

Peer Learning (1 of 4): Trauma-Informed Organising

This is a summary of the peer learning session on trauma-informed organising held on 11 March 2022 as part of the decolonising digital rights process. The session was hosted by Lorraine Maher and Uwayo Dushime and the summary was written by Laurence Meyer. An audio version of this text, read by Joel Hide, is available [here](#).

After a quick introduction from Lorraine and Uwayo in which they both explained how the question of trauma-informed organising connects with their biographical and professional experience, the participants went into break-out rooms to reflect on what trauma-informed organising means for them.

One group shared their reflections around the need to recognise that living in a capitalist society that enforces racism, ableism, and patriarchal norms alongside others as part of a drive for "efficiency" produces multiple traumas.

While there is a need to centre lived experiences in our practice, Lorraine shared the importance of being aware of the potential that this has to re-traumatise people, forcing them to recount and therefore relive their traumatic experience. Space, patience, and listening need to be incorporated into the way we do this. We need to reflect on the ways we implicitly and explicitly bring trauma into the things that we do.

Another group wondered how to have collection of data in a trauma-informed way, but also the ways in which philanthropy and funders' work depends on sharing trauma and can cause harm.

They also shared that Awareness of lived experience and how things are being done need to change, being aware of your own triggers and being able to share these with the team.

Before the break Lorraine Maher shared the definitions she uses, based on the work of Stephanie Coverton.

Here are the definitions:

Trauma informed

- Knowledge about trauma, adversity and its effects on individuals, communities, and society

Trauma responsive

- Policies and practices in place to minimise damage and maximise opportunities for healthy growth and development in all populations at risk
- Creating an environment for healing and recovery

Trauma specific

- Services designed to specifically address violence and trauma, the related symptoms, and to facilitate healing and recovery

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TRAUMA INFORMED ORGANISING IS ROOTED IN 6 PRINCIPLES

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Peer Support
- Collaboration and Mutuality
- Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Coming back from the break, the participants chose to have a conversation in plenary. The discussion approached the issue of minimising damage when aiming for social change.

One participant said they found it "really interesting to see "minimise damage" rather than prevent or stop the description of trauma responsive and wondered if this is an awareness of what we are able to achieve given the work we're doing? Another one asked how to minimise the labour needed to explain trauma and past experiences, while still doing the work of raising awareness.

After acknowledging that there is a lot of voyeurism around racism, Lorraine shared how she deals with it in her work. It involves always having clinical experts and social workers- and limiting the information sharing to a need to know basis- what information is absolutely needed to move forward?

She stressed that offering specific support was also essential.

Uwayo added that in her experience educating people about trauma had been key in minimising damage, it was also key to chose who to send to talk in different places- sending the people for whom being in certain rooms would be the least retraumatizing can be a strategy.

It was raised that using art as strategy could be very efficient if it allowed people to use story telling and diverge from the constant need to be transparent about their own experiences and recount their traumas in very direct forms over and over again.

The question of who is always asked to expose their traumas and to what end was also touched upon. Some people are always under scrutiny and expected to expose what they have lived as a way to justify funding or a right to be here - to access a certain type of safety, they are pushed into potentially retraumatizing spaces. Who has the right to hide, to invent and create and who only has the option to say the truth, nothing but the truth- as if constantly on trial.

It was also stressed that creating specific spaces are also key to be trauma informed and trauma responsive- for example women centric spaces etc. The importance of understanding the space one is in and what could be triggering was also emphasised - what is the degree of literacy for example.

Finally, Lorraine stated the importance of affirming that people exist outside the traumatic experiences that have happened in their life. Sometimes this affirmation might take time, it might mean that we may need to offer consistent interventions, alongside their needs and not our projections of what those needs are.

We then asked how our own process could be more trauma-responsive- it was left as an open question to be answered as ideas and needs come but with the affirmation that flexibility is key. There is no one shoe fits all solution.

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Final words were about knowing the limits of the work we do and not overstepping our own boundaries. We then proceeded to the check-out.