Aboriginal health services supporting health and healing through trauma informed care

Danielle Dyall, Sarah Haythornthwaite & Tony Lee
“We know that we cannot live in the past, but the past lives in us”

- Dr Charles Nelson Perrurle Perkins AO
What is trauma?

Trauma comes from a normal response to significant stressors within life.
Memories and Association
3 yr old brain - neglect
Adverse childhood experiences: These are stressful and traumatic life events for children.

They can include a death in the family; injury; household alcohol or drug problems; child abuse or neglect; living in out-of-home care; and being bullied at school

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have a much higher recorded prevalence of childhood adversities that can impact on mental health in later life when compared to non-Indigenous families

(Jacobs, Agho, & Raphael, 2012; Zubrick et al., 2005).
- Cortex:
  - Slow speech
  - Language and physical coordination difficulties

- Brainstem:
  - Signs of persistent arousal,
  - Difficulty with sleep,
  - Problems with concentration
  - High blood pressure

- Limbic system:
  - Intense fear,
  - Helplessness,
  - Emotional, psychological, physiological distress
  - Problems with digestion system

- Limbic and cortex:
  - Closeted,
  - Contracted and confined,
  - Where the person is unable to relate emotionally in social situations
Developmental age:

- Brainstem – 0 to 4
- Midbrain – 1 to 2
- Limbic - 1 to 4
- Cortex - 2 to 6

Cortex:
- Storytelling
- Drama
- Exposure to performing

Brainstem:
- Massage
- Rhythm
- Touch

Midbrain:
- Music
- Movement
- Touch

Limbic:
- Dance/Play
- Art
- Nature discovery
When we ignore generational trauma
5 generations - South America

- 1st generation. colonised – males killed – imprisoned – females sexually misused
- 2nd generation. Men turn to alcohol or drugs as their cultural and spiritual identity is damaged – their self worth eroded.
- 3rd generation. Spousal Assault -- Societal trauma
- 4th generation. Abuse moves from spousal assault to child abuse or both.
- 5th generation. Cycle repeats as trauma begats violence begats trauma.
- 6th The grown children of the conquerors begin to live in fear of the grown children of the conquered. (Merida Blanco In Levine, P)
Culture is a knowing that flows through our blood like a river.

We understand and commune with the world through our feeling.

We carry a knowing of country and creation within us.

Our cultural frameworks: Our songs, stories and lore live within us and this we carry into the future.
INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA MAPPING
WHAT MAKES OUR SPIRIT SICK

**GENERATIONAL IMPACTS**

1869-1894
- Arrival of British surveying ships (colonisers).
- Forced dispersal of Larrakia from traditional lands.
- British colonisers create Larrakia Kings and Queens to make treaties and agreements easier.
- Access to sacred sites restricted.
- Introduction of flour, sugar and alcohol.

1894-1919
- Chief Protector NT given legal guardianship over Aboriginal children.
- Mixed blood children removed from mothers.
- Darwin declared off limits to Aboriginal people.
- Kalee-Camperdown Mission 1932.
- Permanent need to be outside of Kalee.

1919-1944
- "Half-Cast Policy" of assimilation.
- Segregation by skin colour and tone.
- Mission's utilised to aid in overcoming the "half cast problem".
- Legal status and rights given to lighter coloured people.

1944-1969
- Larrakia of mixed descent start to publicly denounce their heritage to bypass laws against them.
- Removal of Larrakia during War.
- Larrakia servicemen not paid for service.

1969-1994
- Division within Larrakia community due to historical impacts of removals, assimilation policies and colour separations.
- No discussion on Reskin Land Claims for over a generation.

1994-2019
- Decisions to hand back land in native title remains unsigned.
- Aboriginal incarceration rates in NT justice system 3 times the national average.
- Mandated Alcohol Treatment Program bill passed with over 95% Indigenous representation.
- Paternalism within organisations and governance.

**EFFECTS ON COMMUNITY**

1869-1894
- Dispossession, loss of land and the right to walk freely upon the land.
- Loss of language and cultural continuity.
- Nutritional balance upset as traditional diet supplemented by processed foods.

1919-1944
- Loss of trust, sense of belonging and identity.
- The beginning of intergenerational trauma from forced removals and separation. Self-medicating via drinking to ease the pain leading to alcoholism.

1944-1969
- Subjugation, inequality, disadvantage and poverty.
- Ongoing and multi layered grief and loss from continued removals.
- Lateral violence. Disunity, anger and mistrust.
- Community and domestic violence. Depression and other mental health issues affecting whole communities.

1969-1994
- Drug use becoming accepted as part of growing up.
- Moving through the justice system becomes an accepted right of passage for young people.
- Community suicides increase. PTSD.

1994-2019
- Self-harming behaviour increases, self-medication, suicide, substance abuse.
- Paternalism within organisations and governance.
- Sense of ongoing oppression, lack of opportunity and sense of hopelessness.

© Larrakia Healing Group 2015
Trans – intergenerational trauma

When trauma is unacknowledged and unattended to, it compounds and compacts, increasing the likelihood of further traumatic events occurring.
HOLISTIC MODEL OF HEALING
WHAT KEEPS OUR SPIRIT STRONG

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY
Network across Indigenous services and programs. Employ and train local Aboriginal people with genuine support into long-term employment. Choose holistic models of working that consider both family and community connections. Take responsibility for developing culturally competent staff.

CONNECTION TO FAMILY/KINSHIP
Gain an awareness of local family groups, history, and critical reflexivity. Employ local community engagement officers. Allowing flexibility within professional frameworks so staff can work alongside family, elders, and community effectively.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY
Collaborate with local Elders to design and run cultural connection camps and programs. Sponsor a Larrakia public art project. Support welcome to country by local Indigenous people.

CONNECTION TO CULTURE
Invest in cross-cultural training. Involve the whole workplace to actively engage with Indigenous recognition days. Take an interest in your clients' culture. Encourage connection to activities that promote clients' connection to culture.

CONNECTION TO BODY/MIND
Use of family vocabulary when explaining test results or Western concepts of health. Recognizing and understanding the cultural implications of behaviour. Be self-aware and care for your own body/mind. Consider language/images used in health resources.

CONNECTION TO SPIRIT, SPIRITUALITY
Critically reflect on your own cultural influences and biases. Support a two-way in-reach between traditional and Western approaches to healing. Develop your capacity to understand and interact with cultural spiritual frameworks and worldviews.

EFFECTS ON COMMUNITY

CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY
Increased trust and openness towards services. Willingness for community individuals to self-refer. Genuine community participation when invited into two-way sharing. Stronger community support for services. Longer-lasting therapeutic relationships.

CONNECTION TO FAMILY/KINSHIP
Healthy relationship building between services and families. Clients will feel seen, heard, acknowledged, and understood. Clients and families will experience genuine support.

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY
Growing sense of empowerment and cultural pride. Clients experience increased sense of belonging and connection to land and culture. Employment and recognition of local Aboriginal expertise.

CONNECTION TO CULTURE
Clients feel validated and valued in relation to their cultural identity. Increased understanding of and connection with local Indigenous culture. Clients experience increased activities that cultural identity.

CONNECTION TO BODY/MIND
Increased likelihood that clients will experience cultural safety. Increased cross-cultural understanding leading to increased relevance and effectiveness of therapies and other services. Reduction in over pathologising Indigenous clients.

CONNECTION TO SPIRIT, SPIRITUALITY
Indigenous clients feel safer to share what is feeling experienced. Increase in participation in longitudinal therapeutic strategies. Feeling understood and acknowledged.

© Larrakia Healing Group 2015
A significant history of wellbeing
WAYS OF HEALING
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

ABORIGINAL

Deep Listening
Recovering from trauma is a complex process - it is important to sit with the person and listen deeply to their story.

Honouring
Supporting people who have experienced trauma to gain a sense of control and autonomy in their lives is an important part of their healing journey.

Genuine relating
Who you are as a person is just as important to us as the skills you bring to help us.

Two Way Learning
Services and community working together is essential to providing effective care across the full spectrum within a holistic framework.

TRADITIONAL HEALING APPROACHES

Bush Tucker
Our Elders
Smoking Ceremony
Music and Dance

TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACHES

Country
Bush Medicine
Massage

WESTERN

Doctors
Acupuncture
Western Medicine
Hospital
A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

- **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery

- **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system

- **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and

- **Seeks** to actively resist re-traumatization
Benefits of trauma informed care

- skills enhancement
- shared visions and goals
- Trauma informed transformation of
  - structures
  - policies
  - procedures
  - and behaviours
Staff outcomes

• Better Job satisfaction and confidence
• Higher morale
• Increased collaboration with clients
• Better equipped
• Decrease stress and burnout

Client outcomes

• Increased confidence
• Respect
• Safety and trust
• Engagement/attendance
• Follow up
• Ongoing organisational change process
• Informs knowledge, perspective, attitudes and skills that continue to deepen and unfold over time
• Continuum of implementation
Trauma informed Care Continuum of implementation

- Trauma Aware
- Trauma Sensitive
- Trauma Responsive
- Trauma Informed integration
Trauma Informed Care
Core Values
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

1. Understanding trauma and its impacts

   Reduces stigma, increases knowledge, provides a framework of understanding, provides staff with skills to work with persons who have experienced trauma.

   Two strategies promote understanding of trauma and its impacts: trauma-informed policies and ongoing workforce training and support.
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

2. Create environments in families and in social groups where people feel physically emotionally and spiritually safe

safety means different things for different people

• May need separate mens/womens areas,
• Health professionals working consistently, predictably and respectfully
• Need to hear from clients what makes them feel safe
• Providing full information about service processes – in clients’ preferred language
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

3. Culturally competent staff – staff respect specific cultural backgrounds

The importance of understanding how cultural context influences expressions of and responses to trauma and recovery process – identifying the interventions and supports that are most effective

- Culturally competent services are respectful of and specific to cultural backgrounds – offering and supporting opportunities for clients to engage in cultural practices, speak in their first language and offer specific foods
- Culturally competent staff are aware of their own cultural attitudes and beliefs, as well as those within the community in which they work
- Having an awareness of cultural differences
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

4. **Empower and support clients’ control**

Provide opportunities for clients to have a say in recovery, respect for basic human rights.

- Clients are supported to regain a sense of control over their daily lives and build skills that will strengthen their sense of capability
- Services are set up to keep clients/families/communities well informed about all aspects of service delivery, with clients having many opportunities to make decisions about their treatment and healing process
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

5. Share power and governance including individuals and families in the design and delivery of programs

- Promoting democracy and equalisation in power differentials, sharing power and decision making in relation to day-to-day decisions as well as the review and creation of policies and procedures
- For example, making sure community and clients are represented on the board and involving them in design and evaluation of programs and practices
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

6. Integrate and coordinate care to holistically meet the needs of individuals

• Maintaining holistic view of recovery
• Promoting networks with other providers
• As much as possible, bringing together all services and supports needed to enhance physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cultural wellbeing
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

7. Support relationship building as a means of promoting healing

• Safe, authentic and positive relationships are central to healing and recovery
• Importance of peer relationships, peer support
• Safe warm interactions restore core neural pathways
• We learn through relationships
Core Values to Trauma Informed Care

8. Enable recovery

- Recovery is possible and achievable
- Instilling hope in recovery – strength based work and focusing on resilience and strength of the person
Consider a small change you can incorporate into your practice to be more Trauma Informed in the work you do with your clients.
Consider a small change you can incorporate into your practice to be more Trauma Informed in the work you do with your clients.
We make reference to the historical periods of environmental change that have occurred in this country over the past 60,000 years. For a culture to survive and exist in a sustainable way of wellbeing through such periods of great change there would have been systems and processes that were trauma Informed.

Entrenched within Indigenous cultural ways of living and understanding is the knowledge of Trauma-Informed-Care.
Danielle Dyall: Danielle.dyall@amsant.org.au

Sarah Haythornthwaite: sarahhaythornthwaite@amsant.org.au