How do we heal from trauma and integrate collective healing practices into the work of systems change?

Unresolved, unhealed trauma is a force to be reckoned with in most if not all of the largest systemic issues we face. And it is far more common than we acknowledge among all of us with lived and learned experience doing collective impact work.

While some practitioners explicitly focus on trauma work or embrace healing practices in their approaches, trauma is almost entirely missing from the mainstream discourse on social and environmental problem-solving today. When the topic of trauma is broached with most systems change funders, scholars, and practitioners, it often draws blank stares, discomfort, or a desire to change topics.

As the health and economic consequences of the pandemic continue to reverberate and “collective trauma” enters the vernacular in media reporting, never have we had a more opportune moment to achieve breakthrough thinking in the social sector and bring an awareness of trauma from the periphery into the mainstream of social and environmental problem-solving.

To contribute to accelerating this shift, the Collective Change Lab is working with The Wellbeing Project and Georgetown’s Redhouse Initiative to raise awareness of the trauma that is all around us and within us and to explore how practitioners can integrate collective healing into systems change work.

In phase one (2021), the Collective Change Lab is leading practitioner-oriented research on trauma-informed and healing centred practices. More than twenty community healers, collective impact leaders, and social entrepreneurs have been interviewed and the CCL team is working closely with Dr Laura Calderon de la Barca, a collective and intergenerational trauma therapist of indigenous decent in Mexico. The resulting insights are being synethesized into a white paper with the goal of:

- Creating greater awareness among social change leaders about how intergenerational trauma shows up as a force to be reckoned with in most if not all of the largest systemic issues we face, and
- Offering practical, action-oriented insights “from practitioners for practitioners” on how to integrate a trauma lens and collective healing practices into their work.
In phase two (2022), the Collective Change Lab will develop a broad-based launch and dissemination strategy to get the key findings into the hands of collective impact and systems change practitioners, philanthropists, non-profit leaders, foundation executives, and others. Core components of phase two of the initiative include:

- “Translation” companion pieces (e.g. action-oriented two-pagers) for the Associate Voices compendium
- A broader storytelling effort and mainstream media outlet partnerships, to be co-created with The Wellbeing Project leadership team
- An educational training component for practitioners to begin exploring how they can integrate collective healing into systems change work