

RESTORATION

MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLBEING GUIDELINES
FOR MUSEUM AND GALLERY
STAFF MEMBERS

ANGELA SAMATA

Manchester
Art Gallery

The Baring
Foundation

‘Mental health is a state of mind that encompasses emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, crucial in shaping thought processes, emotional responses, and actions.’

World Health Organization,
2022

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1. A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: LIVING MUSEUM PRINCIPLES

- Create a place of warmth
- Create a stress-free, protected space
- Create a connection between art and recovery
- Allow the possibility of redefining and identity change
- Create a place of diversity and inclusion
- Establish a caring community of artists, fellows, visitors, students and workers, both peers and professionals
- Allow, establish and support self-sufficiency; self-care
- Cook healthy; eat healthy as part of self-care
- Make all kinds of art. Don't restrict yourself to what you already know
- Learn to be creative; to perform, to sing, to dance

- Bring about positive change
- Permit multiple reasons and responses
- Permit and invite multiple perspectives and points of view
- Be transparent and authentic
- Show interest and have interests and passions
- Sharing is caring; share knowledge, material, your interests
- Establish educational and research opportunities and curious attitudes
- Establish transgender diverse and non-binary inclusion and acceptance
- Educate each other and become aware of how art moves, affects and shapes us all

The Living Museum, Switzerland
Dr Rose Ehemann, Dr Nicole Ottiger, 26th July 2024

First located in Queens, New York, The Living Museum is an art studio dedicated to presenting artworks created by patients at the Creedmoor Psychiatric Hospital.

Started in 1983 by Psychologist Dr Janos Marton, this approach is now a global movement with sites across the world including Switzerland, Brazil and Germany with caring for the wellbeing of staff and artists at its heart.

2. HELLO

When I was asked to write these guidelines, I started to research what had already been written about supporting the health and wellbeing of museum and gallery staff members and unfortunately, I couldn't find very much. What I could find was how to support people like artists, community members and archivists, but very little on supporting front-of-house staff. So I looked to those evidence bases as my starting point as well as drawing on work and research from other sectors such as health care, journalism and education.

I'm fortunate to have dual careers working across the arts and mental health and I think my experience gives me the advantage of being able to cross-pollinate between these sectors and hopefully bring to you the best of both worlds. I started on the front desk over two decades ago and ended up running the John Moores Painting Prize at The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, which gave me an invaluable insight which I've always learnt into.

Recently, during a wellbeing workshop with an art gallery front-of-house team, we had a conversation about how they felt after the curators and artists had installed the show and moved on to their next project. I noticed during the conversation the language changed from 'front of house' to describing themselves as 'frontline'. This told me everything I needed to know about how their role felt to them, a concept we'll explore here.

As we become more inclusive and engaged, how do we support staff needs?

We can't ignore the impact of the Covid pandemic on us as staff members or on our public, both as a source of individual and collective trauma. In a post-2020 world, museums and galleries must engage with their staff and public in a trauma-informed way.

When it comes to supporting museum and gallery staff's mental health there are three strands which I have considered here, although I acknowledge this is just the tip of the iceberg:

1. ARTWORKS, OBJECTS AND COLLECTION ITEMS

2. AUDIENCES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

3. WORKING WITH COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITION MAKING

Throughout this guide you will see good practice examples of supporting staff wellbeing in the arts, some provocations to reflect on, and a number of suggested self-care and wellbeing strategies. These can be useful to consider whatever role you play in the cultural sector, volunteer or salaried, freelance or fixed term, outreach or on site.

I think there's one thing we can all agree on: no one goes into working in the arts for the money. It's always for the love. But what happens when the love isn't enough and we need to start thinking about our mental health and wellbeing?

We hope you find these guidelines both thought-provoking and empowering when exploring your own health and wellbeing and that of others within your setting. If you find them helpful, please share them.

3. PRACTICE THE 5 WAYS TO WELLBEING

There are five evidence-based actions that can improve wellbeing. Research carried out by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) has shown that by incorporating these actions into our day-to-day life we can protect and improve our mental health and wellbeing.

1

Connect

With the people around you at work with colleagues and visitors. Take time to have a chat. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

2

Be Active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside on your lunch break. Take the stairs instead of the lift. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity at work that you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

3

Take Notice

Be mindful. Notice your surroundings. Notice the formal elements in an artwork. Savour the moment, whether you're walking around a gallery space, eating lunch or talking to colleagues. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Be present.

4

Keep Learning

Try something new. Learn a new skill. Read up on an artist that is on display. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.

5

Give

Do something nice for a friend, colleague or a visitor. Thank someone. Smile. Join a peer-to-peer support group at work. Look out, as well as in: seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

4. ARTWORKS, OBJECTS AND COLLECTION ITEMS

For many of us, caring for the artworks, objects and collections within our museums and galleries is a fundamental part of our daily work. We often witness visitors walking through exhibitions, barely stopping to notice what they are walking past, but sometimes, the connection between viewer and object can be profound and unexpectedly impactful.

Not all objects or works of art are there to make us feel comfortable. Some are there to act as mirrors, reflecting our histories and experiences. For some people, an artwork may be a neutral, unprovocative object, however, for others our objects have the power to trigger difficult memories and conversations, sometimes even initiating a trauma response.

It's vital that front-of-house teams are regularly checked in with when working with our permanent displays or during the course of an exhibition, especially if that exhibition holds challenging objects or discusses emotive subjects. Sometimes witnessing those public responses or being part of those difficult conversations can have an impact on us. Checking on wellbeing is the responsibility of the team's managers and other senior leaders.

The following are some examples of how museums and galleries have supported staff who work with challenging objects and collections that were shared with me. I'm sure there are more:

“An exhibition will be created with a small team, a group - made up of staff, partners and co-producers who bring a huge range of experience together and work intensely on a project. This is ‘their’ project. But once the exhibition opens it belongs to other people, front of house teams need to know it, promote it, understand it, answer questions on it. A detailed and repeated briefing and conversation process between the curators or producers of the content and the people who are the face of it is vital.”

- Curator

RECOGNISING POTENTIAL IMPACT FROM DAY ONE

The Wiener Holocaust Library, London acknowledges during the staff induction process that working around the collection contents can be upsetting for staff members and therefore signposts to counselling services alongside encouraging staff to take self-care breaks when needed. A welcome level of transparency for the first day, although the impact of many collection items is less predictable.

THE IMPACT OF 'HISTORIC' COLLECTION ITEMS IS NOT CONSIDERED TO HISTORY:

Consider our language: the word 'historic' is often used to describe past experiences. However, working in mental health services has taught me that the word 'historic' can be difficult for some as it implies that the impact is somehow consigned to history and of little or no contemporary relevance today. For some people, nothing could be further from the truth. Liverpool's International Slavery Museum opened in 2007 with the collection items charting the horrifying historic and contemporary experiences of enslaved people.

Controversially, the venue contained a collection display containing the robes and insignia of the racist organisation the Ku Klux Klan. The curatorial challenge was balancing the potential of causing transgenerational trauma displaying these items, versus the telling the story of racism and slavery without including them. Today, the inclusion of these objects in the collection is still controversial, with the method of display also being debated. The method of display can elevate the status of an object, glorifying an object that does not deserve glorification. What impact do you think working around these objects has on staff members? Although this collection item is rare within UK collections, these considerations are going on every day in our galleries and staff teams.

THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND

Ulster Museum's display The Troubles and Beyond covers themes of political conflict and the impact it has on everyday life, people and communities. The exhibition features items and imagery that will undoubtedly be unsettling for many and evoke memories and emotions relating to personal and collective trauma. Curatorial staff at the museum recognise the need to prioritise the wellbeing of their front of house colleagues as well as volunteers. They check in with volunteers at the end of every shift and ensure they take regular breaks when working with challenging materials. Front of house staff know that they can raise any concerns or talk about any challenging public interactions with management if needed.

“I recently visited Displaced at Derby Museums. I really appreciated the way the team had displayed Egyptian mummified human remains as part of the exhibition, which looked at the city’s Egyptian collection and colonialism. The exhibition prepared the visitor for the encounter, asking the visitor to think not about the spectacle but about the person. The design of the display meant that visitors had to reflect on what they had learnt and then decide whether to view the remains or not. I thought this was extremely important, both for the remains and the staff working in the gallery. They did a great job on creating an atmosphere of respect. The front of house staff were extremely knowledgeable about the exhibition and the approach and had been part of the development. It showed.”

Emma Martin, Curator and Academic

IN FOCUS:

ARTIST'S SANCTUARY

As part of a Churchill Fellowship research project I visited the first Living Museum, in New York, a concept that has now spread across the globe as noted at the beginning of these guidelines. With artist's studios and gallery spaces cited within the grounds of a mental health hospital, all of the artists who use the studio spaces are clients and patients at the hospital. A staff team works collaboratively with predominately untrained artists, gently encouraging and guiding them with engaging in their creative practices across a range of mediums. I was hooked!

Later I visited the Living Museum in Switzerland and again witnessed staff members supporting the artistic practice of artists who were also living and receiving treatment at a psychiatric hospital. My thoughts turned to the difficult experiences I was hearing from artists and how the staff team were also working with distressing lived experiences on a daily basis.

One of the artists I spent time with talked to me about his work and his experience of torture and solitary confinement before he found political sanctuary and treatment in the Swiss hospital. His paintings communicated his distress, and I wanted to understand how staff members were able to support his practice, witnessing his distress as he began to process often horrifying details. I asked how staff members looked after themselves; What was enabling them to prevent burn out? Some of their suggestions are here in this document.

Self-care and wellbeing recommendations:

- **Supervision**

Whether it's a single session or regular sessions, debriefing confidentially with a trained clinical supervisor can be helpful, especially when we experience a reaction to an object or artwork that has initiated an emotional response. Some arts organisations such as Hospital Rooms, whose aim is to transform inpatient mental health units with contemporary art, have monthly clinical supervision with an independent psychotherapist available to all staff members. This is part of their working practice in recognition of the potential impact of their work on staff and project team members.

- **Creative journaling**

Journaling has been associated with improvements in psychological wellbeing which can really help with insight and emotional regulation. We can express, explore and process positive and negative experiences using the connection between our thoughts and feelings processed on the page. Daily journaling can be an effective part of self-care routines, but even sporadic journaling when you feel it may help can be just as useful.

• Creative Practice

Giving staff opportunities to be creative can help boost emotional resilience and wellbeing. When we're engaged in creative activities, several parts of our brain are working at the same time producing theta waves. Some people call this the 'flow' state. Flow experiences often involve a perfect balance between the challenges of the creative task and individual skills, fostering a sense of mastery and accomplishment. This immersive flow can be highly rewarding and pleasurable, promoting positive emotions and well-being.

• Back to basic

Sometimes we get to the point when burnout and overwhelm kicks in and we reach our limit. When this happens, it's best to get back to basics: get good sleep, cook yourself food, drink water, shower - and other basic daily tasks that we often put to the side in times of high stress.

During high levels of stress, you may need to add more to your self-care routine. It is so important for resilience to intentionally care for yourself. And it is important to remember that the little things add up. You may not feel fully refreshed after doing 5 minutes of creative journaling once, but incorporating that into your daily routine will add up and will make it easier to fall back on when you go through a period that is more draining.

"I believe that through the creative process we can transform painful experiences or negative emotions into something meaningful and transformative that can bring a sense of resilience and psychological wellbeing"

Artist, Practitioner

"Our team work with artists, mental health patients, carers and staff to dream up ways that art can change mental health hospital environments - from places that can be bland, cold and dehumanising into spaces that might inspire and offer hope. As a charity Hospital Rooms envisions a world where abundant and meaningful creative opportunities are readily accessible to people with mental health diagnoses, and where mental health hospital environments are inventive cultural spaces offering solace, comfort and dignity. Our artists and team members work inside inpatient mental health units in order to walk alongside patient and staff experiences. The safety and wellbeing of the patients, artists and staff we collaborate with is at the heart of what we do.

This is why we provide all of our staff with clinical supervision and access to counselling support."

Tim A Shaw, co-founder, Hospital Rooms

5. AUDIENCES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Every morning when we open the doors to our museums and galleries, we offer the public the opportunity to experience an everyday encounter, but also extraordinary moments too. During a recent wellbeing workshop, I asked the museum and gallery staff members what were their best, and the most challenging, aspects of working directly with visitors.

Here's what they said were the most positive points:

- Brilliant, interesting, intricate conversations with visitors
- Visitors' humour
- Discussing a piece with a visitor and then hearing they will pass that onto friends
- Helping visitors explore an artwork feels fantastic
- Listening, being listened to and learning are why many love their job
- Welcoming young people to the gallery and challenging misconceptions
- Getting to know regular visitors by name

“Artistic expression grew in lockstep with human cultural development and has long played an integral part in how we teach, learn, communicate and heal.”

Arts and Health, World Health Organisation

“I let my guard down in front of a visitor. I didn't even know I had a guard until that moment. Definitely an opportunity for personal growth and recognition of the impact on me spending time in challenging exhibitions can have.”

(Front of house staff member)

And the more challenging aspects included:

- There was a recognition that some public behaviour and interactions had intensified since the COVID pandemic.
- “Racist visitors in exhibitions by black artists is deeply upsetting. I am a black woman and I am sure this outburst would be upsetting anyway, but it was especially difficult for me.”
- Being uncomfortable AND alone in a gallery space is very difficult. This is a real issue for anyone lone working and is exacerbated by funding and staff cuts.

Museums can play a powerful role in advocating for, supporting, and empowering individuals and communities affected by a diverse range of experiences. But in order to do this we must not forget about our staff. Staff who feel supported and valued by management will welcome those communities and engage with visitors in a positive and resilient way.

Our self-care is vital when considering the quality of our interactions with our visitors; Here are some self-care suggestions that you may find interesting:

Balance and Routine

Those of us who are old enough will remember the Mars advert that reminded us of the importance of work, rest and play. Balance and routine in our daily lives can help us make sure we have time and enough of each. Consider your daily routines. Why are they important to your mental health?

The 5-4-3-2-1 Anxiety Management Technique

5-4-3-2-1 is a five-step exercise that can subtly be done without anyone in the gallery knowing you're using it. It can be very helpful during periods of anxiety to ground you in the present, when your mind is bouncing around between various anxious thoughts.

- Before starting this exercise, pay attention to your breathing.
- Slow, deep, long breaths can help you maintain a sense of calm or help you return to a calmer state.
- Once you find your breath, go through the following steps to help ground yourself.

5. Notice **five** things you see around you. It could be a chair, an artwork, a fixing on the wall, anything in your surroundings.

4. Notice **four** things you can feel. It could be your hair, your name badge, the gallery floor under your feet or the temperature of the air on your skin.

3. Notice **three** things you hear. This could be any external sound. If you've rushed lunch and can hear your stomach rumbling, that counts! Focus on things you can hear like visitors chatting, the air conditioning or maybe security radio static.

2. Think of **two** things you can smell. Maybe you are near the café you can smell tea or coffee or maybe you can smell paint. If you can, step outside the gallery. What can you smell around you there?

1. And if possible, notice **one** thing you can taste. Notice how you feel now. Do you feel less anxious and able to return to your duties? and repeat when necessary.

OUR BODIES RESPONSES

Understanding what's happening to us physiologically within our bodies when we experience a stress response can help us manage our emotions and feelings. I always think of this by remembering the 'I' in the middle of 'chemistry'.

Our fight or flight response can be triggered by challenging incidents or difficult interactions. Understanding how and why this stress response occurs helps us to understand how to manage it. Although stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol can be useful to us, experiencing high levels of them too often can have a negative impact on our health and wellbeing. Self-care strategies such as walking and running, limiting caffeine intake and relaxation techniques can all help reduce the stress in our everyday lives and at work.

Other prompts for challenging situations

- **Knowing how to take the temperature down**

An awareness of some of the skills associated with de-escalating situations or conversations can really give museum and gallery staff confidence when faced with challenging situations. Knowing how to use clear verbal and nonverbal communication as well as understanding empathic listening can turn a potential conflict situation into a learning

opportunity for all involved. Some museum and have incorporated de-escalation training into their staff induction especially if staff members may work at large audience events or exhibitions with a high volume of visitors. Here are a few de-escalation ideas:

- Ask yourself if you are the right person to become involved in this situation
- Try and keep your body language relaxed and natural, standing to the side to appear more as an ally rather than an opponent
- Speak calmly and slowly and use clear, simple words
- Make a connection and be empathetic with the person, attentively listening
- Walk the person to a quiet area where another staff member may be or away from the public gallery
- Provide the person with choices that empower them to comply

A link to free de-escalation strategies for libraries, archives, and museum staff can be found at the end of these guidelines

- **Treat yourself as you treat others**

Self-compassion means showing yourself the same kindness and understanding as you would show a good friend. It means being kind towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, make a mistake, or notice something you don't like about yourself.

We all have bad days at work and many of us are our own harshest critics. Negative self-talk

tends to become louder and harsher when we are stressed. Being aware of this can help us notice when we are being overly self-critical and bring a sense of compassion towards ourselves.

- **Finding your space in your workplace**

Many workplaces have internal network groups where people with shared experiences, life-stage and backgrounds including LGBTQ+ staff members, disabled people, people of colour and people of faith can come together. Groups, such as LGBTQ+ for instance, are usually led and organised by LGBTQ+ employees and play an important role in improving workplace equality in the UK and across the world, while also acting as a focal point for good allyship from the wider staff network.

If your workplace doesn't have a staff network group that you would like to join, maybe you could consider setting one up.

A note of caution comes from conversations I have had with LGBTQ+ group members – allies and group members shouldn't presume that because people are out in the group, that they are out to the whole workforce or in their personal life. Take care when communications are set such as group emails!

“I’m a member of our LGBTQ+ group and help to organise it. At its best, its been a place of solidarity for me and also a way for us to connect with the wider city during events like Pride. Sometimes our group can be seen by others at tokenistic, so I think you need real buy in from senior staff.”

Art Gallery Project Manager

6. WORKING WITH COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS MAKING

Curatorial practice is a complex web. Those of us who curate shows know only too well that at its best our practice is not solely about preserving the past but engaging the future and creating space for debate and discussion. New museums for new audiences require new skills: they are no longer just beautiful, liminal spaces.

In a recent report the Association for Art History found that 93% of curators surveyed felt that curatorial workplace wellbeing is an issue that needs to be highlighted and addressed. 81% felt that they had encountered challenges to their workplace wellbeing. Most (63%) said their workplace morale, including their wellbeing, had become worse over the last three years.

“Across organisations I've worked in, there's a lot in place practically around staff safety and security - things like lone-working, where there are structured opportunities to check in, but there often aren't check-ins about wellbeing.”

Curator

Discussing the layers of traumatic potentiality when working with archival material, Dr Anna Sexton says; “When undertaking these roles, there has to be an acknowledgement of the deepness of the emotional labour attached to what we do as record-keepers, and that

“There have been times I've been working alone, in an archive, and there's been a check I'm physically back at the office or home at the end, but nothing to take into account the emotional journey I've been on that day, the things I've seen/read which will stay with me forever.”

Archivist

vicarious trauma which can occur through empathetic engagement both with the record and the individual - is something we need to surface, and that we need to be equipping recordkeepers to be able to deal with, which mean finding ways of properly skilling, sustaining and supporting each other.”

It is clear from conversations I have had, that the health and wellbeing of staff members working within exhibitions (e.g Front of House teams) would be improved by their inclusion in the project team before decisions are made. Then, when visitors ask about aspects of the exhibition regarding why display objects are included or why particular text is written in the way it is, the front of house staff can answer from a place of knowledge. In my experience, including front of house team members in those initial discussions also helps to identify appropriate Information and materials for exhibition resources areas.

If we tell compelling stories we can as curators be allies to the communities whose stories we tell. We can empower others to be good allies too, whether staff or visitors

“Every time I curate a show, I feel the weight of responsibility to get the balance right. Navigating the fine line between sometimes representing hard-hitting lived experience, historic context and connection with visitors.”

Curator

6.1 - Before, during and after. Pre-opening briefings are great. Mid show briefings are vital

Considering the place of pre – opening briefings, I was also invited by IKON Gallery, Birmingham to spend time with their gallery staff ahead of the opening of *The Aerodrome*; An exhibition dedicated to the memory of Michael Stanley (1975 – 2012). This was an important opportunity to listen to staff concerns and worries around bereavement, and a chance to plan the exhibitions resource area together as well as a series of events. This opportunity was part of the curatorial pre-opening planning and signalled real support and valuing of the staff experience both before and during the exhibition.

Some may remember the 2010 winner of the John Moores Painting Prize Spectrum *Jesus* by artist Keith Coventry. As the then Project Manager of the John Moores at the Walker Art Gallery, I made it my business to do a walk-through with gallery staff a week into the opening of the show so they could tell me about what the public response was. At this briefing, a number of staff members told me that they had several complaints about the reflective nature of

the glass on the painting and it was causing a real problem for the staff in the gallery. At that meeting I was able to give staff an insight into why the artist had selected the reflective glaze and we also agreed that I would write a text panel to go alongside the painting to explain this. The exhibition went on for 3 months with thousands of visitors seeing the exhibition with not a single additional complaint.

“Much of work we do in museums is increasingly project-based: exhibitions, events, capital projects. There is rarely time to breath and reflect between projects, to take stock and think about what you’ve been through and what you’ve achieved. It is easy for emotions to be boxed off, because there just isn’t time to decompress as the next deadline is already looming.”

Emma Martin, Academic, Curator

6.2 - If your names not down...

For the two decades I’ve worked in and around galleries, Private View invitation lists have been a constant source of contention. Who makes the list internally seems to be an unnecessary source of stress. In my opinion, it’s where we show our work and our development teams make friends, but they are also our chance to say thank you and to recognise the people and talent who make our exhibitions possible. Recognition and validation can be core to our mental health and wellbeing. I’ll leave it there.

LIVED EXPERIENCE CHECK-IN:

QUESTION

If you are care experienced, how does it feel to hear the care experiences of others while working on the gallery? As an archivist or curator, how does it feel to work with records and narratives? How does working with the positive or negative experiences of others impact you? Is there infrastructure in place to debrief this?

It can be easy as a curator or an archivist to quickly move onto the next exhibition, or to start planning content and narratives for the next show, however, we can only work at our best if we engage in meaningful self-care. Here are some examples of what that might look like:

EXAMPLES	HOW
Debriefing	Deliberately sharing the load during regular proactive debriefing provides an opportunity to come together, connect, and reflect on the sometimes challenging nature of our work. Talking through and interpreting what has happened and our reaction to it in a group or just two colleagues together can decrease stress and normalise our responses to content or experiences.
Where's the line?	It's important that we take time to recognise healthy boundaries. Honouring our boundaries around our time, energy, mental and physical health can be the key to our self-care. Being clear about our boundaries can help others to respect them too. Sometimes boundaries can be rigid, but at other times they may be more porous, but learning to say no can be a helpful tool to master.

Buddying system

Informal peer support within your organisation. Someone to share the bad times and the good times with. Is there a mental health champion or first aider in your organisation? Investing in Mental Health First Aid training is a great way to ensure that staff know that there is someone there if they need to talk.

Change of scene

In Liverpool, staff at Fact and Bluecoat swapped roles with other cultural venues in the city. The danger is that everyone will be on their best behaviour and the novelty of being in a new venue may overshadow the experience, but venue swapping still offers an opportunity to see how other teams do things.

The visitors view

It may sound counterproductive or a bit like a busman's holiday but experiencing our venues as our visitors do can be a real eye opener. I often recommend it to senior managers, although I do stop short of recommending a disguise!

Walk in the park

Spending time in nature is core to many people's self-care. Even 10 minutes walking in the park at lunchtime can make a real difference.

Setting the tone

Being open about your experience can set the tone for honest conversations and can encourage others to share their experiences too. Sometimes the saying 'a problem shared is a problem halved' can be true. But just a word of caution: when a person is open about their lived experience, there's a temptation for that person to be the 'go to' on that particular subject which can be overwhelming. A protective, boundaried approach may be helpful here.

7. FINAL WORDS

A final, but most important point about self-care... How we look after ourselves is far from a luxury, an indulgence now and again, it is essential for us, our work, our colleagues and our public.

Turn back the clock

I have lost count of the number of people who have told me that they don't know what they do for their self-care. If that's you, think about what made you feel good as a child. What did you lose hours doing? Was it playing outside, watching TV, reading, playing games, spending time alone or in the company of others. Maybe you were creative as a child, spent time colouring, painting or making models. Often recalling what we spent our time doing is a good starting point for how might take care of ourselves now.

What went...right

Lastly, don't always focus on what went wrong. Some of the most rewarding conversations I've had have started with the question 'What did we get right?'

Enablers rather than barriers

Once you consider what you do to selfcare it might be a good next step to consider your enablers; What enables you to look after your mental health and wellbeing? Often what enables us to self-care is harder to pinpoint than what the barriers to self-care are, the enablers are often based around time and giving ourselves permission.

You don't have to do it alone

Effective signposting can help us and our visitors. A great FREE nationwide resource is the [Hub of Hope](#) with over 15,000 different sources of information and support focused on a wide range of subjects

'We work in arts, heritage and culture to engage in human experience and emotion. We don't want to be disconnected from it, but in these fields it is much harder to separate life and work than in many other sectors. There is a unique propensity for more intense emotional engagement in work for us.

(Archaeologist, North West)

8.ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you for reading these guidelines.

We hope that you've found it helpful, or maybe even reassuring if you or your venue already have what we have highlighted in place. Please pass this on and let's keep the conversation going.

If we've missed something that you've found helpful, we'd love to hear about it and maybe include it in updates. We'd also love to hear from you manchesterartgallery@manchester.gov.uk

THANK YOU

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Dr Rose Ehemann

Katy Jackson

Katherine Lloyd

Dr Emma Martin

Dr Nicole Ottiger

Dr Anna Sexton

Tim Shaw and Niamh White

Liz Stewart

RESOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS:

Hub of Hope: hubofhope.co.uk

The Living Museum: <https://thelivingmuseum.org>

Curatorial workplace wellbeing survey report:

<https://forarthistory.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees/curatorial-committee/programmes-and-initiatives/curatorial-workplace-wellbeing-survey-report/>

World Health Organisation, Arts and Health Initiative: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/arts-and-health>

Free de-escalation strategies for libraries, archives, and museum staff:

<https://www.oclc.org/realm/resources/course-de-escalation-strategies.html>

Churchill Report: The Art That Doesn't Know Its Name:

https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/Samata_A_Report_2017_Final.pdf

Hospital Rooms: <https://hospital-rooms.com>

Anna Sexton: <https://profiles.ucl.ac.uk/32491-anna-sexton>

9. APPENDIX

Living Museum Principles

Fact: Art has a mental and physical effect on us all

Fact: Music increases our ability to concentrate

Fact: Movement & Dancing increases physical + emotional sensations

Fact: Visual art is a way of making mental issues tangible

Fact: looking at art: in Museums, in books, in nature, wherever, is embodied cognition in which mirror neurons in the brain turn things like action, movement, and the energy you see in art into emotions you can feel

Fact: Art impacts us all, whether it makes you sad, happy, or anywhere in between

Art has the power to change the way we see/perceive the world

Art can bring awareness to social issues and encourage acceptance

Art can bring people together regardless of colour, race and age

Art can bring us to reflect on the past, present and/or future

Make time for discussion, supervision: learning from professionals & intravision: learning from others, together and mutually

Learn about how art affect us all

Understand how to look at/digest art – this requires “analysing” how we approach, perceive and experience artworks

- Describe what you're seeing, and what you aren't
- Think about the piece, what it may represent, and what it says about the artist
- Discuss the work with others, and compare it to other works as well as your own life experiences

Use your own vulnerabilities as a strength

Express emotions, fears and notice an increase in your self-esteem

Practice self-care through art:

- Use art as a release mechanism, respond through art
- Use art as a mindful free-flowing energy and process
- Use art to express specific thoughts or ideas
- Use art to communicate thoughts and feelings and experiences
- Use colour to explore emotions: how does this make you feel?
- Become an artist. Grow as an artist, a performer, a dancer, writer, knitter, sculptor, musician, cook, in all art forms

Learn that tension and friction is part of life, necessary for reflection and change

If it doesn't work out, that's ok. It's offered a learning opportunity

Learn that making art can be a stress relief tool, an endurance training and resilience building.

Discover how art has a strong impact on the road to recovery

Discover how art influences a better quality of life for all who create and who want to see it.