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Know Justice, Know Peace: Reflections from a community-based, action research collective

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This article provides an overview of the community-based, action research project called *Know Justice, Know Peace: A Transformation & Justice Community Collective*, which took place with six local grassroots justice-oriented organizations in Southern California's Inland Empire region. Together we explored if, how, and where, wellness, healing and trauma-informed practices and transformative organizing exist in the daily operations and strategic vision of these organizations. Through interviews, focus groups, and healing circles, as well as an 8-month, bi-weekly training program, we identified individual and organizational needs, barriers, and facilitators of actualizing healing, wellbeing, and justice values in daily operation and organizational culture. Overall, the findings of this collective echoed what our review of literature in the field found from a diverse range of interdisciplinary scholars and activists; that to thrive individually and organizationally we must transform the relationships and structures we operate in to actualize values to stay grounded and connected while advancing effective strategies that resist toxic and violent structures and replace them with transformative and sustaining ones. This article summarizes community participants' internal and organizational struggles as well as the assets they build upon. It explores theoretical frameworks deriving from healing justice, transformative movement organizing, trauma-informed and healing-centered methodologies, and emergent strategy that propose critical analysis and applied tools to advance individual and community wellness and healing as well as restorative organizing models and alternative organizational structures for values alignment in the daily operations of social justice-oriented community organizations.

KEYWORDS: Healing, Justice, Community Organizing, Action Research.

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INTRODUCTION

In order to create a better world, we must first imagine her into being. Without radical imagination, we are left only with what we currently know, which limits what could be. adrienne maree brown reminds us that the world that we live in now, its systems, structures, norms, and expectations, were imagined by those who came before us, but did not include all of us. What could we imagine, and then create together, that would ensure that liberty and justice for all was an actual lived experience for the most underestimated[2] among us? What repair and healing do we need to move beyond surviving into thriving as we build the world we want? If we do not practice those values and qualities now, in the very act of imagining and embodying the just and joyous world we need, we set ourselves up to not only reproduce old harms under new leadership, but we will not know how to take care of ourselves and each other in the new systems we create.

So, what is this world we dream of? What would it look like, feel like and sound like there? To have our needs met. To live in peace. To matter. To be cared for. To belong. To be whole. To love and be loved. This is at the root of the world we deserve and need. And to create it, we must enact it with each other until the systems we are part of also reflect it.

Yet, most people working to create a better world suffer from traumas of injustice as well as burn-out caused by hyper-productivity, hyper-individualism, and hyper-competition. As such, ideas of living day to day in peace, love, and wholeness seem unattainable–both due to external measures that can make even survival a luxury, but also due to internal habits that make such things seemingly inaccessible or impractical. As a result, changemakers tend to negotiate high levels of stress, health challenges, and fatigue–then often are disposed of when they burn out, sell out, or are canceled out. In many cases, changemakers feel the need for a healthier and more whole life and are bereft by the hypocrisy of organizations or movements that do not live the values they preach but feel like they have little recourse to change either. At the same time, they are carrying with them tremendous skills and practices that keep them and their movements standing tall in the face of tyranny.

But, what if the tyranny of exhaustion, stress, and conflict-oriented organizations are partially self-imposed and limit the power of our organizations, movements, and vision of the world we want? What if we

[2] Gratitude to Van Jones for this term.

could integrate new ideas, tools, and practices into our personal and collective lives that would elevate commitments of caring for ourselves and our communities and that translated into more sustainable ways for our organizations and movements to operate? What if we discovered that slowing down to take care, to invest in relationships, to put the values of community liberation and wellness into our daily work practices and structures allow us to feel healthier and connected as we do the work of recreating a better world? What if we created the world we want in the one we have and even felt joy, connection, and sustainability in the process of that hard work of change? What if the work itself felt life-giving and restorative rather than draining and conflictual?

Leading BIPOC feminist scholar-activists[3] have long wrestled with these topics and emphasized the importance of connecting social justice activism to radical healing practices–not only as strategies for change, but for survival. Likewise, indigenous communities and ancient wisdom traditions throughout the world have long espoused values of interconnectedness of both mind, body, spirit and of individuals, communities and ecosystems. The models for regenerative and restorative practices that we desperately need today are as old as–and directly connected to–our impulse to repair the world. Thus, what we need is the very knowledge that we hold in our bones, in our ancestral memories, and in histories both abandoned and stolen. What we need now are vehicles for re-membering–that is, bringing the members of such knowing and communal practicing back together, with the added value of what new science, consciousness, and traditions can bring to a (re)mix that will deepen strategies to sustain ourselves in the world we live in and are imagining today.

Calls for such re-membering and emergent strategies have grown even more strongly in recent years, in circles of activists, artists, healers and scholars[4] and also in requests from grassroots organizers hungrily looking for transformative practices to sustain themselves and their movements. In response, the authors of this paper came together with a small team of community organizers to more deeply explore and address these issues as the triple pandemics of COVID-19, racialized police

[3] For example: hooks 1994; Lorde, 1984 and Boggs 1974, 1998; Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey 2016; Anzaldua and Moraga 1981; Bridgeforth 1994; Bernal et al. 2006; Alexander et al. 2002; R.D.G. Kelley 2002; Rendon, 2009; Ginwright, 2015.

[4] For example: adrienne maree brown, Prentis Hemphill, Trisha Hersey, Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, Valarie Kaur, Shawn Ginwright, Ruth King, Sara King, Michelle Johnson, Ressma Menakem; Faviana Rodriguez; Anasa Troutman, Tracey Stanley, Staci Haines, Kazu Haga, Mia Birdsong, Taj James, Thrive Beloved Community

violence and economic instability took over the global stage in the summer of 2020. We had each personally been a part of and witnessed community organizing and social service efforts become overloaded with stress, trauma, exhaustion, interpersonal ruptures, and general disillusionment with the way espoused social justice and wellness ideals fell short in practice. We knew that we were not alone in these struggles, yet we found only a few books, trainings, or toolkits at that point in time that explored and applied actions to address this. Thus, emerged a community-based, action research project called *Know Justice, Know Peace: A Transformation & Justice Community Collective*, which took place with six local grassroots justice-oriented organizations. Together we explored if, how, and where, wellness, healing and trauma-informed practices and transformative organizing existed in the daily operations and strategic vision of these organizations.

Through ongoing conversations, interviews, focus groups, and healing circles, as well as an 8-month, bi-weekly training program, we identified individual and organizational needs, barriers, and facilitators of actualizing healing, wellbeing, and justice values in daily operation and organizational culture. Overall, the findings of this collective echoed what leading scholars[5] have also espoused–to thrive individually and organizationally we must transform the relationships and structures we operate in to actualize values that promote wellness, wholeness, justice, and an interconnected community. Participants in our collective voiced wanting tools to stay grounded and connected while advancing effective strategies to resist toxic and violent structures and replace them with transformative and sustaining ones. In order to achieve a radical abolitionist future, community participants[6] wanted intentional practices

[5] Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds (adrienne maree brown); Healing Justice: Holistic Self-Care for Changemakers (Loretta Pyles); Healing Resistance: A radically different response to harm (Kazu Haga); Love with Power: Practicing transformation for justice (Movement Strategy Center); Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education (Alex Shevrin Venet); Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation (Laura Rendón); Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators (Editors: The Education for Liberation Network and Critical Resistance Editorial Collective); Daring to Lead (Brene Brown); The Four Pivots (Shawn Ginwright)

[6] We use the word "organizer" and "community participants" throughout most of this article because the people that made up the collective that informed this work were in community organizing organizations. Nonetheless, we feel that their experience can extend to (and we aim here to speak to) anyone who works for justice, health, wellness, community building, or community care and healing work (that includes health professionals, service providers, community foundations, schools, and many subject-diverse non-profit and grassroots organizations).

to sustain themselves, seeing their individual wellbeing as connected to collective wellbeing and social change.

After conducting initial conversations, surveys, and focus groups with members of the collective, we responded to their stated needs by creating an 8-month training program with bi-weekly sessions to share knowledge and practices around individual and community wellness and healing as well as restorative organizing models and alternative organizational structures for values alignment in the daily operations of their organizations. Participants responded enthusiastically and began integrating practices and models into their daily life and organizational structure, emphasizing how critical this was for the future of their organizations, and their own lives. What follows is a summary of what we heard from community participants (throughout all phases of this action research collective) about the things they struggle with as well as the assets they build upon; the areas where they want to integrate new ideas and practices and the tools they already put to use for surviving and thriving. Integrated with their insights and analysis are references to current literature and theoretical frameworks across diverse fields. We also include ideas about future research and action needed to fully address and grow the concepts presented here. But first, we place ourselves in the conversation by exploring the setting and context for this collective and the action research methodology that our work is situated in.

RESEARCH SETTING

The Inland Empire

Our collective and the place in which our research and organizing takes place is situated in what is regionally called the Inland Empire (locally known as the "IE"). Covering one-sixth of Southern California, the IE is one of the nation's economic backbones and serves as a global logistics hub. Historically known for its citrus production, the IE has transformed from farmland to now more than one billion square feet of warehouses (Phillips, 2022).

In the book, "*Inland Shift: Race, Space and Capital in Southern California,*" Dr. Juan David De Lara refers to this region as a logistics *regime*, a contemporary site of neoliberal racial capitalism that has "condemned devalued bodies and the spaces they produce to a life of precarity and premature death" (2018, p. 16). De Lara describes how the rapid expansion of the logistics economy has manipulated the IE's spatial

and racial landscape around global capitalism, producing structural inequities to health and wellbeing. This can be seen through the historical development of the IE–from the public investment in infrastructures of logistics such as transportation, land use, and zoning–benefiting transnational corporations to target overpoliced communities of color, predominantly Latinx blue-collar workers into precarious labor conditions as one of the only employment opportunities in the region (Lara, 2018). As the government influences policies to advance corporate interests, communities living in the IE face a significantly higher rate of poverty, limited access to education, chronic health conditions, and air pollution (Lara, 2018; Barboza, 2021; Phillips, 2022).

In response to the IE's deeply entrenched history of exploitation, community-led grassroots organizations have been at the forefront of breaking the cycle of violence. They are building coalitions and organizing direct actions and political campaigns across different issues that threaten the wellbeing of communities due to the rippling effects of systemic oppression. By leveraging the voices and power of communities, organizations and advocacy groups are transforming the IE's narratives, paving a path to an equitable and just future.

CASA

Set amid this landscape is Pitzer College, a liberal arts college founded in 1963 with an emphasis on bridging academia with activism. In 1998, Pitzer founded Critical Action & Social Advocacy (CASA) to advance strategies for social change in the IE through meaningful collaborations with community partners. CASA operates a local community center that functions as an academic and community hub for its intensive community-based research courses as well as office space for a number of community partner organizations. Six of CASA's long-standing core community partners participated in various dimensions of the *Know Justice, Know Peace collective* research and training on healing justice and transformative movement organizing on which this research is based, including:

- Huerta Del Valle (HDV): an urban farm formed in 2012 to respond to food deserts and insecurity with seven community gardens that serve more than 62 families, who each maintain a plot of land to cultivate fresh produce;
- The Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice (ICIJ or IC4IJ): a coalition of 35+ immigrant justice formed in 2008 to advance the

rights, wellbeing, and needs of immigrants through policy advocacy, community organizing, education, and rapid response to ICE and border patrol operations;
- The Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective (IEIYC): a grassroots organization founded by undocumented queer youth in 2010 to mobilize immigrant youth, their rights, and opportunities for higher education through policy advocacy, mentorship, and resource sharing;
- Starting Over, Inc. (SOI): a nonprofit corporation formed in 2004 centered on transitional housing, reentry services, advocacy, civic engagement, and leadership development for formerly incarcerated and low-income communities. This is in tandem with Riverside All of Us or None (RAOUON), a national organizing initiative led by formerly incarcerated communities, their families, friends, and allies united to end mass incarceration and the discrimination faced by formerly incarcerated people;
- The Youth Mentoring Action Network (YMAN): a youth-centric, critical mentoring organization founded in 2007 to uplift and empower Black, Latinx, queer, and low-income youth along with providing nationwide revolutionary educational trainings for professionals;
- Warehouse Workers Resource Center (WWRC): a Resource Center formed in 2011 that tackles the abuses of warehouse and temp agencies and the many issues they have created for people in Ontario and San Bernardino.

Staff from these organizations that participated in this collective represented entry, managerial, and executive positions, and diversity in age, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status, (though the majority of participants were BIPOC women, 25-45 years old). Organizational structure, culture and size varied among the six organizations, though all are 10-15 year old organizations, ranging from 4 to 24 staff members.

The *Know Justice, Know Peace: A Transformation & Justice Community Collective* leadership team that designed and facilitated the action research project, including the 8-month community organizational development program, were made up of a mix of faculty, undergraduate and graduate students and community organizers, all affiliated with Pitzer College and predominantly BIPOC women, ages 19-49. These include: Tessa Hicks Peterson, Hala Khouri, Scarlett Duarte, Keely

Nguyen, Dalia Paris-Saper, Azucena Ortiz; Vanessa Reyes, Therese Julia Uy and Cindy Gaytan.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology that emerged from this collective is grounded in community-based, participatory action research, through an emergent, narrative design. The initial interest and need pertaining to this topic revealed itself through informal conversations, collaborations and community events in recent years. With support from the core community partners, the research team distributed a 12-minute digital survey to community partners and received 26 anonymous responses. This preliminary research sought to identify individual and organizational needs, barriers, and facilitators of actualizing healing, wellbeing, and justice values in daily operation and organizational culture. Following the surveys, researchers facilitated a virtual 50- to 70-minute focus group with each organization to expand on findings. All of the focus groups were conducted in English, with the exception of one conducted in Spanish. Focus groups were framed as listening and healing circles that began with a breathing practice, followed by a check-in prompt for self-reflection, and then a group conversation around relevant themes identified by empirical research and survey results. Open-ended questions allowed each participant to reflect on individual burnout, trauma, and wellness as an organization.

After transcribing and analyzing recorded focus groups, we then distributed a 3-page executive summary of our findings to community participants and their executive directors. Follow up interviews were then conducted with each executive director. In response to the executive summary, we were able to elicit their reflections from their positions of leadership, and identify if and how to shift organizational culture towards alternative frameworks for wellness and restorative justice. It was also then that executive directors decided if their organization had the interest and capacity to participate in the next step of the action research collective. This was a customized 8-month organizational development training program designed to address participant requests to learn and practice transformative organizing and healing justice. While all six organizations saw the value of this next effort, only three were able to commit to their staff's regular participation in the subsequent 8-month training. Additional survey and focus group reflections took place with participants throughout and at the end of this training to grasp its impact and remaining needs. At the close of that training, each organization

received a grant for organizational and leadership coaching to assist them with integrating the learnings from the training into their daily organization operations. The data derived from all phases of this research are incorporated into the findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This project is framed by three theoretical frameworks that correspond both to why the collective project was carried out, as well as to what came forth from community participants and their respective experiences. This section briefly reviews these frameworks, which are unpacked further in the subsequent analysis of the findings.

Prefigurative Politics and Transformative Movement Organizing

Prefiguration is a radical process for how we can imagine and practice a movement's vision and end-goals in real time at a micro and macro-level. In 1977, Carl Boggs theorized prefigurative politics as necessary processes for a revolutionary transition beyond dominant regimes by actualizing grassroots' vision of alternative futures or utopias (Monticelli, 2021; Törnberg, 2021). Prefigurative politics is 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (Boggs, 1977, p. 2, as cited in Jeffrey and Dyson, 2020). Dr. Luke Yates, a professor from the University of Manchester studying collective action further states that prefigurative politics "can be seen as taking place…with the same political logic, on the streets, in the context of planning and implementing protest actions" (2015, p. 15). This nuanced understanding of prefigurative politics links radical imagination with co-creating practices, processes, and structures to orient the political struggles and hopes of dismantling systems of oppression and domination in accordance with their values (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Khasnabish and Haiven, 2021; Fians, 2022).

There are five tenets of prefigurative politics in social movements: 1) collective experimentation of everyday practices within the self and movement, 2) reproduction of knowledge, 3) practice of collective norms, 4) consolidation of collective norms and processes within infrastructures, and 5) spread of vision to others (Yates, 2015, pp. 13-15). These five tenets are grounded in community-and relationship-building as a foundation to build accountability, trust, and safety without relying

on state institutions to intervene. This embodied praxis of intentionally experimenting strategies to counter institutions interconnects with a similar theory of change, called transformative movement organizing. At its core, it engages a similar charge–to transform the conditions that perpetuate violence; requiring a personal commitment to self-and organizational-transformation to dismantle and build alternative structures that resist forms of oppression (Gumbs, 2020). The ongoing movement to transition from dominant paradigms of racial capitalism that overvalue competition (vs. interdependence), hyperproduction (vs. sustainable growth) and profit (vs wellbeing), places an emphasis on living and practicing shared values of liberation in daily operations and in movement strategy.

We can build critical consciousness (Friere, 1970), learn to (un)learn colonialism, and heal generational wounds of oppression and trauma by centering the five pillars of transformative movement organizing. As outlined by the Movement Strategy Center, individual change, societal change, organizational change, movement culture change, and organizational strategies change, collectively work together to challenge the status quo (Zimmerman et al., 2016). Through cultivating an audacious vision of a just future–rooted in *Emergent Strategy* (brown, 2017)–individual and collective transformation requires us to embody these critical communal values in our internal and external changemaking. Ongoing experimentations of prefigurative imagination and transformative organizing on a micro-level can expand possibilities for macro-level transformation (Yates, 2015; Monticelli, 2021).

Traumas of Injustice and Healing Justice

Many Participants that confront oppression and fight against issues that impact their community may be directly and vicariously exposed to trauma (Hicks Peterson, 2018). In *The Myth of Normal* by Dr. Gabor Maté, he states, “the meaning of the word ‘trauma,’ in its Greek origin, is ‘wound.’ Whether we realize it or not, it is our woundedness, or how we cope with it, that dictates much of our behavior, shapes our social habits, and informs our ways of thinking about the world” (2022, pp. 51-52). The lasting imprint of trauma in today’s racialized capitalist state has normalized toxic conditions upheld by institutions for generations, which reflect behavioral patterns of individuals and groups to abide by the status quo and the logic of colonialism. We have formulated a concept of “traumas of injustice” that proposes that many forms of trauma are inextricably tied to and reflexive of systemic injustices and oppression.

In many instances, trauma is not an individualized experience, but a collective disease that can sever communal relationships as well as those between the mind, body, and spirit. As shared by Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective on the impact of trauma and lack of wellbeing as a crisis in movement organizing:

> Many organizers are either without health insurance and do not seek care or are not supported to sustain their well being as a result of overextended work cultures in our movements. We have seen an increase of suicide, depression and long term illnesses impacting organizers at much younger ages. We have lost many valuable people to illnesses, compounded by the stresses of organizing, that were undiagnosed, untreated or poorly treated. Our organizers are coming from communities most physically and emotionally affected by trauma and violence, and yet we are not given models of intervention and prevention to sustain ourselves, let alone the next generations of leaders.

Participants risk being harmed by the lack of structural resources–that privileges those with power–to cultivate their holistic wellbeing; and experience health burdens that disconnect them from transformative movement organizing. Many participants carrying unresolved trauma into movements and organizations may unintentionally engage in toxic ideologies and behaviors that replicate oppressive norms, harming themselves and others (Haga, LaFayette, and Jehnsen, 2020). The lack of wellness in daily practices, operations, and discourses diminish our capacity to cultivate collective hope and agency for reimagining and reorganizing the world we want to live in (Hicks Peterson, 2018). At the same time, trauma-informed clinical care often seeks to suppress individual symptoms rather than addressing the root causes of personal and systemic trauma and incorporating culturally relevant, asset driven practices for well-being (Ginwright, 2018). Many in-movements today are attempting to shift this and ensure that "changemakers do not end up internalizing their anger with unjust systems and projecting it internally within their movements and communities but instead work intentionally to create movement spaces that thoughtfully process anger and make room for healing" (Hicks Peterson, 2018, p. 33). Organizing holistic healing modalities for wellness requires designing alternative responses to transform conditions of collective harm and trauma rooted in oppression (Ginwright, 2018).

The longing for societal change, rooted in a love ethic (hooks, 2000; Hicks Peterson, 2018), calls for a collective commitment to practice healing wounds of systemic oppression and violence to bring forth a cultural shift towards liberation and radical care. Healing justice is a collective care movement borne of feminists of color, organizers, healers, and scholars; it is a strategy, framework and practice that emerged formally in 2006 though BIPOC, queer and trans feminist activists and healers[7] who recognized the need for social movements to address generational trauma and oppression and radically re-imagine collective care, safety, accountability and healing as part of liberatory political strategy. Weaving together ancestral wisdom traditions of healing and knowledge around community care and repair with critical imaginings of change that do not reproduce systemic -isms and interpersonal harm, this movement is led by those directly impacted and surviving in the face of trauma and oppression. With strong roots in anti-capitalism, abolition, and Black feminism, this social movement framework is integral to paradigm shifts in organizations and communities yearning for more roadmaps that are justice-oriented, healing-centered, and community-led.

A healing justice framework guides our understanding of addressing the root causes of trauma and responses to harm centered on resilience, wholeness, and wellness as a mode of organizing and movement work. Rather than suppressing individualized symptoms of trauma, the process of healing justice is asset-driven, engaging in our cultural identities and lived experiences 'to regenerate traditions that have been lost; to mindfully hold contradictions in our practices; and to be conscious of the conditions we are living and working inside of as healers and organizers in our communities and movements' (Page 2010; as cited in Hicks Peterson, 2018). As echoed by organizer Tanuja Jagernaut, 'we have bodies, minds, emotions, hearts, and it makes the connection that we cannot do this work of transforming society and our communities without bringing collective healing into our work' (Pyles, 2018, p. 19). This healing work is political by engaging in practices to decolonize the mind against colonialism and white supremacy; and reclaim individual

[7] Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective is most widely credited with creating and advancing this movement. This is a rapidly growing political framework within social movements, whose roots and lineages can be explored and honored by reading *Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety*, (Page and Woodland, 2023) in addition to other books that connect with the topic (such as *Healing Justice* by Loretta Pyles, *Healing Resistance* by Kazu Haga, *Embodied Justice* by Rae Johnson, *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown, *Queer Dharma* by Jacoby Ballard, and *Liberated to the Bone*, among others).

bodies, spirits, and histories that have been violently erased by hegemonic forces. By disrupting the pervasive nature of violence and harm on a local level, radical care for the self and community expands the capacity of collectives to practice an ideal vision of the future outside of dominant paradigms. Shifting from a world of domination and extraction to a world of regeneration and resilience endeavors on experiential pathways of learning how to actualize infrastructures and practices in alignment with shared values and futures as a collective.

The following section presents findings that connect the conceptual frameworks of living in alignment with visions of social transformation and the experiences of participants on the ground. We segment our findings to the real-time impacts of trauma on collective healing/wellbeing, as well as the ways in which participants are able to embody the values they seek to establish in the world on a personal and organizational level–and the challenges and limitations of doing so. We frame these discoveries in our research with evidence from literature in the field that substantiates similar findings.

FINDINGS

Part I. The fallacy of self-denial

Most people would agree that living and working in ways that embody wellness is ideal, but there are many individual and systemic barriers to holistic wellbeing on a personal and organizational level. The challenges and threats that we found in our research collective include: 1) the emotional weight of the traumas of injustice that participants and their community have experienced; 2) the difficulty negotiating work/life balance and healthy boundaries; and 3) how paradigms of hyper-productivity, urgency, and competition often lead staff to either denying themselves self-care or feeling guilty for the time it takes to care for themselves. Given the emotional weight that arises when participants' work is rooted in their personal experiences, they can be subject to burnout and vicarious trauma while working on a daily basis.

Emotional Weight of Trauma

Sixty five percent of participants identified that their work could bring up past negative experiences and/or trauma. The emotional weight of trauma and stress that participants accumulate in their personal and work life can deteriorate their wellbeing and quality of life, and social

relationships, inflicting harm on themselves and others without being able to tend to their individual needs (Gorski, 2018; Satterthwaite et al., 2019). Since most participants' identities and lived experiences align with their activism, their proximity and understanding of structural oppression and marginalization make them more susceptible to burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue (Gorski, 2018; Satterthwaite et al., 2019). For a majority of participants, the emotional impact of work was a primary stressor. This suggests that participants are working in a constant state of high stress and pressure that takes a toll on their bodies, which can hinder their capacity to cope with dispiriting and demobilizing feelings that hinder their personal sustainability and imagination to envision an alternative future (Peña et al., 2021). This is especially relevant for participants who are confronted by familiar distressing conditions while working with communities impacted by violence and issues that personally affect them and their community (Gorski, 2018; Gorski, 2019; Satterthwaite et al., 2019). We observed that the emotional weight of traumas of injustice that some participants experienced stem from interacting with communities impacted by state and non-state perpetrators of violence. Research also suggests that participants are also likely to be targets of violence that include but are not limited to being criticized, criminalized, detained, and surveilled (Satterthwaite et al., 2019; Peña et al., 2021). The emotional accumulation of ancestral, intergenerational, and fresh traumatic wounds held by participants are retriggered while working against injustices that triggers an endless cycle of suffering.

Negotiating work/life balance and healthy boundaries

Participants perceive themselves as interdependent parts of the community, connecting deeply to its assets and its suffering. Given their level of self-identification with and commitment to the organization, movement, and/or cause, hardships faced by the organizations or its members can hinder participants' personal wellbeing and sustainability (Cox, 2009; Chen and Gorski, 2015). Participants in our research mentioned often extending their availability past work hours to support individuals who seek their help. A participant working for carceral justice recalled receiving text messages at ten o'clock at night from someone she didn't know saying: "they needed [her] help."Caring deeply and being closely connected to community members who experience trauma-inflicted pain, this participant emphasized:

> I don't want them to feel like they're alone. Like I was alone once… so that stresses me a lot. I can't help but to feel, like, I've been there. I know what they're going through. I know what it feels like not to have no one to turn to or not to understand something. So sometimes it's just, you know, with them calling late night or texting at night or calling me crying. But I remember. There [were] times I called people myself. I still cry today.

This participant's physical and emotional dedication to social change makes it difficult for them to separate the boundary between their work and their personal life, taking the stress of work home with them. While interdependence is an asset to community culture and connection, blurred boundaries and attachments can deplete a participant's energy, causing them to feel heightened responsibility for others to the extent that they diminish time and energy towards their own wellbeing. Operating from fragmented parts of the self reduces the ability to show up for communities that they are accountable to if they cannot sustain their spirits (maree, 2019, Haines; 2019, Ballard, 2021; Khouri, 2021; Berila, 2021; Pyles, 2018; Haga, 2021).

Burnout

Burnout symptoms were prevalent among all participants in our research; exhaustion, isolation, irritability, lack of productivity, defeat, and being overwhelmed were cited as conditions experienced by participants in our collective, traits that other movement studies have also documented (Pyles, 2018; Zimmerman, et al., 2010). The symptoms of burnout that participants experience are characteristics of trauma. When the sympathetic nervous symptom becomes overstimulated due to the overload of stress hormones, the body is "stuck on" by feeling anxiety, panic attacks; and experiencing difficulties resting, sleeping, and settling (Khouri, 2021). As stated by a participant regarding their inability to sleep and rest: "our sleep is not consistent… work is on our mind all the time."[8]

Living in a constant state of high stress and pressure prevents participants from being able to rest, disconnecting them from their work was emphasized by another participant in this way: "I worry about other

[8] All quotes included in this essay are derived from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups/healing circles engaged as part of the research of the *Know Justice, Know Peace Collective*. All findings are anonymous and confidential and are overseen by the Pitzer IRB.

people's lives... We deal with a lot of misery, we deal with a lot of grief... it's stressful." This participant captures the nuances of trauma that they are exposed to but may not have the space or time to process, heal, and tend to. We found that the stress accumulated from relating to and witnessing the sufferings of others in their work was often normalized in organizations, due to the urgency, the multiplicity of other demands; and the lack of emotional bandwidth, spaces or tools needed to heal both individually and collectively.

The research also revealed how different participants perceive and respond to appraised stress differently. Many indicated that they experience a differentiation between how much stress they *confront* in work and how much stress they *feel* from it, suggesting that they often feel more stress than they actually confront (insinuating they would benefit from tools for managing and processing stress as it arises). Still another participant spoke to the personalized reasons he did not take home work-related stressors:

> I don't take that home with me… there's a degree of separation. I think that's also from my lived experience as being like a white-passing Latinx person… I have that privilege to step back because… my skin color isn't putting me at risk in a lot of situations, but I know for my friends … there's a lot of [secondary trauma].

This participant's experience clearly illustrates how varying degrees of social privilege aligning with personal identities may shield them–and many in positions of power–from the stress and traumas of injustice that other colleagues may face. Clearly, distinctions in identity and experience make an impact and provide a layer of protection and buffer against being triggered personally for some, which may be very different for those who have been direct targets of the kind of injustice they now work to fight against daily.

There is the added pressure that much of social change work is time-sensitive, especially when certain issues are picked up in the social media outlets and mainstream media. Fueled by the momentum for direct action, a participant explained the magnitude of work and expectations for timely engagement: "There is this need to also be staying on top of our own workload… the work that we do is constantly changing. Every moment. There's always another update. Something has to be changed or tweaked a little... the information has to get out everywhere." This participant reflects how there is an expectation to work 24/7 due to the

urgency of responding to social issues that produce myriad barriers to coping with the impact of stress and trauma.

Connected to this rapid distribution of information everywhere is that constant exposure to distressing incidents. Some of the exposure is in the form of direct contact, graphics, cases, and/or social media; which can exacerbate primary and secondary traumatic stress levels and trigger personal and vicarious forms of trauma (Khouri, 2021; Haines, 2019). Illustrating the daily scope of their intense role, a participant working in a network for detention and deportation rapid response shared their experience of suffering from secondary trauma related to their intimate relationship with the community members they work with:

> I'm the one who gets the phone calls… [and reviews] the recording because I have to record the phone calls. I couldn't even listen to the graphics with the recordings because I just don't want to relive it… and then we just had a campaign and the images–they're so real...

In the age of digital technology and social media, it is challenging to find a balance as participants cannot escape a wide range of images of injustice that are broadcasted throughout the world. Media exposure to distressing events and vicarious trauma can strain participants' wellbeing (Satterthwaite et al., 2019). This can exacerbate burnout symptoms being frontline recipients to stories of direct suffering and staying up to date on current events related to the organization's work is an expectation of the job.

Internalizing the Culture of Selflessness

Participants discussed stigmatizing ideologies of self-care that overlapped with the dominant culture of selflessness in activist communities. The literature substantiates this notion that construed in the identity of an activist-organizer is the ability to endure physically and emotionally hostile conditions that break down their bodies down to the point of exhaustion for the organization's cause (Rahmouni Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2019). This is a common norm in organizationsand movements to reward those working beyond the clock with a badge of honor or being a hero for sacrificing their wellbeing, which reinforces hetero-patriarchal standards of operating and behaving (Rahmouni Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2019; Satterthwaite et al., 2019). Despite recognizing the connection between personal and collective well-being and the necessity of self-care, some participants internalized feelings of

guilt and shame for taking time off work or saying "no" to additional work. As expressed by a participant on the unrealistic desire to take time off:

> If I take a day off, if I have a mental health day, who's gonna pick up the phone if
> something happens to someone, you know? Who's going to be that form of communication? So, and it's not that I don't want to. Of course, I do… but I'm their form of communication from the outside world.

This illuminates the participant's selfless devotion to prioritize the needs of community members at the expense of their personal well-being against high stake socio-political conditions. Yet, the persistent self-denial of care due to one's commitment to justice, as expressed by the participant, can harm and consume individuals. Unconsciously transferring the savior or hero complex onto communities that participants work with can also wound them by stripping their power and agency away (Khouri, 2021). These findings mirror how the culture of selflessness can cause participants to willingly ignore their pain and suffering because these traumatic experiences are incomparable to barriers faced by community members (Rahmouni Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2019). Through the rigorous and disciplined nature of justice work, the body of participants are commodified into corporate athletes to persevere beyond physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual exhaustion (Rahmouni Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2019). It is important to recognize that the culture of selflessness reflects organizational norms and control over participants' bodies (Rahmouni Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2019); and the absence of spaces, structures, and discourses for self-and-community care (Satterthwaite et al., 2019). Our research confirmed these theories in the stories shared by participants about their day-to-day realities of feeling obliged to choose work over wellbeing, again and again.

Perceptions of Self-Care

The fallacy of self-denial, a phenomenon apparent across organizations in our focus groups, is described in *Healing Justice: Holistic Self-Care for Change Makers,* as the way justice-oriented workers internalize unconscious and conscious messages to deny themselves self-care (Pyles, 2018). The presence of this phenomenon did

not, however, stop many participants from engaging in authentic forms of healing and self-care on a daily or weekly basis. These were shared as small practices that brought them joy, pleasure, and self-determination, but were not identified or labeled "self-care." Their self-care practices were perceived as strategies of survival that are relevant to their identity and nourish their bodies and minds but ones that do not fit the dominant, capitalist portrayal of self-care. Self-care was repeatedly framed as expensive therapies, organic foods, and spa treatments, available to those who could afford it in time and money, but not accessible or prioritized in the lives of many in this collective.

Clearly, the commodification of self-care practices in mainstream Western culture impacts participants' perception and access to self-care; additionally, the reality of suffering in their communities and onslaught of demands in their organizations make such access a hard-won struggle. Nonetheless, participants are pushing back in many instances to claim agency and autonomy in healing and care on their own terms. The following section advances this analysis further to explore the ways organizations themselves have been cooped by repressive, dominant norms and how participants are seeking methods to reclaim and restore values of justice, wellness, and liberation inside the operation and culture of the organizations–for the sustainability of the movements themselves, and the individuals who want to thrive, not just survive, in them.

Part II. In a broken system, we all get broke

Replicating dominant norms that do not serve us

Many in the field wrestle with the co-optation of social change work by the non-profit industrial complex which constrains grassroots organizations from actualizing their values and vision for the change they want to create in the world. The groundbreaking 2017 book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, describes the nonprofit industrial profit as such: "A trillion-dollar industry, the US non-profit sector is one of the world's largest economies. From art museums and university hospitals to think tanks and church charities, over 1.5 million organizations of staggering diversity share the tax-exempt 501(c)(3) designation, if little else. Many social justice organizations have joined this world, often blunting political goals to satisfy government and foundation mandates. But even as funding shrinks, many activists often find it difficult to imagine movement-building outside the non-profit model." The inherent nature of 501(c)(3) organizations reinforces the status quo, replicating

dominant paradigms and power hierarchies in movement spaces, cultures, and processes that stem from philanthropic funding by wealthy elites and corporate management styles. In *Between radical theory and community praxis*, Amara H. Pérez (2017) states, "many of the problems we face in our organizing work today are derived from the model of business structures and corporate culture that now dominates the movement" (p. 98). A majority of issues that community participants are working to overcome, repair, and heal stem from the inequities created by racialized capitalism and the ways nonprofits have become another vehicle to monitor and minimize rather than redistribute wealth. Dominant norms that are embedded in the structure of organizations have direct influence on and often contradict both the organization's and the participant's mission and core values, as described by a participant in our study:

> we have funders and grants to meet, we have deadlines, people to serve…its almost being like a corporation where you get your certain amount of sick days or paid leave days. When that's up, you have to suck it up and get back to work.

This participant highlights the structural limitations between balancing community work, funding, and individual well-being that shifts an organization's priority and scope of work to sustain capital resources and produce profit-driven outcomes. Compelled to be hyper-productive and racing to complete tasks before deadlines, participants are consistently accountable to multiple constituents, including their colleagues, executive directors, funders, evaluators, and community members. The demand to engage in community organizing and fundraising can deplete participants' energy, demobilizing them from their connection to the organizations' purpose (Gorski, Lopresti-Goodman, and Rising 2019). One participant admitted that newcomers come in with an "illusion" of the organization, and ultimately leave due to feeling "disappointed" and "deluded" that organizers did not talk about "going against oppression every day." This participant illustrated the realities of operating under a capitalist system:

> Many [young people] come to [this organization] with a whole image of a perfect social justice organization of all their dreams... when they are part of the organization they see that we… comply with the basics of being a non-profit and we are a very normal

> organization in the sense of government organization... we fear how it is not an extreme democracy.

Capturing the idealism of radical organizations among young organizers, this participant recognized the structural implications of high turnover and reduced flexibility for organizers to govern, implement, and sustain their own vision into practice. Both these findings also reflect the underlying sentiments of neoliberalism that blames individual organizers for being unable to take care of themselves and conform to organizational workload and procedures.

The culture of white supremacy also interconnects with the non-profit industrial complex to preserve existing cultural norms and to legitimize standards of whiteness in the culture and operations of organizations. White supremacy reinforces "human value and worth against a hierarchy that privileges and rewards proximity to Whiteness at the top and disadvantages and punishes distance from Whiteness at the bottom" (Whitaker et al., 2021; as cited in Kulkarni, Lawrence, and Roberts, 2022). A number of the participants alluded to the sense of urgency and perfectionism they feel bound to, traits that are key characteristics of white supremacy culture, as identified by Okun and Jones (2001). Some participants were observed to be "living by the clock" and experiencing a "time famine," a phenomenon that Pyles (2018) describes taking place when people are chained to urgency and time crunches and become emotionally and physically depleted and dissatisfied about their life. A participant in a leadership position candidly explained, "I don't know how to not replicate that system…we have to be on top of everyone's productivity." These experiences were shared among several participants, suggesting that toxic cultural norms of hyper-productivity are deeply embedded in non-profit organizational structures that contradict the cultural shifts needed for liberation.

Feelings of disappointment and failure arose similarly among a few participants about replicating a culture of toxic norms in the workplace. The same participant stated:

> Yesterday, I worked 11 hours. Today I am going to work more than 12 hours from when I arrive until I leave. We are all working a lot and… succeeding in many ways [while] barely being able to maintain it. And, then with the criticism that 'you are bad and you abuse us' [from other staff], we are barely able to breathe in the day.

The lack of self-care and balance, and the tensions that stem from the misalignment of organizational values and practices are more than just an individual issue of participants being overworked or organizations being understaffed. These are just some of the unhealthy and unrealistic outcomes that result from dominant norms borne of white supremacy and racialized capitalism that are rooted in the nonprofit industrial complex; ones that value production and profits at the expense of community wellbeing and balance.

Claiming community care

Despite the limitations of their nonprofit organizational structure, the organizations in our collective work hard to fight against dominant norms where they can, and to push their own cultures of care within the organization and the communities they work with. While the possibility of perpetuating unhealthy or harmful dominant norms always exists due to collective socialization in them, many in our research found it critical to reflect on and uplift the assets and strengths of their counterculture efforts against this backdrop. Most community organizations were founded as acts of resistance to systems in place that were disempowering their communities and as acts of affirmation that community-led knowledge and power could create the equity and justice needed. Organizing around a shared problem allows participants to reimagine and embody the possibilities of a future brought about by social movement. As one participant stated, “the systems are inherently unjust, the systems are inherently biased, the systems are inherently disempowering. So, I think [the organization] is quite the opposite. It’s very empowering. And I think that everybody is encouraged to bring their A Game.” Bounded by a shared vision and struggle, this participant, like many participants, sees organization as catalysts for change, which encourages them to show up and step in for their colleagues and communities.

All the community organizations we studied clearly have the intention of ensuring that participants are acknowledged and cared for. The majority of participants said their organization engages in community care and collective healing practices. This suggests that organizations are intentionally resisting dominant norms by integrating communal spaces and practices to foster relationships with their individual bodies and each other. One participant stated, “I love being here. [The organization] has very much been an oasis in my career, in organizing, for positivity and mutual support. You know, we’ve intentionally tried to embody that in

the program we're creating." This participant's experience reflects an organizational culture that emphasizes wholeness, inviting participants to bring their whole selves into the workplace to disrupt western notions of a work-life separation (Haga, 2021).

Many participants reported that their organization enables them to work with like-minded, passionate people who contribute to the goal of meaningfully supporting each other, their communities, and their social justice cause. Given that most identify with under-represented and under-estimated identities in the dominant culture (ie: being queer, undocumented, formerly incarcerated, differently abled, etc), finding a home in communities of shared identities and justice values provides a deep sense of purpose and belonging–qualities that fuel a sense of safety, connection, and agency that are critical for humans to not only survive, but thrive (Hübl, 2021; Brown, 2016; Siegel, 2020). This sense of belonging and connection helps participants often feel sustained and cared for by the work. As one participant said "our team has a really great support system [...] just there to help or guide, give advice, or even talk to." Participants also reflected how they are combating toxic interpretations of professionalism and perfectionism that enable participants to develop authentic and mutually supportive relationships that do not encourage competition among colleagues. The care and love that they give to one another was apparent in how they spoke together and of each other through challenging topics in our gatherings, in the way that they advocated for one another, and in the sense of unity demonstrated when discussing the meaning and purpose of their work.

Urgency as both threat and mobilization

Overall, participants recognize the necessity of self and community-care, but often found it difficult to prioritize their own well-being when the work often requires urgent attention. This illuminates the fact that while high-stakes conditions of life and death are on the line, urgency will prevail; to attend to this without sacrificing individual workers' need for rest will require structural change such that there are less people in need or more people available to serve that need and share the burden of the work across many hands. Whatever self-care practices are incorporated into organizational daily life must be done thoughtfully and with shifts covered, so that they operate within the realistic workflow and frequent emergency situations.

An additional challenge with typical promotion of workplace-based self-care trends is that it puts the onus on an individual to take better care

of themselves in the face of stress and trauma-inducing realities of injustice. Why not put the onus on the societal norms and structures that perpetuate these stress and trauma-inducing realities of injustice (Ginwright, 2017)? It seems that systemic change is often skirted, and focus is put instead on individuals to adapt and become resilient to damaging societal influences. At the heart of this work, it is clear that these participants want to change those systemic problems at the root. This work of structural and systemic change is long and hard, and we must have recourse on the journey to protect ourselves from the traumas, stress, illnesses and sorrow that we encounter. As such, we must both address root causes of these conditions *and* highlight ways organizations can engage practices to take care of workers in the process. This demonstrates the need to adopt care strategies that make sense amid the very real and urgent demands involved in community organizing *and* ones that cultivate an organizational culture shift to prioritize staff wellness and sustainability. Practices should be integrated in the work to energize participants so they do not feel pressured to abandon their work in favor of their own healing and self-care.

The other point to consider: while urgency is a threat to wellbeing, it is also a tool of mobilization. For many, urgency is a mobilizing force behind grassroots activism that empowers people to advocate for their own rights, wellness and justice, against the greatest odds. For example, a participant shared that when they feel overwhelmed, "the community [they] are fighting for motivates [them] to keep going. [They] have to keep going for them and those who follow." This kind of work would not be able to create meaningful change without people acting out of urgency, love, and a desire for justice. The more complicated task, however, is to understand where exactly stress-reduction fits within this urgency–where would it benefit, and what would it detract from? How can we reclaim rest as a form of resistance as well as a strategy for a smarter, more sustainable way of working? As Bayo Akumalofe says, "the times are urgent; let us slow down." Direct suggestions that emerged from our collective are further extrapolated in the following sections regarding how to have needs met and live outhealing justice values in real time, amid the messiness and urgency of the work.

Cultural Shifts in Organization

Participants voiced the need to talk candidly about both the longing for and practical application of structural shifts in the organizational culture that would institutionalize the value of wellness/wellbeing in daily

operations. One participant reflected on the importance of talking to each other to bring about meaningful organizational change, noting: "I think courageous conversations are the first step always because we can bring in conversations about healing and meditation as much as we want, but as long as those [courageous conversations] haven't happened, I feel like it's gonna end up being superficial… and kind of like uplifting an image but not necessarily a reality."

Generally talking about the ideas of healing and self-care in social justice work or inviting a guest speaker or two on the topic is helpful, but the next and necessary step is to collectively reflect on what is needed and then prioritize regular practices and policies of well-being in their work. Participants identified a number of possible practices to create culture shifts in organizations:

- Organizations can take 5-10 minutes at the beginning of each staff meeting to check in with each other, conduct breathing exercises, or other forms of well-being practices to feel connected within and across the community of workers;
- Organizations can facilitate routine listening circles, workshops, and grounding and mindfulness exercises, either self-led or outside led, lending time to build trust, relationship, and safety, and in the organization;
- Organizations can prioritize nurturing an intentional kind of work culture that gives time and value to such things as expressing candidly the vulnerability around hardships in the work, feedback for how support can be given and received, setting boundaries clearly, practicing accountability, and regularly engaging in rest, play and repair;[9]
- Organizations can spend professional development grant dollars towards being trained or coached on the practices for collective well-being, alternative organizational structures, and generative conflict resolutions;
- Organizations can regularly discuss ways to embed these or other practices in organizational structures, policies, and practices that feel resonant with individual and organizational desires for a more sustainable way to do the work.

[9] Brene Brown's *Daring to Lead* (2018), adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy* (2017) and Paul LeBlanca's *Broken* (2022) explore in great depth how to develop these kinds of organizational values and practices

- Organizations can regularly reflect on if these policies and practices are making a difference to their wellbeing and sustainability in the work.

The need to have "courageous conversations" about practices within the organization that do not promote wellness, belonging and equitable practices–places where interpersonal dynamics or workload expectations seemingly decrease wellness–is crucial to individual and organizational sustainability. Such conversations and structural changes need to be centered, as the intention of time and commitment to such reflections can directly translate into changes in daily operations. One staff member in leadership spoke about her intentions to prioritize wellbeing for herself and her staff members in the organization, but being unsure if that was reflected in the actions of the organization: "I always try to say, 'Okay, what really matters first, right?' I always try to think of 'Okay, in terms of [co-worker's] wellbeing, and my wellbeing first'...I always try to do that...but I don't know if that's actually relayed and I think this is a good opportunity to explore that more."

Here, we see a potential discrepancy between intended actions and what may actually occur in the moment. This participant saw these conversations as an opportunity to understand if and how her intentions are being enacted and explore potential solutions of how to institutionalize values better in the organizational operations. Staff leadership value their co-worker's wellness, but without strong structural support for this, it can get lost in the urgency of the day to day work.

Community Building

One pathway forward mentioned frequently was to increase community building among organization members, as investing in cultivating trust and connections with each other as the key to feeling valued, taken care of, safe and whole at work (brown, 2017, Hemphill, 2019; Brown, 2016; LeBlanc, 2022). A participant from the focus group stated, "I think we could use a little bit more of team-building exercises. [...] You know, things that we do together as a team so it could be more cohesive." Another participant stated:

> I think we don't know each other on a personal level… we don't know each other on our relaxation side… [when] stress level is down to zero, you know… We don't know each other... all we talking about is business [...] You know, all we talk about is how are

> we going to do this? How are we going to do that? How are you going to fix this? We don't never talk about, oh, the steak was good or the view's nice, you know, or what we're doing, something, you know, besides helping other people's problems.

This personal connection, along with the work connection, is important for enacting their goals of justice and community work. In fact, the work for justice rests squarely on a deeply connected community; as Rev. Jen Bailey reminds us: "Relationships are built at the speed of trust, and social change happens at the speed of relationships."[10]

Additionally, participants noted that the organization could uplift wellness in the work by "[spending] more time together in a non-workspace as an organization. Bonding and growing together in ways that do not involve work. Checking in with each other and setting schedules to rotate who check's in on who." Another spoke of the need for leadership to "remind us that it's ok to take breaks. Check in on us. [Do] group activities as a team, not related to work." By increasing interactions on a personal level, the organizations can begin to support community building within the organizations themselves. By building that from the inside, they are able to connect in a way that is personal, collective, and healing. Not only does community building and connection directly fortify wellness and sense of belonging but it also strengthens the bonds internally so that participants are better situated to navigate conflict or stress when they arise, which is another way to maintain community care in the face of urgent and heavy work. These participants' intuitive sense of how to respond to trauma and toxic stress by building community, connection and safety within the workplace echoes the research on thriving, flourishing, and trauma-informed practices by esteemed scholars across fields of psychology, sociology, education, and public health (Hübl, 2021; Maté, 2022; Berila, 2021; Venet, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2021; Ginwright, 2022, Keyes, 2002; Acosta, 2022, Brown, 2016, LeBlanc, 2022).

Healing and Trauma-Informed Practices

The organization members repeatedly expressed the need for ways to process the trauma that occurs as a result of their work, given that nearly half of our collective indicated that their work can bring up past trauma.

[10] Rev. Jennifer Bailey *Faith Matters* (2019).

Trauma-informed healing practices will not only guide members through their own healing, but also the healing of those that they serve/organize. A certain level of discomfort is necessary to undergo healing because confrontation of unhealthy familial histories or repercussions of systemic suffering requires great vulnerability, fortitude, and emotional labor. Yet, organizers hoped they could access healing processes that are both sustainable and accessible through tools and practices to navigate the discomfort.

Initially, participants explored why some methods of healing do not meet their needs. One participant specifically spoke about how listening circles can be useful and validating for many, but trauma can be potentially furthered when there is no follow up. “Healing looks a lot different for folks [...] it's great to have a discussion and dialogue around all these things that are happening in our community, right, but [...] they vent it but then there's no healing taking place after that.”

As such, as organizations that attempt to reflect with staff about traumatic occurrences that take place in their communities or movements, leadership must be careful not to ask participants to share their traumas and then leave them to sit with all of the unhealed wounds until the next time they meet. There must be a plan for the actions taken in-between structured reflections; for example, after community sharing, it can be helpful to offer a simple list of steps to take when one feels anxious, overwhelmed, or stressed, or one-on-one follow up check-in’s might help. Organizations must consider participants’ needs and plan for sustainable follow-up so staff feel supported during their own healing processes.

To aid in participant-informed healing practices, we must explore diverse ways of negotiating the discomfort present in healing processes. Some participants spoke about not always feeling comfortable in healing spaces because their preferred method of communication has not been the norm in those spaces. It is important to keep in mind various communication styles or processing approaches when engaging in trauma-informed practices to make healing more accessible to all participants. One participant expressed previous difficult experiences in communicating: “It's always been a stress to even communicate how I'm feeling...I'm more of a writer. I like to write my feelings down versus express them to other folks.” This is important in the way we even understand healing, and how that is influenced from internalizing “successful” communication. While some may find journal writing more nurturing than talking circles, others may experience catharsis through embodied movement or ritual. This poses an opportunity of reflection:

How can we support healing that is accessible for all? How are we not just integrating, but prioritizing, folks who feel the most comfortable speaking in their native language? Who struggles expressing themselves with words and how do we honor neurodivergent thinking and relating in our healing work? How can healing work move beyond cognitive and emotional expression into embodied or spiritual expression, too?

Another participant shared that even the act of these conversations is difficult when she does not share close relationships with folks she is in conversation with: "It's work to even communicate how I'm really feeling cause I feel like sometimes I save those for people who I've had longer relationships with and who've seen me just progress and be who I am today." This participant's statement strikes two chords: one, that often it is most appropriate to engage in healing work outside of work, with friends, family, healers, or counselors with whom one has stronger relationships to contain that emotional process. It also makes clear that if we want the workplace to be a place where emotional healing can occur, strong relationships with co-workers are crucial for negotiating difficult conversations. As we work to build those relationships, we must think about how we intentionally set the tone and appropriate boundaries that creates the space of support for all participating. One participant expressed feeling comforted when people were honest and vulnerable in sharing stories because it "opens up channels" for others to share, and subsequently feel on the path for healing. Balancing where and how healing takes place must be clear so that work boundaries and obligations are not lost to in-house therapeutic processing.

As mentioned previously, many workers voiced that even the notion of healing personal wounds through self-care felt indulgent and selfish–and a notion that has become increasingly commodified and white washed. Yet, some expressed working towards other ways to see healing as a community practice, one that in fact is directly related to social justice work. One participant suggested that: "periodic focus groups/healing circles would help in seeing our personal progress and give opportunities to share with one another [...] reminds people that we are all in this together." It is evident that sharing these kinds of spaces helps re-energize them in their work and reinforces that the organization works effectively because they are a collective that cares about each others' wellness. When one's well-being suffers daily as a result of the realities of oppression, individual and collective practices of care are a critical form of resistance, resilience, and rebuttal. It puts the power of (re)establishing well-being into the hands of the person whose well-being is being threatened. It provides refueling, grounding, and self-love for

those who may otherwise be undergoing a debilitating state of structural or personal violences. Many voiced a desire to spend more time learning and dedicating themselves to community care practices that could be integrated into their lives, communities, and workspaces. They largely felt that this was something important to do, however, some were sometimes unsure how to actually navigate healing work. One participant said, "I mean this [healing circle] is nice [...] I hope I'm doing something right. I would need a guideline [...] I know you guys are experts so definitely appreciate your guidance." Participants were open and willing to learn, but not all necessarily feel emboldened as the experts in their own healing.

All of these reflections brought up additional questions: How can healing be done in a safe and sustainable way that helps participants meaningfully navigate discomfort? How can culturally relevant and diverse approaches, traditions, modes of healing and community building be included? How can it be done in a communal act of resistance rather than as an individualized act of self-soothing? How might it look when engaging multiple approaches, such as art-based and embodied healing methods, meditation, drama, poetry, music, movement, drawing, council, communal cooking and eating, and other traditional practices of community care? How can approaches from different traditions be done without perpetuating cultural appropriation? What trainings, tools, knowledge or models would help with this? How can we strike a balance for healing to take place in the workplace but also ensure organizations prioritize members making spaces outside of work for healing so as not to overlook the reality that most personal healing can't take place in the middle of a staff meeting? How can we intentionally create the appropriate boundaries of community care that happens in the workplace, such that urgent organizational goals and timelines are not usurped by personal healing work and yet the workplace is somewhere that people can arrive as their whole selves and feel supported when the work itself triggers trauma?

These questions led us to creating a 8-month *Know Justice, Know Peace* training institute for participants and a practitioner's manual[11] to provide more tangible knowledge, skills and practices to put into daily

[11] A summary of the 8-month *Know Justice, Know Peace* training institute and videos of some of the workshops are available for free at https://www.pitzer.edu/casa-pitzer. Another outcome of this work is the creation of a practitioner's manual and an anthology on these topics, which is currently being developed by a collection of healing justice scholar activists. Contact the authors for more information.

life of individuals and organizations. The questions also provide a roadmap for the work we have left to do. We hope that by sharing this research through this article we can contribute to and inspire future exploration, literature, and tools on these topics.

CONCLUSION

The work of our action research collective revealed important themes regarding community care, healing, and organizational development, illuminating challenges that community organizers face; and assets and practices they pull on to create meaningful work and communities. We found that within many social change organizations there is a dichotomy of fighting against oppressive systems, but also falling into many of the same toxic paradigms they are fighting against. There is a lived paradox of trying not to replicate the system but perpetuating hyper-productivity, fractured relationships, and debilitating stress because of the urgency and heaviness of what is directly impacting the community. Organizers are constantly working, constantly meeting deadlines, and constantly creating meaningful campaigns and services for social change, all for the betterment of the community but often at the expense of their own wellbeing. Learning how to invest in self, community, care and integration of values for wellness and justice within organizational policy, culture and structures continued to be the things that organizers wanted more knowledge, skills and practice around. As we continue to create these opportunities to explore and develop these things together, we are imagining a new world into being, one that can repair harms of our collective past, regenerate traditions of healing and wellness that have been robbed, forgotten or disposed of, and re-create new norms, structures and systems in which we can live our justice and wellness values for personal and collective liberation.

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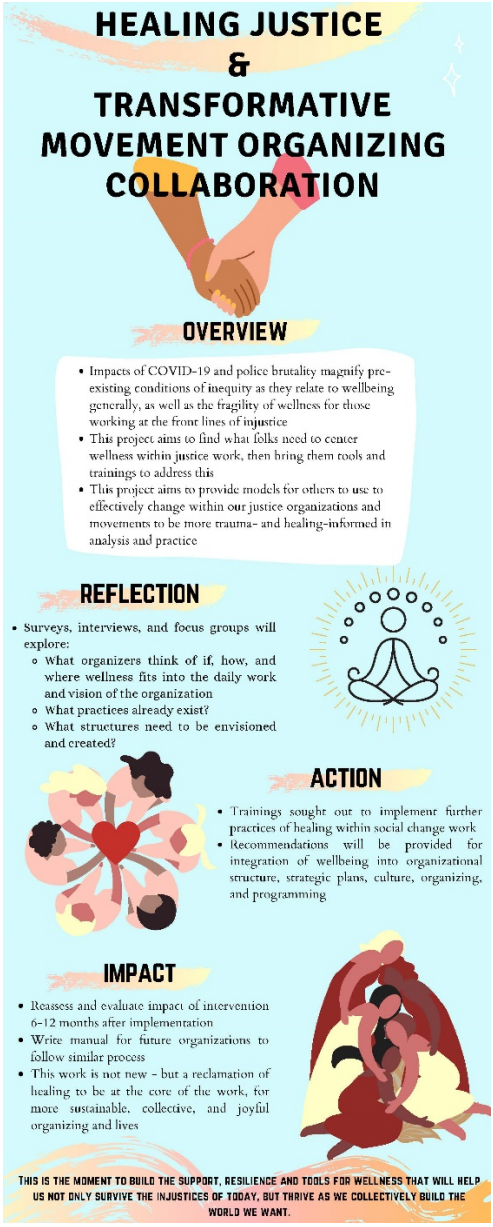
APPENDIX


HEALING JUSTICE
&
TRANSFORMATIVE
MOVEMENT ORGANIZING
COLLABORATION
OVERVIEW
• Impacts of COVID-19 and police brutality magnify pre-existing conditions of inequity as they relate to wellbeing generally, as well as the fragility of wellness for those working at the front lines of injustice
• This project aims to find what folks need to center wellness within justice work, then bring them tools and trainings to address this
• This project aims to provide models for others to use to effectively change within our justice organizations and movements to be more trauma- and healing-informed in analysis and practice
REFLECTION
• Surveys, interviews, and focus groups will explore:
◦ What organizers think of if, how, and where wellness fits into the daily work and vision of the organization
◦ What practices already exist?
◦ What structures need to be envisioned and created?
ACTION
• Trainings sought out to implement further practices of healing within social change work
• Recommendations will be provided for integration of wellbeing into organizational structure, strategic plans, culture, organizing, and programming
IMPACT
• Reassess and evaluate impact of intervention 6-12 months after implementation
• Write manual for future organizations to follow similar process
• This work is not new - but a reclamation of healing to be at the core of the work, for more sustainable, collective, and joyful organizing and lives
THIS IS THE MOMENT TO BUILD THE SUPPORT, RESILIENCE AND TOOLS FOR WELLNESS THAT WILL HELP US NOT ONLY SURVIVE THE INJUSTICES OF TODAY, BUT THRIVE AS WE COLLECTIVELY BUILD THE WORLD WE WANT.

Know Justice, Know Peace: Transformative & Justice Community Collective Project Overview

Project Focus:

- To explore and critically reflect on the challenges faced by justice-oriented, grassroots nonprofits, and the resources, tools and training that might enhance or actualize the work of heaing justice and transformative movent organizing on personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels

3 Major findings:

- Organizational staff demonstrated deep love and passion for fighting injustice and creating structural change by living out values and establishing sense of community and collectivism in their work
- Emotional connection to the work, sense of urgency and responsibility, and the impact of oppressive structural norms make it challening to integrate practices and policies that promote balance, wellness, and justice
- Desire for structural shift based on liberatory values (i.e. integrating restorative justice practices); community building through retreats focused on time off, rest, and collective joy; and guidance on healing-informed practices to promote collective and individual healing

How can we reimagine the world we want to live in?

Next Step:

- Trainings for organizational staff
  - We aim to provide a Practitioners Handbook to share resources with other justice organizationsTrainings for Organizational Staff
  - Scalable model
- Scalable Model
  - We aim to provde a Practitioners Handbook to share resources with other justice organizations

Partner Organizations:

- Critical Action & Social Advocacy, CASA Pitzer
- Inland Empire Coalition for Immigrant Justice
- Warehouse Worker Resource Center
- Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective
- Youth Mentoring Action Network
- Starting Over, Inc.
- Huerta del Valle

Guidance

Community Building

Resources for Practitioners:

- TRANS POC Coloring Book: a coloring book that promotes safety, healing, and love for trans people of color by people of color
- "Freeing Up Your Time for Transformation" Worksheet: a worksheet aimed to help prioritize tasks and time within organizational day/structure to leave room for transformation
- Meditation APP: a "personalized meditation audio program"
- "7 Tips for Managing Virtual Meetings with Care During a Pandemic": ways to ease transitions and adatopn to online meetings with self care in mind
- "White Supremacist Culture in Orgs": provides a "list of characteristics of white supremacy culture which show up in our organizations"
- "The Revolution Will Not be Funded": a critique of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex
- Sanvello APP: meditations, journaling, community, and therapy based on Cognitive Behavioral Theories


KNOW JUSTICE, KNOW PEACE: TJCC MID-TRAINING PROGRAM FINDINGS
1. Community Building, Connection, & Partnership
Participants created beautiful and meaningful connections in the main room, breakout rooms, and chat function, expressing their gratitude for each other and the community they have built with one another. We identified two subthemes: Storytelling as a Means of Building Community and Feeling Held, Appreciating Guidance and Community.
2. Vulnerability & Cross Solidarity
Participants open their hearts and allow themselves to support one another and encourage each other to also be vulnerable by echoing the sentiment and or sending messages of encouragement.
3. Daily Implementation
There were intentions to use and share practices from the training and workshops in their daily lives with others in their communities and work.
4. Heart-Centered Impact
These sessions and workshops have created spaces where participants can recognize their emotions, attend to them through learned practices, and feel the impact in their heart and center.
5. Recommendations for Future Workshops & Healing Practices
Participants have provided recommendations based on their interests for future sessions, such as connecting radical healing and transformation with racial (in)justice, increasing grounding and somatic exercises for emotional regulation, stress, and trauma; and, learning how to hold these spaces for others.