

Understanding and Serving People Experiencing Homelessness: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Library Service

Kathleen Guarino, LMHC

The National Center on Family Homelessness
American Institutes for Research
Health and Social Development program



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Last week . . .

1. Homelessness in the United States
2. Risk factors for Homelessness
3. Intersection Between Homelessness and Trauma
4. Homelessness and Public Libraries

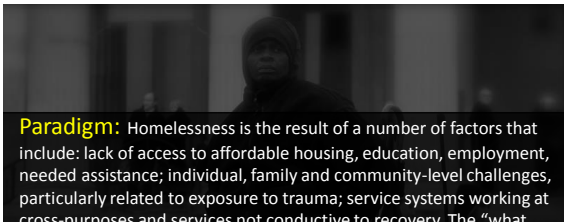
Today . . .

Addressing homelessness and trauma



Paradigm: Homelessness is primarily the result of individual challenges and deficiencies. The “what’s wrong with you?” approach.

Practices: Provider-driven, deficit-based, consequence-oriented, “one size fits all” philosophy, isolated systems.



Paradigm: Homelessness is the result of a number of factors that include: lack of access to affordable housing, education, employment, needed assistance; individual, family and community-level challenges, particularly related to exposure to trauma; service systems working at cross-purposes and services not conducive to recovery. The “what happened to you?” approach.

Practices: Rapid rehousing with supportive services. Services are recovery-oriented, trauma-informed, person-centered, evidence-based. Focus on meeting people where they are with greater emphasis on trauma and recovery.



Needed Services:

- Access to affordable housing
- Education
- Employment training and opportunities
- Transportation
- Child care
- Mental health services
- Substance abuse services
- Child-specific and family-focused services





Libraries can:

- Learn about and refer people to relevant resources.
- Provide some services on-site.
- Facilitate multi-organization collaborations.

Potential partners include:

- Emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.
- Food banks and community organizations.
- Health clinics and hospitals.
- Faith-based organizations (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.)
- Educational institutions and after school programs.

(American Library Association Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, 2012)

Model Programs

Baltimore County (Mary.) Public Library Street Card: Partnership between Baltimore County Public Library and Baltimore County Communities for the Homeless. Street Card provides information on available services in the area (e.g., employment, food and emergency assistance, health, financial support, legal issues, and shelter. <http://www.bcpl.info/community/street-card>

Denver (Colo.) Public Library Community Technology Center: Provides regular visits to area day shelter for women. Provide instruction on job interviewing techniques and technology skills. Bus tokens available to go to main library for tour and library cards. <http://denverlibrary.org/etc>

Pima County (Ariz.) Public Library Homeless Service Agencies: This guide provides information about local services. <http://www.papl.info/community/street-card>

(American Library Association Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, 2012)

Model Programs

Queens (N.Y.) Library: Provides outreach service to homeless shelters. Services coordinated with the Department of Education family shelter liaison. Promotes library programs, events, and services (including family offerings, children's programs, and job search help. <http://www.queenslibrary.org>

San Francisco (Calif.) Public Library: Formed a homeless and poverty outreach library team in partnership with city's Department of Public Health and its Recovery Services Team. Full-time, in house social worker provide staff training. Team includes people who are formerly homeless who provide outreach in the library and distribute information on available services. <http://www.splf.org/>

(American Library Association Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, 2012)

Model Programs

San Jose (Calif.) Public Library Homelessness Panel Discussion: Library initiated a panel discussion to help library professionals learn about the issue. Results of panel included a web page with resources and additional information on the topic. <http://splf.org/tags/homeless>

Traverse Area District Library (MI): Partners with a faith-based winter shelter to offer on-site book club meetings. Fosters outreach and open dialogue.

(American Library Association Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, 2012)



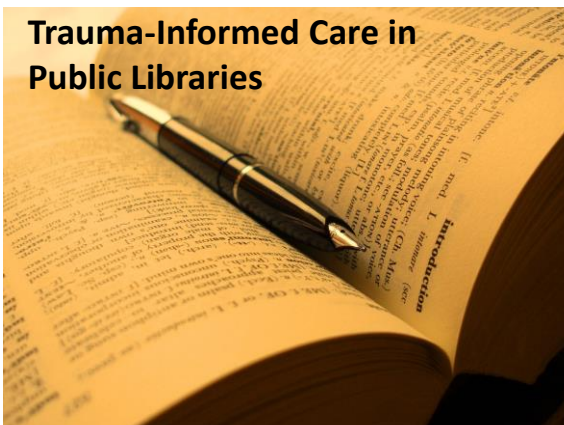
What DC Public Library is doing . . .



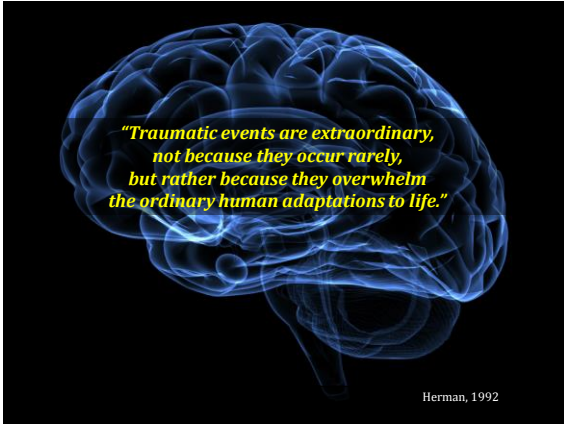
Strategies

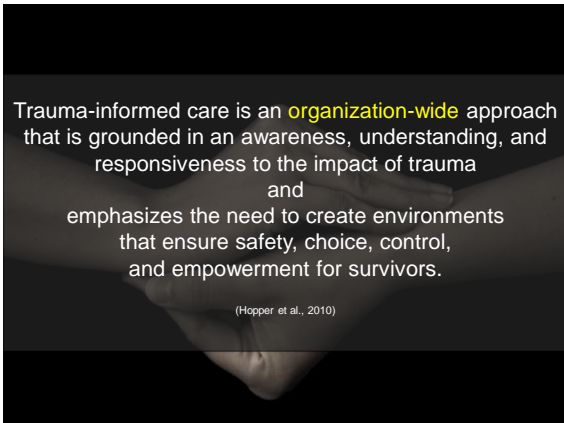
- Learn more about your homeless population.
- Learn what network of community services are available to address homelessness.
- Bring resources in house (e.g., hiring social workers)
- Creating welcoming spaces.
- Book clubs and discussion groups.
- Meals served in libraries.
- Training staff. Bringing workshops and panels into individual libraries or to annual meetings and conferences.
- Bringing education about serving vulnerable populations in library schools.
- Visiting shelters to better understand the services and settings.
- Developing community of practice devoted to this issue.
- Including people with these experiences on library boards.

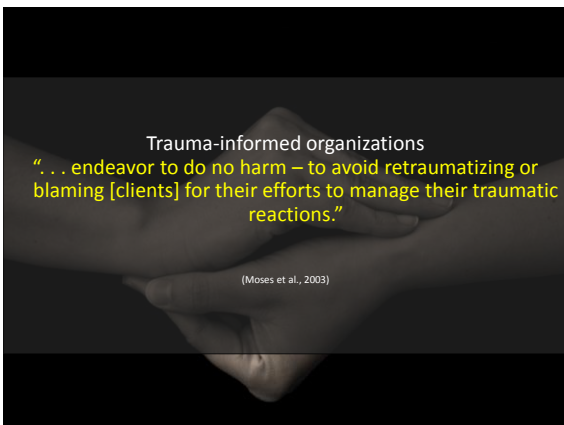
(libraryjournal.com, 2011; american libraries magazine, 2014)

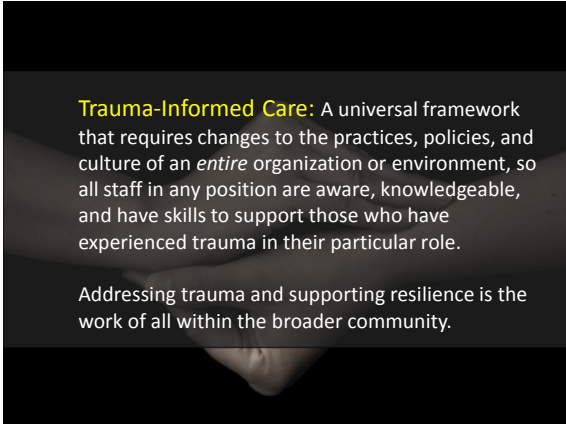


Trauma-Informed Care in Public Libraries










Trauma-Informed Care: A universal framework that requires changes to the practices, policies, and culture of an *entire* organization or environment, so all staff in any position are aware, knowledgeable, and have skills to support those who have experienced trauma in their particular role.

Addressing trauma and supporting resilience is the work of all within the broader community.



Guiding principles

- Believing that recovery is possible & healing happens in relationship
- Understanding trauma and its impact
- Promoting safety
- Supporting control, choice and autonomy
- Ensuring cultural competence
- Integrating care

(Guarino et al., 2009)



Believing that Recovery is Possible

- Recovery from trauma involves a community-wide approach.
- Everyone has a role to play.

Understanding that Healing Happens in Relationship

“Recovery cannot occur in isolation. It can take place only within the context of relationships characterized by belief in persuasion rather than coercion, ideas rather than force, and mutuality rather than authoritarian control – precisely the beliefs that were shattered by the original traumatic experiences.”

Herman, 1992

Understanding Trauma and Its Impact

- Supporting all staff to understand how trauma impacts the brain and the body.
- Identifying and reducing triggers to avoid re-traumatization.
- Recognizing behaviors as adaptations to trauma.
- Educating others about trauma.




SURVIVAL

Trauma survivors have developed survival strategies that have helped them manage, but may be misinterpreted in the present.

- Easily agitated, angry, aggressive
- Complains that the setting is not comfortable or safe.
- Isolates.
- Has difficult engaging with others.
- Lacks awareness of emotional responses, does not emotionally respond to others.
- Alert for signs of danger, appears to be tense and nervous.
- Difficulty following rules and guidelines.
- Complains that the system is unfair/feels targeted
- Invades others' personal space or lacks awareness of when others are invading their space.
- Not truthful or inconsistent in relaying information

Words that we might use to describe a person if we take his/her behaviors at face value



Manipulative
Lazy
Disrespectful
Attention-seeking
Rude

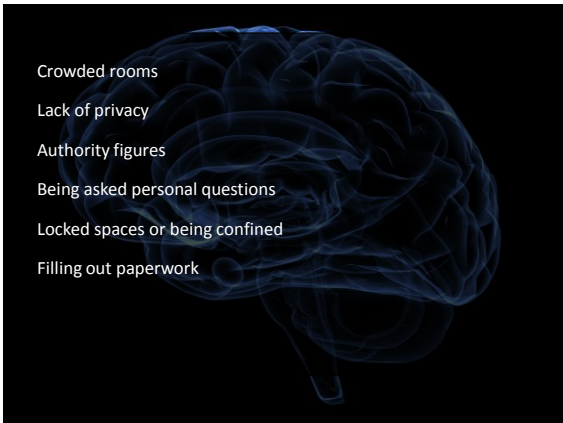
Now looking at the behaviors through a trauma lens . . .



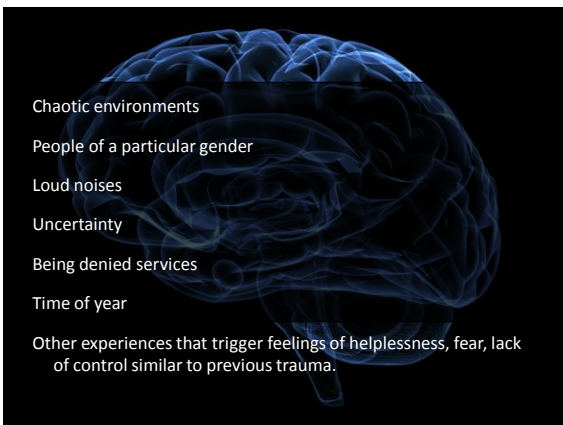
Overwhelmed
Triggered
Constantly on the lookout for danger
Mistrustful of others due to her history of abuse
Frozen/Dissociative
In "fight" mode
Getting needs in ways that have worked in the past



Triggers: Reminders of past traumatic experiences (e.g., sights, sounds, smells, feelings).



Crowded rooms
Lack of privacy
Authority figures
Being asked personal questions
Locked spaces or being confined
Filling out paperwork



Chaotic environments
People of a particular gender
Loud noises
Uncertainty
Being denied services
Time of year
Other experiences that trigger feelings of helplessness, fear, lack of control similar to previous trauma.

Reactions to triggers could be viewed as:



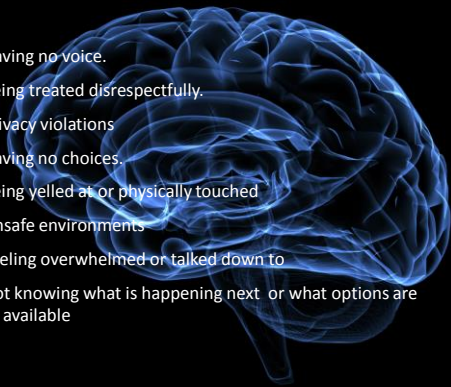
Purposefully offensive, rude, or aggressive
vs.
survival mode

Risk of escalating instead of stepping back
and calming down

Re-traumatizing Practices. Situations that mimic past experiences of trauma, leaving people feeling helpless, fearful or out of control.



- Having no voice.
- Being treated disrespectfully.
- Privacy violations
- Having no choices.
- Being yelled at or physically touched
- Unsafe environments
- Feeling overwhelmed or talked down to
- Not knowing what is happening next or what options are available



Promoting Safety

- Safe physical environment.
- Safe emotional environment. Includes: processes to ensure privacy and confidentiality, crisis prevention planning, consistency and predictability, and open and respectful communication.

Supporting Control, Choice & Autonomy

- Control is often taken away in traumatic situations.
- Recovery requires a felt control.
- Relationships should be respectful and support choice.

Ensuring Cultural Competence

Cultural Competence: The capacity of programs to provide services in ways that are acceptable, engaging, and effective with multicultural populations.

Integrating Care

Having an awareness of trauma-related resources and supports, helping people access those resources, and partnering with other service systems to provide supportive programming for children and adults.

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Kathleen Guarino, LMHC
201 Jones Road, Suite 1
Waltham, MA 02451
kguarino@air.org