Writing Wrongs Right: Decentring Trauma with a Forgotten Australians' Creative Writing Group

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Recording personal accounts of traumatic historical events is a powerful way to learn about the past, in an age where public history aims to amplify lived experience and testimony. On a personal level, developing a narrative can help people to make sense of troubling times and memories. For people who grew up in children's institutions (Care Leavers or Forgotten Australians), sharing their experiences – through both oral history and memoir projects – has played a vital role in shifting public perceptions and raising awareness about the heavy impact of past injustices, as well as helping individuals to process difficult childhoods and develop new personal and collective identities. This article acknowledges the importance of recorded life histories to Care Leaver history and advocacy in Australia. However, through discussion of an innovative creative writing program at Lotus Place in Queensland, we highlight the shortcomings of standard models for therapeutic storytelling for people who have experienced complex

trauma. Instead we explore how creative writing, where participants are not obliged to re-tell traumatic life stories or express painful feelings, offers Forgotten Australians alternative ways to reclaim agency over their stories and to decentre trauma in their narratives. Our aim in writing this paper is to document the creative writing program at Lotus Place and unpack how it works in a trauma-informed way while decentring trauma. This research could help to inform the approach of memory-work programs that work with people who have experienced complex trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Oral history and life writing traditions centre around life history. As Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes have argued, 'driven by the passion for the personal story', oral history 'like autobiography, tends to offer linear, causal explanations of individuals as the inevitable products of their past experiences'.[1] Projects focused on experiences of trauma often anchor life history in the periods of life where these experiences occurred, whilst acknowledging that traumatic memories sometimes cannot fit standard biographical models.[2] In this paper we explore a divergence from this tradition, where experiences of recollecting and sharing are retained but take a creative form that does not require people to explicitly recount memories. Our attention follows a wider shift identified by Dee Michell who has noted that, with regard to Care Leaver[3] biographies in particular, we are now arriving at a 'new movement' where Care Leavers can write beyond trauma narratives and centre everyday survival and strength.[4] Here we look closely at a creative writing program where this shift in emphasis is very deliberate as a collective and creative approach to trauma-informed

1 Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, 'Introduction: Building Partnerships between Oral History and Memory Studies', in Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (eds), *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), xi.

2 John Murphy 'Memory, Identity and Public Narrative: Composing a Life-Story after leaving institutional care, Victoria, 1945–83', *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 297–314.

3 In Australia, people who grew up in out-of-home 'care' in the twentieth century are referred to as either Care Leavers or Forgotten Australians. We will be using these terms interchangeably throughout this article. Likewise, the term 'care' is placed in inverted commas to indicate that many people were not properly cared for while in these institutions.

4 Dee Michell, 'Australian Care Leavers' "Misery Memoirs" as Anti-Stigma Activism' (paper presented at the International Australian Studies Association (InASA) Biennial Conference, Virtual, 8–10 February, 2021), 8.

support for Forgotten Australians. We argue that this approach offers an interesting provocation for oral history and life writing and leads us to revisit the enduring focus on a life history approach.[5] It allows us to critically reflect on who, how and why people may or may not see themselves as suited or able to participate in oral history or life writing/memoir projects, especially those who have experienced complex trauma and may not feel their story is tellable or fits the collective script.

Queensland's Lotus Place, a support service for Forgotten Australians, offers group activities, including a weekly creative writing group facilitated by writer and educator Edwina Shaw. As we detail, the program at Lotus Place differs from other memoir or narrative programs aimed at Forgotten Australians, which seek to help people write a memoir of their experiences (such as the Alliance for Forgotten Australians' recent Life Stories Project).[6] Nor is it a project like the National Library of Australia's Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project that aims to collect stories from Care Leavers in order to 'push the stories of the Forgotten Australians into the public discourse'.[7] Such life history projects, although various in the methods they use to disseminate Care Leaver narratives, share a purpose to amplify voices that had previously been silenced and stigmatised, to raise awareness and to effect social change. Although the fight for Care Leaver justice continues, there have been many gains since the handing down of the Senate report into children in institutional care in 2004, including the National Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants (2009), the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2012–2017) and the National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse (2018–2028). These developments in government policy and the increased awareness of the legacy of a childhood in institutional 'care' are mirrored in the shift noted by Michell away from deficit models to survivor narratives

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5 The common ground between autobiography, memoir, oral history and life writing methodologies is discussed by Dorothy Sheridan, 'Writing to the Archive: Mass-observation as Autobiography', *Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1993): 27–40.

6 Simon Gardiner, 'Life Stories Project', *Find & Connect* (blog), 12 February 2021, https://www.findandconnectwrblog.info/2021/02/life-stories-project/.

7 Donna Hancox, 'Amplified Stories: Digital Technology and Representations of Lived Experiences', in Susan Gair and Airella van Luyn (eds), *Sharing Qualitative Research: Showing Lived Experience and Community Narratives* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2017), 9.

and a wider platform for Care Leavers to speak to diverse life experiences.[8] Nearly 20 years on from the Senate inquiry of 2004, space is now opening up for creative projects that provide opportunities for people to be recognised as something other than a Care Leaver or a victim/survivor – as Hibberd points out, opportunities that are scarce because 'their stories and identities have been assumed to be the property of public interest, media speculation and even the pursuit of justice'.[9]

The creative writing classes at Lotus Place encourage participants to write creatively, following prompts that lead them away from 'problem-saturated stories'[10] towards a range of emotions including positive and whimsical memories, or to write imaginatively in ways that can draw on their biography indirectly or focus on altogether different topics. This does not mean that the program avoids trauma or painful experiences, rather it works in a way that recognises other routes to 'working through' trauma, which focus on building voice, imagination and confidence through creative writing. In this paper we look at how this approach, while not geared directly at accounting for trauma, nonetheless operates as trauma-informed support, and arguably gives participants more agency over how they know and talk about their lives, including the option not to talk about their life history at all. In this, our paper speaks to existing work in oral history on trauma and the right to silence and refusal, such as Sean Field's 'Beyond "Healing"', where he states that 'Talking about feelings or traumatic memories is not always the best strategy; listeners need to respect the speaker's right to silence and understand the reasons for and "content" of

8 The More than our Childhoods project aims to disrupt 'deficit narratives' of Care Leavers by sharing stories of Care Leaver survival and positive community contributions. See *More Than Our Childhoods* (2022). Available at https://www.morethanourchildhoods.org/. Accessed 6 October 2022.

9 Lily Hibberd, 'Negotiating uncertain agency', in Kate MacNeill and Barbara Bolt (eds), *The Meeting of Aesthetics and Ethics in the Academy: Challenges for Creative Practice Researchers in Higher Education* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 79.

10 David Drustrup and Donna Rosana Baptiste, 'Problem-Saturated Stories in Narrative Couple and Family Therapy', in Jay L. Lebow, Anthony L. Chambers and Douglas C. Breunlin (eds), *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 2334–2336.

these silences'.[11] Contributing to this existing work on trauma in oral history and life writing, our aim in writing this paper is to unpack how the creative writing program at Lotus Place works in a trauma-informed way while decentring trauma. In this context, we argue, the attention to recognising trauma is in the structure rather than in the content of the activities, and it offers imaginative work as an alternative to the choice between only disclosure or silence in discussions about the cathartic value of voice.

This research also joins an interdisciplinary tradition of exploring group memory-work across oral history, life writing and memoir, and the role played by creativity and imagination in narrative and reminiscence projects.[12] Before the 1970s, reminiscence was viewed as an 'undesirable indulgence, an encouragement to live in the past, or at least to view the past with a high degree of nostalgia'.[13] Schweitzer writes about how reminiscence grew in popularity as an organised structured activity for older people in Britain, and led to reminiscence theatre productions that drew on oral testimony, to share information about the past, as well as foster connection between older people and the wider community. Reminiscence is always a creative activity, whether it is taking place in an oral history interview, testifying to an inquiry, writing a memoir or doing creative writing.[14] However the potentials of this are not always fully dilated in the mainstream format of oral history which accounts for nuances in memory and recall of life history but tends not to offer participants opportunities for creative reflection or to reinvent their stories.

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11 Sean Field, 'Beyond "Healing": Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration', *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 33; see also Luisa Passerini, 'Memories between silence and oblivion', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 238–254; Jennifer A. Cramer, '"First, Do No Harm": Tread Carefully Where Oral History, Trauma, and Current Crises Intersect', *The Oral History Review* 47, no. 2 (2020): 203–213; Wendy Rickard, '"More Dangerous than Therapy"?: Interviewees' Reflections on Recording Traumatic or Taboo Issues', *Oral History* 26, no. 2 (Autumn, 1998): 34–48.

12 Alistair Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History in Britain: Personal and Critical Reflections on Twenty-Five Years of Continuity and Change', *Oral History* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 97–98; Anneke Sools, 'Back from the future: a narrative approach to study the imagination of personal futures', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 23 (2020): 451–465.

13 Pam Schweitzer, 'Making memories matter: Reminiscence and creativity, A thirty-year retrospective', *Oral History* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 84–97.

14 Jane Mace, 'Reminiscence as Literacy: Intersections and Creative Moments', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), 393.

At Lotus Place the writers and facilitator work together to talk, listen, write, read and respond to each other's stories. The group provides a supportive and creative setting for participants to narrate their lives and reinvent and reclaim their stories. In this paper we draw from interviews with the staff and creative writers at Lotus Place, not as oral histories per se, but as accounts of doing creative writing that allow us to reflect on the ways we work with trauma, memory and life stories as oral historians or as memory scholars more generally. As Alistair Thomson has observed, 'people may well write different stories to the ones they speak, not least because they have more control when they tell their own story as opposed to when you ask them to tell it to you'.[15] Our observations of the Lotus Place creative writing group led us to wonder whether an inclusion of imagination and creativity could enhance life history and oral history practice, and bring in the stories of individuals and groups potentially excluded from projects that employ traditional practices.

BACKGROUND – CARE LEAVERS IN AUSTRALIA

The provision of child welfare and out-of-home 'care' in Australia occurred not long after British colonisation. In Queensland, the first orphanage was established in 1865 and more institutions followed, some run by the state, and others by charitable and/or religious organisations. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, children experienced 'care' in institutions as well as foster 'care'. In the later part of the twentieth century, and in line with social policy of the time and national and international trends, the larger institutions were closed down, in favour of smaller group homes, which were meant to better mimic family life.[16]

It is now well understood that for many children life in out-of-home 'care' institutions was one of neglect and abuse. Many children were removed from their families and placed in institutions as a result of contemporary judgements about race, class and poverty. Life in institutions was hard, with children expected to work, and education often neglected. There was little emotional support or affection provided

15 Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History in Britain', 98.

16 Find & Connect web resource, 'Historical Background about Child Welfare' (12 December 2018). Available at https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/resources/historical-background-about-child-welfare/. Accessed 1 October 2022.

by the staff of the institutions, and children were prevented from seeing, or getting information about their families. Abuse of all kinds was prevalent, and no support was provided to the children once they left the institutions.[17]

In the 1980s and 1990s, as survivors started to articulate their experiences, knowledge grew about the difficult experiences of children who grew up in out-of-home 'care', as well as its lasting impact and a recognition that many survivors had complex trauma as a result of childhood institutionalisation. However it was not until the mid-1990s that it was understood that further investigations into these experiences needed to be undertaken – this was after ongoing advocacy from survivors and advocacy organisations.

The first report to consider these issues was the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), the outcome of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. This was followed by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into the experiences of British and Maltese Child Migrants, resulting in the publication of the *Lost Innocents* report in 2001. And finally, after much lobbying, advocacy and awareness raising by survivors who were not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or Child Migrants, the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquired into the experiences of this group, resulting in the publication of the *Forgotten Australians* report in 2004.[18] These reports resulted in two National Apologies in the Federal Parliament in 2008 and

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17 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or out-of-Home Care as Children* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004), 85–125. Available at https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index. Accessed 29 August 2022.

18 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). Available at https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-report-1997. Accessed 28 August 2022; Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record – Report on Child Migration* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2001). Available at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/1999-02/child_migrat/report/index. Accessed 28 August 2022; Senate Standing Committee, *Forgotten Australians*.

2009 following the election of a Labor government in 2007. Responses to inquiries around institutional 'care' also took place on a state and territory level.

Following the 2009 Australian government apology, funding became available for a variety of projects to collect and preserve the stories of Care Leavers, for the purposes of memorialisation as well as awareness raising and therapeutic outcomes. Before turning to our focus on Lotus Place, we briefly outline some of these testimony and biography projects to offer a comparative ground for our analysis.

TESTIMONY AND BIOGRAPHY PROJECTS FOR CARE LEAVERS

When it comes to narrative projects with Care Leavers, there has been an overwhelming focus on life history. As noted above, Care Leaver narratives in the form of life stories, memoirs and testimony have played an important political role in transforming public understanding about 'care' and its impact. For Care Leavers in Australia, life storytelling is inherently political, and closely tied to activism and advocacy.

Sharing and amplifying personal stories has been a very effective strategy in Care Leavers' continuing campaign for recognition, justice and redress. Testimony and lived experience have been at the centre of national and state inquiries and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Swain and Musgrove observe that the government inquiries gave primacy to survivor testimony, in the form of written submissions and public hearings.[19]

The introduction to the 2004 *Forgotten Australians* report acknowledged that 'without doubt this inquiry has generated the largest volume of highly personal, emotive and significant evidence of any Senate inquiry'.[20]

Nearly all projects that work with Care Leavers' life stories have focused on documenting the Care Leaver experience for advocacy and education purposes. The

19 Shurlee Swain and Nell Musgrove, 'We are the stories we tell about ourselves: child welfare records and the construction of identity among Australians who, as children, experienced out-of-home "care"', *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 1 (2012): 4.

20 Senate Standing Committee, *Forgotten Australians*, 11.

National Library of Australia's (NLA) Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, was one of the projects funded by the Australian government after its 2009 apology. The aims of the NLA project and its method for selecting interviewees are set out in the booklet that accompanies this important collection, which states that, 'Many interviewees are working to achieve justice for those who were in institutions as children, in a range of different ways – as advocates, counsellors, support service workers and in self-help groups'.[21] Leading advocate Leonie Sheedy further explained the oral history project as a public history endeavour that would amplify the voices of Care Leavers for posterity and make sure the wider public knew how they were treated. As she is quoted:

> Thankfully the voices of care-leavers around Australia will have a permanent place in the National Library. It is important that our voices are heard, in order for our children and the families we have created to understand what we endured as children. Our stories have a real place in Australian history.[22]

This mode of testimony was therefore intended as a public record to be preserved and to be used in advocacy and education.

The written submissions to the 2004 Senate inquiry, published on the Parliament of Australia website, provide another collection of Care Leaver stories, where the political motivation of the storytelling is clear.[23] Although there were no prescribed guidelines, the vast majority of the published submissions to the 2004 *Forgotten Australians* inquiry take a very similar form, the story of the person's traumatic childhood and its lasting impact on them. Many of the writers used the official files from their time in 'care' as the scaffolding for their life story. The files provide a

21 National Library of Australia, *You Can't Forget Things Like That: Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), 32. Available at https://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/forgotten-australians-oralhistory-booklet.pdf. Accessed 2 October 2022.

22 National Library of Australia, *You Can't Forget Things Like That*, 45.

23 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 'Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care: Submissions Received by the Committee' (2005). Available at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/submissions/sublist. Accessed 2 October 2022.

chronology and key information like dates, places and names, enabling Care Leavers to arrange their traumatic and partial memories into a narrative. Official records are of vital importance to construct life histories, but they have many shortcomings, as Care Leavers Jacqueline Wilson and Frank Golding demonstrate. One of the major features of child welfare files is the relentless surveillance of children and families, and the almost entirely negative representation of them in the records created by institutions and government departments. Wilson and Golding describe the records, and Care Leavers' feelings about them, as 'profoundly ambiguous': records can be the key to (re)constructing and reclaiming a life history while simultaneously continuing to oppress, deride and limit people's understanding of the past and themselves.[24] This necessary reliance on official records, with their many shortcomings, leads to the creation of a genre of Care Leaver narratives that inevitably share common features and follow similar narrative arcs. Scholars have observed that this has created a dominant 'master narrative' of abuse that many Forgotten Australians draw on to create a coherent life story.[25]

When called upon to tell their life story, many Care Leavers have little choice but to rely on these collective narratives, as well as bureaucratic records, because they can struggle to form cohesive autobiographical memories of their childhood.[26] It was very common for children to experience multiple placements in various types of 'care' – reception centres, foster 'care', orphanages, reformatories – making it difficult to recall a coherent chronological childhood story. In recognition of this, Life Story Work is now an established practice in out-of-home 'care', to help children and young people make sense of their identity.[27] In the context of this dislocation and lack of tangible keepsakes, as Davis discusses, telling one's story as testimony is

24 Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, 'Latent scrutiny: personal archives as perpetual mementos of the official gaze', *Archival Science* 16 (2016): 93–109.

25 Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2010), 106.

26 Stine Grønbæk Jensen, 'The Rebuilding of Fragmented Memories, Broken Families and Rootless Selves among Danish Care Leavers', *Journal of Family History* 46, no. 1 (January 2021): 79.

27 Simon P. Hammond, Julie Young and Claire Duddy, 'Life Story Work for Children and Young People with Care Experience: A Scoping Review', *Developmental Child Welfare* 2, no. 4 (December 2020): 293–315.

'an especially partial and selective genre of life writing: They cover, at best, a short episode or series of episodes in one person's life, selected for their relevance to the inquiry's purpose'.[28]

In addition to the political drive to tell a particular type of life story, there are practical reasons why Care Leaver narratives conform to a genre. Government services for Forgotten Australians often require people to repeat their life story in order for them to prove eligibility. The National Redress Scheme provides a stark example of this. The redress application process requires applicants to share 'with as much detail as you can' their experiences of sexual abuse ('Part 2' of the application) as well as the impact sexual abuse has had across the person's life ('Part 3' of the application).[29] It is a requirement of the scheme that the information in 'Part 2' is shared with the institution responsible for the sexual abuse. Until 2018, the information in 'Part 3' was automatically shared with the institution. As a result of advocacy, when survivors raised concerns about the sharing of deeply personal and highly sensitive information with their abusers (as well as with insurers), applicants are now able to choose whether to share 'Part 3' with the institution.[30]

Existing narrative projects for Care Leavers have played an important political role, and for many people the process is also therapeutic. Most recently, the Life Stories project, delivered by the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) and funded by the Department of Social Services, has highlighted the potential wellbeing benefits of storytelling.[31] Its promotional brochure states, 'Making a record of your life and telling of some of the events in your life is one way of saying you matter and that your life matters'. The AFA Life Stories project involved Forgotten Australians working with a biographer to write their life story. If the authors chose to, the stories were

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28 Fiona Davis, '"I Fought. I Screamed. I Bit": The Assertion of Rights Within Historic Abuse Inquiry Transcripts,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 42, no. 2 (3 April 2018): 19.

29 National Redress Scheme, 'Thinking about applying' (2021). Available at https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/applying/thinking-about-applying. Accessed 28 August 2022.

30 Robyn Kruk, 'Final Report: Second Year Review of the National Redress Scheme' (2021). Available at https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-06/d21-508932-final-report-second-year-review-national-redress-scheme.pdf. Accessed 28 August 2022.

31 Simon Gardiner, 'Life Stories Project', *Find & Connect* (blog), 12 February 2021, https://www.findandconnectwrblog.info/2021/02/life-stories-project/.

then collected and published, but the option was also there to simply keep the story for themselves or their family. The program emphasised 'You own your story. Your story stays yours!'. This reflects the important emphasis on ensuring people have agency to tell their own story and choice about how it can be used.

However, life story writing may not be suitable for all Care Leavers. Much of the literature about life writing as a therapeutic practice comes with an assumption that the storyteller will be able to achieve structure and meaning in their story, and this coherent story 'facilitates a sense of resolution, which results in less rumination and eventually allows disturbing experiences to subside gradually from conscious thought'.[32] However, Donna Hancox observed after working on a digital storytelling project with Forgotten Australians, this expectation that people have a coherent personal narrative available makes traditional formats for recording life stories problematic when working with people who have experienced complex trauma: 'There is…an assumption that participants arrive with a store – tangible and intangible – of memories and mementos from their lives that they can use to make a digital story', whereas 'Often such stories seem too incoherent to be told and too painful to be heard by others…'.[33] This highlights that developing a life story may not be suitable for all Forgotten Australians, but this should not mean they are excluded from writing altogether.

Malyn et al. note that the literature on creativity and wellbeing focuses on visual and performing arts, rather than community-based literary projects.[34] In the Australian Care Leaver space, the Parragirls organisation has produced many creative art projects by women who were former inmates of the Parramatta Girls' Training School.[35] The

32 James W. Pennebaker and Janel D. Seagal, 'Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative', *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 55, no. 10 (October 1999): 1243.

33 Donna Hancox, 'The Process of Remembering with the Forgotten Australians: Digital Storytelling and Marginalized Groups', *Human Technology: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Humans in ICT Environments* 8, no. 1 (2012): 67, 70.

34 Brianna O. Malyn, Zoe Thomas and Christine E. Ramsey-Wade, 'Reading and Writing for Well-being: A Qualitative Exploration of the Therapeutic Experience of Older Adult Participants in a Bibliotherapy and Creative Writing Group', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 20, no. 4 (December 2020): 715.

35 Lily Hibberd with Bonney Djuric, *Parragirls: Reimagining Parramatta Girls Home through art and memory* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2019).

women's artworks are very much grounded in the site of this institution, a precinct which was inscribed on the National Heritage List in 2017.[36] While Parragirls do produce creative writing pieces, the emphasis is on visual arts and performance.

The literature is much more likely to engage with creative art than with writing, and Deveney and Lawson observe that there is less literature about the therapeutic benefits of creative writing, as opposed to expressive writing, where the therapeutic benefits are well established.[37] Deveney and Lawson found that creative writing has 'interesting possibilities as an effective, low-level intervention', and wrote about its benefits:

> These include the cognitive processing of trauma and emotional difficulties in a gentle yet beneficial way. Writers hand over their real-life personal issues to imaginary characters and, in the process, find an increased sense of detachment and objectivity, a changed perspective and new levels of self-empathy, catharsis and healing. The immersive process of writing, and the creation of a fictional narrative that uses real experience, allows patients to focus on their difficulties in a safe and positive way.[38]

The literature on narrative therapy (also known as narrative practice) emphasises the benefits of re-authoring the stories that we have about ourselves.[39] Like narrative therapy, the creative writing practised in the group at Lotus Place gives the participants a chance to find shimmering threads in the stickiest, muddiest, most problem-saturated stories and to weave a new story. Creative writing gives back

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36 Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 'National Heritage List inscription: Parramatta Female Factory and Institutions Precinct' (2017). Available at https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/places/national/parramatta-female-factory-and-institutions-precinct. Accessed 1 June 2023.

37 Catherine Deveney and Patrick Lawson, 'Writing Your Way to Well-being: An IPA Analysis of the Therapeutic Effects of Creative Writing on Mental Health and the Processing of Emotional Difficulties', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 22, no. 2 (June 2022): 1–2.

38 Deveney and Lawson, 'Writing Your Way to Well-being', 2.

39 Leonie Sheedy, 'Try to Put Yourselves in Our Skin: The Experiences of Wardies and Homies', *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* 1 (2005): 65–71; Alice Morgan, 'What Is Narrative Therapy?' The Dulwich Centre (2000). Available at https://dulwichcentre.com.au/what-is-narrative-therapy/. Accessed 2 October 2022.

control to the writer that can contrast with the person's sense of helplessness in the real world.[40] In contrast to expressive writing, creative writing does not come with the imperative for a person to make disclosures about traumatic events or uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.[41] The participant can feel safe that they are able to choose what they want to share. Where life writing can be difficult for people who have experienced complex trauma due to the need to come up with a coherent narrative, creative writing can work through and beyond life history in non-linear ways.

THE 'WRITING WRONGS RIGHT' PROJECT

This research project began when an article was published by the ABC in June 2020: *Forgotten Australians rewrite childhood trauma through power of storytelling.*[42] This led to conversations with Katie McGuire, Program and Resource Worker at Lotus Place, about how the organisation uses the 'healing power of story' in its work with people who grew up in institutions and foster 'care'. The project team successfully applied for a Community Engagement Grant from the Melbourne Social Equity Institute, a scheme which aims to develop interdisciplinary and community-engaged networks within and beyond the University of Melbourne. Funding was received in December 2020, enabling the researchers to travel from Melbourne to Brisbane (in a quick break between COVID-19 lockdowns) to engage with Lotus Place staff and participants to document the organisation's innovative approach to creative writing and storytelling.

After obtaining ethics approval from the University of Melbourne, we travelled to Brisbane and conducted qualitative interviews with both staff and creative writing participants at Lotus Place. This included Katie, who set up the program, Edwina, who runs the workshops, Helen, who works as a volunteer scribe, and ten participants in the creative writing group, Gloria, Lana, Lynette, Jessie, Pierre, Michelle,

40 Deveney and Lawson, 'Writing Your Way to Well-being', 3.

41 Stephen J. Lepore and Wendy Kliewer, 'Expressive Writing and Health', in Marc D. Gellman and J. Rick Turner (eds), *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine* (New York: Springer New York, 2013), 735–741.

42 Inga Stünzner and Megan Hendry, 'The Power of Storytelling Helps Tania Rewrite Memories of Childhood Abuse', *ABC News,* 21 June 2020. Available at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-22/forgotten-australians-use-storytelling-to-cope-with-trauma/12360902. Accessed 29 August 2022.

Denise, Cecily, *Sam and *Polly. Some participants chose to use pseudonyms and these are indicted with an asterisk. We used a set schedule of questions but allowed participants to decide if they wanted to be interviewed alone or with others. As a result, interviews were with between one and four people – Katie, Lynette and Jessie were interviewed individually; Edwina and Helen, Lana and Gloria, and Sam and Polly as pairs; and Cecily, Pierre, Michelle and Denise as a group. This methodology ensured people felt safe in the interview and also captured some of the social dynamics within the group. These were not oral history interviews per se, but informed our thoughts on the role of memory and creativity in ways that can add to methodological considerations in the field.

We also participated in the creative workshop on one of the two days we were visiting Lotus Place. We did this not so much as formal participant observation but as a way to experience some of the vulnerabilities and pleasures involved in creative writing and to be more present in the happenings of Lotus Place while we were there, which also involved participating in bingo and morning tea. Although unplanned, we reflected that the fact we took part in the workshop in the morning of the first day, before any interviews, also had an effect in changing the power dynamic of interviewer/interviewee as we were quite demonstrably the least experienced and skilled creative writers in the class.

To analyse the interviews, we coded the transcripts for themes and looked for what staff and participants said were the benefits of participating in the creative writing group. In the following sections we describe and analyse the way that Lotus Place's creative writing program differs from existing writing projects that focus on memoir, yet still offers an important therapeutic space for Care Leavers. We quote from participants at length in keeping with their right to speak to their own experiences. Before discussing the interviews, we provide some background on Lotus Place and its program.

CREATIVE WRITING AT LOTUS PLACE

Lotus Place is a dedicated support service and resource centre for Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants, and offers a number of services to those who grew up in out-of-home 'care' in Queensland. These include records and family

tracing services, counselling services, National Redress Scheme support, individual advocacy, assistance and referrals to other government services, and programs and activities including peer support groups, tai chi, art and dance classes, weekly lunch and bingo, movie nights, and the creative writing group.[43] Katie McGuire started the creative writing group in 2015 as a response to service users expressing an interest in improving their literacy. Edwina Shaw soon joined as the facilitator. Edwina is a published author of both fiction and nonfiction and specialises in trauma-informed creative writing.[44]

The creative writing sessions usually begin with a meditation based on the yoga nidra where Edwina also incorporates a visualisation on getting rid of your inner critic. To structure the rest of the session, Edwina offers a series of prompts for creative writing, setting small tasks that are done on the spot one at a time. After each exercise the participants take turns reading out their writing. Prompts in the workshop we attended involved a combination of both remembering and imagining, or doing something creative with memories. For example, in one exercise participants were asked to describe a moment of joy using all of their senses, what could they see, smell, feel, and so on; in another, to choose a portrait from a magazine and make up the life story for the person pictured; or to write about a life event that seemed bad at the time but led to something good. We also did a craft/writing activity, making affirmation cards, where there were the options to make up your own affirmation or draw from an existing set of cards. As we will explain, including such choices is a vital part of the ethos of the trauma-informed workshop.

The workshops are accessible with participants able to attend in person, join by phone, or Zoom in, for all or part of the session. For example, in the workshop we attended one participant joined by phone just for the meditation, and another participant showed up late to miss the meditation. As another important accessibility

43 Lotus Place, 'Lotus Place: Services' (2018). Available at https://www.lotusplace.org.au/services/lotus-place. Accessed 27 August 2022.

44 Edwina Shaw, *Thrill Seekers* (Winchester: Ransom, 2012); Edwina Shaw, *A Guide Through Grief: First Aid for Your Heart and Soul: Practical Tools, Creative Activities and Yoga Exercises to Help You Cope with the Loss of Someone You Love* (Brisbane: Red Backed Wren Publishing, 2020).

aspect of the group, participants with low literacy are paired with a volunteer scribe who works with them to write down their ideas and to read their story out to the group. Each participant has an exercise book that they write in and is stored at Lotus Place. Sometimes Katie selects stories to be published in the Lotus Place Lilypad newsletter, and the group have also produced a zine with selected stories included alongside images.

PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES OF CREATIVE WRITING AT LOTUS PLACE

As we have outlined, the creative writing program at Lotus Place is a significant departure from other Care Leaver projects that use life writing and storytelling. It distinguishes itself from creative projects like Parragirls, or life story projects such as the AFA Life Stories project in that it does not have an overt social justice purpose. Going into the project we were curious about what makes the creative writing program at Lotus Place work and what attracts Care Leavers to participate. While the writing itself was important, the structure and format of the workshop played a significant role in drawing and keeping participants, in some cases across a number of years, including people who described having been reticent to share their life story. The value of the workshop format chimes with established practices in 'group reminiscing' that have been popular in oral history but have somewhat fallen out of vogue. Our analysis of the work at Lotus Place reaffirms the potentials of group memory-work in place of or alongside individual interviews.

In different ways, all the participants noted that an important part of the creative writing group's success was the lack of judgement and the focus on being imaginative. Participants noted their appreciation for getting to imagine a story for themselves beyond their Forgotten Australian experience or the ways they may have articulated their life story in the past. While the Lotus Place creative writing group is a space where participants are free to discuss their experiences if they wish, they can also imagine different narratives that might contain a small part of their experience or extend into entirely different topics. This was evident in Pierre's work which he describes as 'sensual erotic romance' and in the writings of another participant we did not interview but was mentioned several times for his stories about dogs. The facilitator's prompts for stories, such as images, can lead participants to remember or

imagine positive stories about emotional connections between people. In addition, the activity of cutting out images from magazines allows for a creative set of choices in not only telling the story, but deciding its premise.

Sam explained that she preferred to write imaginative stories than to write autobiographically. She said: 'I just don't want to share my story with the world out there. I think everybody else has got a pretty hard life out there, why should I tell everybody about what happened to me? I just feel that way'. Similarly, Pierre said, 'I don't touch on my personal life in my writing'. As Pierre and Denise explained, the creative writing prompts mean that participants can choose to disguise little pieces of their life story or leave it out altogether. This, in addition to adopting different authorial styles, was felt to be therapeutic:

> **Pierre:** It's coming from within, whether it's an experience, and as Edwina said, you know, you can either write about your life experience, or if you don't want to write about that life experience, put that experience under the banner of a character […] so you're sort of pushing it out.
>
> **Denise:** You're releasing it.
>
> **Pierre:** And there's different forms of writing which I've learnt from coming to classes. We get to write in first person, second person, third person. Third person is basically what they call a guide looking down, so to speak, so you can say you're looking into someone's window and they're doing that.

As Pierre and Denise note, creative writing is no less cathartic or empowering than writing that explicitly describes traumatic experiences, and can be so in a different way, by offering ways to assign or resculpt events via point of view and characters. Malyn et al. write about how creative writing can help people to gain increased insight into themselves by providing an 'intermediary object' between the person and their problems.[45] Writing about the Parragirls Memory Project, Hibberd makes a similar claim, that 'the production of an artwork permits the institutionalised subject to set her or himself apart from victimhood, to tackle difficult experiences and memories

45 Malyn, Thomas and Ramsey-Wade, 'Reading and Writing for Well-being', 717.

from a distance'.[46] Creativity allows Care Leavers to take a break from activism and advocacy, to express themselves and define their identities without having to refer to public understandings of abuse and justice that we have become more used to hearing when we think about people who grew up in 'care'. Encouraging imaginative writing can thus enable people to put some distance between themselves and their traumatic life stories, and allows them to work through painful material in a less direct way.

While Denise sometimes does write about her life, she noted that Edwina's focus on positive prompts meant that she was able to recall and describe parts of her life that were otherwise overshadowed by bad memories. Interestingly, Denise used the language of 'triggering' to describe the experience of recovering forgotten good memories:

> **Denise:** [...] I've had really bad memories as a child, sometimes it will bring a good memory, so that good memory will come up and it will pop back into your system. That's really, it gives me tears just thinking about it. [...] it's a really nice memory, and you'd only get that from being in that class at that time. [...] So it's mindful writing for me.[...] because you remember the bad ones. The good ones only slip in through something triggering it. Especially in creative writing.

The fact that participants felt welcome both to write or not write about their experiences in 'care' or after was an important part of what attracted them to the group and created an environment where they felt able to take creative risks in following the prompts. Their experience as Forgotten Australians was already recognised within the group and was not required to be the main focus of their writing if they chose to write about other topics or memories. As we will discuss further, participant choice in the structure of the storytelling program, not just its content, was a defining factor at Lotus Place, and guarded against the entrenchment of a prescriptive approach.

46 Hibberd, 'Negotiating uncertain agency', 79.

In this sense, the creative writing program works in a way that is trauma-informed to decentre trauma from participants' narratives. A 'vital paradigm shift' towards trauma-informed practice (TIP) in organisations providing services to people who have experienced past or current abuse was discussed by Harris and Fallot as early as 2001.[47] Trauma-informed practice is a way of working that acknowledges the lifelong and serious effects of trauma and seeks to reduce the likelihood of people having stressful, retraumatising interactions with an organisation.

Over the last 10 years, TIP has grown in popularity in Australia, although the Australian Institute of Family Studies noted in 2016 that it was not yet entrenched, highlighting the need for a consistent national framework to implement trauma-informed systems in child/family services.[48] Indeed, in the early 2020s, TIP is no longer confined to the 'caring professions', and is being adapted to sectors as diverse as journalism, the law and archives.[49] TIP is applicable in a wide variety of settings: as Russon highlights, in the broader Australian population, one in four people are survivors of childhood trauma, including abuse.[50] Recent work in oral history has also begun to consider how TIP shapes the design of interview projects, though many of the premises would be considered part of oral history's methodological foundations, such as empowering narrators.[51]

One of the principles of trauma-informed practice is to give people choice, for example, as already discussed, the choice to not participate in an activity. Edwina

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47 Maxine Harris and Roger D. Fallot, 'Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System: A Vital Paradigm Shift', *New Directions for Mental Health Services*, no. 89 (2001): 3–22.

48 Liz Wall et al., 'Trauma-Informed Care in Child/Family Welfare Services' (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2016). Available at https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/trauma-informed-care-childfamily-welfare-services. Accessed 3 October 2022.

49 See for example, DART Center for Journalism & Trauma, 'Journalism & Trauma' (5 February 2009). Available at https://dartcenter.org/resources/self-study-unit-1-journalism-trauma. Accessed 2 October 2022; Kirsten Wright and Nicola Laurent, 'Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment: Trauma-Informed Archival Practice', *Archivaria* 91, June (2021): 38–73.

50 Penni Russon, 'Beyond Trigger Warnings: Working towards a Strengths-Based, Trauma-Informed Model of Resilience in the University Creative Writing Workshop', *TEXT* 21, Special 42 (31 October 2017).

51 Kae Bara Kratcha and Taylor Thompson, 'Talking trauma-informed oral history project design with Gabriel Solis', *OHMA* (blog), 10 May 2021, http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/blog-posts/talking-trauma-informed-oral-history-project-design-with-gabriel-solis; Kelly Flannery Rowan, 'Trauma informed Interviewing: Interviewing with Empathy and Protecting Oral History Narrators' (2 December 2022). Available at https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/glworks/122/. Accessed 1 June 2023.

emphasised that choice and autonomy were a key part of the design of her workshops, where participants could feel confident to make decisions themselves. Her approach highlighted the flexibility offered around giving participants different options within any one prompt, particularly if it might be challenging:

> **Edwina:** Here the focus is on fun, expressing ourselves, and trying to sneak in some of that transformative stuff. And you have to be very careful also. The main thing is you don't know what people's triggers are, and it could be, you know, so if you want to go in and do one of those transformative ones you have to be very, very gentle and give multiple options. The most important thing is you don't have to do anything, you know, you don't have to do this exercise.

This kind of sensitive facilitation was crucial in the reasons that participants gave for attending the group. The autonomy to make decisions about what activities to do or not was inclusive of participants who, for example, may have shied away from participating had they been asked to focus on describing their lives directly. The choice to write about whatever came to mind on the spot allowed people to exercise the power of being a storyteller, not within the confines of a set life narrative elicited by others, but in determining the genre, tone and content of the story itself.

As Edwina explained, part of her method was to prompt people away from telling the same story and give them the confidence to tell alternative stories with a range of affects. As an example, Edwina discussed one of the long-running participants, Sam, who had recovered her imagination through creative writing, with the help of a volunteer scribe Helen. '[Sam] used to say, when we first started, that she didn't have an imagination. I used to get that a lot, "No, I don't have an imagination", and people would get stuck telling their sad stories. But getting them to do the imaginative stories has really, really worked. I mean, you saw [Sam] today, she's on fire [laughs]'. Edwina's workshops are designed to help people open up their repertoire of stories by working with imaginative prompts that are carefully designed in a trauma-informed way to avoid triggering. Following these sensitively designed prompts, participants

could give their experiences to characters in ways that helped them gain distance from their trauma and exercise agency over their story. As Edwina added:

> **Edwina:** It's not just focusing on me and my life and all the sad, bad things that happened to me. [...] You know it's very freeing, all this, the imagination's fabulous because it opens up every world. [...] So when we did the exercise today, pick a character and you can make something bad happen to it, it can be something that happened to you, that's actually very empowering. Give it to somebody else. [...] So that's, the imagination is very, very powerful, and it's about getting people to remember that they do have it and to use it.

As an outcome of the creative writing program, participants spoke about gaining a sense of accomplishment and replacing others' negative assessments of their aptitudes with positive proofs of their creative talents and capability. This was especially important, as several participants noted, given many Care Leavers were not provided with adequate education. The creative writing group offered a chance to improve literacy, and several participants told us they were initially drawn to the program with hopes they would learn the 'correct' way to write, deploy grammar, and so on. While they then found that the group was more about play and creative expression, the outcome nonetheless bolstered confidence and a sense of accomplishment in both literacy and composition. Michelle spoke about learning processes of drafting and editing rather than expecting first attempts to be 'right', she explained:

> **Michelle:** And like Denise said, you become more expressive and articulate, you can articulate more, express yourself. I suppose though, one of the things I came to understand with writing was I probably wanted it to be just right. I didn't realise there was a technique in it, you have to do drafts and revise your drafts, and that was and still is a big learning experience for me. [...] …And again, with Edwina's help, it's sort of just practising the six senses. And I notice that when I'm out and about now I can do that and I sort of create little mind stories or stories, like a little narrative.

As Michelle says here, the skills she learned in the creative writing group could be carried into everyday life. She found herself more comfortable with making mistakes and experimenting rather than being 'correct'.

Katie explained to us that prior to the creative writing group, people were already interacting at Lotus Place but their interactions were 'a bit functional'. They would have some knowledge about each other, 'which Homes they were in and what happened to them as children, but they didn't know a lot about each other's lives and what was important, what amazing things have happened, what was their best day or worst day'. Katie saw the kinds of rich conversations that were opened up by doing creative writing together as more akin to friendship. As she noted, 'people were just more connected with each other after the creative writing because they had shared things, and sort of broke down barriers with each other'. This did not mean that participants never mentioned their experiences in 'care', but rather that for those who did not wish to focus on that aspect of their biography, the support and collegiality on offer did not rest on mutual disclosure solely about traumatic experiences. The creative writing group allowed for but did not structure itself around disclosure, thus providing opportunities for participants to construct their selves and identities as more than their 'care' experience.

Several of the participants spoke about positive, potentially healing, effects of doing creative writing. Lana reflected that the creative thinking provided purpose and knowledge that was often withheld from children in 'care'. 'You're getting knowledge', she said, 'To know and have knowledge is the biggest thing you could want. [...] and all the stuff that Edwina gives us makes our brains think, it gives us a reason to try, what can I say, it's fantastic'. For Jessie too, creative outputs where her skills were instrumentalised by other people helped her to overcome negative comments and abusive experiences:

> **Jessie:** I was told all my life I could only do what I could do for others and what they could use me for, and I was a worthless piece of shit, and I'm not. [...] I'm learning to be creative in all of these ways, and who would have thought, me, that I could write songs. Like I can write songs! And I can be in plays and I've

> been in a few films, a few people's movies, and yeah, now I'm writing as well. It's like wow, that's cool. If I can do it, anybody can do it. I think it's amazing, yeah.

As these reflections from Lana and Jessie show, the accomplishment of producing a piece of writing had the effect of giving back a sense of capability and confidence that was withheld in earlier contexts of their life in 'care'. It was not necessarily the content of the piece but the process of writing and sharing of it – providing the recognition and self-recognition that they are creative – that had a positive effect on the participants' wellbeing. Like the experience of participants in the Parragirls art projects mentioned earlier, creative practice provided a way for the creative writers to reclaim and redefine their own identities.[52]

Staff and participants at Lotus Place spoke about the work of creative writing in developing imaginative skills that could be used beyond the class context to think differently about both past experiences and future paths. Both Edwina and Katie described the transformative potential of imaginative activities, beyond the outcomes of traditional talk-therapy or support-group settings. Katie elaborated on how imaginative skills can be used as life skills:

> **Katie:** I think it's also about developing an imagination. That's a big one. [...] People that grow up in low socio-economic circumstances, or in Homes especially, often haven't had conversations as children that are anything outside of functional conversations. Like 'Get down there and scrub the floor. Have you showered? Come and eat', you know? There's very minimal language and imagination is a waste of time. And so saying imagination is actually really a great skill and tool, developing that imagination so that you can develop an alternative explanation for something that is happening, [...] it can be actually a coping skill that is being developed.

In Katie's description the creative writing is empowering not only because it is a chance to tell a story but because imagining exercises a skill that can be used beyond

52 Hibberd with Djuric, *Parragirls*, 50.

the class, it recovers a mode of learning and creative sense-making that was often denied to people in 'care'.

CONCLUSION: CREATIVE WRITING AS TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

It could seem counterintuitive that a writing program for Forgotten Australians would not focus on telling about their experience in 'care'. However, the writing group at Lotus Place demonstrates that imaginative and creative writing which prompts participants to write beyond their own experience can be a trauma-informed, healing and community-building exercise. Indeed there was great value in moving away from a focus on deficit or trauma narratives. As we have noted, some participants only attended because they had the freedom not to write about themselves and their memories. In addition, several participants had developed their own genres of writing, such as erotica, pet fiction, or poetry, or branched out into other creative modes, such as songwriting and dance. Other participants reported that the imaginative skills learnt went beyond the telling of stories in the class and became a way to engage with the world more generally, creating alternative narratives for the present and future.

Life history projects have played an important role in reshaping the Australian public's collective understanding about the history of institutional care and raising awareness about the experiences of Care Leavers, and have been an important tool in advocating for making changes and providing services to those who grow up in out-of-home 'care'. But life history storytelling does not suit all Forgotten Australians, particularly those who are not able to produce a coherent life story. Conventional oral history and life history storytelling projects may shut people out and this means that there are many Care Leavers whose experiences are not being recorded. Creative writing and imagination provide new possibilities for Forgotten Australians to express themselves and reflect on their lives. Lotus Place's creative writing program provides a way for Care Leavers who have experienced complex trauma to avoid these inherent challenges of storytelling. Participants can also step outside the expectations of the dominant Care Leaver life story genre and the testimony model.[53] At Lotus Place,

53 Douglas, *Contesting Childhood*, 108.

the purpose of the program is not to bear witness, or to amplify stories, to 'write the unspeakable' or even to write your own life story with a coherent plot. The storytelling is of the moment, and most exercises, while recorded in the participants' journals at Lotus Place, are created for the immediate experience of the creative process. Its focus on creative writing, rather than life writing, opens up additional modes of expression for Forgotten Australians.

The creative writing work at Lotus Place offers a new mode of storytelling that departs from the focus on sharing a life history but nevertheless provides a way for Care Leavers to talk about their lives. The program provides an alternative way for Forgotten Australians to express themselves, to work through trauma and develop life skills and have positive experiences that improve their sense of wellbeing. This indirect way of working with memory raises interesting methodological and ethical considerations for scholars and practitioners of oral history and life writing, where a traditional focus on recording a linear life history still dominates as the mainstream form. For oral historians, being aware of the possibilities and potential of creative writing and imagination could provide some new insights and practices to life story work and invite new voices into oral history. As Thomson reflected, 'The continuing challenge to community oral historians is to consider our own blinkers, and to constantly reflect on if and how our work may still be excluding or silencing'.[54] The facilitation of memory work with a group such as Lotus Place creative writing group includes people who would otherwise not participate in telling shared stories, but who feel comfortable working with prompts and creative expression. Particularly when working with groups who have experienced complex trauma there could be value in allowing for a diversity of forms where memory could play a role in narration but not always be at the centre of the story that a narrator wishes to tell.

54 Thomson, 'Oral History and Community History in Britain', 98.