontline shifts. In bringing administrators to a location, they are able to better meet and see the staff, while also experiencing what the front line staff encounters at work. The second step is to create communication partnerships, pairing administrators with frontline staff to meet regularly over a six month to one year period, creating rapport and

communication. This partnership would entail regular meetings, and give staff the space, time, and comfort of being able to express themselves.

For this communication initiative, library staff and administrators would create a memorandum of understanding (MOU) so that everyone knows what to expect, while also creating an opportunity for both parties to be radically vulnerable with each other. The measure of this process would be asking staff if these interventions are working for them, or potentially offering an open channels communication certification.

Challenges

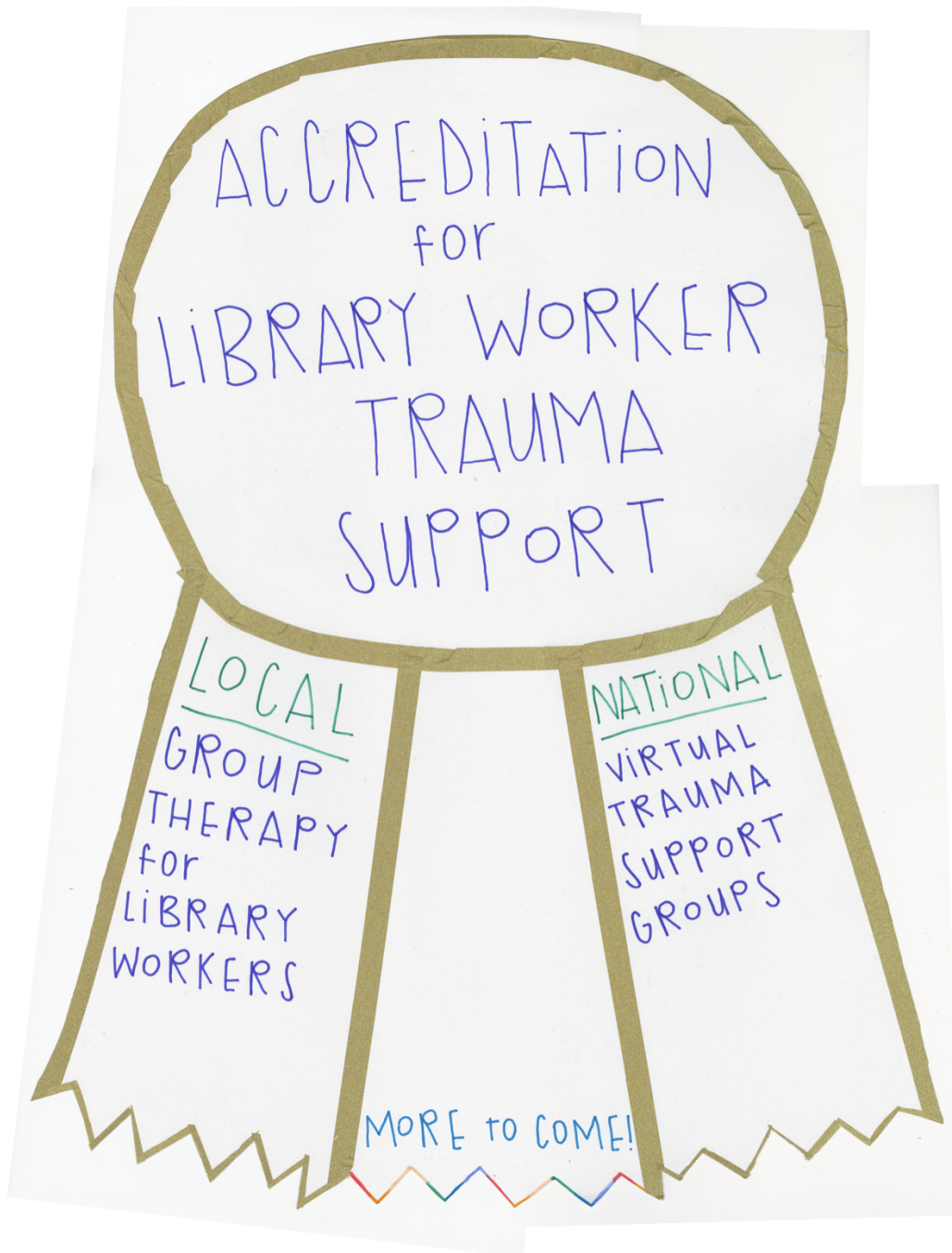
Just like with any project this one has its challenges, the first being willingness of both administration and staff to participate. This initiative requires all parties involved to be vulnerable and open with each other, which may be difficult if staff are fearful or have a lack of trust in administration. Administrators may fear that confidences or concerns shared here would undermine their ability to lead. Additionally, both staff and administration would have to find time for this project, something libraries typically do not have enough of. Time would be needed on both the staff and administrators end to create, attend, and implement meetings, along with any training for desk duties. While there are other challenges as well, they may differ from location to location, but the main challenges remain time and willingness to participate.

Potential for Impact

If implemented, these ideas would help to create an open line of communication while helping administrators to gain awareness and empathy for the work that staff do for the library, while also helping administration to become more responsive to the needs of staff, potentially catching problems early on. Having a continued presence also allows opportunities for praise and recognition of what staff members do, internal promotions, and better relationships. Even implementing some of the ideas from this group, would be a step forward in helping frontline library staff feel seen, heard, and validated to help create a better work culture for the library.

Accreditation for Library Worker Trauma Support in Libraries

Team Name: Fighting Rage



Accreditation for Library Work Trauma Support poster

Description

Fighting Rage focused on the fact that library workers are often treated as superheroes, which causes library staff to not be given much needed help. To provide support to library workers and push against the notion that library workers are infallible superheroes, this group created a library trauma accreditation to encourage libraries to create better work environments. The more supportive the organization, and the better care library workers receive, the more equipped workers are to do their jobs. Libraries are an important part of community care.

For a library to become accredited, they must offer localized support such as group support, peer support, or group therapy. For these support sessions the time used must be paid and protected by the library, to encourage workers to participate. Additionally, the library can direct library workers to a larger, national support network that offers virtual trauma support groups, a trauma hotline, as well as support and tools for local groups. Once accredited, this national group would maintain a record of accredited libraries as well as holding libraries accountable to keep their accreditation up to date.

Challenges

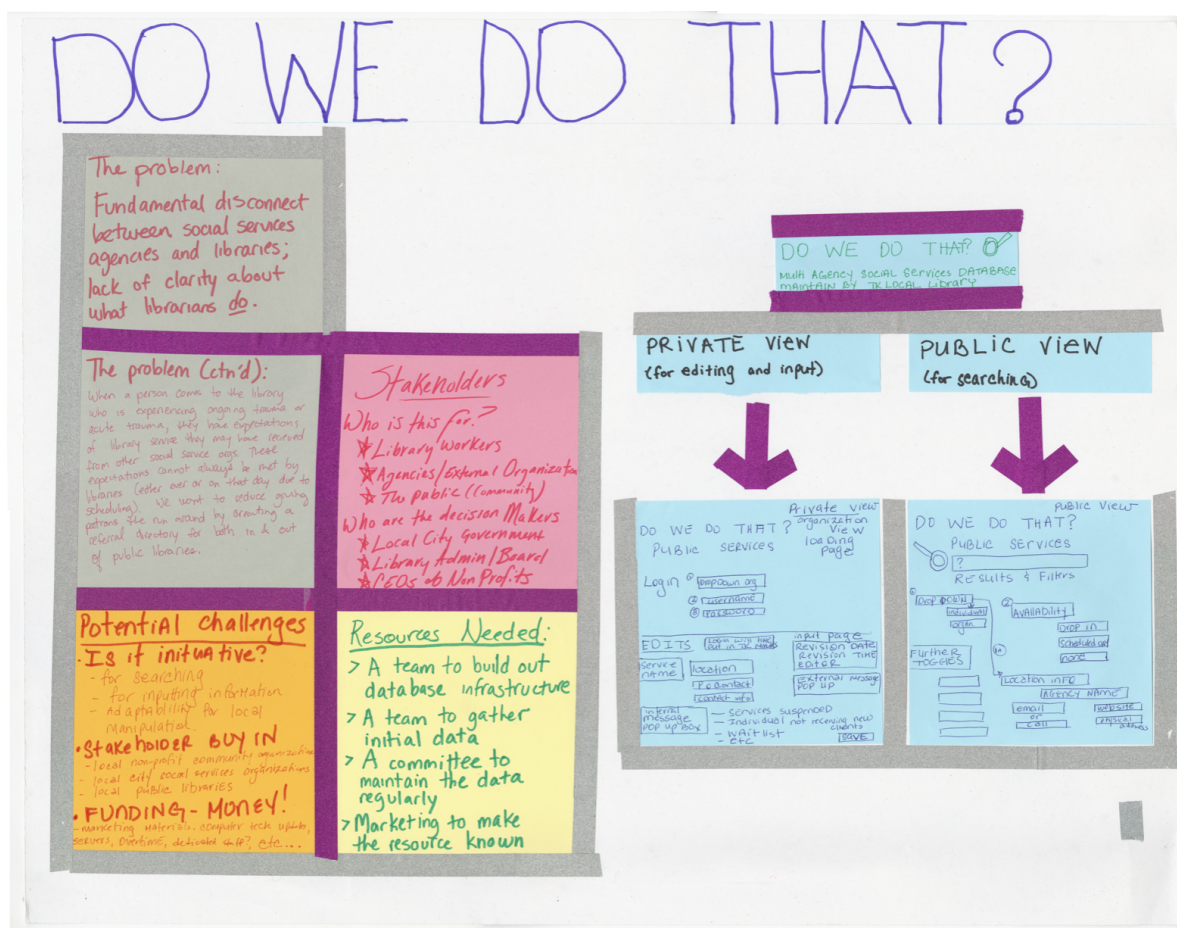
As with many of these projects the main challenges is creating buy-in and getting libraries invested in these ideas, especially since there is not much quantitative data regarding trauma in libraries. Also, like many of the projects, creating an accreditation process and providing resources to library staff will take time and money by both the library and the national oversight group, which will need to be created to oversee the accreditations. Along with the oversight group, there are challenges to finding funding, offering services, and coordinating across various time zones, locations and communities.

Potential for Impact

Besides the obvious impact of giving library workers opportunities for support and mental health resources, the accreditation would also give library workers a way to advocate for themselves by pressuring organizations to work towards accreditation. Additionally, accredited libraries would be able to promote their accreditation to help them recruit library staff. Finally, the national arm of this project would be open to all library staff, allowing support and discussion around trauma, regardless of library accreditation status. Ultimately, the accreditation is a way to ensure that library staff receive support and resources that are needed to deal with trauma and library work.

Do We Do That? - Online Database of Community Services

Team Name: Team Awesome is Good



Do We Do That? poster

Description

Since libraries work with and refer people to many community services often library workers find themselves wondering, “do we do that?” In this project, a database is created as a multi agency, social services website that is owned and maintained by the library, where searching for services would be like searching for a book in the catalog.

This intuitive, collaborative, database could be used by the community as well as library employees. For the community, there would be a public view, allowing for a simplified way to look for social services, while also having a back end that will be edited, maintained and updated by library staff in collaboration with various community agencies. Library staff and

community agencies would be able to create pages with information that can be searched, allowing the database to be customized to the library and community it serves.

Challenges

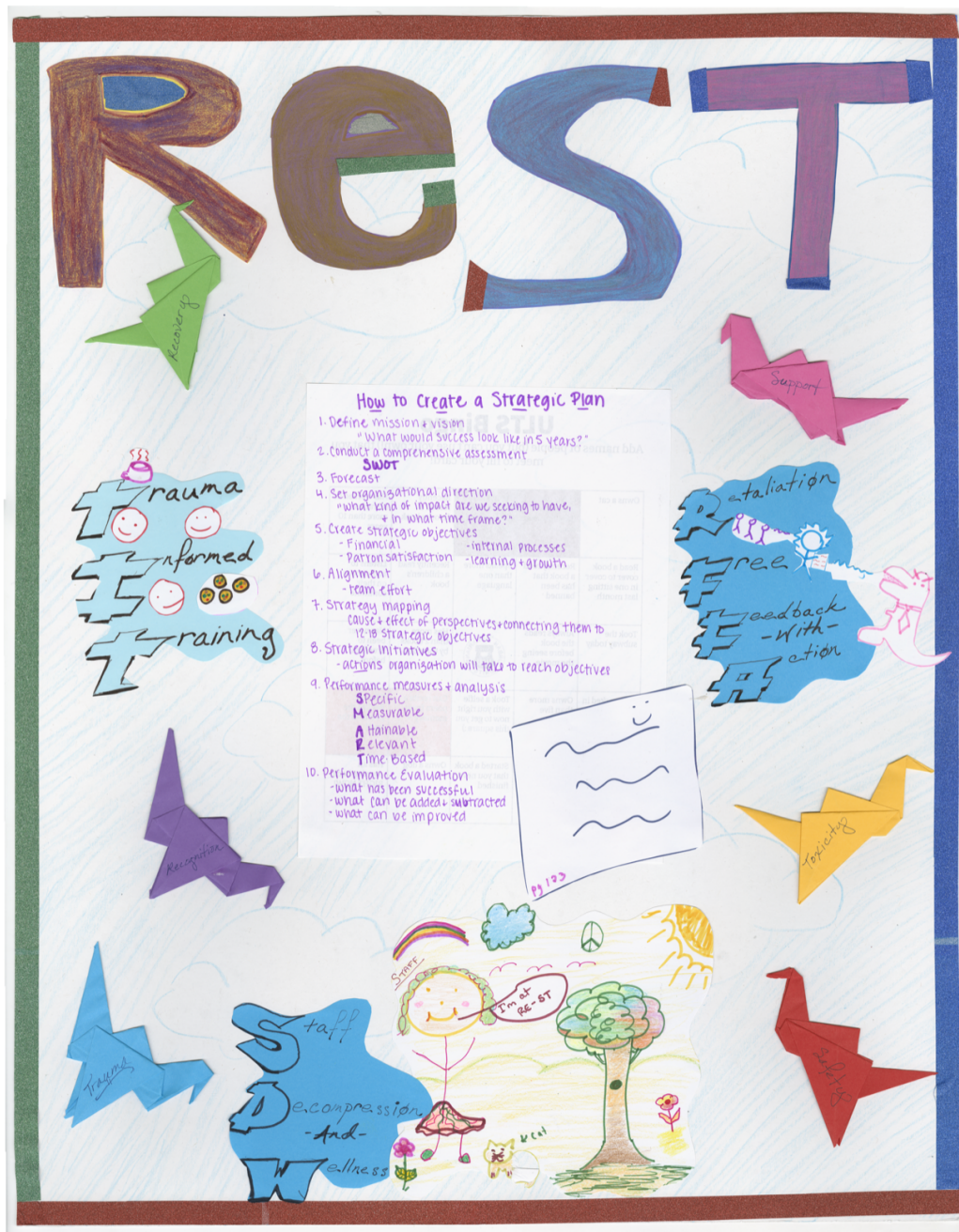
The main challenges for this project, as identified by the group, are ease of access for both the community and the library staff, as well as stakeholder buy-in, and funding. The database needs to be intuitive - easy to search and to add information (without much tech know-how), as well as adaptable to the individual library. Library staff also need to find value in the database, not only to use the database, but to give staff time to continually edit, update, market, and maintain it. The cost of the staff time, as well as servers and technology may also pose a monetary challenge.

Potential for Impact

The impact for a community services database can be seen both in the library and in the community. First, having a database allows for libraries to be able to more easily refer patrons to resources outside of the library. Both helping patrons connect with resources they need, while also recognizing that libraries cannot meet all the needs of its community. In creating this database, the library would also foster relationships between community services organizations, allowing for more collaboration, resource sharing, and communication. Most importantly, having a database would help patrons get connected simply and quickly, without having the frustration or run around of trying to find resources. Finally, helping patrons connect to resources seamlessly, reinforces the library as a place for information and a community hub.

Creating a Trauma Informed/Centered Strategic Plan

Team Name: RE-ST (Recovery, Recognition, Reform, Safety, Toxicity and Trauma)



RE-ST - Creating a Trauma Informed Strategic Plan poster

Description

RE-ST considered six main concepts around trauma in libraries and decided to build a plan around them. The concepts are - Rest, Recovery, Recognition, Reform, Safety, Toxicity, and Trauma. From these concepts the group decided to tackle library trauma from the foundations of a library - the strategic plan. The proposed strategic plan takes trauma-informed principles and injects them into other library plans and documents like mission and vision statements, assessments, future planning, organization direction, objectives, mapping, initiatives, performance measures and more. Instead of simply having a trauma statement, this initiative would inject trauma-informed care for library staff into all elements and documents of the library. So that rather than trauma being a separate thing, compassion would be a vital part of the governing documents of the library.

The group even created a staff mission statement as an example (seen below):

RE-ST holds an unwavering commitment to a culture of healing. We support our staff in continuous growth and recovery from trauma and its impacts. We honor the many challenges they face in their work. We recognize the effort, time, dedication, and energy they invest in uplifting our organization and community.

We hold sacred the emotional, physical, and psychological safety of our staff members. We consciously move away from a toxic culture that expects sacrifice. We move toward the bright future of mutual respect, action for change, open dialogue, and flattening of power differentials.

We celebrate the diversity of our staff and the life experiences they bring to enrich our lives and provide us with wisdom in our service. We are dedicated to a workforce of thriving individuals so we may also have a community that thrives.

Challenges

The first major challenge for this project would be the cultural shift that statements like the mission statement above would require. Placing this focus on library workers' wellbeing in such a strong way may come up against reluctance from the community, board members, administration and even staff.

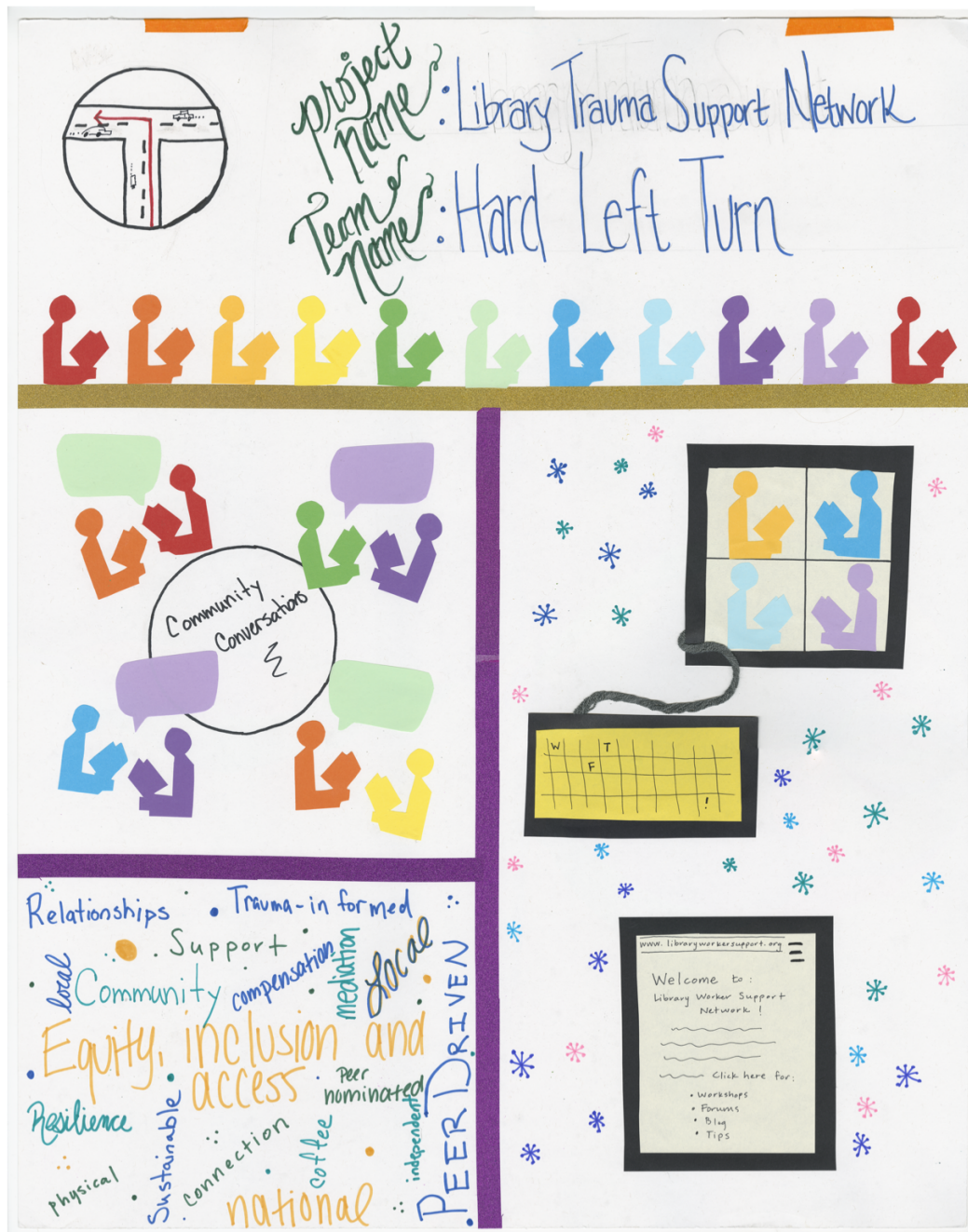
While integrating these ideas into library documents there may be some discomfort between frontline staff and administration in creating these policies and phrases, and administration could easily take control. Additionally, this initiative relies on staff emotional labor and vulnerability to be able to communicate with administration their needs. So, like many of these projects, honest communication without retaliation is key in creating realistic values and policies.

Potential for Impact

In adding RE-ST concepts into the policy of the library, respect and care for library workers will become an important part of the governing documents for the library. Not only does it create accountability for administration and boards, it also allows library staff to have something concrete to directly point to for advocacy. This initiative also allows for libraries to create support systems and worker initiatives as needed. Additionally, the idea of making trauma concepts a part of the regular library documents, as opposed to a separate statement, highlights the integral part that library staff health plays in the work that libraries set out to do.

Library Trauma Support Network

Team Name: *Hard Left Turn*



Library Trauma Support Network poster

Description

You can't self care your way out of a broken system, so this initiative proposed support networks for library workers experiencing trauma. Team Hard Left Turn proposed both local and national support groups to help build comradery, support, connection, and healing for library workers.

First, monthly support groups would be localized in regions to allow people from different libraries to connect. To support the regional groups, there would be a national network to provide information, workshops, discussion groups, and more. These two different modalities aim to foster connection, documentation, resilience building, and healing as well as connecting library workers with resources, workshops, tips and more.

Organizationally, both national and local groups would be peer driven, independently governed, and not be traditionally administrated or rely on external organizations. The initiative would be for library workers, by library workers.

Challenges

In this project there are two main challenges - money to maintain the national and local support groups, and peer support/labor to run both of the groups. Since this initiative is fully peer run, there is a need for volunteers, an organizational structure, and people to give their time. Since many people who may be interested in helping with this, have most likely experienced trauma themselves, it could lead to burnout or further trauma. Additionally, money is needed for the initiative, especially since the goal is to be independently sustainable, so it can remain library worker focused and not be swayed by any outside forces. Money is needed for technology, trauma experts, assistance, and to help compensate individuals for their time.

Also since this program is for library staff, and not administration, the group will need to establish who qualifies to be a part of this group, which addresses another concern - that of retaliation. The fear of retaliation, or one's administration finding out, also may hinder support and trust in the organization. Finally, while not a challenge per say, issues of diversity, equity and inclusion must be considered when creating committees, discussing issues, and organizing groups.

Potential for Impact

The primary impact for this initiative would be to connect library workers, because the forum brought to light that many workers think they are alone in their struggles. With connecting, these groups would allow for individuals to meet more people in the library world and connect. In this connection, there could also be an opportunity to begin to create a collective library worker voice for advocacy. In this way, the group coalition building can not

only advocate for workers but for the profession as well, something that is difficult to do when libraries are siloed. But, as with many of these initiatives, the main goal is to create happier library workers, who feel supported in their work.

Recommendations

This report makes it very clear that there is a crisis of unresolved trauma in urban public library work. It is present at every level and impacts how staff interact with colleagues and patrons alike. MLIS education does not prepare people for the trauma of the job.

Management and administration exacerbate trauma in work culture and organizational norms. Library workers shift trauma over to colleagues and attack one another in break rooms, on social media, and in professional organizations as a reaction to the trauma, both primary and secondary, that they encounter on a regular basis.

Identification of the issue is an important start but work needs to be done immediately to begin to address this crisis. This report makes four major recommendations which will make a start on the issue but all of them will require further support as well as buy-in from the larger library profession. It will be important to have engagement with LIS education, professional organizations, and libraries of all types and sizes as we move forward towards healthier library work.

These are just a few of the solutions which should be tried out to address this issue across library work. Openly addressing this problem is new in library work and any efforts to move the needle on this will take time, effort, resources, and engagement beyond the working group of this study.

4 Recommendations

1. **A National Library Worker Help Line** where library workers can call for immediate support during mental health crises and burnout.
2. **A set of standards for healthy library work environments built by a coalition of worker-led library organizations.** These standards will allow library workers to ask for better conditions and library administrators to point to organizational successes and commitments.
3. **A collection of policies & procedures written from the perspective of trauma-informed leadership.** These policies will offer enough specificity and nuance to be usable but will be written with the intention of being “plug & play” for administrators and library leaders who want to incorporate them into their organizations.
4. **A series of peer-led support groups made up of library workers** which allow workers at all levels to offer and receive support from colleagues at other institutions who can empathize and understand the unique challenges associated with library work. These will be online and workers will be able to opt into groups that match their interests, issues, and level of work (ie. workers of color, administrators, pages, etc.).

Library Worker Support Line

The need for informed mental health support came up time and again in the research for this report. It can be difficult for library workers to access mental health care for a variety of reasons including financial, limited healthcare coverage, lack of healthcare for part time workers, and a host of other barriers to access. Even where EAPs are available many library staff were afraid to use it for fear that their concerns and issues would make it back to management, or that it would be an issue if management found out they were accessing those resources. When they do make use of these services the interactions were typically brief and unsatisfying because mental health workers lacked context around library worker stress and trauma.

Urban Librarians Unite will seek funding to work with mental health care providers, consultants, and project managers who can help us set up an independent mental health line for library workers. Caseworkers who answer the phones will be familiar with the kinds of primary and secondary trauma that library workers face in their workplace both from patrons and colleagues. They will be trauma-informed and tied to anti-racist and allyship focused care for any and all library professionals who call in. This will be a non-judgemental, library-informed, anonymous service.

This project will take approximately three years to bring up to speed on a national level. There will be a year needed to research the scope of the product, and find allies and partners. It will take a year to develop the tool and create the training and scripts for caseworkers. In the third year the project will slowly come online with a series of soft openings to work out any issues while not overwhelming the burgeoning new systems. The project will be closely monitored for long term viability and real impact. All calls shall be strictly confidential at all times throughout every stage of the development and launch of this new tool.

Standards for Healthy Library Workplaces

Going forward, the authors of this study will work with other library worker focused organizations to set up standards for healthy workplaces and practices. These standards will be disseminated widely and will be used as a yardstick to talk about the trauma that already exists within organizations and how they support workers who experience and carry that trauma. Standards offer more flexibility than a formal accreditation in this context. Organizational culture can change quickly due to leadership changes, budget cuts, or structural changes. Certifying a library as a trauma informed workplace could quickly become out of date for a variety of reasons. Also, creating a series of standards recognizes that it is a journey not a race, the process of making healthy non-toxic spaces for our staff and patrons is going to be an ongoing process for many years to come. We cannot simply tick off a series of boxes and call the work done.

These standards will address issues like security, support for staff trauma, agreements on respectful boundaries for staff and administration, as well as suggestions for how libraries can improve communication across groups, which are often seen as in opposition, a hard dichotomy that deepens the disconnect within the organization. This document will provide suggestions of how to reconcile past trauma and build systems which will help staff avoid trauma where possible and help process it when it does happen. Current and prospective employees will be able to reference it when they advocate for improvements in their work environment. Administrators will be able to point to it as a strong commitment to improvement and engagement in response to workplace trauma.

It will take approximately a year to set up this coalition, agree upon standards, and publish the final standards and suggestions for best practice. More funding will be needed to produce this work. There will be costs associated with publicizing and promoting these standards. Funding must also be applied to compensate individuals and organizations for their work. One constant source of stress and trauma associated with library work is uncompensated labor along with emotional labor, this project asks for both. It is important that this work be valued enough to be funded in development and subsidized in publication to make it available to as wide an audience as possible. They should be accessible free of charge for libraries to use as one tool in their processes of self-evaluation and improvement.

Policies and Procedures for Trauma-Informed Leadership

Creating a manual of policies to help guide organizations in engaging with trauma-informed management in library work could make trying out new organizational norms a lot easier for administrators. Library administrators have work days that are typically dominated by either meetings or crises. It can be difficult to dedicate the time to research and carefully craft policies and procedures even if the desire to try out new practices is there.

Our workgroup is proposing that we develop a manual of best practices, policies, and procedures which libraries could adapt to their particular use. These are inspired by the classic NoLo legal form books so often utilized at reference desks. The goal is to have standardized policies that can be easily adapted, which are designed as plug and play for a variety of trauma prone situations. Incident reports came up time and again in the study and are a great example of the kind of granular document which can change the way an organization looks at trauma situations and its response to them. Again, funding will be sought to support the development of this project, research and write policy/procedure templates, and design and publish this policy manual both electronically and in print.

Peer-Led Support Groups for Library Workers

Urban Librarians Unite will work with partners to develop a series of peer-led support groups. These will be largely modeled on meetings in the recovery community where peer driven meetings are often the norm. Standards of behavior and meeting rules will be set to

allow a wide range of library workers to both offer and receive support from their colleagues and fellows.

It will be important that standards of honesty, anonymity, and trust are established early and are reinforced as core precepts of the groups. There will be support literature which will set out standards and expectations of conduct. Isolation was a constant problem highlighted in this study. Library workers across the country are experiencing identical traumas and each believes themselves to be alone in their experiences. The focus groups for this study were raw, difficult, and often brutal conversations. Despite all this, people commented often that just having the conversation was helpful and made them feel less isolated. People felt that their trauma had been validated even if it didn't go away in that hour.

This will be a two year project to launch with a longer slow growth period of approximately ten years if the initial two are successful. The first year will be spent developing the support literature and codes of conduct for the groups. These will be heavily reliant on the norms from the recovery community for initial structures and conventions.

Once a basic framework has been set up the second year will be spent setting up groups on a small scale to test the processes and iron out details. Capacity will be built out based on success and need in the library community. If the program is able to successfully establish itself for two years and legitimately help people, then it should be allowed to grow on a repeat 5 year evaluation cycle so it has time to grow and fill out organically and as people need it in different and changing ways.

Resources will be important to support the development of the standards and codes of conduct. Staff will be needed to coordinate the various groups during the first year of development. While these groups will always be anonymous, it will be important to collect data and feedback during the initial launch phase and in the first five year cycle after that. This kind of structured administration is difficult to do in peer-driven support where the focus should be on shared recovery from trauma and improved mental health. It will be important to have staff to promote and study this program to make it effective and have a long term impact on library work and mental health.

Conclusion

This report is the product of two years of research and is representative of the work, perspectives, and experiences of over 600 people. It is clear that there is a crisis of trauma in urban public libraries and the evidence for this is so overwhelmingly compelling that it seems likely that trauma impacts work in libraries of all types across the profession. It is also clear from the literature search and the conversations that created this report's conclusions that the library profession is starting to wake up to this deeply corrosive crisis.

The last few years have dropped trauma on everyone. Our colleagues, our bosses, our families, our boards, our patrons, our vendors, every person, every institution we interact with will be coming from a place of trauma. We will be approaching them with our own trauma, hurts, and hesitations. That's OK. We are all on the same footing and knowing that we are there together is a step toward approaching others and ourselves with the tools we will need to heal.

We have worked to make as much of that source research available to other researchers as possible. There are large sets of data and brainstorming notes available to anyone who wants to delve into them. We welcome you to try our ideas. We welcome you to use our research to try ideas of your own. We ask that you just please try something.

There are a lot of conversations about "what's next" and "returning to normal". We don't know what's next and that is normal now. COVID-19 disrupted everything. As we rebuild and recreate our profession there are things that shouldn't come back or ever be normal. Trauma, safety, trust, these are things we need to build new structures for everyone working in libraries.

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Appendices

All of the documents listed below can be found at <http://www.urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults>

Proposal

Full Project Narrative - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-project-narrative>

Literature Review

Annotated Bibliography - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-annotated-bibliography>

Survey

Survey Questions - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-survey-questions>

Survey Visualizations - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-survey-visualizations>

Focus Groups

Focus Group Facilitation Guide - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-fg-facilitationguide>

Focus Group Notes - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-fg-notes>

Forum

Pre meeting facilitation guide - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-pf-facilitation-guide>

Participant prep material - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-forum-prep>

Forum facilitation guide - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-forum-facilitation-guide>

Forum Documentation - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-forum-documentation>

Forum Posters - <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults-posters>

Urban Library Trauma Study

The Urban Library Trauma Study is a partnership between the New York Library Association, Urban Librarians Unite, and St John's University



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