

REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMING THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

Addressing Toxicity in Non-Profits



RIGHTING
RELATIONS

JOHN HUMPHREY CENTRE
for **PEACE** and **HUMAN RIGHTS**

Acknowledgements

This is a heart-led project that we worked hard to put together and are joyful to share with you all.

We hope it brings peace, awareness, and inspiration to create visions to move forward as individuals and as a sector.

Thank you for engaging with this labor of love and joining hands in working for change.

You are not alone, we're all in this together.

With Love,
Reflections Team



Special thank you to [Allison Ochoa](#) who was commissioned for the artwork featured throughout. To explore the images in detail, [click here](#).

Allison is a multidisciplinary artist, musician and occupational therapist based in Edmonton; amiskwacîwâskahikan, in Treaty 6 Territory. Allison enjoys the challenge of graphic recording and is grateful for the opportunity to create a visual representation of this megaproject.

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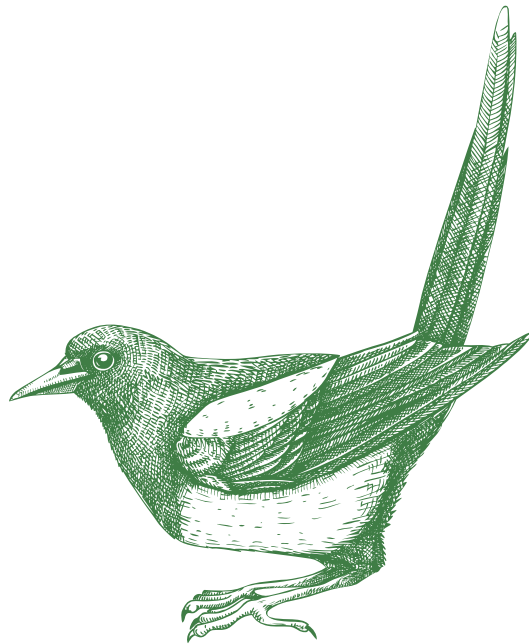
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A Magpie's Story



There once was a group of animals, each gifted in their own way. These animals met in the attic of an old house and together, they found many things in common. Love for their community and especially for the Young People, found them working together day after day. Soon they were travelling all over the Land making new friends and helping the Young People use their voices, align their hearts and mind, and, in special moments, even connect to their spirits. This work went on for many years. Some of the animals would get sick, and some went through times of sorrow but always the work was done. As time passed the animals' connections grew stronger. They shared many stories of their travels, often laughing hard and teasing each other. They made many friends and met many challenges, sometimes quarrelling amongst themselves, but always finding ways to help the Young People.

The Magpies, a flock of intelligent birds with love for The People, began to watch the animals closely. The flock became curious about these animals travelling around, always joyfully teasing, giving long speeches and working together as such an odd bunch. What made their circle so strong? Once, a hundred Magpies sat on the roof where the animals were gathered with the Young People. The birds listened carefully to what the animals' conversations with the Young People were all about. They liked what they heard. It was really humorous. Some Magpies began saying hello and became friendly with these special animals by greeting each of them in their own way. It was determined the animals' love for the Young People was at the heart of their Circle. The Magpies felt the same way.

At the Great Magpie Council, the Magpies decided they wanted to help this special team of animals. They were to be made family. Adoption in this sacred way meant that the Magpies would be part of the animals' important work. The Great Magpie Council wanted to add its gifts to the animals and strengthen their circle by making each of them a honorary Magpie. Making the animals Relatives meant that they could call on the Great Magpie Council when they needed guidance. They would all be given the same Magpie chatter and songs to unite them, even though each retained their own unique gifts and remained their own animal. It was a great blessing. All the animals had to do was commit to wearing the Magpie colours, hold a Feast and make offerings to the Great Magpie Council yearly.

So, it was.

After the adoption ceremony, the animals built a solid Magpie nest. The newly gifted animals continued their journeys, happily learning the Magpie songs and being guided in the spirit of their new relations. Camping with the Young People and commitments to visit yearly during certain seasons happened for many years. The health of the Young People was always the priority and the best times were spent sharing and laughing in friendly relations with the animals, the honorary Magpies. Much work was completed and even a few lives were saved in the process.

Unfortunately, it did not last long enough. A Big Seagull was tasked with caretaking the territory the Magpies had built their nest in, and they were jealous of the Magpies. This Big Seagull did not value the Magpies or even know much about their work except that their nest was in its territory: a territory that Big Seagull's father had invaded, and bullied the natural Eagle leaders out. Big Seagull would never admit they didn't have any right being in the area, or that Seagulls had only run it for two generations, so they didn't really know what they were doing.

Nevertheless, Big Seagull strutted around loud and awkward, ordering every element, animal, plant and tree to grow. As if a tree needs to be told! It was quite silly. Big Seagull didn't like the Magpies at all. They were getting so much attention, for they were very much beloved, always singing. Big Seagull also did not like the Magpies' chatter. They were so loud!

The Magpies took turns coming up with ways to make the territory safer and created ideas to share more resources from their territory with the Young People. Their chatter never stopped. Big Seagull did not like being asked for anything and really hated it when the Magpies sang in front of others living in the territory. In fact, Big Seagull was actually Sick Seagull because they were so full of ego. Soon the trees, the waters, the winds and other elements in the territory began to see what the Magpies could see in Sick Seagull. They could also see how the Magpies worked together and used their songs and chatter to confront Sick Seagull asking them to stop being so bossy and rude to the territory. Some of these elements became brave and began singing their own songs. This made Sick Seagull even more angry and vengeful. They knew unity was their ultimate threat, if they could not get the Magpies to be quiet.

So, Sick Seagull bribed, lied and made false promises to carry out their evil plan: to be rid of the Magpies. A nearby flock of geese who also had much love for the Young People, had some leaders who went along with the plan. Sick Seagull promised these Geese time with the Young People, plus the shade of the tree the Magpies had their nest in. In return the Geese leaders watched hopefully without a honk of warning to their fellow birds. You see, Sick Seagull had learned from their Grandfathers the divide and conquer tactic. They applied that twisted teaching well. A few other creatures pretended they didn't know what was going on and stick to that lie even today. Some were fearful of Big Bully Sick Seagull and made their choice to harm the Magpies by that. Most were simply fooled.

It took many rotations of the Earth and lots of shadow weaving, but Sick Seagull managed to get everything ready. Without a thought to the Young People, a violent attack was launched upon the Magpie nest. In one single stroke, the nest fell from the tree and was destroyed. Every single Magpie lost their head. The spirit of the Magpies survived, but Sick Seagull had planned so well that the Magpies could tell no one of the violence they experienced or they would be punished and banned from the territory completely. They were not to chatter; not to sing. Even worse, Sick Seagull squawked to the entire territory that they had finally taken the Magpies' advice to share and were starting with their resources. They tried to pass off what they did to The Magpies as good! Sick Seagull told all who would listen that the Magpies nest was taken down so it could be moved and the resources shared with another territory. It was not true. They wanted to hoard the resources for themselves and try to steal the Magpies' blessings. The worst of it was the severing of relationships to the Young People who were counting on The Magpies, their visits and their special Medicine. The fact that this loss is not yet acknowledged is the deepest of the Magpies wounds.

Lots of the elements, some Young People and many other animals in the territory could see the lies and felt the loss. They became angry and sad too. Magpies have a lot of friends. Friends who used their gifts to chatter, honk, roar and claw at Sick Seagull and their helpers. One Goose even pleaded to their leaders to fly up in formation and help make known what Sick Seagull was doing. That didn't happen but the Magpies appreciate her efforts. She is a true friend. Of the Warrior kind. Some elements, Elder animals, and even a few who were beheaded long ago held meetings to plan a revolt. They wanted to circle the nest and empty tree to let everyone know what had happened. It was the Magpies who decided against this. The Magpies were made fearful. Plus during this time, a new and great sickness began taking lives across the Land. This worldwide sickness detracted attention away from the plight of the Magpies and the Magpies themselves agreed this was right. After all, what's a few Magpie heads rolling then the world is on fire?

The Magpies did try one special strategy though. Refusing to carry hatred in their hearts, the Magpies tried using Medicine as their GrandMothers had taught them. They gathered their Tobacco and using an Eagle Whistle, they called out to a Golden Eagle known for his strong call and ability to help The People. "Help us! The Seagull is lying and has unfairly taken our heads. The Young People will be hurt!" chattered two Magpies, who were tasked to signal the Golden Eagle. Hearing them, Golden Eagle nodded respectfully as he flew over them in a circle. He answered, "I believe you but there is nothing I will do on your behalf." Learning this answer and realizing no help was coming, the Magpies reconciled to take care of each other and trusted that the truth would one day surface.

Today, a few strands of the nest are left. It will never return to that same tree and it will never be as it was. It will not be able to serve the Young People with the same medicines as it once had and the knowledge of the Time of the Magpies is fading. It is a very sad tale indeed.

However, not all is lost. The Magpies quickly recognized the divide and conquer tactic that Sick Seagull was using: by destroying their nest and their livelihood, they hoped the birds would fight each other out of shock and desperation. The Magpies, having a true connection, refused and decided to grow new heads instead. It was painful for each of them. Some Magpies' heads grew back quickly, exactly the same, as the head chopped off. A few heads grew back as a completely different animal and some heads are still growing back very slowly to this day. It is a difficult thing to grow back your own head! It takes courage to feel the feelings of a beheading. For some, a deep inventory of the heart was needed.

One saw it as a rite of passage, a few accepted it for it was, “business as usual in Seagull territory.” Others had the love of their families to cheer their heads into growing. The dearest friends, outraged for the Magpies, also brought healing through continuous dancing, praying and humourous mockery of those who initiated the violent attack. Endless fantasies of revenge were plotted. Revisions were made over long flights and after soaring with anger and rage the Magpies would always settle on the ground, remembering their medicines, thankful they still had each other and the elements, plants and animals they called friends. They did their best to let their hatred go. For all of the Magpies, long hours of reflection and many conversations with friends and accomplices brought about the sprouting of their new head. For they were not the first to lose their heads, only the most recent. Many tales of beheadings in Seagull territory exist and Magpies know to believe each of them now. There is revelation and comfort in this, knowing many animals regrow heads, and sharing our stories promotes this growth.

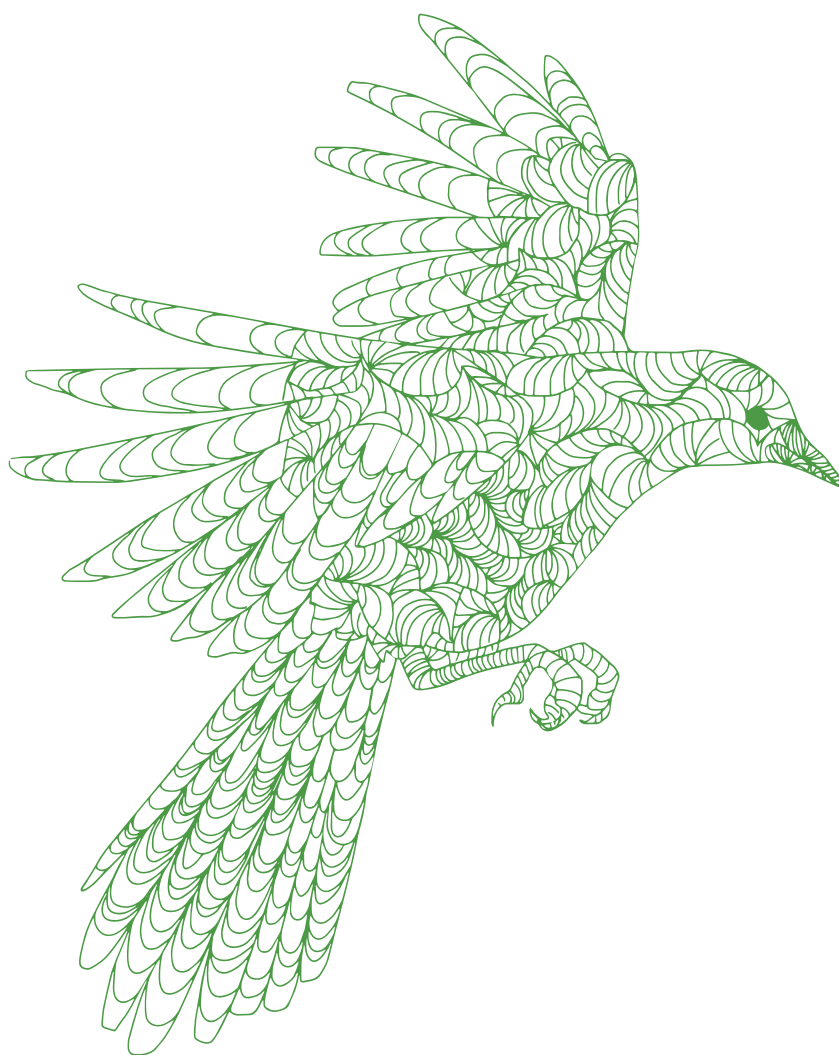
It is one such Magpie with a head still growing who writes this. For me, hope survives as long as the spirit of the Magpies live. The songs we sang to the Young People are catchy tunes, and many Young People sing them fully in their hearts now. All the Magpies' work, the lessons, memories, and time spent together mean that us Magpies have a sense of what being spirit-led genuinely means. We continue to be true and respect what was gifted to us. We gather in special times. The colours are worn proudly and the offerings are still made. You see, the Magpie Grand Council saw in us qualities of themselves that, in their wisdom, they knew we would need.

Magpies can learn and adapt quickly. We often fly out in mischievous pairs and are fine on our own too. We are intelligent beautiful scavengers who will eat garbage to digest the sickest of animals in order to neutralize them. We are jokesters who can adapt and rebuild. Magpies are unable to keep quiet and are known for their ability to remember long after a fact. This story and the following reflection toolkit are creative examples of that.

You see, the occupiers, the colonizers, their co-opted allies, and those complicit in the violence against the Magpies have lost as well. They have surrendered their integrity and gotten the blood of the Youth on their hands. In moments of compassion, I imagine their hearts working and the shame they could feel. I can thank them, too, for they have awoken Warriors. Some of us will never be oblivious to colonial strategy again. Also, most hopeful of all, the Young People we helped over all those years have their own voices.

They are growing into leaders of their communities. The Great Magpie Council still watches these things and offers blessings to the spirit-led. Hope continues. All Magpies, new and old continue to sing for the Young People.

Despite the losses, the learnings from this painful experience inspire. In fact, it is a rite of passage for Two Spirit, Queer, Transgender, Black, Indigenous and other Racialized People (2SQTBIIR): to be decapitated by colonizers who can never complete their mission. It is an Ancestral knowledge passed down through the generations. Now, we do not doubt it. We trust our instincts. We can recognize a Sick Seagull easily. When we suspect treachery we know the friends to call. No matter the grief, our spirits remain intact, actually stronger, and we have learned to tend to our fires, to build from within. We create our own resources now.





“Reflection is the lamp of the heart. If it departs, the heart will have no light.”

Imam ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād

“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.”

Desmond Tutu

“Non-profit organizations, who are the organized voice of civil society, are handcuffed.

An increasingly marketized, professionalized, and bureaucratized sector acts less and less as a voice for the community and more as simply a cheap delivery arm of the state.

The non-profit sector is used to responsabilize community, family, and individuals to take on a greater portion of caring work, particularly the work that serves marginalized and vulnerable individuals forgotten by the private market.”

Meghan Joy and John Shields

Introduction

In March 2020, at the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights' (JHC) *Human Rights Facilitator Training*, members of the Righting Relations National Network of Adult Educators for Social Change shared some of their difficult experiences working within Non-Profit Organizations. This conversation led to the creation of the **Righting Relations Non-Profit Organizations (NPO) Transformation Working Group** [now, **Righting Relations Non-Profit Sector (NPS) Change Lab**], a group of Righting Relations (RR) members with years of experience working in the non-profit sector and inspired by the urgent need to explore the challenges of the sector and strengthen spaces of healing, resistance and transformation within the work we do. Members of this Working Group are driven to identify strategies that encourage non-profits to adopt decolonizing, heart-centered practices that meet the needs of people and workers.

At the onset of our work, the NPO Working Group created a survey to capture the challenging experiences of other RR members working within non-profit organizations, the coping mechanisms they have used to deal with those difficulties, and the healthier, transformative ways of being in non-profits. The results of this survey have guided us in prioritizing topics for further exploration and creating tools and strategies for collective creation and transformation. We have found much validation and healing in the act of sharing these common experiences, and we wanted to move forward to address this toxicity, offer support, and find effective strategies with others working in the sector.

Our strategy with the survey and with this document is to walk a road that starts with recognizing problems, identifying ways of resisting and surviving, and proposing and enacting ways of transforming our current realities within the non-profit sector.

Even though we recognize that the survey and the toolkit are not exhaustive in revealing and addressing the wide range of oppressive practices and the violence lived in the non-profit sector, this document invites you (board members and staff¹ of non-profit organizations) to engage with the Righting Relations network's collective wisdom and experience shared in those surveys and the reflection and analysis of the NPS Change Lab to think about what you are living. Our hope is that through this guided reflection, we will become more aware of the nuances of colonial models of charity work, we will validate each other's difficult experiences, inspire each other to act, contribute to stopping harm, strengthen ourselves as individuals to do the important work we do, and, overall, explore a decolonial model of transformation of non-profit organizations and the sector at large. Please take the time to engage with the material in mindful ways and avoid treating it as a checklist.

If you are interested in further exploring the findings that emerged from the survey, its methodological details, and finding direct quotes from participants' responses that inspired and ground this toolkit, you can access it through the following link: the survey was disseminated as an internal document for Righting Relations members in 2021 and is now [publicly available to support engagement with this Reflection Toolkit \(click here\)](#).



¹ We use "staff" and "workers" almost interchangeably.

White Supremacy 101

There are many writings and reflections about whiteness and white supremacy that have been shared since the 1950s when Franz Fanon discussed the challenges of ideological decolonization, and later in the 1990s, when important developments in the understanding of the structural works of whiteness were unveiled by several scholars and activists. The intention of this document is not to carefully explore the development of this body of literature and practice but rather to create a brief framework that helps us think through the existence of whiteness and white supremacy in the non-profit sector. There is no need for us to rephrase what has recently been clearly and powerfully defined and described by authors such as Gebhard, McLean and St. Denis in their edited book, *White Benevolence: Racism and Colonial Violence in the Helping Professions*. The ideas in this book are thought-provoking and having been written in the context of the “helping” professions in Canada, their definitions and examples resonate well with what the respondents of the survey expressed. Thus, we will use their thoughts and research to briefly immerse ourselves into framing what white supremacy is and how it acts.

Gebhard, McLean, and St. Denis begin by establishing the interlocking system formed by colonialism, racism and whiteness. These three interconnected systems of power encompass, justify, and maintain “all of the various relations of power that [arise] from the domination of one racial group over another.”² While racism acts as those unquestioned, generally accepted set of ideas, values, and norms that justify colonialism, whiteness can be described as those beliefs that white man is the “predestined master of the world”, as described by Fanon (1963).³

2 Ware (2015) in Gebhard A., McLean, S., and St. Denis, V. (2022). *White Benevolence: Racism and Colonial Violence in the Helping Professions*. (p.6).

3 Ware (2015) in Gebhard A., McLean, S., and St. Denis, V. (2022). *White Benevolence: Racism and Colonial Violence in the Helping Professions*. (p.6).

This belief is not only “embodied and maintained by white people; however they benefit exponentially” from the existing white supremacy structures. Therefore those widely accepted racist values, norms, and ideas that are present in all structures and social relations in our society are not only accepted, they are spread by white people. This is a really important characteristic because it helps us understand why we must reflect on and understand how we are all accomplices complicit in transmitting and validating these ideas that benefit white people directly while devaluing, overlooking and hurting primarily Indigenous and Black people.

Based on Cancelmo and Mueller (2019) and Frankberg (1993), Gebhard, McLean, and St. Denis describe whiteness as a “social identity that is positioned as superior to other races within a system of racial hierarchy,” and that has “three interrelated dimensions” that we will paraphrase as follows:

- Structural advantages that translate into a wide range of privileges. These unearned advantages that are “natural” to white people are cumulative and intersect all their lives (higher wages, access to education and protection in the justice and legal system, given standards of beauty and ability, etc.).
- As a belief or idea, whiteness is also a standpoint or a vantage place from “which to look at oneself, others and society.”⁴ Therefore, we can value and judge ourselves and our relations through the lens of whiteness, even if we are not white. However, if we do not experience the advantages of whiteness, it is more likely that our experiences show us the injustice embedded in these systems more clearly than if we were white.
- It has also become a set of uninterrogated “cultural practices” that guide a way of being in the world and that are associated with concepts such as professionalism, neutrality, normal, Canadian, individualism, etc.

4 Ware (2015) in Gebhard A., McLean, S., and St. Denis, V. (2022). White Benevolence: Racism and Colonial Violence in the Helping Professions. (p.7).

White Supremacy in the Non-Profit Sector



White supremacist violence, rampant in every facet of society, is also a factor in the non-profit sector. It is omnipresent, with many people acting as vessels. Before we can begin to transform the sector, we need to unpack how white supremacy manifests through the current structure and lateral violence between workers.

Hierarchy

"Hierarchical structures limit the possibilities of engaging and resolving problems in creative ways and in serving the needs of the employees."

Survey Participant

Board(s) of Directors

In most non-profit organizations in Canada, the board of directors is responsible for governance, policymaking, hiring the executive director, providing direction, supporting management, and protecting the organization's assets. Participants in the survey describe problematic experiences with boards in several ways. They describe them as "oblivious and unaware," "unsupportive," primarily of management and staff, and lacking an understanding of both workers and the community that the organization supports. Some boards are described as "condescending and abusive," and respondents explained that boards

are “reactive” in situations that they do not fully understand and “overstep” their functions. Respondents also shared experiences of raising urgent or time-sensitive matters, i.e., policies or direction, being in dire need of attention from their board, and finding them “slow” and “dysfunctional” in their responses, for example, struggling to find times to meet. Other respondents identified boards’ lack of awareness of both the organization and workers’ workloads as an issue, noting that because of this, some boards will micromanage or add unnecessary tasks that further burnout people.



Board Reflection Questions

For Staff

- Do you know the board of directors of your organization?
- Are the values and beliefs that guide the board's work congruent with the organization's values or position statements?
- How do they see their role, and how do they engage with staff?
- Are they part of the community the organization serves?

For Board Members

- Have you taken the time to meet staff members? If not, how can you address that gap?
- How often do you attend the events of the organization?
- What experiences and perspectives do you bring to the governance of the organization?
- Which experiences/identities are not represented in the board, and how does the board strengthen recruitment among those?

For Management

- What strategies are available in your organization for board members and staff to reach out to each other and know each other?
- What strategies do you use to communicate the everyday work of the organization to the board members?

Management

Under the category of “management,” we have grouped all references to “leadership,” “executive directors,” and “management.” This is an interesting category because two of the respondents shared their experience as Executive Directors (EDs) who primarily struggled to navigate their relationship with boards. However, other respondents’ responses spoke of the lack of training and experience of EDs and other management staff in dealing with interpersonal conflict (e.g., lack of conflict transformation skills), “psychological safety,” and “violence prevention measures.” EDs, some respondents argue, have little understanding of the community that the organization works with, and some “do not care about clients.”



NPO Working Group members support these concerns and believe that capacity building and training in this regard is crucial at all levels, including within our organization[s]. In other responses, EDs are described as “lacking transparency,” paying “lip service,” and “being passive-aggressive” to workers. Leadership, however, is also described as “overworked” and “burnt out,” which contributes to difficult relationships with staff. Importantly, in a couple of responses, participants pointed out how hierarchical structures⁵ limit the possibilities of engaging and resolving problems in creative ways and in serving the “needs of the employees.”

5 A hierarchical structure is typical for larger businesses and organizations. It **relies on having different levels of authority with a chain of command connecting multiple management levels within the organization**. The decision-making process is typically formal and flows from the top down.

Management Reflection Questions

For Staff

- What is the board or the organization's process of conflict resolution?
- What is the key to maintaining your psychological safety?

For Board Members

- What are the capacities and training of the ED?
- What is the ED's workload, and how many hours a week are they putting in? Is this sustainable?

For Management

- What is the key to maintaining your psychological safety?
- Are your values and beliefs congruent to those of the organization's values or position statements?

White Supremacy Culture

Within this category are values and characteristics of the NPO sector that survey respondents identified as **justifying oppression, discrimination, and the marginalization of people.**

Respondents talked about organizations within which the expectation of “professionalism” is used as a tool of manipulation or control. In these instances, workers are expected to control their emotions, address only certain topics when they engage in casual conversations with coworkers, and dress in specific ways, all of which encourage people to be “fake.”

Respondents also elaborated around “lip service” being paid to diversity whilst only a few staff members are Indigenous and/or Black, or other racialized peoples (BIR), Persons Living with Disabilities, or members of gender and/or sexually expansive communities. In some responses, there are also references to the patronizing treatment of BIR staff and ableism within organizations. The focus and values associated with managing budgets and finances were identified in the survey as resulting in lower wages and a lack of appropriate

compensation for non-profit workers in comparison to skill and industry standards.

The lack of sufficient, stable funding which could guarantee the administrative, operational, or managerial functions of the organization was also referred to as a cause of distress, with some respondents left unsure if the essential work they do was secure. Funding insecurity was also described as contributing to the fact that workers and managers tend to treat other non-profit organizations with similar missions as rivals rather than partners or collaborators.



White Supremacy Culture

The current model of funding for non-profits allows governments to reduce the budget allocated to provide services to essential community services, well-being, and other social programmes without attracting attention because it is distributed amongst several agencies in small pockets. Thus, government austerity measures have a larger impact on services supporting the well-being of racialized, low-income, and marginalized communities. This funding model also causes austerity thinking to trickle into non-profit management styles, creating and reinforcing oppressive, hierarchical structures due to labour uncertainty, the precarity of

work, and the control of scarce and insecure resources.

The survey responses make it clear that white supremacy culture permeates the policies and processes used by many non-profit organizations. White supremacy does not refer only to the skin colour of the people who lead or work in the organization; it primarily refers to the language, values, principles, and ways of thinking that embody, uphold, and advance the inequality, violence, and oppression of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people, and works to keep Whiteness as the dominant power at the expense of all others.

These characteristics, whether language, values, or perspectives, are reflected in the everyday work and interactions in non-profit organizations. White supremacy in non-profits is a vehicle for values that are damaging and create toxicity in organizations and in individuals. It is important to point out that white supremacy always exists in alliance with colonialism: colonial powers are created by white people. To decolonize the non-profit sector, we have to see and challenge white supremacy.



Visible Characteristics of White Supremacy⁶

- 
- Perfectionism
 - Paternalism
 - Objectivity
 - Individualism
 - Defensiveness
 - Either/Or Thinking
 - Austerity Thinking⁷
 - Power Hoarding
 - Sense of Urgency
 - One Right Way
 - Quantity over Quality
 - Concentration of Power
 - Worship of the Written Word
 - Fear of/Aversion to Open Conflict
 - Discomfort as Unsafety/Right to Comfort
 - Accountability as Antagonism/Aggression
 - Progress is Bigger/More (Growth Mentality)
- 

6 Dismantling Racism Works, adapted by The Centre for Community Organizations. (2019). White supremacy culture in organizations. Dismantling Racism Works. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from <https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/toolbox/white-supremacy-culture-organizations>

7 Bhattacharyya, G. (2015). "Austerity and Extending the Racial State." Crisis, Austerity, and Everyday Life. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137411129_4

White Supremacy Reflection Questions

Can you think about ways in which white supremacy exists in your work or organization?

How does the previous list of values deepen racism, sexism, classism, ableism and other forms of oppression? Do you feel complicit in it [within your organization], and if so, how?

Which of the white supremacist values is the most present for you and your organization? Keep in mind that these values are interrelated and cannot be divorced from each other.

The Nature of NPO Work and Working Conditions

The non-profit sector is described by participants as a sector in which workers' passions and identities are profoundly connected with the organization where they work. Ergo, it is important to look deeper into the responses to understand the work environment and how it affects individuals who are committed to the organizational values and cause.

Unmanageable Workloads

In our survey, Righting Relations members shared being “stressed,” “burnt out,” “overworked,” and feeling “compassion fatigue” as part of their experiences working in non-profits. Both workers and management described their unmanageable workloads as negatively impacting their physical and mental well-being and the capacity of organizations to fulfill their mission. Furthermore, “overworked people” is described by participants as one of the causes of toxic relationships within the sector.

Funding and Finances

Most certainly, the ways in which non-profit organizations are funded create a lot of challenges in the workplace. Respondents connected funding to several problems within the organization. They told us that funding restrictions impact workers' training and the resources available. They also identified that the “poor pay” non-profit workers receive compared to other sectors and the lack of job security, benefits, and pension plans, create a lot of anxiety, job insecurity and staff turnover. Furthermore, the contrast of funding limitations with increasing community demands creates the perfect storm for a sector that is overworked and underpaid. Respondents also shared how the sources of funding limit the impact of the work, noting that non-profit organizations are compelled to “sanitize” their language and people's stories to avoid displeasing funders.

Reflection Questions

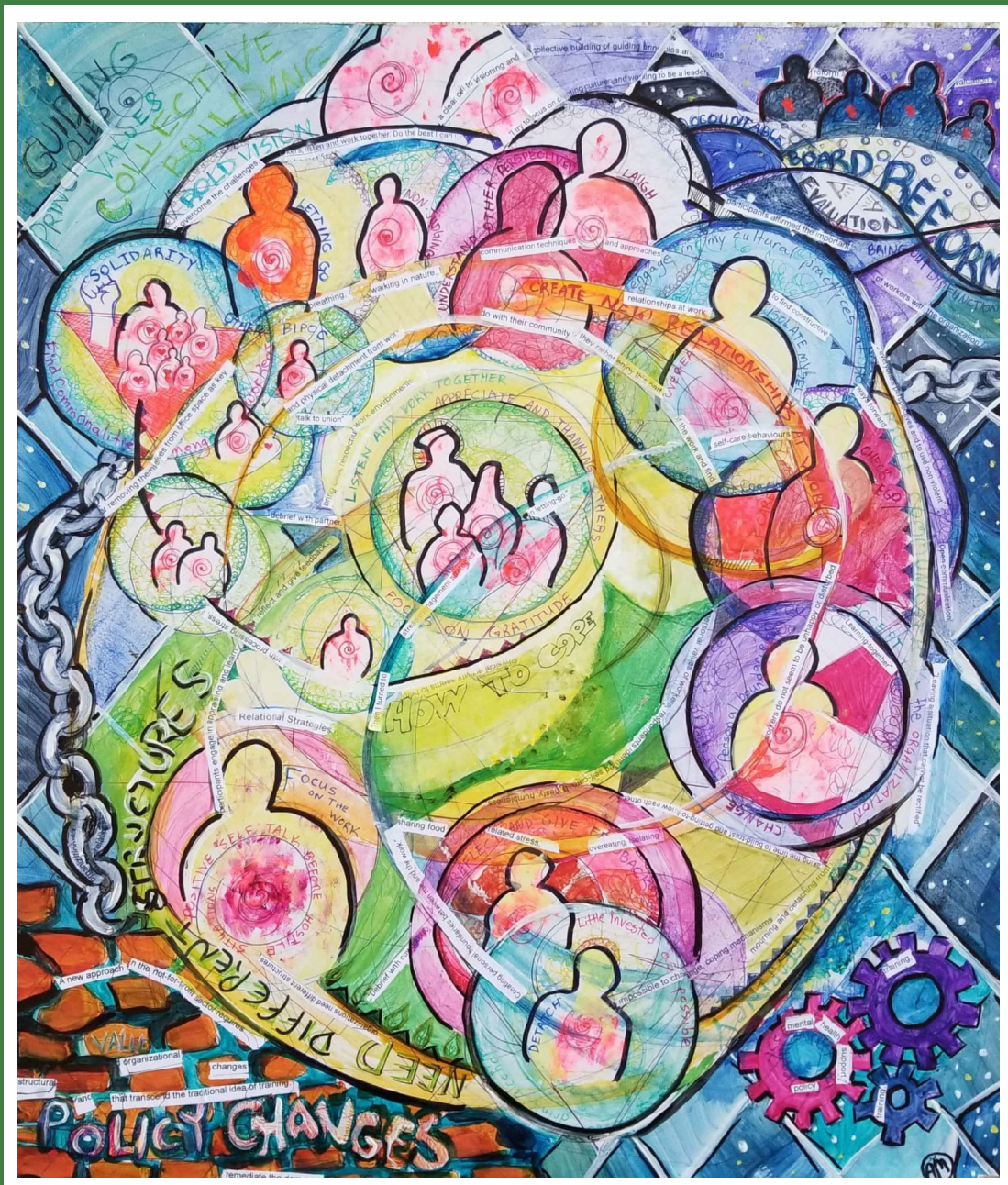
- What are ways that these systemic situations can be challenged in your organization?
- If you are in a position to enact change(s), how would you address them?

Release Your Feelings

Now, let your feelings/frustrations out. A rant? Some scribbling? Drawing a picture? Mockery or name calling? Feel free!

How do these systems affect you in your work? How do they play out in the organization? How do they impact the team?

Individual and Collective Coping Mechanisms



"More communication, less firewalls. More transparency, less backroom conversations. More control to those who know their jobs. More bold vision for what our orgs can be."

Survey Participant



"I turned to stress management strategies to manage my symptoms and focused on letting go. This helped my stress levels but damaged my sense of worth. Now I try to focus on creating cultures and working to be a leader who can recognize that organizations need different structures that aren't as conducive to power dynamics and divisions between board and staff."

Survey Participant

"Laughter at the absurdity, solidarity with other BIPOC, washroom breaks, overeating, isolating myself at work, positive self talk before hostile situations (meetings), engage in my own cultural practices at home and never sharing with coworkers, being as little invested as possible and drinking alcohol."

Survey Participant

Coping strategies are described as processes that are "integral to adaptation and survival."⁸ Also referred to as coping mechanisms, they are used by "people to detect, appraise, deal with, and learn from stressful encounters."⁹ The increased levels of stress in the non-profit sector demand that workers make sense of the situation and explore ways to individually or collectively face challenges. Respondents to this survey mentioned many coping strategies, and the NPO Team divided them into three groups: individual, relational, and organizational coping mechanisms.

⁸ Encyclopedia of the Human Brain. (2002). "Coping Strategies." Retrieved April 15, 2020 from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/coping-strategies>

⁹ Encyclopedia of the Human Brain. (2002). "Coping Strategies." Retrieved April 15, 2020 from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/coping-strategies>

Individual Coping Strategies

Individual coping strategies are primarily mentioned by survey participants as ways of dealing with stress and protecting oneself whilst working. One of the main ways respondents described dealing with stress is by focusing on work. **Workers do not seem to be unhappy or disturbed by the needs of clients and the work they do with their communities; they enjoy this part of the work and find fulfillment in it.** Non-profit workers are usually passionate about their work, and focusing on the well-being of clients and communities gives them hope.

Mindfully incorporating self-care into routines and modifying personal conduct at work were also shared as part of respondents' personal strategies to cope with work-related stress. When referring to self-care, respondents mentioned different kinds of physical activity, such as walking in nature, breathing exercises, or removing themselves from office

space, as key strategies they incorporated.

When their situation is understood as "impossible to change," coping mechanisms described by participants are related to emotional and physical detachment from work and mourning and separating oneself from the organization. Thus, coping becomes about removing themselves and accepting they cannot change the situation: "stop being invested," "do not share their cultural practices," "accept that the organization won't change," and "letting go."

Finally, there are also individual coping strategies related to modeling and creating new relationships at work:

"Not [engaging] in personal attacks," "check EGO," "understanding other perspectives involved," "not judging," "appreciating and thanking others," "focusing on gratitude," "reflect and give feedback."

Reflection Questions

How do one's coping mechanisms impact solidarity and commitment to Community?

How do they impact your commitment to your work?

Organizational Coping Strategies

Organizational strategies are those actions that participants in the survey described as creating and engaging in to promote organization-wide changes to overcome challenges: policy changes, board reform and evaluation, and visioning are a few organizational coping strategies that have been tried by the surveyees.

When referring to training, participants stressed the importance of training new staff within the organization. One participant noted that staff must be “properly trained to do their job and have access to mental health support.” When the organization is facing difficulties and tensions arise, there is the need to bring in outside support and training. Some organizations do not have the skills to address mental health, remediate the damage and/or bring back respectful work environments.

Wellness and mental health policies are fundamental to the work of NPOs. Thus, there should be a practice of calling in and reminding people when current policies are not followed, inviting staff and community feedback about necessary policies and practices,

such as including mental health and wellness days.

Boards, as mentioned by some of the participants, must be evaluated and accountable. These responses highlight the importance of annual board gatherings, as well as anonymous board evaluations and self-evaluations.

Finally, a clear call to visioning and the collective building of guiding principles and values is important in transforming challenging and toxic situations and building stronger non-profit organizations. In addition, being bold and open to envisioning the work of each one of our non-profit organizations and imagining a heart-led non-profit sector with healthy organizations is key.



Heart-Centered: A Righting Relations Pillar

Righting Relations envisions a collective and heart-centered approach as one that is founded in dialogue, where we pay attention and care to the processes we use and build deep, kin-like support networks. Being heart-led means being radically inclusive, building trust, relationships and safe spaces, and validating and building upon people's emotional, cultural, embodied, and spiritual knowledge. In emotions, body, mind and spirit, we recognize multiple ways of knowing.

Righting Relations defines heart-centered as embodying and cultivating hope, creativity, and wholeness in our reflection and analysis. We recognize the importance of self-care, healing, and community support in sustaining popular educators.

Being heart-led also means centering our work and relationships around the voices, experiences, and leadership of those who are marginalized on the basis of their race, gender and sexuality in white cisheteropatriarchal systems. In addition, heart-led work may sometimes find it necessary to hold closed spaces for folks with [a] shared identity/-ies.



Relational Coping Strategies

“Self-care is not a replacement for Community [care].”¹⁰

The Blurt Foundation

Under relational strategies, the team has grouped all coping mechanisms that refer to relationships at work. These strategies make reference to values that must guide working relationships such as “open communication and transparency,” solidarity and support among colleagues and racialized staff members, and organized ways to address injustice such as unions.

Relations are important because it allows people that are facing similar situations and might have similar experiences or perceptions to debrief and share their experiences. Validating our experiences as well as sharing coping strategies and exploring avenues for change within the organization are foundational to coping. We need to put time into building those relationships, and finding commonalities and allies.

Also, coworkers might have had direct experience or knowledge of internal complaint mechanisms or can serve as witnesses when complaining outside the organization. Using the available internal and external complaint mechanisms and processes

serves to document what is happening and to explore possible remedies to the situation(s).

Making a formal complaint is a difficult choice, but it is a path that can be worth walking if one feels prepared. It can attract a lot of attention on the complainant, but it has the potential to transform the situation or at least leave some record of what is happening for upcoming workers to build on those other cases. Even though complaint mechanisms did not appear in the survey as a coping strategy, we wanted to include it because complaints have the potential to change some of the most discriminatory practices in the sector. The NPO sector in general will also benefit from strengthening the complaint mechanisms to make them accountable. It is important to remember that the decision to make a complaint is a personal one; only you can decide whether you want to take that path. Whether or not you decide to submit a complaint, documenting experiences of toxicity, oppression, or violence in the workplace can still be valuable.

¹⁰ The Blurt Foundation. (2019). “Self-Care Isn’t a Replacement for Community Care.” Retrieved April 15, 2022 from <https://www.blurtitout.org>

Incident Documentation Tool

In many situations, when facing toxic environments, making the decision to complain is difficult because there is a lot at stake, and the toxicity at work harms our mental health. The **Incident Documentation Tool** is designed to help you document toxic, oppressive, or violent incidents and weigh your options in deciding how to move forward. You can make as many copies as you need and use them to document your experience every time you are facing a toxic, disrespectful or abusive situation at work. If you end up having to complain internally or launch a human rights complaint, this tool will help you build a record of all the things that have happened to you.

The incident tracking sheet can be used as evidence, or it can help you process what is happening in your organization, or both.

For example, if you find yourself filling out this documentation tool regularly, it may be an indicator that a formal complaint is needed or that you need more support.

Filing an internal complaint, or a Human Rights complaint, is not an easy process, but in addition to potentially finding a solution for you, it can benefit your colleagues and future workers at the organization.

On a larger scale and thinking collectively, every complaint filed is important because it can document patterns of abuse, creating a record that might help address future injustice. That said, you must always do what feels right for you.

There is no wrong decision.



Incident Documentation Tool

Incident #		Date:	
Describe what has occurred:			
What is the best thing about filing this complaint?		What is the worst thing about filing this complaint?	
What is the best thing about not taking action right now?		What is the worst thing about not taking action right now?	
Action to take at this time:			

Incident Reflection Activity

This reflection section is designed to support you in the process of creating or reaffirming coping mechanisms to navigate your current workplace situation.

Any course of action that you take to face the challenges in your organization is valid and should not be questioned. You should always do what you need to do and what is right for you. The following questions are not designed to pressure you to take any specific action but to support you in reflecting on what is available to you, what you want to do, and what you feel you need to act on:

What is/are the situation(s) that I am facing at work?

Who supports me, internally or externally to the organization? What kind of support can they offer?

Who can I communicate to? Is there a purpose in that communication other than debriefing?

What is the complaint protocol in my organization?

Who are the people in power accountable to? (e.g., board, community, staff)

Who can put pressure on the management of my organization?

Is this a case that can be brought to a Human Rights Commission?¹¹
Do I have the support systems and energy for this process?

What options for mediation processes/resources (e.g., anti-oppression education, healing circles, conflict resolution sessions) do I have access to?

¹¹ If you want to explore filing a Human Rights Complaint to seek remediation on discrimination that took place at your work place (NPO), review our complaint process tip sheet on page 20.

Complaint Process Tip Sheet

“Even what or who has been binned or buried can acquire a life. Those complaints in the graveyard can come back to haunt institutions. It is a promise.”¹²

Sara Ahmed

- Document personal accounts, screenshots, conversations, and the toll it takes on you. Save it all in a personal account or device that cannot be accessed by your employer.
- If you are approaching your organization’s human resources team, recognize your rights as workers (Occupational Health and Safety or Human Rights legislation in your province). If you have the support and capacity, discuss a strategy of this approach with a trusted person or advocate prior to going to human resources and always document the process (preparation, conversation and outcome).
- Use private channels. Do not use the organization’s communication channels to talk about your issues with coworkers/others.
- If you are approaching your organization’s Human Resources team, remember that “Human Resources are not your advocates. HR is not your friend; they protect the organization at the end of the day.” (NPS Change Lab team member)
- Non-profits are not traditionally unionized spaces. Find allies at work if you want to organize and join one. If you are unionized and you feel comfortable, seek their advice and support. Be wary that racism, discrimination and oppression exist in unions as well. Trust your instincts and seek out trusted advocates from outside the prescribed systems where possible.

12 Ahmed, S. (2018). “On Complaint.” 5/04/2022, Sara Ahmed: On Complaint - YouTube

Complaint Process Tip Sheet

Human Rights Complaints

Filing a Human Rights Complaint should be the last resort when you see no evidence that the situation can be solved internally, especially since your Human Rights Complaint is stronger if you can show that you have followed internal processes first. Keep in mind that employment practices fall under provincial jurisdiction, so if you do decide to file a Human Rights Complaint, you would have to file under the provincial Human Rights Office. You can find links to the Human Rights Office for each province and territory on the Canadian Human Rights Commission website. You might find it helpful to get familiar with the complaint form even if you have not made the decision to file a complaint.

For a Human Rights Complaint, you will have to demonstrate that you are or have been treated differently than other employees based on characteristics such as skin colour, family status, gender, gender identity, age, etc. Usually, you can only file a complaint for events that have happened within the last year, but keep in mind that the process takes a long time to be resolved (many years), so it will not be a short-term solution.

Although you do not need a lawyer to file a complaint, you might want to look for support in filling out the form. It needs to be written “objectively” and succinctly but still include many details. You may find that writing in this style, especially about traumatic events or experiences, is challenging, and having someone to support you can be valuable. There might be organizations in your province that offer support to file this kind of complaint or local community services that offer advocacy support.



Complaint Process Tip Sheet

Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)

An NDA, or a confidentiality agreement, is a legally binding contract between an employer and employee originally designed to protect the employer's confidential information by governing and limiting the use of information shared between people and/or organizations. NDAs are also known as confidentiality agreements (CA), confidential disclosure agreements (CDA), proprietary information agreements (PIA), secrecy agreements (SA), non-disparagement agreements, or release forms.

NDAs are used during the hiring and onboarding process to ensure that employees do not reveal an employer's trade secrets, even unintentionally. NDAs protect the employer and ensure that employees keep sensitive and proprietary information confidential. NDAs also ensure that employees do not take the employer's confidential and proprietary information and start a competing business or organization of their own. NDAs may take the form of a clause in an employment contract, or it may be its own standalone contract an employee is required to sign.

The key elements of an NDA are:

- The parties involved;
- The term of the agreement or time limitation (how long the NDA will last);
- Definition and scope of 'confidential' information, including what information is protected by the NDA;
- Any exclusions from confidentiality, including parties who already know the information; and,
- The legal remedy available if the NDA is breached by the employee, including financial penalties that the employee is required to pay.

Retain the advice of legal counsel before signing a nondisclosure agreement.

Complaint Process Tip Sheet

Unfortunately, NDAs have been used as part of termination packages as a tool to put pressure on workers and protect organizations from gaining a bad reputation; to silence people and victims of sexual harassment and assault; to prevent people from discussing toxic workplaces or any type of human rights violations; or, to seek remedy upon departure from the organization.

By limiting employees' options to discuss and/or report these violations, they perpetuate workplace sexual and verbal harassment, bullying, discrimination, etc. NDAs have become an effective way to prevent employees from lawfully reporting those practices and confine them to their job. NDAs can also suppress employee speech and stifle creativity, and there can be financial penalties for breaching an NDA not to mention the emotional costs.

NDAs take advantage of the economic insecurity of someone who is leaving their job with an uncertain employment future by buying their silence, preventing them from exposing the potentially toxic practices in the organization.

It is worth noting that in the US, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that employers cannot include blanket non-disparagement clauses in their severance packages nor demand laid-off employees keep secret the terms of their exit agreements, with the general counsel of the NLRB clarifying that the ruling is retroactive.¹³ This could potentially have implications here in Canada and reverberate worldwide.



¹³ This information comes from a clarifying memo issued by the NLRB Office of Public Affairs from General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo: "NLRB General Counsel Issues Memo with Guidance to Regions on Severance Agreements." March 22, 2023. See also Maxwell Strachan, "Non-Disparagement Clauses Are Retroactively Voided, NLRB's Top Cop Clarifies." *Vice*, March 24, 2023.

Complaint Process Tip Sheet

Getting a Fair Agreement

In order to protect their best interests and obtain a fair agreement, prospective employees may consider reviewing the NDA contract or clause contained within their employment contract for any discrepancies that may skew favourably towards the employer. Possible clauses to review include:

- Time limits of the NDA that go on for unreasonable amounts of time (for example, the employee's lifetime may raise a red flag);
- Broad language protecting the company rather than the confidential and/or private information forcing employees to be silent about anything to do with the employer;
- Provisions for damages which set out financial amounts to be paid by the employees in the event they breach the NDA; and,
- Arbitration clauses defining how any disputes between employer and employee are to be resolved, including choice of law and forum if multiple jurisdictions are involved. It might be considered a red flag if the arbitration clause requires that all disputes be resolved through private and confidential arbitration rather than a public forum or court of law.

Employees should ensure that any oral communication or agreement with the employer regarding the NDA is included in the contract before signing. If the terms of the NDA differ from what was discussed, the employee should clarify any discrepancy before signing. Upon signing, the contract is binding and legally enforceable.

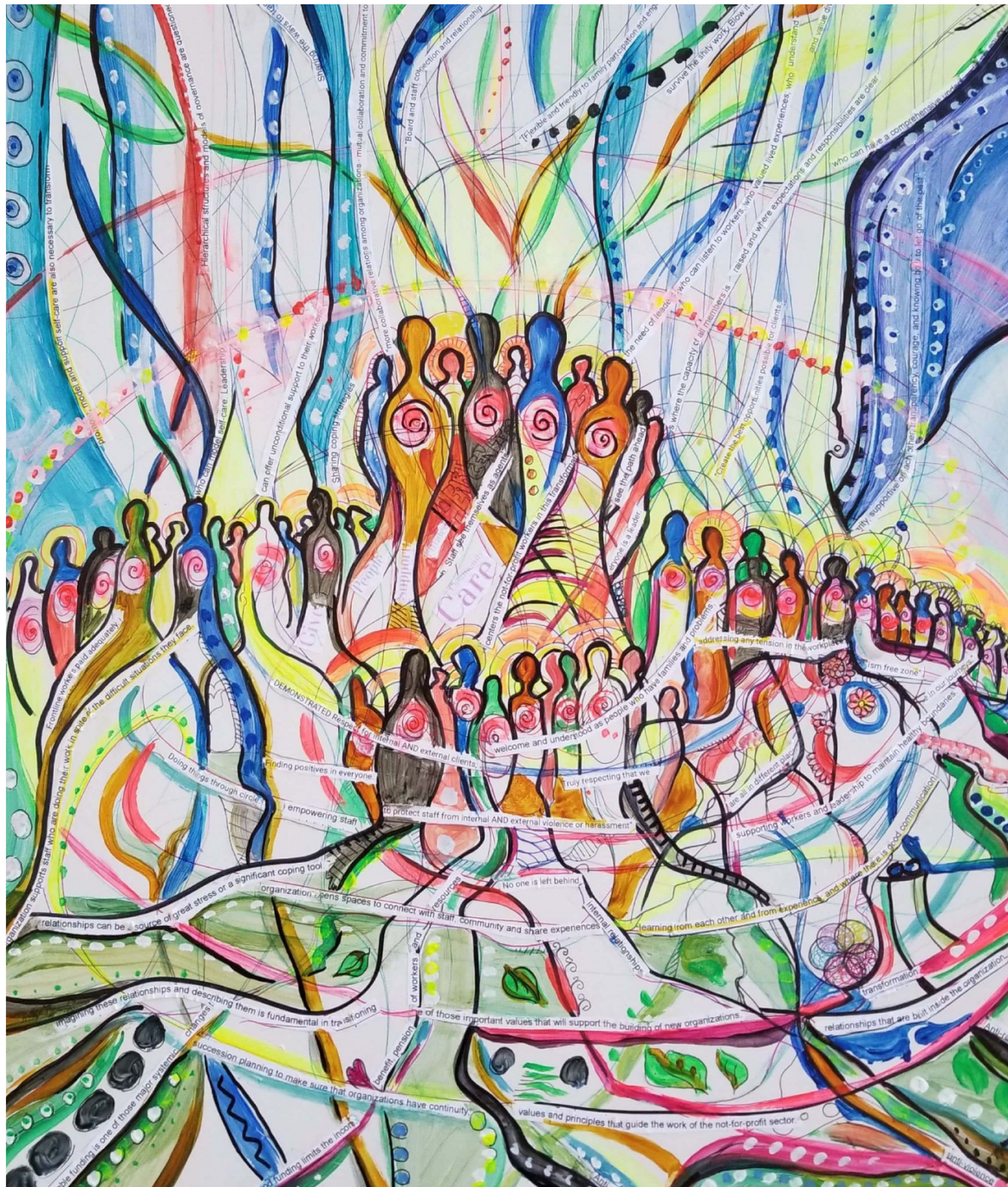


Release Your Feelings

Now, let your feelings/frustrations out. A rant? Some scribbling? Drawing a picture? Feel free!

What actions and decisions support/protect what you value most? What justice do you wish would happen?

Transforming the NPO Sector



Transforming the NPO Sector

At the end of the survey, to forge the path ahead, participants were asked to share their vision for the characteristics of an ideal non-profit organization. A word cloud of responses places the workers of the non-profit at the center of this transformation. Staff see themselves as agents in the transformation. Therefore, the most frequently used word from this question was “staff,” and it was always associated with the values, behaviours and capacities that staff or workers have, which they would like to root the organization in, as well as the things they still need to learn. As with the previous questions, we organized the data into three main groups.

- The first group of responses described the **changes needed to the values and principles that guide the work of the non-profit sector**. These values and principles are associated with the programs and services the organization should provide, the funding opportunities, the governance model, and the opposition to white supremacist values.
- The second group focused on **internal relationships**. In all responses, the relationships that are built inside the organization were identified as a key component of both coping and transformation, but also as a potential source of stress. Therefore, intentionally envisioning and describing these relationships is fundamental in transforming the non-profit sector.
- Finally, the third group of responses referred to **changes in structural and organizational relationships**. A new approach in the non-profit sector requires structural and organizational changes that transcend traditional ideas of training, supervision, and hierarchy.



Characteristics of an Ideal NPO



A word cloud generated from the responses of Righting Relations members participating in the nonprofit experience survey, 2019.

Changemaking Values and Principles

Some of the values mentioned in the survey are described as foundational to the work of a reimagined non-profit sector. Being an organization working towards and with an ethos of **decolonizing/decolonization** was related to being heart-centered and empowering staff and community members; avoiding hierarchical power and establishing a horizontal distribution of power; including and/or centering ceremony and equality; and respecting and valuing lived experience and evidence-based best practices.

When referring to respect, respondents talked about **respect** for each other as staff, the roles that each staff member plays, the moment each staff member is in, on their personal journey, and in addressing internal and external conflict. Anti-oppression was perhaps the most foundational value identified by 20% of respondents. However, it was often mentioned without further context or description. It would be insightful to explore the words and experiences associated with

anti-oppression in the following stages of this process. **Anti-racism and anti-violence policies and practices** were seen as important in protecting the team, as well as the clients and communities non-profit organizations work with and for. It was important to survey participants that non-profits create not only policies but reporting mechanisms to make sure action is taken when racist or violent incidents happen. When respondents mentioned anti-racism, it was usually paired with valuing diversity and inclusion.

People described diversity as making sure that there are BIPOC at all levels of the organization. Survey respondents found it important to mention not only that organizations recognize and organize around those values but that they adhere to them as principles. In other words, participants explained that those values should guide decision-making and the direction of the organization and the sector.

Reflection Questions

In terms of the **personal values of workers, respondents identified self-care, honesty, humility, integrity, community care, transparency, courage, and knowing how to let go** of the past, as some of the important values that will support the building of new organizations.

Which one of these values defines the ways you behave in your organization?

Which one of these values would you like to cultivate more?

Who in your organization upholds at least one of these values, and how do you acknowledge it?

Internal Relationships

Healthy and supportive relationships are fundamental to the transformation of the non-profit sector. For participants in this survey, relationships at work are foundational to the well-being of the sector, the organization they work with, and the people they serve. Thus, non-profit workers aspire to have a place of work that is free from “isms” i.e., racism, ableism, sexism, etc.; where staff are welcomed and understood as people who have families and problems; where there is a culture of learning from each other and from experience; where there is good communication;

and where the organization supports staff who are working in spite of the difficult situations they face. Therefore, organizations that promote, model and support self-care, and more importantly, community care, are also necessary to transform the sector.

Staff members should have time and space where they can build and strengthen relationships among themselves. Getting to know each other and cultivating relationships is foundational to their individual well-being and the well-being of the organization.



Structural And Organizational Changes

Work within the non-profit sector is described throughout survey responses as underpaid and unstable. The lack of secure funding is perhaps one of the major and main causes of stress amongst the sector leaders and workers.

Consequently, workers identify a shift towards secure, stable funding as a major but imperative systemic change within the non-profit sector. Participants shared that the lack of funding limits the incomes, benefits, and pensions of workers, as well as the resources necessary to do the work. Non-profits can become focused on chasing funds in an attempt to ensure stability and security for both staff and the organization as a whole, which may result in applying for funding that may not be best suited for the needs of their specific community. This funding structure is described as creating competition amongst non-profit organizations, making it difficult or impossible for emergent or grassroots non-profits to find funding when applying alongside larger and established organizations.

In regard to leadership, respondents talked about the need for leaders (executive directors, management, and boards) who listen to workers; who

value lived experiences; who understand and value diversity; who have a comprehensive understanding of equity; who can offer adequate support to their workers; and who can model boundaries at, and with, work.

Leadership must seek out training opportunities for themselves and their staff so everyone has adequate tools to do the work, and must also create opportunities to connect with staff and volunteers.

Leadership is advised to avoid structural situations where they are disconnected from staff or, worse still, where they, as individuals, are so central to the function of the organization that in the event they are indisposed, the entire organization falls apart. There is also a need to create non-hierarchical structures, e.g., horizontal or circle ways of working. Building these structures is a crucial part of decolonizing the non-profit sector, but it also creates a more sustainable organization that is not dependent on one person to uphold and sustain the work. **Decolonized non-profit structures should embrace the notion of collective wisdom and collective responsibility.**

Reflection Questions

Survey respondents pointed to the importance of accountability for all staff through regular and meaningful evaluations and performance reviews; they also identified the need for organized structures that demand engagement from everyone. A well-organized and functioning organization provides spaces to connect with staff and community, creates opportunities for everyone to share experiences, and still supports both workers and leadership to maintain healthy boundaries. This includes the creation of succession planning to make sure that organizations have continuity and that opportunity is given to others to become leaders.

What is the current structure of your organization?

Identify a place or places in that structure where hierarchical structures can be replaced by non-hierarchical models of governance.

What is the responsibility of a leader in a non-hierarchical model of governance?

Reflection Questions

What is the structure of these assessments?

How often do you have assessments?

Can you imagine more ways in which assessments can be non-hierarchical?

Can staff assess the organization or express their challenges and ask for support during those assessments?

Finally, the last piece of imagining the transformation of the non-profit sector is the relationship between the non-profit organizations themselves. Real and solid partnerships that raise the capacity of all members and set out clear expectations and responsibilities are key.

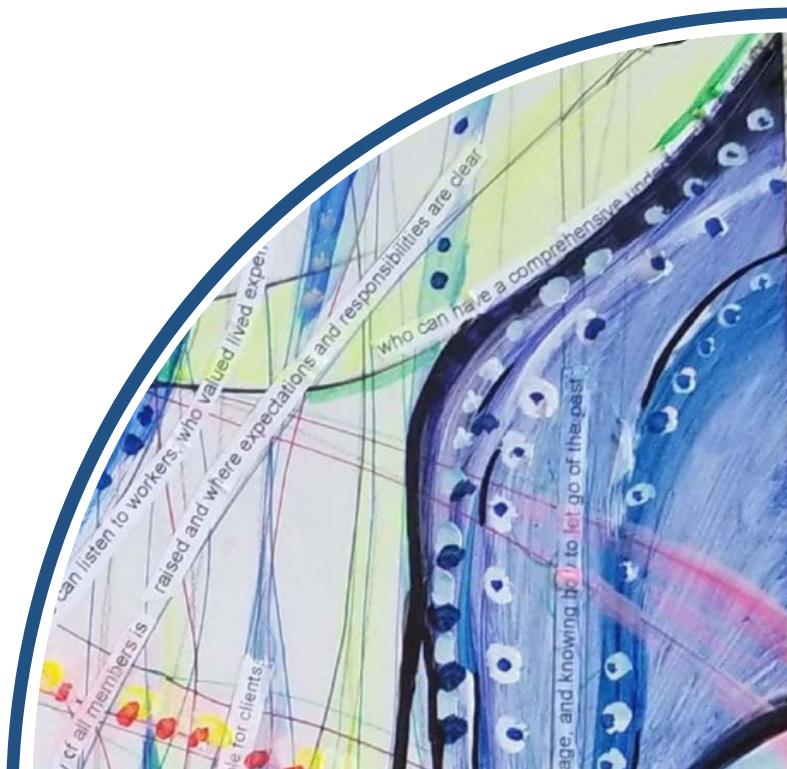
Transformation

The oppression and discrimination experienced by staff and volunteers of non-profit organizations in Canada is, without doubt, damaging to the individuals that work within those organizations, the communities they work with, and the organization itself. Many of the ills are associated with structural problems that will take some time to transform.

The sector in itself exists as a response to the unattended and invisible inequity and discrimination that exist in our society, and in responding to these needs, we can contribute to oppression, become gatekeepers, and/or cause harm.

However, there is also potential for non-profits to challenge themselves to become spaces of transformation and agents that work towards disrupting systems of oppression whilst also supporting communities. So, let's reflect on how we, as organizations and individuals, can contribute to this process.

At times, it is difficult to be hopeful about change; it is human to lose hope and perhaps resign in defeat. Any decision you make is right at the time you make it, as you identify your pathways and what fits best with your needs and well-being. You may decide to challenge toxicity or oppression from inside an organization, choosing to focus instead on your own survival within the organization, or leave the organization or the sector entirely and start something different and beautiful. There is hope in every path you take.



Reflection Question

What actions do you take to try to meet your needs and promote your wellbeing?

Creating Hope Through Resistance

"everything can't be decolonized. some stuff gotta burn."

Stephanie D. Keene

As organizations or non-profit workers look for ways to transform themselves under these difficult circumstances, it is important to create spaces where we can remain hopeful about the possibility of transforming the sector in spite of adversity and to design collective paths to resist and transform. We can:

- Recognize that it is ok to remain hopeful or lose hope altogether in our organization or in the sector. Acknowledge that new hope can be found elsewhere after difficult experiences are endured.
- Root in community and knowledge:
 - Build realistic/material/transformative care.
- Strategize together to push the organization and the sector to evolve.
- Vision together to solve issues and short-term and long-term organizational plans.
- Strategize board reform and transition of directors.
- Give each other a heads up on what is happening in organizations and the risks staff may experience.
- Create a support system.
- Expose the ills of the sector.
- Engage in and nurture spirituality as a source of meaning and strength.
- Validate any decision you make to resist and celebrate.
- Do not forget you have your own knowledge, skills, and resources. No one can take that from you!
- Reclaim your work before you leave, i.e. take what you can of what you own/is yours.
- Leave the organization or the sector altogether and build something beautiful.
- Leave and report or stay and report.
- Root in your knowledge and build from there.
- Root in your relationships with people in your organization and externally:
 - Strategize together/work in solidarity knowing one movement is linked to another.

Transformation Reflection Activity

How do we transform/decolonize non-profits and the sector? Let's imagine a decolonial non-profit sector! Read the following list of characteristics of a decolonial organization that works, and feel free to add more to the list:

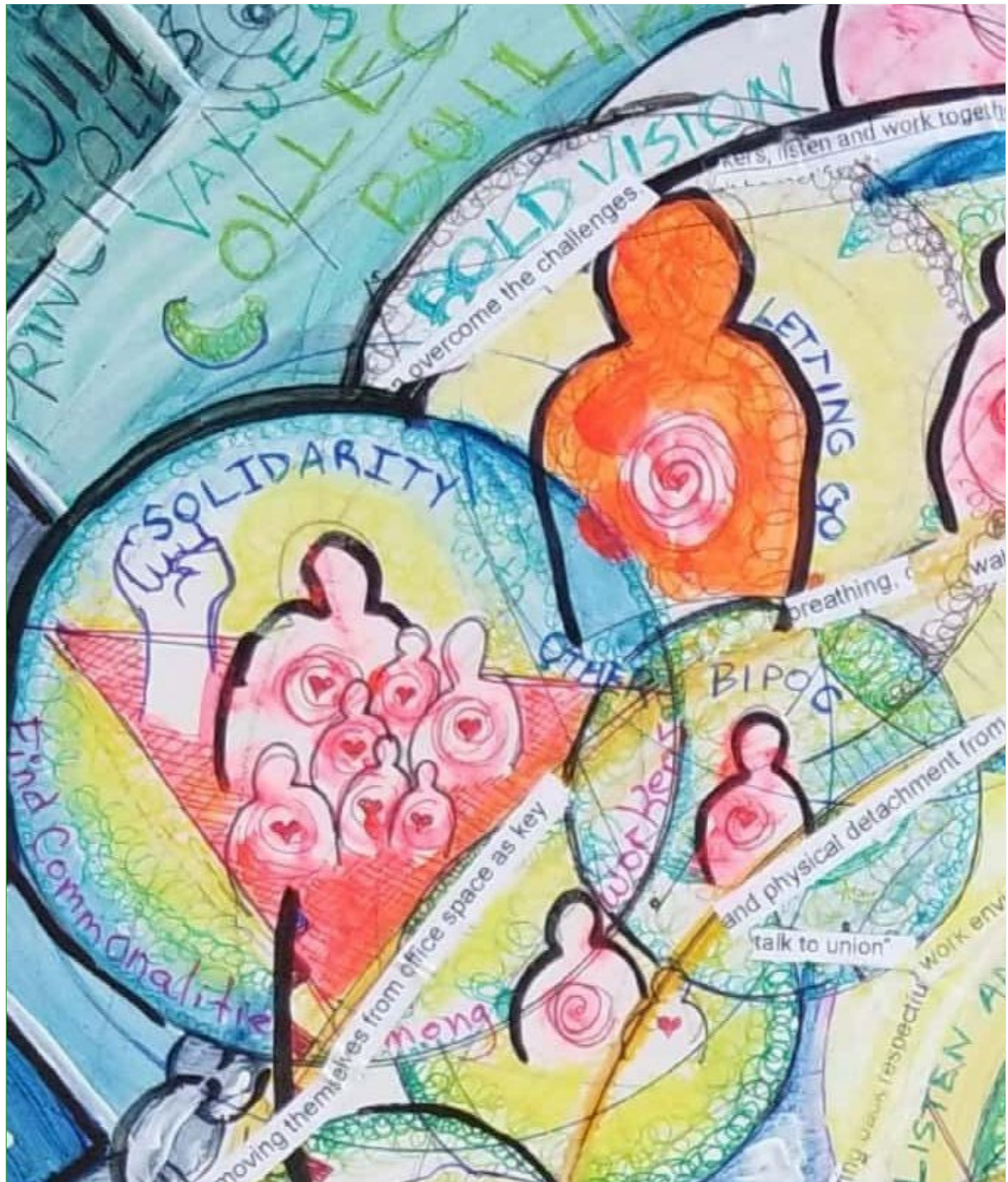
- Relational based
- Accessibility needs centered
- Non-hierarchical, e.g. circle mode of governance
- Adjusting processes
- Thoughtful actions
- Spirit-led
- Consensual
- Community-connected
- BIR led
- Queer-centered
- Multitude of ways of being
- Actively decolonizing
- Rotating leadership
- Anti-oppressive
- Holistic approaches

What characteristics would you like to start cultivating within your organization?
What would these values look like in practice?

Create (draw or write) your ideal non-profit. Think about:

- People you would like to work with;
- Processes that support individuals, the team, collective work and community members;
- Moments that you would enjoy;
- Qualities of your co-workers; and,
- Ways of being in community that feel meaningful to you and the community you work with[in].

Final Reflections



Final Reflection

Antidotes to White Supremacy Culture

2STQLGB+, People Living with Disabilities, Indigenous, Black, and Racialized People, Inherent Ways of Being

Imagining new ways of relating with each other, being within organizations, working with community members, putting staff and community members at the center of the work, restructuring organizations, managing organizations, assessing our own work performance, working in harmony with the Land we live on, and committing to being part of a team is difficult and requires collective engagement. **Allow us to imagine with you the antidotes to white supremacy culture in the non-profit sector.**

Collectivism

- Is the fundamental way of understanding, being and knowing and the only way we operate.
- Acknowledges building trusting relationships is key. Treat each project as a team project with leads.
- Is not being overly responsible. Build capacity and share workloads; build a consistent team check-in point. Have a succession plan for the organization and projects, even if you are unavailable for a short period. Loop people into what you are doing so they know where to pick up if you go.
- Ensures your responsibility is to the community, including staff.
- Regularly celebrates being and working together.

Honour Multiplicity of Gifts, Knowledge, and Ways of Being

- Brings in and values all forms of knowledge at all levels of the organization, especially in the positions of power where hierarchies are in place.
- Creates space for working together in ways that honour multiple ways of doing, being and knowing.
- Shares gifts and knowledge.
- Realizes there is no objectivity. Recognizes that white supremacy is the default setting, and it is harmful.

Acknowledge We Are Just How We Need to Be: Perfectionism is a Construct of Whiteness and White Supremacy

- Consent and the necessity of diversity are the foundation of all work.
- “Mistakes” are valuable and necessary learning opportunities.
- Zero tolerance for blaming and guilting; the focus is on addressing solutions, understanding that we will each need a reprieve from guilt and blame at some point.
- Work consensually.
- Respect the capacities of all staff; share or reduce the load when it harms members of the team.
- Allow space for individual needs to be expressed and tended to.
- Shift the concept of competitiveness from the individual to the collective. Who is the “best” team player? Who supports the most and is generous with their encouragement?
- Value the attempts and completion of things.

Sovereignty on all Levels

- Sovereignty is asserting autonomy and standing firm in one’s legitimacy as an authority of Self within and beyond the realm[s] of the state.
- In our contexts here, Sovereignty means cultures of consent, decision-making and self-determination around your job. One is to be allowed to do their work to the best of their abilities without external interference; they are given the autonomy of visioning and performing the job they were hired to do.
- Indigenous, Individual, Collective, and Community Sovereignty is a key practice in dismantling the roots of white supremacy.
- Personal Sovereignty cannot be had without Indigenous Sovereignty because it is only through the latter that we can achieve the former.
- Availability of up-to-date, accurate information necessary to make decisions and perform one’s duties.
- Sovereignty includes trusting people’s abilities and judgements.
- Sovereignty includes trusting oneself to not only make decisions but live with those choices, including dealing with the impacts.
- As Sovereign beings, we are the building blocks of our organizations and communities; as such, our opinions, thoughts, and actions not only matter but reverberate.

Quality Over Quantity

- Put the time into building relationships based on accountability inside and outside the organization and with other organizations. Relationships are the basis of community and cannot be discounted.
- Value the meaning of the work while recognizing that bigger and more is not always progress. Use sustainability, insights and participants' experiences to measure progress. Recognize that healing is often not quantifiable nor appropriate to report.
- Value anonymous feedback by those accessing services as it is the safest way for participants to disclose and one of the most effective ways to gauge quality. Also, do not discount feedback, especially the uncomfortable kind that gets defensiveness up. See it as a gift, directing us where to improve.

Humility

- Have humility and curiosity about your team and the community you work with.
- Know your team's strengths and weaknesses. Be a helper, never an expert.
- Be open to feedback, be teachable and see feedback as an opportunity.
- When power or status is bestowed upon an individual or group, or a hierarchy is attempting to take hold, be quick to respond by grounding in community and sharing credit with all involved.
- Center the people with the highest needs.

Sharing Power and Leadership

- Distribute power. Unofficial leadership/power matters. Pay attention to it.
- Move seats of leadership. Leadership is cyclical.
- Recognize that each Circle has a starting point and an endpoint. Someone has to start and end the work. This is the leadership's role.
- Honour each person's gifts and recognize who is the most suited to lead "this one."
- Leadership by consensus and learning to step aside and give room.
- Let unofficial leadership emerge, and do not be afraid, but rather value it.
- Lead from the back by encouraging, suggesting and guiding in full support.
- When hierarchies are in place, the principle is that the higher the level of leadership, the more that accountability is required.

See Conflict as Opportunities for Learning, Healing, and Growth

- Do not be scared of conflict, feedback, and learning, as they help us evolve.
- Be receptive to discomfort and stop yourself from justifying and defending.
- Discomfort is not a synonym for 'unsafety.'
- When you have privilege, learn to listen.
- Comfort is not a right.
- Do not compare or rate different types of oppression.
- Do not use your marginalization as a shield from accountability.

Practice Honesty

- Value honesty as growth and understand it can be uncomfortable.
- Own your words and be accountable for their impact, not your intention.
- Do not weaponize kindness.
- Say what you need to say and be straightforward. Avoid disclaimers and the "compliment sandwich" (where one says something complimentary, then the truth they need to speak, then another complimentary thing again).
- No apologies are necessary for stating what you need, think or feel.
- Honour and model assertive communication.

Value People's Privacy and Consent

- Do not force co-workers to share their private life.
- Understand and give room for individual's personal needs including:
 - Do nothing without consent.
 - Practice Sovereignty, i.e. – allow space for individual needs to be expressed and met. This includes bodily sovereignty, such as moving and not moving when there is a collective expectation (e.g., walking at lunch or standing up or stretching during a meeting).
 - Do not make it a requirement to share personal life (related to the first bullet).
 - Do not coerce communal eating.
 - Do not force people to engage in non-work related conversations.
 - Do not force cohesion among the team with expectations that cohesion be a certain way. Let the group establish the equilibrium and trust it will.

- Cultivate environments that are conducive for people to build relationships but do not set expectations or force participation. It is significant to note and accept that; in that environment, people will likely have different degrees of relationships, from merely work acquaintances to best of friends or (found) family. Respect one another and the boundaries set.

Play with Grants

- Take the least amount of information about communities needed to satisfy funders.
- Challenge funders.
- Protect community from being hurt by grant requirements/surveillance.
- Anonymize information grant holders don't need.

Financial Planning

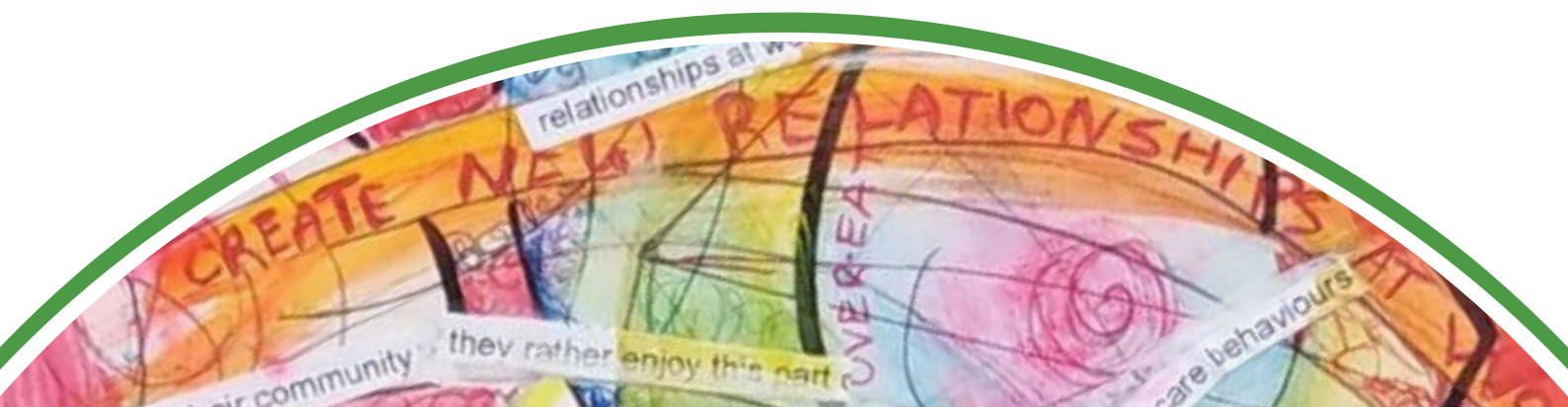
- Be flexible with your budget lines. If a team (staff and/or community members) starts planning being restricted to a budget, they will limit themselves from dreaming and start thinking within the budgetary confines. Have them focus on the what of the work before any numbers are provided. That way, your vision will not be restricted by money. Allow imagination and dreaming without a number that limits. Often things will come in lower than expected. Always shoot for the sun; if you miss it, you'll still land amongst the stars.
- If non-profit workers are paid appropriately and with secure benefits, you will have better retention and workplace culture. The mindset of low pay and viewing human resources as an expendable part of the budget where costs can be cut is detrimental to organizational culture and morale. It is human resources that are often the most important, and to value them will have positive ricochets in the organization.
- Many non-profit organizations function only in short-term contracts with staff along specific project lines. This way of functioning creates instability and results in the release of staff after a project ends, and thus a loss of institutional knowledge in the organization. Share projects across staff to allow the team to work across different projects and bring their best skills to each project. Avoid having positions pigeonholed to one project.

Build Relationships with Funders

- Get to know your funders on many levels. Understand what motivates them in their work.
- Include stories and heartfelt experiences when engaging with funders.
- Protect community and workers by explaining to funders that the communities' safety transcends the funders' needs. Work from the assumption that they understand this.

Spirit-Led

- Offers opportunities to create connection and community. Incorporates spirituality in intentionally non-appropriative ways with your team and in your work wherever possible. Acknowledges spirituality and uses culturally responsible ways to invite Spirit into your work.
- Recognizes and acknowledges the Indigenous communities whose land you are on. Understand this is inherently spiritual even if you do not "get it."
- Does not appropriate. Indigenous staff or Elders are not obliged to share with you. In acknowledgements, remember that you do not have a right to Indigenous knowledge or spirituality if you are non-Indigenous.
- Recognizes the varied Indigenous voices, teachings and medicines.
- Continues inviting, building trust and recognizing Indigenous works. Also, learn to take a no as an answer from community[-ies.]
- Encourages understanding and curiosity about the relationships between Land/Earth and Spirit.
- Recognizes the varied Indigenous voices, teachings and medicines in your local area and beyond.
- Listen to and take actions based upon the spiritual direction that comes.



Reflection Question

What does being Spirit-Led mean to you, and what might it look like?

Final Reflection Activity

Circle Insight Activity

Identify Organizational Strengths and Opportunities to Grow

This activity can give a board and/or staff a space to reflect and understand how white supremacy and oppression are manifesting in their non-profit. It offers staff the opportunity to air their concerns in a “safer” manner; it validates the “good work” happening and when done consistently, can help improve accountability and team building. Make sure to use it when the organization is ready and willing to address the issues.

To run this activity online, you will need access to software that allows participants to share information with you in an anonymous way. Anonymity is key to creating safer spaces and gaining genuine insights. We recommend the [Mentimeter application](#)¹⁴ but use what is available to you and whatever makes the exercise accessible to participants. You will also need a whiteboard/flipchart with a circle shape drawn on it.

To run this activity in person, you will need small pieces of paper and tape or sticky notes, pens, and a picture of a circle either on a wall or a flipchart that all participants can interact with.

Goals

- To gain genuine insights into NPO strengths and areas to improve
- To draw out and validate staff knowledge and experiences in the NPO
- To strength connection and growth in relations between staff and board

¹⁴ [Mentimeter](#) is an online application that combines digital quizzes, polls, and word clouds to offer a central point for group interactions.

Instructions

****Anonymity is key to creating safer spaces and gaining genuine insights.**

In-Person option

Provide sticky notes or small pieces of paper to participants for them to individually and anonymously answer the following two questions.

Online option

Use the [Mentimeter](#) application and have participants anonymously answer the following two questions.

First question:

Think about all the things you dislike or the ways you see your non-profit organization enact oppression or uphold colonial values. Write those things on a piece of paper. Please write one thing per piece of paper.

- Collect the answers from the first question, post on outside of the circle, and read out loud. Debrief and reflect.

Second question:

Think about the things your non-profit does that are anti-oppressive practices in the way that they are reducing colonial harm by truly centering the people you serve and the community at large. Please write one thing per piece of paper.

- Collect the answers from the second question, post on the inside of the circle, and read out loud. Debrief and reflect.

Reflecting on the Collective Responses

Reflecting on what we see inside and outside the circle is key to this activity. The outside statements are areas to recognize, address and improve on. Those on the outside can lead to the toxic outcomes we are trying to avoid. The things inside the circle can be used to address the outside and are considered pathways to healing and wellbeing in the organization.

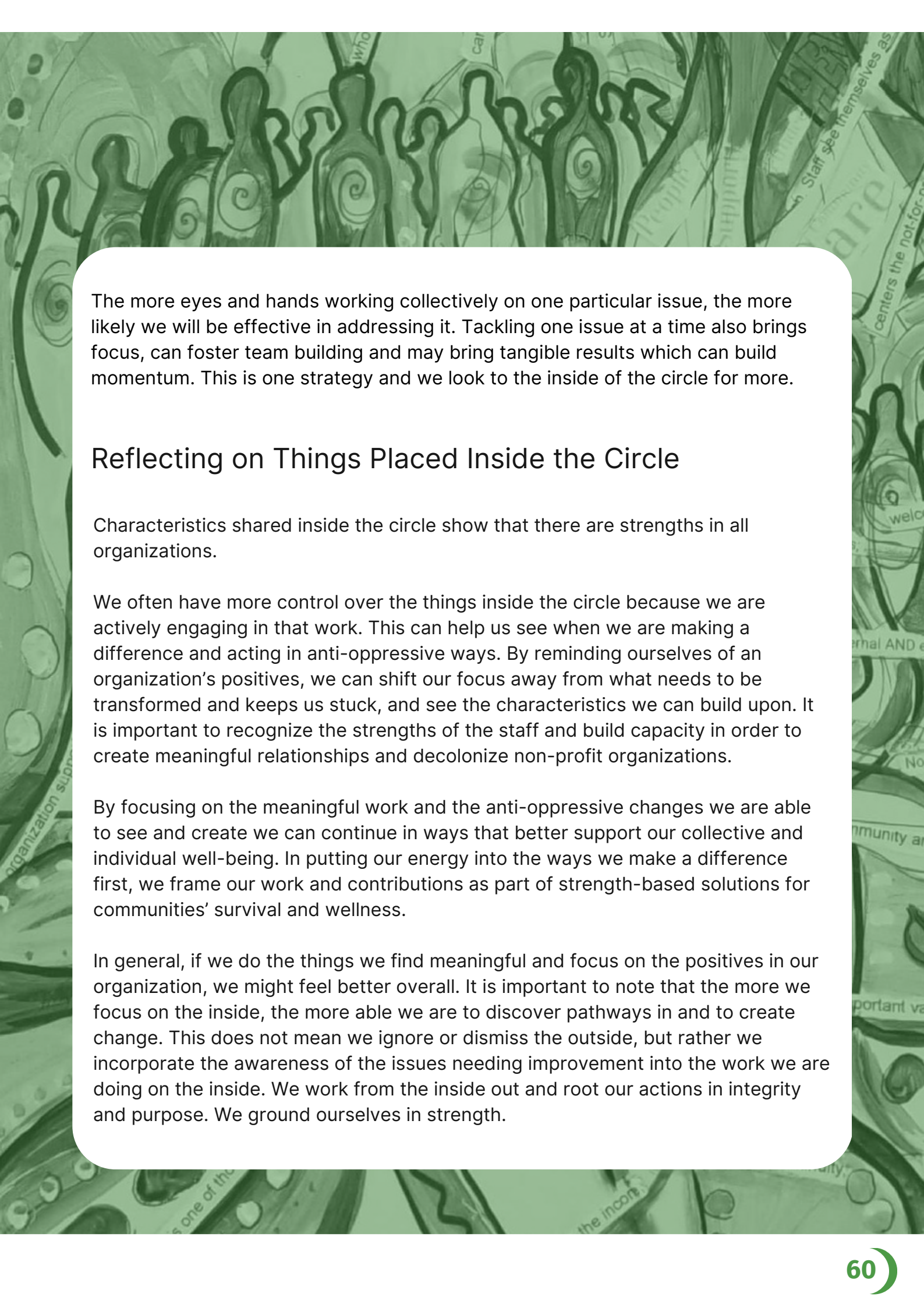
Reflecting on Things Placed Outside the Circle

This is where the work lies and we gain the most insight. It is important to honour every contribution that comes up. The challenge is to honestly reflect and be curious to the harms that are named so we can begin to understand and address the issues in meaningful ways.

Also it is important to acknowledge the difficult challenges we face. It is good to name the heavy loads we carry and injustices we encounter on a regular basis. Take a moment to acknowledge and validate the difficult struggles that come with this work. We are doing hard work!

At times it can feel that there is “nothing good” happening in the organization, and we get caught up in only naming the harms and challenges. This is compounded when we see that many of the issues are out of our control e.g., funding, power structures and the presence of white supremacy. However, if we spend most of our time focusing on what is wrong and cannot change, we may lose hope and burn out. While it can be necessary to vent, we caution against wasting too much of our energy focused on the outside of the circle. Instead we take an honest inventory and we look for balance to find paths forward.

To heavily impact an issue and/or make an actual improvement, a collective response with as many groups working together on one particular issue can be most effective. For example, if underrepresentation is the issue, take a staff survey to identify specific barriers and strategies for recruitment to tackle the issue collectively.



The more eyes and hands working collectively on one particular issue, the more likely we will be effective in addressing it. Tackling one issue at a time also brings focus, can foster team building and may bring tangible results which can build momentum. This is one strategy and we look to the inside of the circle for more.

Reflecting on Things Placed Inside the Circle

Characteristics shared inside the circle show that there are strengths in all organizations.

We often have more control over the things inside the circle because we are actively engaging in that work. This can help us see when we are making a difference and acting in anti-oppressive ways. By reminding ourselves of an organization's positives, we can shift our focus away from what needs to be transformed and keeps us stuck, and see the characteristics we can build upon. It is important to recognize the strengths of the staff and build capacity in order to create meaningful relationships and decolonize non-profit organizations.

By focusing on the meaningful work and the anti-oppressive changes we are able to see and create we can continue in ways that better support our collective and individual well-being. In putting our energy into the ways we make a difference first, we frame our work and contributions as part of strength-based solutions for communities' survival and wellness.

In general, if we do the things we find meaningful and focus on the positives in our organization, we might feel better overall. It is important to note that the more we focus on the inside, the more able we are to discover pathways in and to create change. This does not mean we ignore or dismiss the outside, but rather we incorporate the awareness of the issues needing improvement into the work we are doing on the inside. We work from the inside out and root our actions in integrity and purpose. We ground ourselves in strength.

Our Fingers Laced, Lives Entwined¹⁵

For over a decade we worked at a CHC (Community Health Colonizer): Leaders in Trauma-Informed Care, or really: Leaders in Caring to Inform my Trauma. We pushed back against their white supremacy, their violence, and pushed to decolonize. Eventually they got rid of all of us for it.

Not before we made our mark though, not before we showed them what a circle looks like. Not before we embarrassed them at their own meetings, in their own white house. Not before we showed them how successful a program could be. Not before it became so obvious to outside observers why they got rid of us.

In one of my first years of our work, we flew to Pimicikamak and you told me about your dreams. You told me about how this community had fought against hydro. The youth there told me that my last name sounded like the Ininiw word for "crow." You took a risk and asked me to be your real friend, not just your work friend. You snapped the ring off of a red condom, got down on a knee and proposed to me. I said, "yes! yes!!" and we cackled about it. We spent the rest of the day giggling and plotting, basking in our new found solidarity through the pain and violence of non-profits.

Our flight came back to the city two hours early and you needed a break. You mischievously looked to me and suggested we sneak into the movies, lying to everyone we knew about where we were. Of course, I agreed. You parked your truck up on the curb when we couldn't find a parking spot and I was in awe of your bravery.

For the next decade we had each other—side eyes, post meeting meetings, new jokes, and secret names to describe colonial violence. After they got rid of us, their BIPOC staff, I told myself to write about what happened, but it's hard to write out the pain. Instead, I'm trying to remember the moments together in which we embodied pleasure, joy, and love in the face of oppression, how we planted seeds with the youth, and the moments in which I followed my spirit.

¹⁵ Originally published in Carnation Zine, Vol. 2 "Pleasure." Reprinted with permission from the contributor, Hema Krueger Vyas.

I always said, "all-staff meetings are a vanity project for this management team." We would sit and listen to people with no connection to our communities talk about their irrelevant "work." One day, I called you before the meeting and said, "let's ditch this shit."

We went to a drive-thru to buy lunch instead and spent the entire afternoon eating onion rings, basking in the sun and our friendship. As we lay in the grass, I felt the warmth of the grease dripping down our hands, the sun shining down on us, our hearts beating strong. We watched the birds flying over us and you taught me to see the Red Willow growing all around us.

We watched the time flash before us, a decade of nurturing our life's work, and as you pushed to decolonize, you taught me to see the beauty growing all around us.



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