

CATA's Caroline Liuzzi on Shifted Mindsets and Iso Moments | [Transcript](#)

Intro:

"We really didn't have enough time to think about the impact on our own mental health."

Right now one of the biggest concerns for leaders in the social sector is the wellbeing of their staff.

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Clare Desira: Welcome everybody to today's episode of Leading Generous Teams. I'm so excited to be joined today by the CEO and founder of CATA, Creative Art Therapy Australia, Caroline Liuzzi. Hi Caroline.

Caroline Liuzzi: Hello Clare.

Clare Desira: Oh, it's so wonderful to have you here. Now, I'm just going to share a little bit about your organisation, which I find completely fascinating. Now, you were originally known as Art Cabriolet back in 2009 when you're established, and I know that in those early days, you were actually doing a lot of work in the Black Saturday bushfire areas at the Marysville Primary School, working with several young students there.

The reason for that is because your organisation, which is so fascinating is all about supporting people who are braving trauma using creative art therapy. Using creative out therapy to help them work through physical, emotional, and psychological experiences.

Let's dive in. where I really want to start is here we're delivering programs, travelling to delivering custom programs in both clinical and non-clinical populations, and then earlier in the year, COVID hits. Tell me what has been the impact of that to your staff and the way that you work.

Caroline Liuzzi: Yeah. I'd probably say that the way that it's impacted us, it happened twofold. When the first round hit in late February, early March, we really had a massive chance to step back from the space that we work in and reassess all our processes, our procedures, our guidelines, our mode of operandum, and really dissect how service delivery was happening because it was all face to face. Just even administration upkeep, just general housekeeping. I'm going to call that it was the mad scramble reset phase. We were quickly trying to re-evaluate how are we going to reach the people that we've reached. We reach over a thousand people a year, and now we've gone to zero face to face.

Looking at how we could do this, we went through technology-enabled health, and that set a whole different set of challenges for the staff. We really kept so busy in this period of time. We really didn't have enough time to think about the impact on our own mental health, I guess, of our staff and our teams, because we just wanted to get something out there to every Australian that we could. It really was a rigorous shakeup for us personally, as well as for the org. What we didn't anticipate is what the mental health and wellbeing space was going to look like this quickly. The speed at which it hit our country has been really, really quick, and we weren't ready for that.

We were ready in terms of setting up telehealth. When the second round came, we only got to work face to face two weeks, and then we were shut down again. As quickly as we resumed practise, we quickly had to shut that down, and it was really, really short lived. That impact was very different on my staff. I found that the staff morale was very, very low. I found that the disconnection and having to operate from home permanently bought its own challenges, and I've found that my staff needed that 60 per cent of mornings for a quick check-in. That informal check-in, I realised how important the seeing and the hearing was for my colleagues to regroup and check in and say, "Are they on track?"

As a leader, I guess I had to adapt to that need and ensure that my diary was vacated 60 per cent of the mornings every week to be able to be there for them. It was two phase. The first phase, the first round, it was very much about the mad scramble, let's get things right, so that we can get out there to all the people that we serve, children and adults. Then the second phase was really more about us as a culture, as an organisation, as a group of people, and holding each other up. It's been difficult.

Clare Desira: Thank you for sharing that, and I think a lot of listeners will be able to really resonate with that idea of the mad scramble phase and almost throwing everything that you have in to be able to get your services out there in new ways and to be able to adjust almost using all of fuel in the tank to do that-

Caroline Liuzzi: Correct, right.

Clare Desira: ... and then that second phase being like, "Oh, hang on a minute. We have no fuel left," and-

Caroline Liuzzi: That's right.

Clare Desira: ... the beautiful strength about people I think working in the social sectors is that they're never just thinking for themselves.

Caroline Liuzzi: Yes.

Clare Desira: They're often thinking about obviously for you the thousands of people that you're working with around these art therapy services, but also around the people that are impacted as a ripple effect in the families of those people-

Caroline Liuzzi: Correct, correct.

Clare Desira: ... but also for the people that you have the foresight to know that these sorts of challenges, environmental and economical challenges, and the fear factor around a pandemic is there's actually that for your staff and many staff in the social sector is that foresight and experience to know that it's not just about the people we've been serving already, but this is actually going to snowball and there'll be so many more people-

Caroline Liuzzi: Correct, correct.

Clare Desira: ... with mental health, wellbeing challenges-

Caroline Liuzzi: That's right, that's right.

Clare Desira: ... rapidly rolling in soon enough.

Caroline Liuzzi: To give you an example of that, we have a bird cage at work where we put in there love hearts with the first name of every child that's worked with us and that's passed away. We have an end of life program, and it actually broke our hearts that we could no longer reach those children, and that we could not be there for the families that really, really needed us. Now fast forward to where we are now, we're now looking at providing workshops for bereaved families and siblings because we just can't be there now at the critical moment of end of life.

It's really thinking outside the box and yes, we are really saddened by the fact that as a collective and as a group, we can't place our hearts in that bird cage because we can't reach those families, but how can we turn this around so that we can reach them in other ways? I think that's what gives us fuel. That's the whole idea of thinking of others, but thinking well, does it need to stop and how can it change? With that change, how can we actually offer an improved service when things get back to normal, whatever the new normal will be? I think that gives you fuel in the tank, or it certainly gives our tribe that fuel in the tank. Yeah, lot of food for thought in that department.

Clare Desira: Oh, absolutely, and I love that you're using that drive for hope and it's almost if we can't be there like we used to be there, let's be there better and stronger when we can, when the time is right.

Caroline Liuzzi: Right.

Clare Desira: When we were chatting earlier, you said to me that your team have a bit of a policy around never saying no to somebody that is in need, which I really admire, but I also wonder the flip

side of that is around how do you keep your own fuel going if you're never saying no to anybody? Just I'd wonder as a leader, not only of your team and your wonderful volunteers, but more broadly across Australia in this space, what tools do you use yourself to support your own mental health, mindset, and resilience to keep on going?

Caroline Liuzzi: That's a great question. I did use this phrase low morale with your first question, but I've shifted my own mindset now, and I try and stay away from that. I use the word my staff and my team have shifted their mindsets. When I look at the difference in the words from low morale, I feel like there's bricks on my shoulder and there's a lot for me to hold, but when I look at shifted mindsets, I look at it and I say, "How can I weave my way through the shifted mindset?" I don't feel so heavy when I say those words to my own self as a leader and I asked the team. I say, "What do you need to get yourself through your own day? Do you need to stop, work and run? Do you need to just run, run, run during the day?"

Do you need to spend more time with your children during the day and work through the afternoons? Whatever your package looks like in your needs, I'll work with that because for me, I'm looking at it saying, "Well, do I really care when the work is done, or do I care that the work is done, and that my staff feel held?" I'll go for number two. I want them to be held. Offering that flexibility and handing over that ownership of time management back to them, I can feel that they're less weighted, which makes me feel less weighted and I'm able to work through that.

I also say to them, "There's a no go zone in terms of working after 10:00. I don't care if you're bored. I don't care if you're tired, go do something else. 10:00 no activity and if I see activity, I'll let you know about it in my Zoom meeting the following morning." I always say, "If you're alive and you're, well, you have tomorrow, so tomorrow is another day. You have it so use it then." I find that that just takes so much pressure. I find that my staff, their input that they've got more to give because they've got those boundaries of a little bit more loose now for them. I stay away from a phrase like stay positive because when I think about those two words, I think, well, what does that mean if I'm feeling frustrated or overwhelmed, I'm isolated, I'm a bit depressed, I'm uncertain?

It's a phrase, it's not an instruction. I talked to my tribe and say to them, "Well, look at the life lessons that we've been gifted. Gift is a beautiful, strong word. When we all receive gifts, it lifts us." You can look at your gift in so many ways, the gift of time, the gift of shifting your own mindset, the gift of being able to have time to spend on myself. If I want to go for a run during the day and not work, so be it. That's the gift I give myself. The gift of stripping away and removing noise and clutter in our lives. COVID's impacted us in so many ways that aren't positive, but there's also the gifts that we can take, and it's a collective gift. All of humanity's going through. It's not just CATA going through it.

It's not just other corporates going through it. It's all of humanity. It makes the concept a little bit more easy to grasp when you talk like that with your staff, and I found it's been really helpful in lifting their morale. Another cheeky thing that I did, which I did for myself, I sent out a care pack that I built myself to all my staff. It was very personal. It was all about CATA. It was very personal, and I put in there... Do you remember the old fashioned cameras, the disposable cameras where you take a photo and you can't edit it? You can't filter photos. You see your moment and you snap it, but you cannot alter it.

In my instructions, I said, "I need you to take photos during your ISO days and I want you to snap the funny, the contrived, I don't care, make it raw, make it real, include your families. If you've got your dog sitting up while you're doing a Zoom meeting, I don't care, just take your ISO moments."

And it would be like Kinder surprise when you go to a developer and got to develop these photos. What I love about is that you're really not going to know what you're going to get. All you're going to remember is the moments that felt good to you when you took the photo. Everything I've put in the pack has to make your work. When we take photos with our digital cameras, it's easy. We edit them, we delete them, we filter them, and we upload them.

Well, you can't do that here. It's good old fashioned photos. I gave them a bunch of seeds to plant. You have to go outside. You've got to plant this in some part of your garden, and I made sure I picked onions because onions make you cry when you use them. It's a bit like COVID-19, we have a little cry about what it's doing to our world. It was relatable to the situation that we're in. I put a card in there, a beautiful card that you have to pay forward to someone who's really struggling through these times, someone that you can't reach that needs a hug, someone that may have lost a parent. It doesn't matter who, don't tell me who it is.

I don't need to know, just someone that you know that needs to be lifted, but in writing a card, which is not like writing a text or an email, you have to go to the post office, you have to put a stamp on it. It's an old fashioned way of doing things, but everybody loves receiving a card in the mail, and it's those little things of remembering how we just enjoy the little things. That's what my pack was. It was a reminder of going back to the simplicity of what we enjoyed. I put tea in there, but instead of putting the teabag, which is pretty disposable and it's pretty quick, you just duck your teabag in your hot water and you throw it out.

It's loose leaf tea, so it's a bit more arduous, a bit more ritualistic in preparing. That's the common thread. Everything I've given you will give you joy, but there's also work attached to it, and it's a change of mindset of how you use your tea, how you use the camera, having to send someone that message. Just changing the mindset, which is reflective of our COVID-19 days. It's changing our mindset, how we work, how we operate within families and so forth. It's a great way to keep conversations alive. It's a great way of checking in without saying how you going when you know that morale is not where you really want it to be, but it's a way of checking in through this game through this pack and keeping them busy.

The last thing that I did is I asked them all for their top five. What would you do if you had more time off your sleeve? What's the top five things that you would want to do and that you always say, God, if I had more time, I would do whatever it is, and just email it to me. I intend to start the ball rolling with just one of those five because I can't spend money on their professional development at the moment. I'm going to spend their money a little bit on self-care for them, and I'm going to start the ball rolling with something that they want to do. One of my staff members wrote, "I really want to pick up a guitar and start guitar lessons."

I found someone who could teach them guitar online, and I've just paid for a voucher for three lessons just to get the ball rolling. That's my thing that I've done to take care, and everything that I've issued out to our staff, I've issued to myself. I haven't put one of those packs in the mail, and I got really excited when I found it at my doorstep just to-

Clare Desira: I love it.

Caroline Liuzzi: ... to get my mind in that mind space. It's important, it's important to do that.

Clare Desira: Love it. You'd be like, "Gee, this person knows me so well."-

Caroline Liuzzi: I love it, I love it.

Clare Desira: ... and it's so attentive.

Caroline Liuzzi: Well done team. Well done, and I found-

Clare Desira: I love it.

Caroline Liuzzi: ... it's been a great point of discussion. It's been a great way to talk about mental health amongst us without being too intrusive in their lives and giving people that privacy, but still opening up the door for that conversation to happen.

Clare Desira: Yeah, wonderful. I love all of the things in your gift packer about really engaging the senses and doing something that I really love to share in our programmes, which is slowing down to be able to go faster.

Caroline Liuzzi: Yes, yes.

Clare Desira: Whether it's making the tea or writing the card or unwrapping that present. It's actually that slowing down to be able to go faster, and we're not very good at slowing down-

Caroline Liuzzi: No, no.

Clare Desira: ... to be able to give people physical reminders and tactile things that can support that and for them to know that you're going to check in on them in their team meeting as well.

Caroline Liuzzi: That's right, that's right.

Clare Desira: Yeah. I think that's really, really clever and really creative, beautiful idea. Caroline, I'd love to ask you about managing your own mental health and mindset, and I've heard that you use a beautiful analogy as well around this. Could you share that with us?

Caroline Liuzzi: Yeah, for sure. All our art therapists, when they engage with and particularly children, when they engage with their clients, I always say that everything that they give from themselves to their clients is it's taken from a water well. If you can visualise stretching your arms out in front of you and creating loops like you're going to hug yourself, but your hands are really stretched out and you've looped your hands. Just imagine all of that is filled with water and the water sits just above your chest, where your heart lies. Every time you reach out and give to someone in need, you are actually allowing them to take from the water and what does water do?

It quenches our thirst, and every time that someone takes from the water, your hands are getting closer and closer to your heart. Once the hand of the therapist is resting on their heart, that means the water well has no more water left to share with others. We have to rest them. We have to work with them and give them an opportunity to debrief, and to be counselled so that they can slowly fill up that water well in front of their heart and invite others to be able to take and receive and to be nourished. We must nourish ourselves in order to be able to nourish others because if we don't look after our team, we can't send them out there in the hope that they'll be able to look after others.

They need to be strengthened. They need to have their own souls nourished to be able to give to others. We do that quite frequently in our team, and we have forums where they're able to just channel in and put their hand up and say, "I need the water filled and off we go." We do that for each other, and we do that for our therapists. We do that for our volunteers, our placement students. We are in a space where we recognise when that water needs to be filled and be able to give to others, and that it doesn't make us a very, very strong team because we ensure that we're able to give. Yeah, it is a good analogy because we all understand what our heart does, and we all understand what water is. They're both life, aren't they Clare?

Clare Desira: They are absolutely life. Thank you for sharing that. That will stick with me. I know it really, and I think for your team who are professionals in supporting people that have experienced trauma and are going through potentially some of the most challenging times in their lives, for you to be able to be at capacity to be able to support them, your team need to have that water filled. I just love that you use that language and that you know that. I also love that it sounds like your team have a really great understanding of what it is that they individually need to fill that water-

Caroline Liuzzi: Yes.

Clare Desira: ... because I'm sure that is different for all of them-

Caroline Liuzzi: Absolutely.

Clare Desira: ... as it is for all of us as well. I just think it's incredible that you're creating that space, and you've created that language.

Caroline Liuzzi: Thank you and it is. It's welcome for all. I mean, it's a hard space at times to work in when you're working with chronically ill people, or you're in the disability sector or accident trauma, whatever the trauma is. I mean, right now, I look at Australia and we are collectively going through this together, and each person carries their own level of trauma I guess. The beauty about what we do is we deliver it differently according to people's needs, and it's listening. It's being able to sit back and listen to what people actually need, and being able to be creative and clever enough in how we deliver it. It's always a challenge, but we are creative and that gives us an edge, I guess, to how we deliver to person to person, child to child, mom to mom, dad to dad, whoever. It's very fulfilling I have to say, very fulfilling.

Clare Desira: Mm-hmm. I'm sure it is. I'm sure it is. Can you tell me, what are your hopes for your team as they navigate through the rest of this, however long it takes and the avalanche of support they'll be providing for others to build their resilience, mental health, and mindset? What are your hopes for them?

Caroline Liuzzi: For Creative Art Therapy Australia, anyone in this team, I hope for them that they understand through every fibre of their body that they are supported, and that they have clarity because with clarity, you're able to push the engines through, and surrendering, surrendering, acceptance, and courage to change the gears that we need to change for a new way of thinking, so that we are able to provide a better service for all Australians and that they could be lifted when they do it.

Because if they have strength within themselves, within their own homes, within their own families,

and that they know that they are supported by us as a group of people, that's what I hope for them, and it gives clarity.

I think that that helps you push through your engines every day. It gives you the fuel to push through, and that's what I hope for them to know that they're supported and they're loved. They actually are, they're really loved and to know that, I think that they do know that.

Clare Desira: Yeah, I'm sure they do. Thank you so much for your time, Caroline.

Caroline Liuzzi: Thank you Clare, appreciate it. Thank you.

Clare Desira: Wow, what a force and incredible woman to spend some time with. I really want to expand on the idea of slowing down to go faster. I recently spent some time in a round table with some mental health CEOs and leaders, and a key thing that kept coming up was about how COVID-19 has forced us to stop rushing, and that busyness before had almost become our purpose, or the purpose for many people being dragged between different things and having such full lives. Now without some of that noise, maybe some of that commuting, some of that rush, we can find ourselves in an unusual and sometimes uncomfortable space.

From working with many teams and with people one on one, we know that there is so much power in these reflective moments when people slow down, but we also know they aren't always that comfortable, but being able to slow down time for yourself and for people in your team is an incredible skill. For example, Caroline mentioned that a large amount of her time is being spent supporting her team in ways that she can't plan for. Most of her mornings has been spent with her team allowing space for whatever is coming up. Mat Tinkler from our first episode, if you haven't caught that yet, Mat's the deputy CEO of Save the Children. He mentioned the importance as well of taking time to check in with his team without an agenda.

Now, as a generous leader with a job to do and no end of ways that you can serve and support other people, the idea of carving out time to do nothing might feel a little bit uncomfortable compared to carving out time with a really clear strategy and a plan, but actually allowing this space could be the most strategic and supportive way to spend your time with your team. One other thing that Caroline did was send those gift packs to her staff. What an amazing boss, hey.

Now, not everybody's in a position to be able to send out generous gifts to their staff, but one thing that you can do that is accessible to everybody is to support them to slow down by engaging their senses and when where any of us have our minds racing, or we're stuck in a thought loop, or we're really frustrated or emotional about something, being able to ground ourselves and support other people to ground themselves can be a really powerful tool, and another great example of how we can slow down to go faster. A really simple way to do this is to just kick off a meeting or a conversation with someone in your team by saying, "Hey, it's been a really busy week or a really busy morning.

Let's just take a minute to take a few breaths. Let's really just feel ourselves in the seats, feel our feet on the ground." That's engaging, of course that sense of feeling or touch, and then even suggesting something like, "Hey, just take a minute before we start to have a look around at five things that you

can see, or three things that you can hear. What are three things that you can hear right now," just to disrupt the start of those conversations and give you and your team member that chance to really ground on in and activate a different part of your brain. Another way that you and your team can slow down to go faster is taking the time each day to write down what we call a top five list.

This is essentially a gratitude list, but it's more around a moments from each day, rather than being thankful for the same things each day. Writing a list like this retrains your brain, and it actually supports you to look out for and expect the good in your team, in yourself, in the industry, in the social sector, and to be able to see the wins. The final way we wanted to share today to slow down to go faster is to grab a copy of our to feel list. This is a template that you can grab over at topfivemovement.com/tools, and it helps you train your brain to look out for ways to live your life differently. Perhaps it's with more grace, ease, focus, or fun.

As we close out today, I want to encourage you to think about how can you slow down, so that you can go faster and get more clarity, and maybe change course where you need to and listen to what you actually already know deep down that's buried amongst a state of busyness usually. Then how can you extend this to your team, how can you support them to be able to slow down so you can go faster. Lastly, as a team, you might like to try out Caroline's online art therapy as well, which is available for free until the end of September. We'll include the links in the show notes, so you can find those as well. Where to from here, well, on Friday, we'll be dropping another bonus episode, and this week, I'll share more about the power of our thoughts and the words that were used.

Caroline talked about the power of shifting languages, so the example she used was shifting the language of low morale to another option. I promise you that this will not be around about positive thinking. Personally, I think that positive thinking is boring and doesn't cut it, especially at a time right now, but I will share something that for us we've seen work time and time again.

Clare Desira: As we wrap, I want to say a big thank you to all of the generous leaders and their teams out there making a difference in our world, especially right now. I'd like to say thank you to the people of the Kulin nation from the country where this podcast is produced. Of course, I want to say thank you to you, our listeners.

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