From Risk to Resilience

A trauma informed framework for sustainable library services

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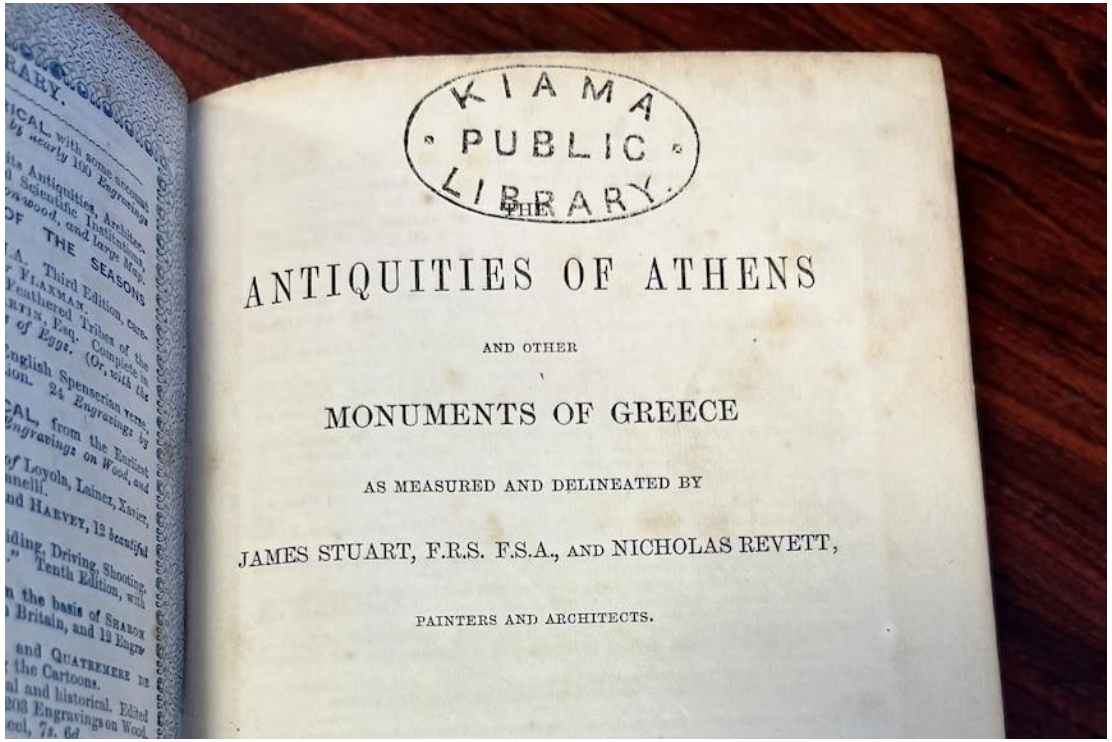
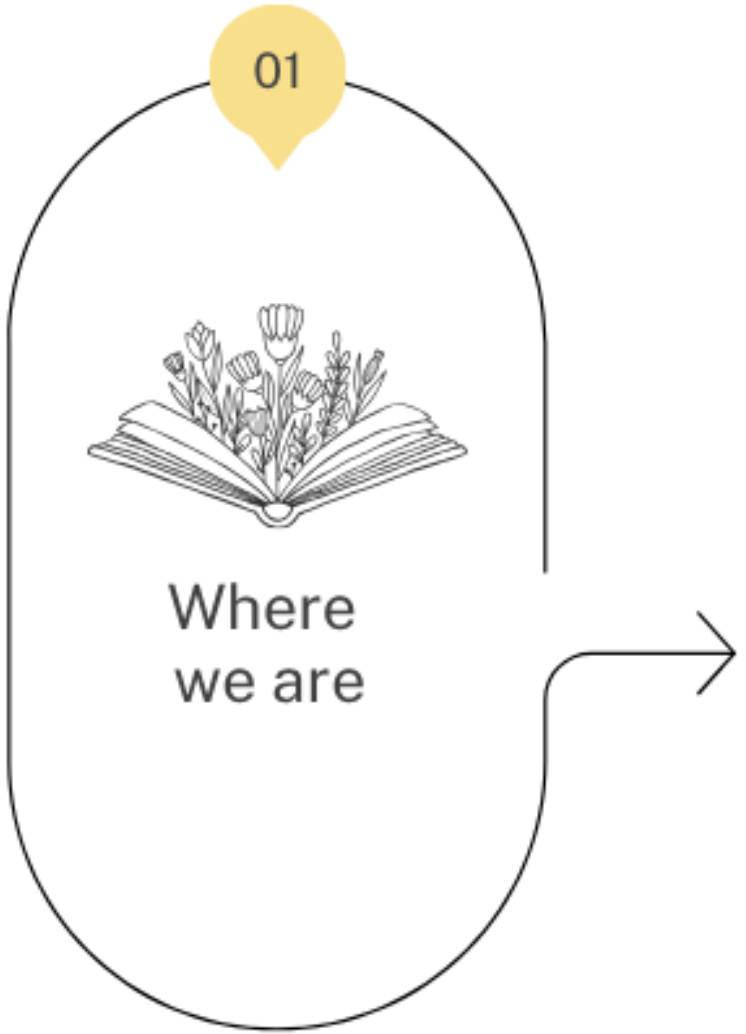
Book returned to NSW library 150 years after being borrowed

By Justin Huntsdale and Nick Rheinberger
Book returned to NSW library 150 years after being borrowed - ABC News



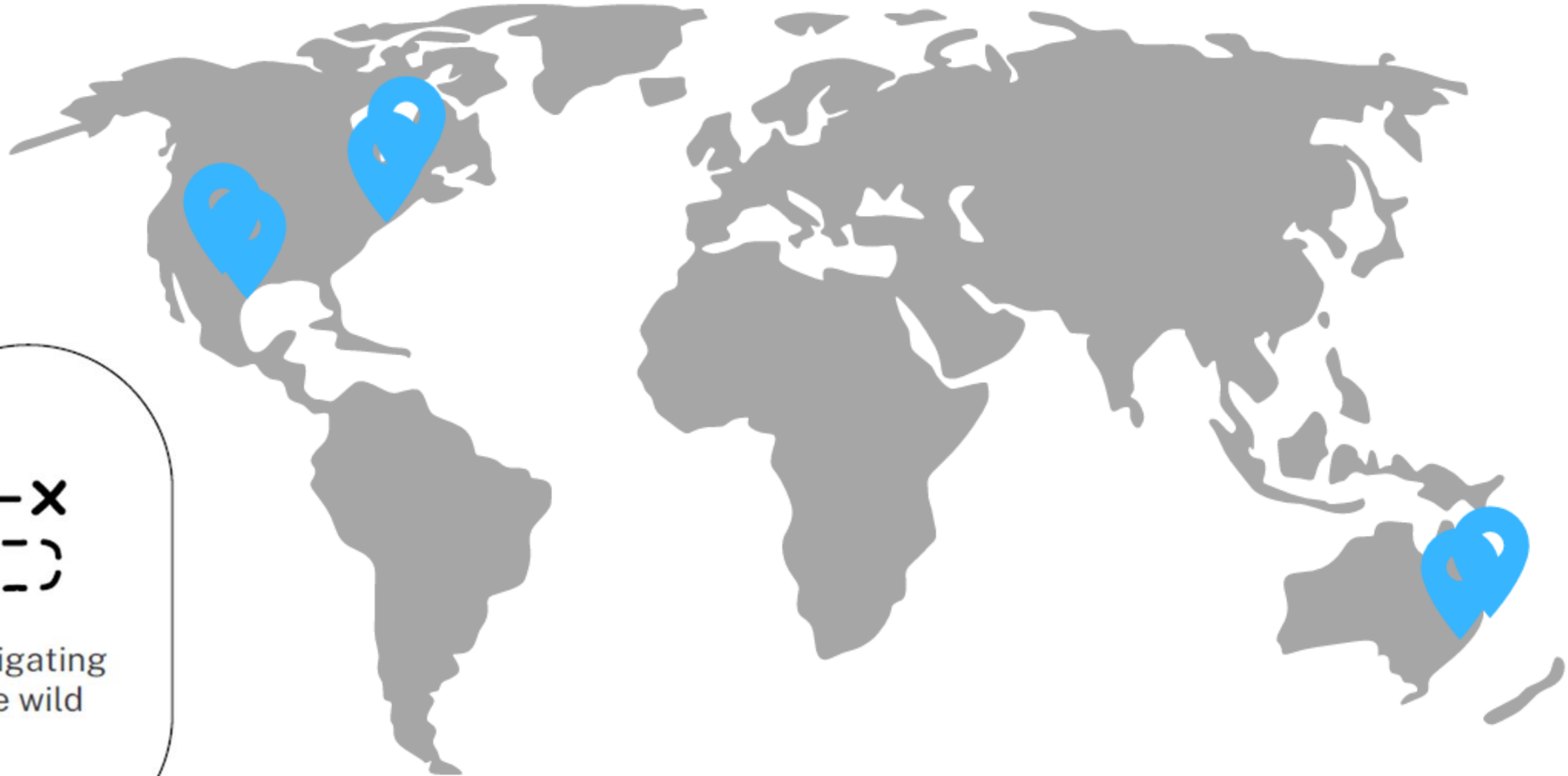
The book has been dated to a time when the library operated out of the local School of Arts building. *(Supplied: Kiama Library)*

"Anyone intoxicated was not allowed to borrow a book, and anyone behaving in a disorderly manner would be fined at least five shillings per offence."



Tapestry of public library practice

- Service delivery models
- Community expectations
- Libraries as drivers of social cohesion and connection
- Strengthening organisational resilience
- Strategic framework for positioning libraries and reducing psychosocial safety hazards



Navigating
the wild

Brooklyn Public Libraries: Info Commons

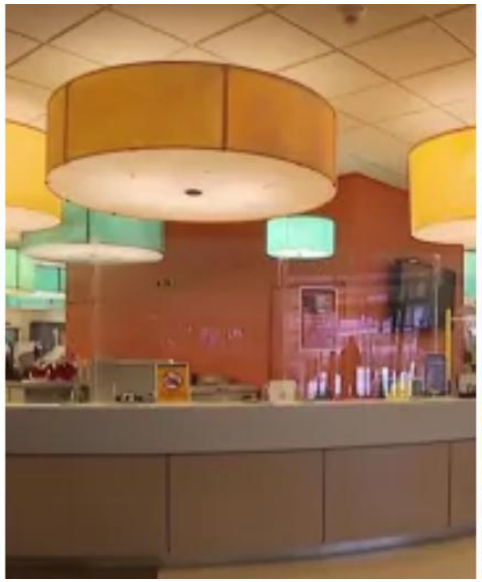
Key Learnings:

- Boundaries do not reduce compassion; they make it sustainable.
- Discern between a library problem and a societal issue.
- Staff thrive when support, safety and expectations are clear.

Brooklyn Public Libraries: Justice Initiatives

Key Learnings:

- Build strong internal team culture
- Partner with specialist trauma-informed providers
- Introduce restorative practices for staff, including:
  - Day off after trauma
  - Rotations away from high-intensity work
- Embed lived experience within the team



Queens Public Libraries

Key learnings:

- The “net” concept to support staff
- Capability + partnerships = scalable support
- Training should be continuous

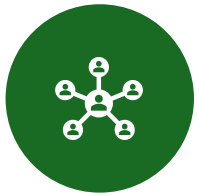
The Free Library of Philadelphia

Key learnings:

- Service wide trauma informed approach
- Harm reduction needs to be applied strategically and operationally.
- Social workers and outreach reduces psychosocial safety risks
- Multidisciplinary programming connects with those already in library spaces.
- Safety improves when systems support staff

Case study learnings

Connection matters



Trauma informed whole organisation approach.

Recognise that library work is expanding into social complexities

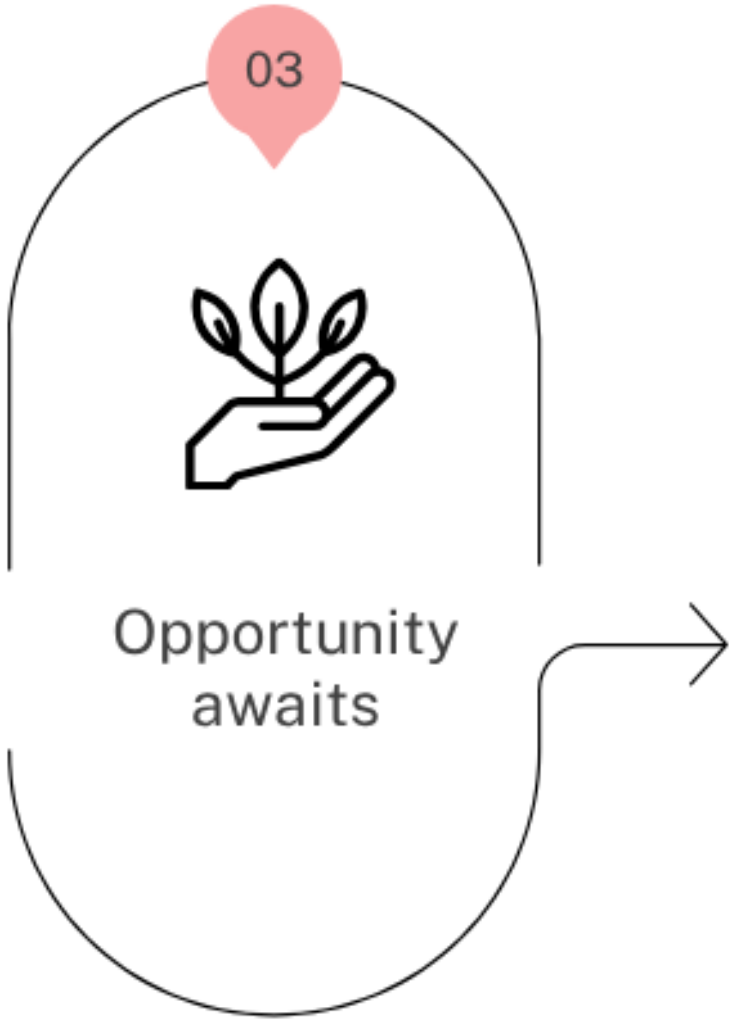
Uplift foundations for strength

Boundaries reduce the strain on teams

Partnerships amplify capacity

Tell the full story

Invest in leadership



From insight to action: tools for your team

1. Fostering connection
2. Equipping leaders and staff
3. Collaborative partnerships
4. Strengthening organisational support

Matrix of Action:

Level of Impact	Fostering connection	Equipping leaders & staff	Growing collaborative partnerships	Strengthening org support
1: Foundational	Developing a culture of care	Equipping staff	Strategic goals and desired outcomes	Support continuous development
2: Moderate	Code Lavender	Personal boundary setting	Sustainability	Establish consistent debriefing, feedback, and wellbeing structures
3: Significant	Micro – Regulation Interventions	Staff: Personal Safety Plan Concept	Safety net: Workplace Health and Safety and Security	Embed Trauma-Informed Principles in all policies and procedures
4: Transformational	Structured reflective practice mechanisms	Developing core leadership capacity-trauma informed	Partnerships with purpose	Lead with visibility and connection

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Where to from here

Recommendations:

- Establish statewide trauma informed framework
- Formal education as a system enabler
- Strategic partnerships to amplify capacity
- Organisational capability

Thank you

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