



COMPASSIONATE
BALLARAT

Healing COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

JUNE 2022 Dr Lynne Reeder & Talya Gundogan



Contents



- 3 Introduction
- 4 What is trauma?
- 5 What is collective trauma?
- 6 What is global trauma?
- 8 What are other examples of collective traumas and disruptions?
- 10 Why is thinking about collective trauma important for community wellbeing?
- 11 How can compassionate design support collective trauma and disruption?
- 12 How can compassion science help heal collective trauma?
- 15 Are there existing examples of city-based initiatives?
- 18 Recommendations
- 20 Appendix

INTRODUCTION

This report is inspired by a forum held in 2021 at the time of the Out of Darkness exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ballarat. That exhibition dealt with the difficult issue of institutional child sexual abuse, which has left a detrimental mark on Ballarat's history.

Compassionate Ballarat held this forum to bring together representatives from the Charter for Compassion networks around the world to discuss the issue of collective trauma. This forum was organised on the basis that too often trauma is seen as an individual issue to solve. Thinking that we 'just need to fix Sue or Steve and all will be well' keeps a focus on individual pathology and not on the systemic factors that led to the collective trauma in the first place.

No matter how private or personal, trauma cannot belong solely to a family, or even a family's intricate ancestral tree. The consequences of trauma seep across communities, regions, lands, and nations.

Thomas Hubl – Author, *Healing Collective Trauma*

Increasingly, local governments are being asked to develop and maintain three distinct but interwoven forms of infrastructure – physical, economic, and social. While in the past local governments may have been restricted to rates,



roads, and rubbish – they now have a unique mandate to support, represent and give voice to 'communities of place'. It is this level of government that can directly support their communities to improve their collective mental health.

This report explores the emerging issue of collective trauma and provides recommendations for local governments, which after all is the tier of government that works most closely with its community.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

One of the world's best trauma experts Bessel van der Kolk describes trauma as the occurrence of an event that demolishes an individual's emotional or physical state, leaving unbearable and intolerable effects on the body and mind.

The unexpected and unassimilated nature of these events can create long-lasting trauma that leaves profound traces on our emotional states and mental well-being, as well as on our biology and immune systems. Trauma increases our risk of anxiety, depression and heart disease, in part as a result of our evolved capacity to overthink and ruminate.

The renowned psychologist Daniel Siegel reminds us that we are not 'Homo Sapiens': '...the ones who know' – but 'homo sapiens sapiens': '...the ones who know and know they know' and this heightened level of awareness of our situation in the world comes with a greater capacity for love and connection, but also with a greater capacity for anguish and anxiety.

The physical and emotional pain of trauma is certainly detrimental to the lives of victims and create wider adverse effects on their families and communities.



Trauma devastates the social engagement system and interferes with cooperation, nurturing and the ability to function as a productive member of society.

Dr Bessel van der Kolk – Author
The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE TRAUMA?

The philosopher, Prof Gilad Hirschberger describes collective trauma as a “cataclysmic event that shatters the basic fabric of society”. Collective trauma leaves enduring marks on group identity, collective memory, and history which, when not addressed can leave long-lasting intergenerational impacts.



Collective trauma is a response that can follow a variety of traumatic experiences. Situations that may elicit a collective

trauma response include, but are not limited to wars, natural disasters, terrorism, pandemics, systematic and historical oppression, recessions, and famine or severe poverty (Aydin, 2017; Chang, 2017; Hirschberger, 2018; Saul, 2014).

Creating a sense of social belonging within communities is vital for promoting well-being amongst individuals, particularly in the wake of trauma. A greater feeling of social belonging has been proven to reduce the body's pro-inflammatory state in times of stress and reduce risk of anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, and autoimmune and neurodegenerative disorders.

Many local communities have been deeply impacted and suffer damage to their sense of their collective identity and social cohesion.

Kathy McPhillips – *Senior Lecturer University of Newcastle and forum speaker*

6

For example, while individuals may not be able to stop the current war in Ukraine, they can support their own children by offering them peace education. Indeed, in Ballarat a Rotary peace pole was recently planted by Let's Talk Peace Ballarat and Compassionate Ballarat at Sebastopol Primary school.

[illegible]

mining blasts reminded them of the sounds of shelling during the 11-month siege of Sevastopol.



One hundred and sixty-seven years later the children of Sebastopol Primary School paused to remember the children in Ukraine around a peace pole where the wording 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' was inscribed in Ukrainian, as well as Wadawurrung, English and Māori, all languages of significance to students at this school.

The future indeed has the power to rewrite the past. In fact, when we integrate our trauma, we're utilising this principle because healing past energy creates a forward ripple effect.

Thomas Hubl – Author, *Healing Collective Trauma: A process for integrating our intergenerational and cultural wounds*

As the global pandemic is proving, trauma can affect our everyday lives, by both bringing people together, as seen in the kind acts of community support, and at the same time pushing them apart, as seen in the anti-lockdown protests. The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected our ability to maintain a sense of social belonging with a rise in anxiety and depression, as well as isolation and loneliness, due to the lockdowns, unemployment, and financial issues.

WHAT ARE OTHER EXAMPLES OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMAS AND DISRUPTIONS?

Historical Trauma -

has been described as a complex trauma experienced over time by a group of people who share identity, affiliation, or circumstance.

Just as a child's growth is impacted by development trauma, so a culture's evolution is shaped historical trauma.

In historical trauma, multiple generations across many families bear out these effects, along with impaired or broken social and cultural relation.

(Thomas Hubl)

Natural Disaster Trauma -

other traumatic disruptions such as the natural disasters of fires or floods can also leave devastating emotional and physical effects on entire communities.

The 2021 Australian bushfires impacted thousands of people across the nation, creating displacement, loss, grief, and uncertainty, and the recent floods in NSW and Qld are causing unparalleled disruption to those affected by these 1 in 100-year floods now coming around every ten years.

Intergenerational Traumas -

a deeper example of collective trauma is that of the trauma of removal of culture as has happened and is still happening in Australia.

Australia's Indigenous "Stolen Generations" has left behind continuing intergenerational collective trauma.

Reports show that the children of individuals who were forcibly separated from their families still face increasing emotional and physical challenges, including worse socio-economic conditions and negative health and school experiences. Indeed, if people don't have the opportunity to heal from past trauma, they can unknowingly pass it on to others.

At the Murri School in Queensland, therapeutic intervention, service coordination, family case work, family camps, and cultural activities have been combined to create a holistic healing environment for students. The program brings together family support workers, psychologists, health professionals and healing aware trauma informed teachers to create a culturally appropriate, supportive environment for students and their families. <https://healingfoundation.org.au/intergenerational-trauma/>

And internationally a successful project in Belfast has been the Garden of Compassion, a Zen garden where schoolchildren can come and rake sand with the idea of 'raking up the past' to explore it with new eyes.

Frank Liddy - *Founder, Compassionate Belfast, and forum speaker*

WHY IS THINKING ABOUT COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IMPORTANT FOR COMMUNITY WELLBEING?



10

Making meaning out of trauma is essential for the recovery of individuals and communities. Representations of trauma are hugely important in the healing process and as such, it is vital to create spaces in which people can feel safe enough to speak about their experiences. Local governments are in a position to assist their communities in crafting stories and spaces that can assist people in healing in meaningful ways.

Compassionate responses towards trauma can promote social connectedness and reduce feelings of anxiety, fear, and loneliness, whilst enabling communities to heal. The social life we experience doesn't exist in a vacuum, there's a context for it which can be supported or undermined by the places we design.

Improving our levels of shared trust is important because shared trust offers real protection against the uncertainty of these times. The motivation of compassion helps build trust because it acknowledges that everyone's wellbeing is important.

Often the challenge with existing structures for those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable is that they do not have the same opportunities as the majority. Local government can help bridge this gap by empowering relevant organisations with resources and support to drive meaningful change for those who do not have a voice.

Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well, can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity.

Pema Chodron – Author, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*

HOW CAN COMPASSIONATE DESIGN SUPPORT COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND DISRUPTION?

Compassionate design applies to both physical and social infrastructure. In his book 'Palaces for the People,' Eric Kleinberg describes social infrastructure as the glue that connects and binds us together in our communities.

Social infrastructure helps shape our interactions and when it is robust, this level of infrastructure can foster all kinds of social interactions, help build relationships, and turn community from a vague concept into a lived experience. When social infrastructure is degraded and neglected, it makes it far more likely that city residents will grow isolated and be left to fend for themselves.

Indeed, our social life can support or undermine the places we design. Kleinberg argues that renewing our commitment to this infrastructure is essential for the rebuilding of a more cohesive, civil and forward-looking society, because our social glue has come undone with the high level of polarization and divisiveness we are currently experiencing.

It is timely now to think more seriously about what compassionate design looks like.

We also know that some places have the power to bring us together through social bonding such as schools, libraries, sport, and pet parks. Kleinberg concludes that the social systems we build in coming years will tell future generations who we are and how we see the world today. Therefore, we need to build places that promote active lifestyles and

frequent interactions in the public realm by asking the landscape designer Jenny Donovan's question: *What conditions in the places we inhabit make it more likely that people will develop strong or supportive relationships – and what conditions make it more likely that people will grow isolated and alone?*

A city's social infrastructure is important because when libraries, playgrounds, and other public meeting spaces get degraded people reduce the time they spend in public settings and their social networks weaken – and distrust rises. Humans are social beings who need each other – we have survived as a species because we developed the social cohesion necessary for our mental and emotional health.

The ways our cities are designed, managed, and are occupied embed messages in them that influence what we do and what we want to do. This matters. It impacts people's lives.

Jenny Donovan – Author, *Designing the Compassionate City: Creating Places Where People Thrive*

HOW CAN COMPASSION SCIENCE HELP HEAL COLLECTIVE TRAUMA?

Compassion science is a relatively new and multi-disciplinary area of study, which includes the disciplines of psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and management theory.

One definition of compassion from these disciplines is: '...the willingness and ability to see suffering in self and others with a resourced commitment to try to alleviate and prevent that suffering'.

In our fractured world, this new approach to the ancient value of compassion is important, because there is considerable evidence that when people are caring towards others and feel cared for by others, their physical and mental health improves.

Leaders have a moral imperative to act on behalf of the wellbeing of citizens to promote mental health and wellbeing so that communities can flourish.

Dr Laura Burgess – CEO, Human Values Centre,
USA, and forum speaker

And it is important to recognise that compassion is not a soft skill – indeed Prof Paul Gilbert, founder of 'compassion focused therapy' says that compassion is the courage to descend into the reality of the human experience. For us to make that descent in a way that does not overwhelm us requires resources; and some of those resources include our capacity for wonder and awe.

These capacities are vital in coming into our compassionate selves, since coming into a sense of wonder and curiosity stimulates our need to better understand the world in which we live. Researchers define wonder as the feeling we get in the presence of something larger than ourselves.

By continuing the open conversation that can lead to the social action we can provide communities the opportunity to transform hurt into healing and ultimately to move beyond trauma.

Initiatives such as The LOUD Fence Movement in Ballarat, where ribbons are tied on the fences of schools and parishes where children were hurt, help to engage communities, and utilise art as a powerful medium for addressing issues when words can feel inadequate.

Kathy McPhillips – Senior Lecturer,
Newcastle University and forum speaker



Another important aspect of collective trauma is what is known as the 'bystander effect'. Very little abuse happens without other people knowing about it, so that the triangle effect of victim, perpetrator, and the community is important. In better dealing with some aspects of collective trauma, we can find ways of engaging and empowering bystanders that allows them to feel safe enough to speak out against organisations.

By respecting and remembering what people did in the face of harm – we can celebrate the strength of those directly affected by trauma that led to significant societal change.

We need more people with the courage and compassion to call out societal harm when they see it.

Prof Tim Chapman – Chair, EU Restorative
Justice Group, and Forum Speaker

Of course, many local governments already have policy areas and managers that specifically focus on community wellbeing. To date much of that focus has been on resilience – having communities bounce back from traumatic events such as floods and fires. But if governments are listening, they will hear people saying that they just can't bounce back anymore.

Rather they want their suffering to be seen and help to get them through yet another trauma at both an individual and a collective level. This shift will require a new starting point in healing collective trauma, one that starts with the question: *Where and how does shared suffering show up in your city?*

Placemaking is the art of creating meaningful, inclusive and connected places. It is the collaborative process of making places that benefit all people, every day.

Gilbert Rochecoust –

Founder and Managing Director of Village Well



ARE THERE EXISTING EXAMPLES OF CITY BASED DESIGNS?



Yes, there are many examples of spaces that are designed to bring people together and support their positive interactions. There are wonderful international models of designs that innovatively create community connections. For example in Montreal, a team of designers placed an interactive installation of musical swings alongside a city bus

stop. The swings play a tune when pedestrians move in unison rather than independently. The result is a giant instrument made up of 21 musical swings; each swing in motion triggers different notes, all the swings together compose a piece, the sounds of which emerge only from cooperation.

The Little Free Pantry pilot project began in May 2016. The Little Free Pantry offers a place around which neighbours can gather to meet neighbourhood needs, whether for food or for fun.



We count on each other to create something bigger than ourselves. Generally, canned vegetables and proteins, personal care items, and paper goods go fast. Child-friendly non-perishables, crayons, and inexpensive party favour items are also popular.



Men's Sheds have proven successful in providing important connections for men to connect and enjoy each other's company. Equally the community garden movement supports people of all ages in engaging through planting, harvesting and sharing food.

More recently there has been a movement to create social scripts – for example the Central Highlands Association of Neighbourhood Houses are working with an Asset Based Community Development and Human Centre Design approach to explore and co-design referral pathways between health practitioners and neighbourhood houses in the Central Highlands area, to increase people's participation in community based social engagement activities to enhance and support wellbeing.

Many communities are also looking at how existing spaces can be converted – for example cemeteries are seen as an integral part of a community because they are places that can link the past, present, and future. They inspire reflection

and compassion by providing an insight into individual stories and major historical events and therefore they are an ideal place to sit and think or wander quietly through. Cemeteries are now opening their gardens as spaces for community reflection, inviting generations of all ages to wander and wonder.

Creating places that are a canvas for self-expression allow people to make community connections. Urban designer Jenny Donovan in her book *Designing the Compassionate City* says that designed characteristics play an important role in framing the range of experiences that people enjoy, endure or miss out on. The following table from this book provide examples of how design influences our prosocial behaviour.



Walk



Drive



Use public transport



Avoid public transport



You are welcome here



You are not welcome here



RECOMMENDATIONS

Local councils as a primary objective, act as a funder, supporter and facilitator of community wellbeing and compassionate outcomes. In moving from a trauma-based city to a healing-focussed community (recognising that people respond very differently to trauma), local councils consider the following suggestions and ideas:

First, identify your local points of shared suffering and then consider:

- Working with youth organisations to fashion a healing culture across the city that teaches young people to develop and maintain hope and meaning.
- Generating innovative social infrastructure that sparks wonder and awe in people of all ages to feel supported, and part of something bigger than themselves e.g. create a project between the local Art Gallery, the local Observatory and Indigenous groups on stargazing, and other planetary events.
- Linking all existing compassion related outreach services so that they can share information, resources, and build networks for more efficient and targeted delivery of those services.

- Placemaking as a response to building communities (NB: placemaking is not the same as constructing a building, designing a plaza, or developing a commercial zone. A great public space cannot be measured by its physical attributes alone; it must also serve people as a vital community resource in which function trumps form. When people of all ages, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds can not only access and enjoy a place, but also play a key role in its identity, creation, and maintenance, that is when we see genuine placemaking in action). www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking
- Setting up wellness centres for the whole community, that connect people in ways that make them feel safe, included and are accessible for all.
- Developing creative opportunities for Indigenous story telling of the 40,000-year history of the local area, to develop improved connections to looking after the local environment/country.
- Literally 'grow' new ways of being in nature – create a city-based garden which invites children to plant seeds of compassion – speaking their compassion wish for the city, planting flowers and watch them grow.

- Developing quiet and reflective spaces in areas not normally used, including in cemetery gardens.
- Working with existing Neighbourhood Houses to promote social scripts – where GP's have access to a full list of healing resources and formally write scripts for patients to attend outlets such as men's sheds, multi-cultural care services, nature walks, visits to the art gallery, etc
- Establishing civic squares where people can gather, connect, and share significant events to recognise that social belonging involves a sense of interconnectedness.
- Setting up more adventure play parks for children that are not digital based, particularly in low socio-economic areas, to support stress reduction in children
- Informing local kindergartens of evidence-based and trauma-informed early childhood programs that specifically support social and emotional learning.
- Embedding the soothing sounds of nature in highly stressful spaces such as hospital emergency departments, aged care, those on mechanical ventilation, etc
- Keeping social organisations accountable for the ways they can silence and marginalize victims and protect perpetrators – to always prioritise the safety of our youngest and oldest community members.

- Creating memorials to recognise the significant collective trauma events in your city – these could be physical memorials, or reflection spaces, or water features, etc
- Offering mindfulness practices in community settings, including the use of music to calm people, because neuroscience has demonstrated that it is very difficult to connect with others when we are in our threat system.
- Ensuring there are enablers for these spaces and ideas to work – you can create wonderful spaces but there also needs to be enablers to purposively bring people into these spaces.

Please note that these ideas provide just a starting point for healing our shared trauma – so feel free to share your ideas with Compassionate Ballarat at: compassionballarat@gmail.com and we will upload and share them.

If we dare to dream of a more loving country - kinder, more compassionate, more cooperative, more respectful, more inclusive, more egalitarian, more harmonious, less cynical – there's only one way to start turning that dream into a reality, each of us must live as if this is already that country.

Hugh Mackay – Author, *The Kindness Revolution: How we can restore hope, rebuild trust and inspire optimism*

APPENDIX

About the Global Charter for Compassion

The Global Charter for Compassion is an international network, connecting organizations and leaders around the world with a shared vision of living a more compassionate life. The Charter endorses compassionate dialogue and debate through political and civic gatherings to help to create supportive communities of practice and learning.

About the Australian Compassion Council

The Charter for compassion is represented in Australia through the work of the Australian Compassion Council, who are Deep Dreaming Australia: A Continent of Compassion. The ACC has three key activities:

- Australian Compassionate Cities and City Initiatives
- Compassion in Action via its Sector Activity
- The National Day of Compassion

About Compassionate Ballarat

CB Steering group formed to develop and implement a strategic approach to develop Ballarat as a Compassionate City and to contribute to the global Charter initiative. meets six times a year to review issues, initiatives,

and plan projects. The Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group comprises: Ben Kelly, (Chair), Dr Lynne Reeder, Dr Mary Hollick, Annie De Jong, Sam Luxemburg, Dr Kerrie Shiell.

About the Out of Darkness Exhibition

“Out of the Darkness: A Survivor’s Journey” was an exhibition held by Ballarat Art Gallery from May to August 2021. The exhibition was curated by Robert House, a survivor of institutional child sex abuse in Ballarat, and sought to explore the issues that arise around the trauma caused by child sex abuse, using art as a powerful medium to tell the stories of those survivors, and the effects on their communities. The exhibition paid particular attention to the need for compassionate responses from individuals and communities when dealing with such intricate and personal matters.

About the Compassionate Ballarat forum & forum speakers

In July 2021, Compassionate Ballarat and Ballarat Art Gallery held the Compassionate Responses Forum, alongside The Charter for Compassion. The forum was organised in conjunction with Ballarat Art Gallery’s “Out of Darkness” exhibition, to discuss the significance of collective trauma and discuss the process of community healing in its aftermath.



Peter Freund Marketing and Public Programs Officer at the Art Gallery of Ballarat. Peter introduced the forum and set the scene by outlining the Gallery's involvement in the Out of Darkness exhibition and the Continuous Voices project.



Cr Belinda Coates Ballarat City Councillor and a former social worker and has been closely involved with the Continuous Voices project and its intention to create an open community healing space for those affected by institutional child sexual abuse in Ballarat.



Dr Lynne Reeder National Director of the Australian Compassion Council and a member of the Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group, who chaired this forum. The panel consisted of international speakers from the global Charter's network, to discuss the ways in which collective trauma has affected their communities, and the important work they're doing to aid the healing process.



Prof Kathy McPhillips Senior lecturer at University of Newcastle and has been researching child sex abuse in religious organizations. In Ballarat and Newcastle, the communities Kathy has worked most closely with have struggled to hear accounts of victims, especially when they involve such powerful institutions as the Catholic church. Kathy firmly believes that an integral aspect of dealing with trauma is treating survivors with empathy and integrity.



Frank Liddy Co-founder of Compassionate Belfast, a city that has experienced a similar traumatic history to Ballarat of institutional child sex abuse enquiries. Much of Frank's work through Compassionate Belfast has focused on the importance of compassionate conversation in bringing

survivors and communities together. His work in restorative justice is also particularly focused on compassion, having looked at compassion in addiction, the arts, and within education.



Prof Tim Chapman Chair of European Forum for Restorative Justice. He emphasised the important role justice plays in bringing peace to people, noting that there is no peace without justice. During the forum, Tim shared the main areas that the European Forum are involved

with, the first being a project on polarization and society that works with several other European organizations to introduce the notion of a restorative approach to justice.



Dr Laura Burgess is the CEO of Human Values Centre in California, and during the forum spoke about the moral imperative of leaders to act on behalf of the wellbeing of their communities. As such, the Human Values Centre has focused on the importance of multi-sector collaboration,

bringing people together from business, government, education, healthcare, non-profits, and the faith communities.



Talya Gundogan Graduate volunteer to the Australian Compassion Council. She recently completed her Degree in International Relations at the University of Sydney and is currently working as a Supervisor at QT Hotel and Resorts.

A REFLECTION ON THIS BOOK

Adam Heath – Headmaster, Ballarat Grammar School

This publication asks each of us to engage with a greater sense of community – as antidote to the inevitability of experiencing trauma in our lives; be that through absorbing



the gravitas and sadness of world events, such as war, or experiencing trauma first-hand in our own lives. This antidote is achieved through our commitment to many small things: more access to nature and the wilds, more playgrounds, more communal meeting places and activities. All this because community, our sense of connection to others, is the ultimate buffering layer of protection, the many hands and hearts that pick us up from our inevitable moments of despair. Like the authors, I take inspiration from Hugh McKay in his book, *The Kindness Revolution*, when he suggests our ultimate longing should be for the nurturing and protection of one another. “Homo sapiens. That’s a label we invented for ourselves, of course: Latin for ‘wise man’. It may be hoped that we will eventually either evolve into something worthier of that appellation or aspire to an even better one. How about *Gens unanima* – ‘harmonious race’ or ‘a people of one spirit’?



COMPASSIONATE BALLARAT

creating a nurturing city

compassionballarat@gmail.com
www.compassionateballarat.com.au