



DECARCERATING CARE

COMMUNITY-BASED HEALING ALTERNATIVES AND HOW TO BUILD THEM

Institute for the Development of Human Arts

**Decarcerating Care:
Community-Based Healing Alternatives and How to Build Them**

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Closed Caption Transcript

>> JESSIE ROTH: My name is Jessie Roth, and I'm the Director of the Institute for the Development of Human Arts. I'm a white woman wearing a black t-shirt. I have dark brown hair and it is in a bun on top of my head. I'm wearing glasses and I have houseplants behind me, sitting here in my apartment. We are super thrilled to invite you here this evening for Decarcerating Care: Community-Based Healing Alternatives and How to Build Them.

And we can go to the next slide and I will tell you a little bit about the Institute for the Development of Human Arts, otherwise known as IDHA if it's your first time joining us. IDHA is a community of current and prior mental health service users and survivors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other clinicians, activists, and artists and we have come together with the common goal of transforming mental health care. What we do here at IDHA is we are advancing critical and effective and scalable alternative approaches to mental health through collaborative development and community development.

What makes IDHA unique is: we are integrating experiential and academic knowledge to challenge the idea that only those who work in the field are the "experts" and the goal is to shift power dynamics in a field we find generally only privileges professional experience, at the expense of other forms of knowledge.

So we would like to share a couple of community agreements with you this evening that we use and these apply to the chat, the first is "shared expertise and wisdom." Everyone brings their own expertise to the conversation and we can all gain and respect each others' expertise. "Collective liberation." Overcoming oppression aids everyone's liberation. It is our responsibility to challenge various forms of prejudice. We educate in the spirit of solidarity and hold each other accountable without criticizing who we are as people. "Listen like allies." We respect a wide

variety of choices and perspectives, even when we disagree, and we don't judge or invalidate others' experiences.

And a couple of notes on accessibility. The first is that we have live closed captioning available tonight, you can click the closed caption button at the bottom of your screen to turn this one. We have two ASL interpreters joining us today, thank you for being here, and they will be swapping out throughout the event. We will aim to provide visual descriptions like I did in the beginning, giving a description before the speaker speaks for the first time.

A couple of notes on tech. We have a dedicated team member named Noah who is providing tech in the chat, feel free to reach out to them with issues. And we are recording this event, we'll be sharing it with everyone who registered later. We invite you to join the conversation in the chat. We are a big fan of resource sharing and all of the links and wisdom, so we encourage you to participate there. We also encourage questions, even though we might not be able to answer all of them. We always save the chat and hope to engage with that on an ongoing basis beyond tonight.

So with that, the format of this evening is: I'm going to pass it to our moderator in a minute, Mayowa Obasaju, who is an IDHA member and has been on the organizing committee of this incredible event. And we will dive into the panel, we will have introductions and then Q&A. That is it for now for an introduction, thank you for being here. We can take down the slides and I will pass it to Mayowa. Thank you everyone.

>> NOAH - TECH: Mayowa, I think you are muted.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you, every time. Hello, everyone. My name is Mayowa and I'm going to give a visual description. I'm a Black woman with brown skin. I have curly microlocks that are colored a cinnamon brown at the bottom half. I'm wearing glasses and a black top with cream patterns and a blurred image in my background. I want to take the time to extend a warm welcome to IDHA's conversation on Decarcerating Care: Community-Based Healing Alternatives and How to Build Them.

This conversation is occurring in the context of our Decarcerating Care series, which has explored how to maintain the safety and health of our communities, while preserving the rights and autonomy of those in crisis – with a focus on concrete steps and tools providers can take to decarcerate their practice. For tonight's talk, we are going to hear from a number of brilliant speakers who are going to discuss their work and see how it is connected to decarcerating care. We know that the work of decarcerating care and creating new care systems is a huge task, and not a new one.

Our hope for tonight is to present you with people who have done the work, and are doing the work, so we can draw from their insights and walk away with tangible models and practices to implement in our own lives. In that, it is really important for us to name that there are so many people who have done this work, are doing this work, and we really want to validate and uplift that. This is a microcosm of a much broader movement and so much of what we are doing in creating care systems – some of which are outside of the system – are often not seen as legitimate, especially when we have BIPOC, mad, disabled activists. And though not seen oftentimes in some circles as legitimate, we know that it is, and we know it is powerful.

So as we engage with this work, a theme that underlies and connects many of the panelists' words is this question: what would it look like if we could be our full, authentic selves in the spaces and places we inhabit? Can we vision answers, both individually and collectively? Because the truth is many of us live in a world where people are labeled as mentally ill if they express a full range of emotions; rage against oppression; feel the pain of the earth and speak to that pain; engage in behaviors that are deemed outside of the boundaries of what is acceptable in our society or cultures.

With all of that, what is deemed as acceptable or normal is often based on the values, beliefs, and actions related to white supremacy. It is often predicated on a white, middle and owning class, heterosexual, Protestant able-bodied, sane, neurotypical, age 30 to 45, English-speaking, in monogamous relationship, cis-gender male.

A minority – if it even exists – that is held as the norm, the ideal, and the goal. And for many of us, we experience daily pressures to emulate this norm, which is a form of mental health oppression, where we are sold the lies of normality. This normality disconnects us from ourselves, from others, spirit, earth, and sometimes then places us in restrictive communities, prisons, involuntary commitments, even jobs and spaces that tell us over and over again: we are not good enough as we are.

Where, as the Mental Health and Liberation Policy by Reevaluation Counseling states: “that mental health is a pressure to be normal, and that pressure makes people feel abnormal, afraid of being different, and afraid to question or try to change society.” But how can we say no to a harmful and restrictive sense of normality? How can we honor all pieces of ourselves? Honor our madness, our neurodivergence, our expansiveness, honor our connections to earth, to spirit, to ancestors, and to community.

We can do that in so many ways. We create, we understand differently. We center those who have had the experiences. And we cry, scream, yell, smile, laugh. We dance, play, be in silence, honor our realities, and our inherent dignity. We take space. We connect, we transform, we heal. We embody, and we rest. And maybe we believe, and I quote Reevaluation Counseling again: “there is no set of expectations that we are trying to reach. Only unlimited possibilities.”

So tonight, the panelists will speak to some of these unlimited possibilities. And possibilities that build on the strength of communities built within, and outside of, and in between systems. And speak to the strength of peers, self-determination and cultural wisdom, of liberation and liberatory practices, and cultural wisdom, spirituality and of the intangible and the unknown. And we are so very excited to start this conversation. And with that, we are going to start with the panelists. They are going to provide a brief introduction, and then respond to the following question: what lineage or history brings you to this work? What political homes do you belong to, or what social movements? And we will start with Yolo.

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: Hello, everyone. This is Yolo speaking. To give you an image description of me, I'm a light brown Black person with blond hair. I'm currently wearing a gray collared shirt with my signature floral patterns, which I often do. I'm sitting on a brown wooden chair in a room with a door behind me. I'm thrilled to be here to collectively reimagine, create, this new world we are giving birth to. I'm excited. Who I am, I'm the director and founder

of BEAM. BEAM stands for the Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective. We are a national training, movement building, and grant making institution dedicated to the healing, wellness, and liberation of Black folks.

When I name my lineage that I come from, I recognize that many times when I see this question, people often lift up the names that are recognizable; however, many of the names and the people who have supported me, who have cared for me, who have educated and trained me are not names everyone in this room may know. They are many direct service workers, social workers, many folks who are survivors and communities who are doing first responder work. So I want to lift up the millions and thousands of names of folks who do the work but don't necessarily get their names elevated. That's the lineage I come from and the people I celebrate and I'm consistently grateful for every single day. That was the first question and the other question, can you remind me? I'm sorry.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Yeah, what are the political homes you belong to, or what social movements?

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: So I'm a southerner without a shadow of a doubt. My political home, I come from sweet tea country, whiskey folk. I was brought into movement through the Atlanta community and surrounding areas through the work of the people doing reproductive justice work, HIV and AIDS work, violent prevention and intervention work. Those are the folks that ground me, anchor me, taught me, and mentor me. It's definitely where I see my political home. And folks who are recognizable in that lineage are people like bell hooks, Audre Lorde...many others who have inspired me and led me to this work. I will stop there.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you so much, and next we will hear from Vesper.

>> VESPER MOORE: A home, a home all to you. That is thank you in Taino. And that's that is my descent, my lineage. I am of the Quisqueya and Borikén tribes. I think something that is so important about that is – that affiliation, that ties to the grounds are so important to my work. I work as the chief operating officer at the Kiva Centers, an Indigenous, peer-run organization based on Nitmiluk land, also known as Massachusetts. And I also do a lot of collective work at Madness Network News, a psychiatric survivor, mad-run initiative. That really brings me to what movements I'm involved in and what work I'm involved in.

I am what I consider a mad liberation activist. I think a lot of people define that in a variety of ways. I define it as a liberation from our traditional understanding of emotional distress and mental health in our wider society. I do think of it as an intentional way of decolonizing our ideas around emotional distress. The way and the spaces in which I hail from and my learnings are really from the wider mad movement spaces, and I attribute a lot of knowledge that I gained from peer support spaces. As someone who was incarcerated in the psychiatric system for four and a half years of my life, I really dedicate my work to changing our understanding once again and transforming our approaches to mental health. Thank you.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you. And next we will have Aida.

>> AIDA MANDULEY: Hi y'all. I will start with the visual description. I'm a mid-sized fat person, light skin with some freckles. I have short wavy brown hair with a side shave and a

dangling hair wrap, with various beads and artifacts on it. I have strong arched brows and brown eyes. I'm wearing a black t-shirt with mushrooms, sometimes visible and sometimes not. Tragically Zoom is de-enhancing the glitter on my face, but I need to all know it is there. It's important. Silver nose ring, black faux plug earrings, red lipstick, light little mustache. And my background has a lot of framed pieces of art, depicting a multiracial and fantastical assortment of beings, both real and imagined. And there is a small Puerto Rican flag. My pronouns are they/them and elle/le. As for where I'm coming from and housed, I'm currently in territories that have housed the Wampanoag, Massachusett, and Nitmiluk peoples, as well as a long heritage of Black liberators. I was born in Puerto Rican, and I call home a space in upstate New York, the Lenape people.

At the core, I'm an activist and organizer. Yes, I work as a therapist and circle keeper and sexuality educator, but the core of what I am is an organizer. I do clinical work but that's not the first thing I was born doing. In term of lineage, I'm just going to say freaky queers is the first thing I want to say. Yes, I can talk about LGBTQ activists and healing justice and transformative justice and those matter, but those were not the first things I felt or knew. So the first thing I was born into was a lineage of freaky queers, so I like to say that first.

If we give the slightly longer answer, it started with a lot of LGBTQ activism and sexual freedom work, then moving into migrant rights and anti-racism when I started to realize the horrible colonial legacies in the land I grew up in and was raised in. Then I moved into anti-violence work, which led me to transformative justice and healing justice work. And that's where I'm firmly planted right now even though they are all still there. I am every age I've ever been, similarly, I'm in all movements even if I move in them a little bit differently. And I'm relatively newer to things like abolition and disability justice because I have less lived experience with those things, so it was a bigger lift to change my mindset to match those values. And yeah, I think that's it for me for now. I'm excited to be here.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you. And next we have Anjali.

>> ANJALI NATH UPADHYAY: Thank you so much. Thank you to all of y'all for being here. My name is Anjali Nath Upadhyay. She and they pronouns are fine by me. In terms of an image description, I'm a visibly sleepy human with long wavy black hair and some graying, silvery temples, wearing a teal dress, holding a magenta and green hand fan, with a mediocre-ly appointed rental background for y'all to enjoy behind me.

So far as the lineages that I'm bringing into this space, so much I would be honored to share around that. First, I would like to lift up – in terms of the visual description, I'm holding a photo of Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask, who I know that those of you tuning in from Hawaii and elsewhere in decolonial struggle are likely familiar with. I bring her in first because on the institutional front, I had the honor of being invited to what was at the time the only Indigenous politics PhD in the settler colonial US back in 2010, at the university of Hawaii. A program run by all native Hawaiian women who were actively working to kick the illegal US occupation out of the Hawaiian queendom.

And a program that, although in the academic-industrial complex, is rooted in us remembering our ancestral traditions of meaning making, of perception, of being – not attempting to diversify a titanic, not attempting to be legible within an oppressive context as if we

don't have our own paradigms. But rather encouraging us to unlearn to then be able to be in a place to remember and imagine accordingly in the service of our collective liberation. So I'm also honored to be founder and lead teacher in Liberation Spring, rooted in occupied Ohlone territory, so-called Oakland, California. This is a grassroots adult education program that offers political education and consciousness raising in the service of collective liberation. Shout out, I see we have students coming through, participants from Liberation Spring and from moments when I was in the academic-industrial complex previously, it is good to see you and have y'all here.

I'm the host of feral visions, which is a decolonial feminist podcast. A lot more to get into later around this invitation to remember some of the movement traditions – whether it is the abolitionist struggle and what was before – the need for abolition. Our decolonial movements in different parts of the planet, and what was before colonialism. So then in this moment, we can nourish our imaginations around: what is after decolonization? What is after abolishing – not just cops or social work, not just psychiatry, not just the prison-industrial complex – but all of the interconnected systems and institutions of oppression that seek to monopolize our focus, concentration, and understanding of where we come from and who we are. I'll leave it there for the moment, I'm grateful that you are here to be a part of this dialogue. Thank you.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you so much. We also have Gretchen.

>> GRETCHEN ROHR: Thank you everyone. Thank you so much for this opportunity to join this panel. I'm like wow, what a panel – that's how I felt when I was invited. Can I sit back and listen to everyone else? Such a joy to be here. My name is Gretchen Rohr. I have brown skin, I'm African American, I have a pretty big – afro curly, depending how much mousse I put in it – hair style. Today I'm wearing a green shirt and behind me is a very large nine year old fiddle leaf fig plant of nine years. It is my best friend here in this office space.

I come from – I'm currently, for the last six years, have been focused on movement grant making. Movement-driven grant making with Open Society Foundations, as well as playing a role in the advocacy and the development of quite a few campaigns in the Open Society Policy Center; namely, many of those campaigns have been in restructuring and designing a new space of safety especially for those of us with disabilities who are Black, brown, and queer and survivors of systems of oppression and pain. The work that I've done with Open Society has taken me to many states – I will talk more about that, but to be able to show my gratitude and appreciation for the movements that have been feeding and fueling me from the beginning.

Originally, I came out of a home built out of an intentional community. I love what was noted about freaky queers, I come from a household of freaky queers and I am one myself. I'm thankful for my father who is a queer Pastor who led many changes within the Lutheran church and taught me to fight for spaces for others to be included, but then don't stay in a place that doesn't want to include you. I grew up in a household driven, and I'm a baby of the ACT UP movement. And really worked deeply within, even as a child, within the harm reduction spaces, in solidarity – within my family – with those living with disease, as well as those who are supporting and advancing the sexual and bodily autonomy of sex workers.

My political home has been developed and supported through my teachers. I'm grateful for Ericka Huggins, who is the first to develop meditation-based and health-based practice

within the Black Panther party that has become mainstreamed within much of education today. Vanya Davis, who was absolutely in the support of the advocacy and the transition of the support of the Indigenous roots and the African diasporic roots of the restorative justice practices that have been a part of my life. Audre Lourde, as the base, very much, of my belief that liberation must be inclusive of the liberation of our erotic selves. And Gina Sharpe and Larry Yang, who were some of my deepest and most beloved teachers in Buddhist practice. I'm Buddhist by identity, as well, and in the teaching community that I support with the Insight Meditation Community of Washington.

And so I very much come from the Buddhist tradition, but my work in integrating and supporting, tantric as well as other somatic practices, has come from the pleasure activist and the TJ movement, and the disability justice movement. So thankful that so many others here have been running in those movements and look forward to today's conversation. Thank you.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: And thank you, all. Before we get started with the questions that we will have for each panelist, I want to uplift the energy in the chat, which is a lot of gratitude. Folks are already inspired and excited, impressed and enriched from the descriptions and the introductions, so I want to let you know that. So a question we have for you all is: when you think about decarcerating care, what is your vision for the future? What would a healing center system of care look like? Whoever would like to start can unmute.

>> VESPER MOORE: I would like to start. And I want to say I didn't get to do an image description. I have long black brown curly hair, I'm a mixed-race Indigenous person, light brown skin. Behind me is a Hopi tapestry and a shamanic rattle on a white wall. And I think to start up, with that question, it's really in that idea of when we say "systems of care," can something systematically, inherently have care? Can it foster ideas of care? When we try to be inclusive, right? And we talk about inclusivity, this concept and the intention of it – can something systematically that is designed by cis-white men be inclusive?

From a design justice perspective, it makes me wonder: does that mean inherently we will always leave people out and is there such a thing as a system of care, if in its design and inception, it doesn't involve many people. And often can be designed to oppress those people. If you think about things historically – like psychiatric institutions, there were very deliberate federal institutions for natives, to incarcerate natives and take them from their land and their people. There were also the same attempts made to Black and African American folk early on, we are talking 60s and 50s. So if that's the root of what we are working with, right, what does it actually mean to have a system of care, right? Is it actually a thing? You know, that's just a question I beg to ask in response.

>> AIDA MANDULEY: I would love to take it from there. I was thinking about the system question. As someone who likes to think in systems, and wants us to have a world where we are humble enough to recognize when a system is not working, and who it's not working for, as well as who it's working for. I want us to have a care world where we can pivot. To me, that also brings in visuals and ideas – I think in metaphors. I think of an accordion, where the bellows get smaller or large when you breathe in, and it expands and contracts. A lung is not doing its job if it's not doing both, you need the expansion and contraction.

That's what I see as far as a world of care we can live in. It has to be something that adapts and changes and shifts. It can't be static, because we are not static, the environment is not static. To me a vision of a care world is ecologically balanced, a world that is more attuned to the geographies we live in and the land that we're on. It's a world where there is more attention to the different ways that we can heal, rather than just go see a therapist. As a therapist, that's trash. So I would love to see more things like animal-based therapies and hearing, forest schools. Moving in different ways so we can get people what they need.

And focusing on equity rather than equality in our care. Everyone doesn't need the same things. For anyone in the world of neurodivergent, or working with folks who are, we know there is no single way our brains work, and acknowledging that to me is important. And then finally, for care, just living in a world that doesn't use non consensual suffering, confinement, and deprivation as the primary tool for change and modification. And will that mean slowing down? Absolutely. Will that mean not having as many diverse products out on the market? Yeah, probably. That's not inherently a bad thing. The humility of downsizing and de-escalating things can bear to be smaller, so other things may grow in their stead. That's my thoughts.

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: I love that.

>> ANJALI NATH UPADHYAY: Go for it, Yolo, please.

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: First of all, I love everything that everyone has shared. Thank you all, it has been beautiful and powerful. One thing I was thinking about, or the first thing that came to my mind: when I think about decarcerating care, I imagine the possibility of tools, framing, and language that are not rooted in pathology, colonization, and shame. Thinking about tools that center neurodiversity, not the medical model that we currently have, I'm going to say the DSM – people are like, Yolo you are always researching the history of the DSM and recognizing the terrors that it has created, and the faulty way it was crafted. Thank you.

I imagine that part of decarcerating care is we have a new template to discuss shared language and frame how we ourselves and the different ways we show up in the world, which is not based on the ability to produce for capitalism. Imagine that a big part of that decarceration is us building collectively new tools and framing and language and manuals and descriptions and understandings that aren't what we currently have, as far as the DSM is concerned.

Another piece for me, I will say, I believe that this is one of the really critical mental health wellness interventions – having people having a living wage. I'm a Taurus moon so I'm going to bring in: people need money. We have a Black parent support fund, we support parents who have children living with mental conditions or who themselves are living with mental conditions. And we have had to tell funders, they were like: why are you just giving them 500-dollars every six months? How is that mental health? I'll be like, do you know how depression and anxiety is without lights? Do you know what it's like to live with schizophrenia without food? The fact that it has to be described or understood for them is a big part of the way to think about mental health frameworks.

So I think about a living wage, and new tools and framing for how we understand ourselves. I think about the possibility – when I imagine what the care system is going to look like in terms of proximity. I live in a neighborhood or community that is a couple of miles. And the

centers we go to in that area, if that makes sense. Giving us the opportunity to hold those folks accountable in a different way when we're in community together. If I know my neighbors go to the same care spaces, we can say – there is an opportunity for the peer support, the therapy, the psychiatry – we won't even call it psychiatry anymore when we have a new world. Whatever we have, we are able to hold those folks accountable and responsible for our collective wellness in a different way than we are in our current structure, if that makes sense. I will stop there.

>> ANJALI NATH UPADHYAY: Yeah, I can certainly add that the silos that we're groomed to imagine in are not helpful for answering this question. Whether that is having certifications in certain disciplines and climate catastrophe not being in your field so why would you think about it? It's not your responsibility. Un-silo-ing our imaginations accordingly, is everything to be able to address this question in a robust, rigorous way. Reality doesn't exist in silos, even though the vast majority of professional studies does.

So back in the history of women's studies, ethnic studies, Indigenous studies – even as compromised as those fields are – folks realized over half a century ago oh, this disciplinarity, it is disciplining what can otherwise be expansive modes of visioning within our social movements. So then some folks were like, I've got it, what about interdisciplinarity? Looking at two things in tandem, and some folks were like, that's interesting, what about transdisciplinarity? That's a little more robust. What about anti-interdisciplinarity?

If we have learned something in the field of mental health or psychology or psychiatry, having the humility to acknowledge there are all of these other facets in the kaleidoscope that is our reality that are getting obscured if we are just putting up on a pedestal one form of jargon, one mode of perception, one textual community of folks in a scene or a clique, academically or professionally, that go to these conferences but not those, whatever it might be, that merit unlearning if we are going to be able to engage this question in the service of getting free.

The last thing I'll mention is: land back, shout out land back, when in doubt land back. Land back over land acknowledgments. There is just absolutely like was mentioned in our lovely intro, no bypassing speaking to the ecocide that's happening right now, and how it impacts all living beings. So there will absolutely be no liberation without repairing our relationship, as the species with the earth. If we are not contending with that, whether we frame it as our broader kinship structures and responsibilities – if we're in concrete boxes continuing to engage these conversations, we have also, as far as we've gone, hardly started to scratch the surface of the praxis that is going to be required to get us to collective liberation.

>> GRETCHEN ROHR: I love this question. It is one that comes up quite a bit with my work, and I always start with the first thing that my abolitionist teaching has been that, as stated here: to create the new we don't necessarily need to create any of the new. Even the language of systems that I know I have adopted and employed and had to change my thinking as to absolutely whether it is systems that operated before the destruction, before colonial destruction, or systems operating during, despite and the corporatization and the devastation of really the nonprofit-industrial complex, and the medical-industrial complex and what has been stated here.

Much of where I see hope and faith coming forward are folks who are trying to hold on to what has always been there. So we don't have to look far, we just have to look quite differently at what systems keep us alive.

I looked to the spaces of the people who have been building unique forms of care. And that includes even at the very intimate level. So I believe that the way forward is at a very intimate level for many of us. The work by Mia Mingus, Ignacio Rivera, even thinking about family systems, and how we can support having these conversations and dialogues at the family level, particularly as being someone who lives with a disability and also lives in a household with many psychiatric survivors. I know there is a role that I must play in their care, and there can be roles that many family members play which actually move towards the carceral frame. It is often family members who are the number one callers of 911 that can result in – in a devastating way – the death of their loved ones, when the police respond.

>> AIDA MANDULEY: Gretchen, you're muted.

>> GRETCHEN ROHR: I just muted myself. Sorry, I dropped in the chat, and I believe Loa has for the rest of y'all, some resources. That includes One Million Experiments and Interrupting Criminalization, which are just wonderful partners that have been working – Mariame Kaba, we've been working together for four years, five years now – how can we promote this stuff happening that people don't know about. And it's happening. And particularly, I think a vision of it is Dream Defenders, Dr. Armen Henderson and a whole team in Miami that has built out a peer response network and a way of having emergency response without it being a carceral frame. Also, as I posted, in Minnesota, there are so many creative frames of care that are being resourced by the communities by the survivors.

Erica Woodland, the Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network – besides the amazing work the network delivered, they also have a fund, there's a deadline in April for an application for their resources. And absolutely I know the folks, Noah has amazing resources tied in with networking, resourcing, as well. That is a form of creating our care. It exists already and a lot of folks are tying in: how can we build in collective care? How can we address transgenerational trauma in a way that uses language that is accessible, but can really blow that language apart.

One last thing. I would say that I think it is really powerful what I learned from abolitionists, particularly who are survivors of sexual violence, that I think is Rebecca Farrer that has a quote: the future is not where there will be no violence, and in this case, there will be no need for care, everyone is all healthy. Please, that is not a future I envision will exist. It is how we approach harm, how we approach exclusion, how we approach the need for care. And I think one of the visions that she described that I just loved was relating to rape and most definitely, the challenges of people with disabilities and mental health needs have – as disproportionately targeted and then also the mental health need of the care in response to the harm.

And she was stating, there is no longer a need for hotlines. That one visual thing, there is no longer a need for suicide hotlines and rape hotlines, all these hotlines where you need to anonymously report because of a stigma of being a victim or a stigma of having a need. That's the future she was challenging us to think of. Where the care and the service and the support is

so embedded in us understanding, that's how we all liberate. That is how we can all thrive and the needs of the person with the disability is not simply a burden to the community – but one that is actually going to free the community to engage its best and most powerful resource, which is human beings.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: So, if people so choose, I would love for us to just take a moment and inhale the visions. Yeah, inhale and exhale the visions that we are just beautifully – and as someone in the chat said – needed now, and not in the future. Needed now, at this moment. If we can breathe those visions in and out, and we have heard. I'm sorry, I need a moment. This is so powerful. Gratefully, we have heard from everyone. We are going to shift and take a moment to ask questions of each individual and have moments for reflection.

We'll start with Yolo. What frameworks, perspectives, and contexts do you use to talk with Black folks – both with people with lived experiences and professionals – about mental health and community building via BEAM? How does it differ and overlap with dominant narratives about mental health?

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: Thank you for this question. So I'm going to talk about one of our core offerings, which is our Black Mental Health and Healing Justice Peer Support training. This training was coming out of the reality that myself, and it was co-created with Erica Woodland. We recognized that there were a great deal of folks who had a lot of language around discourse around mental health and psychiatric survivors, but not necessarily a lot of skills and tools to hold the spaces that we often theorized. We knew we needed more folks with the skills, embodied practice. We built a training for anyone who works and lives in Black communities – that centers Black folks and our experiences – giving a framework and understanding how to respond to crises in dignity without police. How to reframe the current context of how mental health has been understood and center a liberatory praxis.

There are a couple of important things that I want to name. The first thing is, whenever doing any kind of mental health or wellness or healing justice training, we recognize that many of us are coming in there with many things. So all of our trainings start off with consent-based practice. It helps us to take a sacred pause, internalized capitalism wants us to rush to the content. We want to ground and root ourselves in a way that allows us to prepare for the information we are going to digest. Working with Black folks, all of us are in some way survivors of the prison-industrial complex, mental health-industrial complex. So I was kind of irate, to be honest, about the ways in which they would jump into these heady, ideological conversations without giving a chance to pause, breathe, connect and get them ready for that. So there was so much there.

So we spend a great deal of time grounding, checking in and reframing, helping craft a space to create collective safety together. That is something we make together. As facilitators, we help introduce and we collectively craft that. The other piece that is important any time we talk with Black folks about healing justice and mental health is really acknowledging the ongoing harm of the prison-industrial and mental health-industrial complex. Many of us don't see those things as distinguishable. There are many Black folks whose first encounter with mental health is not the really beautiful, Sunday brunch therapy session. It's actually the carceral system, really destructive and damaging and dangerous to our folks. So naming the legacy of that harm,

knowing it is still ongoing, not pretending that all these mental health institutions are great. "You are going to get a therapist and it is going to be everything!" That is not the only strategy viable.

Another important part of the work is acknowledging that we as Black folks in this country have always had tools and strategies to heal. We have legacies of healing, of what was never called peer support. The reality is, when we were enslaved on ships, we had to find ways to care for each other in the moment of distress and trauma. We would not be here if we didn't have systems of care within the slave's quarters, etc. to navigate and support ourselves. There are strategies and tools we have always had. Whether it is the current day Tarot ladies, Pastors, informal kitchen table conversations, barber salons. Uplifting the legacy of healing so it is not obscure by the white medical-industrial complex, which says: only this is what is healing.

Uplifting that legacy. People will come into the sessions and say, you know, I never thought about that. I used to be in the salon, my moms and all them would talk and cry and hold and process. Get money to go to the hospital, and do these things. I'm like yes, we have those systems already, so even naming some of the beautiful things you were all sharing, some of those things are in our world now. Naming that they are here.

And then a part of my work and hope is to uplift them and illuminate them, and say: that which you mentioned, it happens. It may not happen on a big grand scale yet, but it is here. So those are some things that are important for me. To name that history and not pretend that the systems always have our best interest at heart, but to uplift that we have tools and strategies to support ourselves. We can build systems of care outside that system. We can navigate that system cautiously, we can advocate for each other and protect each other whether we have to get some things from that system, whether it's medicine or what those things are. But really going in with that approach, as opposed to what I've seen a lot of people do with Black mental health, which is: everything is great, go to a therapist, it is going to solve your problems. And not looking at systems and structural issues. And therapy is not the strategy for all of us, it is one tool that has significant limitations. I will stop there, I know I said a lot. Let me mute.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you so much. I want to give anyone on panel an opportunity if there is a response.

>> VESPER MOORE: I would like to respond. I think it is right on. It is good work. We talk about the formalization of peer support a lot, but we don't realize that it has existed for hundreds and thousands of years. It is interdependence that has existed in communities. It's working through suffering at the kitchen table with your hands in the soil. It is outside, it is together. And I think we have this culture of oh, we must look to these hierarchies and these people to answer our questions. You know, and that is a culture, that is something that comes from white supremacy largely.

A lot of and a lot of Taino tribes, the people I hail from, we had chiefs who were women, women of color doing that work, and then when the Spaniards came in, a lot of the colonization came in and we were hung in groups of 13 to symbolize Jesus and the 12 apostles. Our work of collective responsibility and restorative justice and working together and a lot of these ideals we are trying to foster now were eliminated. A lot of us who lived in this wider diaspora, we have to relearn and reconnect to the roots. It goes back to what Anjali was talking about. We have to care and do the work for the earth. We are at a point right now where if we lose the earth, or

rather, the earth is no longer inhabitable for us. The first folks that are going to be impacted are disabled folk, or mad folk. People won't care until it starts to impact the more privileged populuses..

>> AIDA MANDULEY: I'll keep it short, but not everything needs to be scaled up. We live in a country, and honestly most countries at this point. We are operating under – you have to scale it up. You have to make it bigger. And not everything has to do that. And also, especially when talking about reconnecting: all of us are a native to some place, family and lineage, we don't have to be co-opting other people's stuff. We can create our own rituals and ceremonies, and if there is any kind of sharing, that is different than: “that seems nice, I will do it at home.” That is not the same as borrowing or being given something, which I say as one of the lightest skinned people here, who probably has a big load of European ancestry. We don't have to co-opting things to make our own stuff. We do all deserve ritualization and ceremony to hold us and heal and there's a lot of different ways of doing that.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you both for responding and building with Yolo. With that we are going to shift the question to Vesper. It is coming off a question coming up in the chat and in the panel already, about interdependence, about community, and what that can look like when talking about decarcerating care. So Vesper, as you have been involved in building peer respites, how institutionalized racism, whiteness in the mental health system, impacted the work you do? What is the power of a BIPOC, Indigenous approach to peer respites?

>> VESPER MOORE: Thank you for that question. There is a lot of power. Something that is so important to the model of peer respite, and what we are developing – I use that term “model”, it really does point to what we were talking about earlier. It is attempting to bring us back to our roots as human beings, as communities, and as reservoirs in a society that is inherently disabling and causing emotional distress.

So something that really brought Karaya Peer Respite, the peer respite I was involved in in the oversight and creation of and I'm still involved every day. Karaya was really born from the Taino ancestral spirit, for the moon, Karaya, who I am wearing on my pendant today. And as a symbolism for rest and self-reflection, but also states of mind, multiple states of mind – as there are many phases of the moon, and the original roots of lunacy and the moon. I think that is very important when we talk to the root, is that name first. And then secondly, something that's been so instrumental in the creation is that throughout COVID, there were a lot of people being incarcerated in psychiatric institutions.

I really do use that term, being incarcerated in psychiatric institutions. I don't think a lot of folks often take that terminology and think of it as incarceration. And what was happening was that people were turning to these spaces because they were entering the mental health system, the mental health-industrial complex largely for the first time – even if they were indirectly impacted by it, they were directly impacted by it. And they were saying, I really wish that there were more peer respites I can turn to, more models like this. There are peer respites in many different places. So we were like, okay, what if we try to develop a peer respite? There has to be more and more mental health funding. We did, we applied for that funding, and we wrote it to the best of our ability.

It is important to understand when you develop things like this, you are going to develop it within this wider range of capitalism and inherent productivity and liability and risk culture and all of these really awful things that actually take us away from: how do we presently sit in the sense of danger and unsafety in our society that is inherent, that can be tied to our ancestral roots. Like I was talking about earlier, so many of my people historically were killed, colonized. Our culture was, you know – a lot of it was eliminated and lost and isn't validated today. And I live with that. Yet that is not often thought of when I am being given a mental health diagnosis. When I'm being assigned and told that this is what defines my distress, right?

So when we talk about peer respite, we are really talking about it as a diversion from that larger mental health-industrial complex. and the way in which I think a lot of folks don't realize we can talk about a culture that allows us to presently have the dignity to approach a lot of these distressing states of being, that we can actually sit with someone in the space of their deepest suffering and realize that oh wow, if I were to just really listen and be present with that person, right? And not assume what risks are going to occur organizationally or with others, but rather what is best for this person, and what they're looking for? We could redefine a lot of our ideas and approaches.

For example, one thing that I am focusing a lot on is – in addition to police responses, with peer supporters, and peer supporters responding to certain police calls, particularly for BIPOC folk, in emotional distress – instead of a social worker where there is a lot of violent history with that white social work system. Instead, you can have a Black Indigenous person of color responding to that call and being in that space. Also in spaces like peer respite, having an agricultural peer specialist who is in space with you, and again, you know, allowing for that self-determination to work with the land and gain that connection with the land.

I think some ideas take us away from the traditional idea of: we have to have a formalized DSM, formalized diagnoses, these models that exist in these ways. In order for us to get there, we have to introduce and continue to introduce, we have already introduced it, these alternatives. So as we decolonize, as we dismantle, we have something else to turn to.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you. And we do have time for maybe one person if there was a comment, additional thought.

ANJALI NATH UPADHYAY: Shout out to the earth's moon. Thank you Vesper for bringing in lunacy, which of course we know is such a gendered form of pathologizing, right gas lighting, gaslighting, clinicalizing, psychiatrizing. And just to pause and to ground in: how disrespectful to how many of our ancestral traditions? Who of our people didn't have a relationship with the moon?

If we were going to be wave finding, or we fish, if we planted, if we harvested for our ritual, for our holidays, for our ceremony, for folks who menstruate, for tracking our period, we could continue. Just the audacity of a system that would lie so profoundly as if our relationship with celestial beings is a source of pathology or ignorance or unknowing. It is such a profound example of the kind of upside down world that is the mainstream neocolonial, global mental health movement. That would have us diversifying poison at the expense of – like so many of the panelists have been naming – remembering with humility and respect with what came before. We don't have to reinvent the wheel, we can reconnect with the moons and our tradition

and be wisdom keepers and knowledge keepers, out of respect for our traditions that merit nourishing.

Don't get me started on the moon, I can continue but lunacy is such a – we do a lot of work in Liberation Spring on a class we offer called Gaslight the System: The Politics of Madness and Sanity – reminding people of the power of lunar reconnection as one entry point into alternative modes of imagining, what on earth these conversations about perception and psychic states could sound like. So thank you so much Vesper for bringing that up.

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: Sorry. I want to big up “diversifying the poison.” I will be quoting you on that, that is literally what is happening, diversifying the poison. A lot of it is not something to celebrate, like oh yay, we have a person of color that is the president of the plan of mental health. That's not exciting, I don't feel excited about that, that's not got me riled up. One piece I wanted to add. When I think about connecting to the moon, lunacy, it goes back to that capitalism, white supremacy, has a deep investment in us not doing that because we don't become the hyper-productive, super-capitalist people – I'm not doing that, I'm doing this, I'm connecting to this part of myself. This doesn't make sense, why would I do that? There is an intentionality of disconnecting us from that part of ourselves and our heritage. Thank you for naming that and what you shared.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you all. I want to say something, but I'm going to Aida some time. There's so much here. As the chat is saying, people want longer and longer with each of you, there is so much richness. I do want to give Aida a question: as we already started talking about, with the oppressive social control tools used in mental health, how does one do liberatory work and cultivate autonomy, and what sustains that?

>> AIDA MANDULEY: I will start from the last part to the first part. This is a statement about connection, rest, and restoration. Restoration is not the same thing as rest. Restoration is, your battery is filling up, and you are growing resourced. Rest is: chill the fuck out, just stop, pause, that might be sleep or other things, it is the existing and that's it. Not focusing on too much else. Connection, relationship, we are already talking a lot about that. I will leave it there, This is where hope as a discipline comes through. Shout out again to Mariame Kaba.

Hope is not something that we have to just magically have and in the world we live in, no shit, of course we're not going to feel hopeful a lot of the time if we are just breathing in these poisons of all of these systems and we have to practice it. A lot of these things need practice. Shout out to things like Cambridge HEART, which I'm on the board for, which is imagining alternatives to police response in the city of Cambridge in Massachusetts. Shout out to the One Million Experiments. Part of this is about celebration, ah! We need to celebrate to continue moving and going. Because otherwise, it is so easy to fall into hopelessness and, why am I doing any of this?

So big shout out to celebration, big shout out to things like – and I was making a joke about this earlier, literally just putting colors on one's face if that makes one feel more aligned with one's gender and joy. Little things can make it easier to go through the day and bring a little bit of celebration. Is that going to change policy? No. Is it going to make you wake up with more internal desire to change a policy? Yeah, probably. So looking at things that are small that can make a huge change is a big thing. For me, this is a marathon, not a sprint and treating it like a

sprint is going to hurt us in the end. As someone who tried to treat it as a sprint. for whatever reason, including capitalist indoctrination: it is not a sprint. Let's stop that.

In terms of how to do the work outside of the sustainability portion. Connecting with people that are licensed and unlicensed. If you are unlicensed, connect with the licensed folks and vice versa. If you don't have a community of people that do the kind of thing that you do across a range of educational levels, you are A) missing out on some good stuff, and B) probably not doing that good of a job and you should check your life. We have to divest from purity politics, of "I need to wait for the perfect job." Good freaking luck. Or wait for the perfect activist. We are all going to fuck it up and do some bullshit, and the recovery is more important than: "I will never be problematic ever." We could have a whole conversation about how we are all problematic and we are trying to change that or heal or repair it. That is different from "I have never done anything bad."

See where our gift shines and focus there. But also keep little tendrils, I'm thinking of mycelium, tentacles. I do certain things and there is only so much time I have to "work." But do I know the people that do other things that matter to the work I'm in? That is going to be important. That will increase my ability to do my work well, and it will help me move in a different direction if I choose to. I was not always a therapist. I'm not always going to be a therapist. To be able to shift in and out of different ways to do the work is making it sustainable on an individual and collective level.

Another piece I want to shout out is, shout out to liberation health and liberation psychology for liberation health. It asks us to always be looking at the personal, cultural, and institutional factors when trying to look at what a problem is. If someone is depressed and they say that is their problem, cool. Let's talk about the personal, institutional, and cultural factors that are enabling and/or creating the depression. Let's also look at the historic memory of change in your lineage, whatever that is, that can help move you forward or even diagonally. And let's think about action steps. Let's not just talk, but see how we can move these thoughts into the material world in some way.

So again, those are a couple of frameworks. Another piece here is around incorporating feedback into any relationship that we have. When I do work as a therapist, I generally have, instead of a formal evaluation six months in, I do a little bit of feedback at the end. I ask, generally, what was curious or are you taking away from today, and what was the most challenging part of today. And again I can say a lot of what clinically that gives me, but it gives the client a chance to say that was trash, or I liked this and did not like that. And I use humor as with a way of building a rapport with people in the clinical space and outside of clinical space.

And I see that I have a minute or two left so I'm going to wrap it up. We are on time and doing good. Another piece that I incorporate here is moving with respectful curiosity and assuming that when people are doing something it makes sense to them, under some framework. If you don't get it and are trying to judge it, take a moment. "This may make sense to you, I don't know how yet, but I want to be curious about it." Because that way we can better build connections. We are not coming from a place of judgment, but I trust you right now, I don't get it right now, I trust you and am trying to build with you, or mm, you should clearly leave the abusive relationship. Clearly, that's bad for you. It's never as simple as just leaving, as many of

us know. So moving with that curiosity and assumption of, “this somehow works for you and makes sense,” can build a better bridge.

And then finally, I will leave it at: getting really well versed in dialectics, which is just a fancy way of saying this/and, instead of, or this or, and this versus. A lot of things are true at the same time. They don't have to make logical sense, they just are and trying to fight that keeps us stuck with: the DSM has the true answer. No it doesn't. So I will leave it there. I'm sure I can say more.

>> **MAYOWA OBASAJU:** And I'm sure we would love hearing you say more. Does anyone have any thoughts or comments?

>> **VESPER MOORE:** I do want to say that the growing culture of surveillance isn't new. It has always been there, and surveillance in many different contexts. So psychiatry is working on – specifically digital psychiatry as a field is working on – digital phenotyping, which will be able to diagnose you based on your use of your cell phone or device, the brightness setting, the type of content you are looking at. And that would interface and relate to the entire diagnosis. What's happening is that we are now seeing new forms of oppression that didn't exist before, or rather using a similar blueprint but in a different context. And a lot of that is slipping under our attention. To your point on surveillance and that piece. That is something that I think, in terms of tangible advocacy, we can start doing – now is the time. Because they are really trying to push for it.

Another piece too is I really want to interrogate that idea of what we define as our understanding of emotional distress currently in our society, and how we approach mental health. So often, you know, there are folks that I find in many different spaces who never really thought they could identify with anything beyond their diagnosis. And have identity freedom in that context. So I think challenging the cultural narratives with neurodiversity and mad liberation, with a lot of these things we're talking about – and in the context of when we talk about mental illness and how people identify with their mental illness, does that interrelate with their disability, their chronic illness. I hear from a lot of people who are like, I know how we define mental illness in our society is inherently damaging and problematic, however, at the same time I feel an illness in my body. How do I come to terms with that and have these conversations? I think, as Aida was saying earlier, there are multiple truths, we have to hold multiple truths and organize collectively.

I think something that really inspired this conversation in the first place was the fact that there are a lot of white folk who have access to the mental health system who end up being abused by that mental health system and would wonder why anyone would want access to that otherwise. And meanwhile I see a lot of people in my community who are literally like, I want to see a therapist instead of being put into a prison, right? And they have not really quite contextualized psychiatric incarceration and mass surveillance, because we have grown dependent on it. We have been told that we must depend on it.

So there is liberatory work culturally that has to happen. I think we have to challenge psych institution licensure boards. We need to make alternatives like these simultaneously, we need to go to state houses and spaces in DC like Capitol Hill and talk about the needs for these alternatives and really advocate for them.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Yes, thank you Vesper for naming additional specific steps that we can take to challenge the systems that are surveilling and incarcerating us. We are going to shift and ask Anjali: Why is it important that we have people building outside of the system, and I think we have started that conversation. What is the power in that? Who is centered and how is this different from who is centered in the system?

>> ANJALI NATH UPADHYAY: Thank you for that. Well, we know that— just like it has come up so many times in the dialogue – the system is deeply professionalized, and it is a problem that our social movements and so much effort, that people who attempt to get free have been professionalized. That's not intrinsically connected to our collective liberation in any way, other than it being an impediment to it, frankly. What would the benefit be for operating outside of the system as is realistically available to us? Being able to de-professionalize our praxis.

With humility, it is an honor to bring in someone who has done that so exquisitely. Have y'all heard of doctor Frantz Fanon. I'm lifting up a photo of him for y'all who may be watching the screen right now. He was an Afro Indigenous psychiatrist, who actually, as a part of his oath that he had made to support the folks that he was working with, ended up deprofessionalizing himself, to play with this language.

So he was from the Caribbean island of Martinique, ended up working at a psychiatric institution in the French colonially occupied Algeria. And when he was working with folks, he realized, hearing story after story of somebody witnessing their family members be murdered. Of someone else experiencing their ancestral homeland being ripped away from them. These folks don't have anything wrong with them that needs labeling or pathologizing. If I'm serious about some ethical commitment to these folks I'm supposed to be in solidarity with, what I actually need to pivot my responsibility to is kicking the French colonizers out of this country, is ending the system of oppression that is creating this alienation and disease to begin with.

Not pretending that this is individualistic or a personal problem, but having the honesty to name the structural injustice that he was witnessing. He stopped being a psychiatrist. He took up arms and he fought alongside the Algerians to kick the French out of their country. I bring him up here because sometimes when folks are operating within the system, we get lied to through stories about “professional ethics.” As if somehow professionals have any monopoly on ethics at all, whatsoever. And I know wreck imagine so much better than that. I would like to invite all of y'all to do so accordingly.

I would like to share a story related to a time after my mother unexpectedly passed away about 15 years ago. My maternal grandmother is someone who heard, auditorily, all sorts of things including voices that many people didn't seem to have consciously have access to, and some folks operating from a tragically colonized mindset within my biological family, might in hushed tones use the word schizophrenia when they would speak to my grandmother talking about perception – that she respected and revered, that they didn't know having access to themselves.

And after I had the incredible honor of participating in a ceremony with some loved ones, I went to my grandmother's house with my siblings and she – as we were sitting on the couch – was telling a story. I was sitting next to her, and for the first time since my mother

passed away, I saw her standing over my grandmother. It was the first time I had seen her so clearly in my waking consciousness since she passed. I was entirely transfixed until I heard my grandmother interrupt herself. And she said, “hang on a second, Rosanne is saying something to me right now.” At that moment I realized, without telling anyone that I had seen my mother come to us, and without my grandmother knowing I was witnessing her presence, my grandmother was hearing my mother talking to us talking in that circle at that time.

Part of that purpose of operating outside of the system is to revere the wisdom of our perception, particularly for survivors and for those of us with access to ways of knowing that that would get pathologized – to unapologetically honor the wisdom that our ancestors are giving to us right now without labels like schizophrenia. If someone doesn't even know that ancestor veneration is a thing, let alone those who have connections with plants, with other species, unapologetically that exist in part in solidarity with us, even those who have forgotten what we are capable of knowing. And having some respect for that support that is coming through at this moment to support us.

I want to leave off with that invitation to remember the survivors that we could be centering unapologetically. Not founders, not gatekeepers, not sensors. Our grandmothers, the spirits if we want to invoke that language in the English language, although we have other vocabulary to speak to what it is I'm putting it down – to have the rigor to even attempt to remember some of that languaging, instead of our tongues continuing to be colonized by a language that had nothing to do with supporting us getting free. A system working real well in the service of maintaining oppression, that is not broken but doing exactly the role it was created as a part of ongoing colonization to perpetuate. A system that cannot be decolonized because it is colonialism itself.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you and yes, fire. With that, I would like to ask if people are so moved – if you would like, if you would like to unapologetically remember, there is an opportunity to share in the chat. The survivors. The people. Maybe even the places. We can take that moment here and now because it is so important to do so, thank you so much for providing us with that invitation. And I know from the chat and people's reactions that there is so much that folks want to say. We will have time to ask more questions that everyone will respond to. I want to honor all of the powerful voices we are being gifted with right now.

And to ask Gretchen and to please continue with the power of the chat, too. I want to shout out the vulnerability and the care and information and support you are offering to each other in the chat. It is beautiful to witness. For Gretchen. Given that we are all often working with folks from a variety of spiritual backgrounds and beliefs, how do you see spirituality or the intangible fitting into this work and what can this look like in practice?

>> GRETCHEN ROHR: I see it in many ways and I feel it in other ways. And the feeling is something that I am developing a deeper trust of. When we first speak about spirituality, we must recognize that, as was stated earlier: in the traditional form, religion and faith-based institutions have played a clear role in traumatizing many if not all of us. And there is also a movement for integrating, adopting, and adapting faith practices that have – I would use the example with Buddhism and my practice actually, the emphasis on lay meditation is a part of Western application of Buddhism and in the practice of faith traditions. Before it transferred to the West, it was much more emphasis on ritual, movement, and community practice.

The individualized private meditation practice is one that has kind of blown up because, for a lot of reasons – because it is great, I love meditating. And it can serve a role to manage Black and brown bodies. It can serve a role to convince us that individual practices are meant to change and shift your mindset so you can get along with or be bearable to others, whether it is sitting down in your class. Whether it is our role in communities. And so I elevate in what I see, and I help contribute to a lot of what I see, which has blown up in movements and blown up in mainstream spaces, which I do see as spiritual practices.

Meditation, mindfulness, somatic practices – many somatic practices, we talk about chanting and other practices that have come from traditions, many that are Indigenous to many of us. Then the science catches up and they are talking about the vagus nervous system, isn't it good to sing and hum, it really helps with your balance. And I'm like what, I was taught to chant a long time ago.

There is also a great emphasis I'm seeing on safety and security practices minimizing the harm of systems. I'm seeing a lot more professional development and healing practices and building capacity builders for healing your capacity within institutions and organizing groups to heal. And a space for the spiritual, which is leaning into your purpose and not simply conflict resolution with others but internal conflict resolution – that to do this work oftentimes, I know I have felt, that I can be in a space of cognitive dissonance and holding that terribly is pure terror. Really, I think it is a work of spirituality.

I think that much of our healthcare innovation has emphasized the reasoning, the reasonable attributes, of spiritual practices. Circle keeping, all of that, but has really ignored other aspects that are critical. We have spoken about collective capacity and connection. Because they are contrary to selling a product, or contrary to building out the corporatization of care. So I do believe that spiritual grassroots organizing, advocacy, and mutual aid is something that very much has been operated, held, and generated by our faith institutions, of various degrees and our spiritual communities – and also indeed harm reduction.

Much of the origins of it and recognizing those who are living with external attacks on their livelihood have to have a space of refuge and a state of restoration, which is different from rest. I see it also, with where it is you can go for your refuge to rebuild up and revolutionize. And as for me, the Black church in its history in the US has been one of the most powerful institutions to hold those spaces. It is where the majority of money has been invested and continues to sit with Black power. It is the space, the community space of feeding, caring, and mutual aid, of counseling. And when there has been a deep breach between how those institutions have been responding to preventing – and unfortunately perpetuating the harm against so many – we're really in a crisis of faith, I see it.

I don't believe we are in a crisis of faith where folks need to return back to faith institutions. What I see is the crisis of faith in the protection of those institutions or infrastructure that we still need. We need to change those institutions, we still need institutions. This is coming from the person that said it's all on the individual level. The problem is the safe space for us to explore and have control of our care has been in some ways robbed from us in the attack on these spaces, of sacred spaces.

I mentioned the Black churches as an example because so much of the civil rights and organizing movement could not have occurred without a space without police surveillance, and we are losing those spaces. How can we get infrastructure into the hands of the modern day, the contemporary builders of our spiritual healing and support? How can I get those resources so they have long standing infrastructure? And also how is it that we can preserve sacred spaces that are not recognized as the church institutions? The burial grounds, the sacred water spaces. All of the work that has been done on climate protection is very critical to address the cognitive dissonance we feel in our stewardship with the earth and relationship with other people.

One thing I would definitely say that I'm hopeful about is the increase in institutional recognition of death doulas. The need for there to be a – there's been a birthing, there is a birthing of new creation, creative spaces is where we have our liberty. When we think about capacity building – in philanthropy, we think about capacity building a lot. Are we building the capacity to hold this moment? This moment of transgenerational trauma? How are we billing each other's capacity for adaptability and creativity, which is happening in these spaces? I see that as a goal and a purpose of spirituality. So there are areas which I think are under-resourced and I wanted to note a few there. As was noted, divination.

I'm a big fan of bibliomancy. I like to open a book, any book I am engaging in and see what is speaking to me. I do have a tarot practice and does every Black woman have a practice now? I say that with jest because this has been going on for years, we would have organizers providing and supporting individual training in that, I have not come across or industry resources to support that. It's seen as intangible. For something so intangible, I'm seeing that everybody is driving into it, and so thinking through how to support the training and the training of folks so they are not simply appropriating and exploiting practices, but have access to the way to deliver with care for themselves and explore.

In addition, in building out people's sense of belonging, the ancestor veneration. It was raised, it is quite common. But for many of us who have been disrupted from our lines of ancestry, it brings up a whole additional trauma. And needing to recognize that, yeah, just throwing a little ancestor veneration in the beginning of the meeting is going to work for everyone. No. So that is where I'm seeing so much juiciness and need for connection. Big shout out to Song of the Spirit and Black Earth Wisdom. They are building out some incredible work. I was in a prayer and ceremony practice with her in December. Even as a preacher's daughter, do I really want to be incorporating prayer in a practice that is in the movement and that's what's missing: praying to the earth.

And how much we are taught to not take prayer seriously – if it's outside of religious context or a space. And yet, all of the science says we will not shift, we cannot. without that sense of engagement with something larger than ourselves and the intangible. So in trying to resist the cultural appropriation, exploitation, I come at it with quite a bit of humility of how those of us who are having to create almost a mix of practices because it is so difficult to access what truly was my genetic ancestry practice.

So one thing, people need more for folks to have that ability that people are trying to tie into other languages that are dying and being eradicated, structurally and systemically. And that recognizing there is no space where I believe any of us can operate – which is where there is a

culture of a colonizer versus a culture of the colonized. And that just like how Buddhism has shifted in many of the spaces in the countries, it is to adapt to what has been a power dynamic. I think our devotional practices, our spiritual practices that I'm seeing so many of my organizer partners utilize. They have apothecaries now within their organizing spaces, herbalism is huge. That's the work I do. The chanting and dancing. Spiritual baths.

You got to know your limits and I introduced the spiritual baths at my foundation; instead they got a vibration chair. But hey. Knowing the difference of folks' spiritual needs by at least recognizing sometime we can come back at it through a scientific description. Shamanic drumming, spiritual baths – this work on vibration, it is very much supported by science. But I'm very eager to learn how we can restore respect for something beyond science. And that is the spirituality of it, the meaning of it. No one will be able to stay in space without it.

So I just say that letting go of the reasoning and the management – I feel like much of spirituality is like to give people their thing so they will stick around, or they are resilient. I think we need to focus on revolution and it is something that can only come out of spirituality. A space of absolute creativity, has no idea where it comes from. People talk about space, the need for revelation. I think that faith-based groups have brought that to the movement and we need to hold onto – I also think mourning, the power of mourning has been more fully embraced by those who first come at mourning as a spiritual or pastoral care lens and I don't want to see it destroyed by our work elsewhere, but we need to work more collaboratively to ensure it is not ignored in our needs as we heal as a community.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you so much. Because you have opened up so much for us to think about and to sit with, and you also really wonderfully helped us to segue to our closing question. You already started naming what are some of the community-based alternatives, what are the aspects and, what are the strategies and pieces of the alternative that look the most promising to us. You were talking about the death doulas, end of time of vibration and beyond science.

Opening up to the rest of the panel, too: What do you think are the most promising community-based alternatives and what conditions they'd to be put in place to build them? What tools – you already started naming them – what tools and knowledge can help advance them. So in the interest of time, and knowing that we would all love to hear so much from you all, just hearing for a few minutes from each of you, what are your thoughts?

>> YOLO AKILI ROBINSON: I will briefly say, I think some of the best community care strategies are ones we are already doing, we just need to uplift and refine. Black southern communities where I'm from, what does it mean to go into the churches to make them sites of liberatory psychological practice? What does that look like? How do we make that happen? We work and train a lot of stylists and barbers. We recognize that it is a space where a lot of healing and conversation and discourse happens. So thinking about how to acknowledge where it happens, where white supremacy said it is not real or legitimate, find those places. Whether it's the kitchen table or the barbershop, the faith space, whatever it is. And go into the space and share some things that we are learning and growing so we can grow together in those spaces.

I think that the spaces – in my experience working in Black communities: building up the practices we already have has been more effective than trying to introduce something completely foreign to folks. So they are like I don't get this, but I can do the kitchen table, if you can get me some skills to have a different kitchen table conversation. I can do that. An intervention I get is people call me and say I need to talk about something difficult with someone or address something or hold them accountable. I'm like, do what my grandmother says, you need to find a meal y'all like, if it is something ya'll cook together or get church's chicken. There is a tradition of food and gardening that can be a powerful opener for conversation. We have a lot more than white supremacy leads us to believe we don't have. Building and refining those is important.

>> AIDA MANDULEY: Agree with that, and one of the questions that got asked was about money and funding and like how do you fund this? Funding is not just about money. We have to think creatively, in terms of: what things are we trying to get with the money and can we get them another way? If we are looking for money to feed people, can we cut the middleman of money and feed them in some way. Obviously in the system money has to happen somewhere in there and again, that's where redistribution comes in and mutual aid comes in. I'm going to uplift a resource and then I'm going to put in the chat called Ride Free Fearless Money, and the SCLC, in terms of looking at cooperative ways of moving money. If you are a clinician, I have a lot to say about responsive fee systems and sliding scales and building a practice so some people pay more and some pay less.

This idea of thinking creatively and trying to see where you are trying to go and work backwards. Rather than we have to raise two million dollars. Okay for what? What are we trying to get, and who are we building with who may have the dollars? Another shoutout to cross-discipline and cross-movement solidarity to share resources and pool resources. Because it is true, we are going to need things and we have to figure out a way to get them. And another piece on this thinking of groups and organizations. Sometimes we get really excited about all of the different things we can do and pause, think small. Great revolution, love it, are you doing something with your neighbor? Are you doing things with your best friends or your community?

Sometimes again we have to scale down, not the dream, but scale down the practice so build it sustainably. When I think about what are the most promising community-based alternatives? Honestly, my friends are the people doing work. People on this call, and it is not because they are grounded in an institution, it's because of the small bits of work that add up to something really huge. I just want to say that. We can drop a lot of names but are you going to Google them? Maybe, but what can you do now and tomorrow, instead of: here is the resource list I'm never going to look at again. That's it from me.

>> ANJALI NATH UPADHYAY: I'm happy to follow up on that capitalism piece. Thank you for going there. Our minds have been so monetized, so what would it look like to demonetize our imaginations, exactly like I heard you speaking to. So doing the thing and putting the direct in direct action, as opposed to immediately presuming money as an indirect vehicle for things. Got to do a shout out to the Zapatistas – bringing up a photo of them right now. One of the most tremendous examples of peoples who have been holding it down in an autonomous decolonial space.

So in Chiapas, in the southern region of the so-called nation state of Mexico, overwhelmingly Indigenous Mayan folks, who aren't operating with a whole lot of money because they have a connection with their land base and waterways that sustain them – as one example of what we can be inspired by and support when we do movement education. Which is another principal invitation, political education, not politically bypassing. There are so many strands within the mainstream colonial culture that perceive psychology as a deeper way of understanding things. And there's such copping out of political literacy that is certainly not helping us get free.

So unapologetically doing political education. With humility. When so many of our loved ones are currently incarcerated, are dying unnecessarily, are being targeted, like one of the founders of the field of liberation psychology, Dr. Ignacio Martín-Baró, who was assassinated by the US government – for a psychologist to be assassinated by the US government, we should learn about what he was doing. That might be edifying for us. We don't have time to reinvent the wheel while so many folks are being harmed. So really doing our diligence to learn from our social movements and be able to nourish our imaginations accordingly.

>> GRETCHEN ROHR: I'm going to jump in and say, on the funding track, we will drop the resources if you are wishing to apply for grants. Our funding partners do incredible work – Third Wave, Estrea Fund, Kataly Fund. Many of those who have been working with these questions and continue to do so. And yes, allow for big foundations like mine to move it down there and have that engagement, but our goal and yes, the training with the Zapatistas is exactly it: it is a matter of generative resourcing and changing how we see resourcing. The work of Vu Le and Nonprofit AF website really does break down how we can be decolonizing, how we see resources. Being with so many organizations that think that the best way to raise resources is at the big level and not realizing what internal resources we have.

I am really excited to see the link dropped for the Peoples Hub Community Care Clinic, well as Spirit House in Durham, North Carolina. What it takes is time. Seventeen years they spent developing community conversations about care in book clubs and plays. And I hate the phrase “meeting the person where they are,” it becomes this thing, but they are doing it. There is better language! But introducing the community – it is the space of recognizing that it can come through music and movement, the conversation to then shift to take responsibility for care.

One thing I noticed most being the biggest fan girl and having the opportunity to follow on the wings the work that Mariame and Mia and so many partners are doing: there doesn't have to be a “build out immediately of the work.” How can it be broken down into small pieces for folks to use and how can we evaluate differently? Nicole Pitman once said, and has an amazing program: how can we evaluate progress based on love rather than based on numbers? The deepest accommodations and the shifts can be in how we can evaluate. But the resourcing is, what is the most sustainable thing we have some control over and we are in the midst of a culture war. A major culture war.

I think it is due to some of the major successes that people on this call and others pushed through in decarcerating care over the last few years – to lean into being a battle over our souls. How can we operate quite differently with each other? And that can come through changing how we respond. So my big pitch is, if you've got land and are not willing to give it away right now, write it into a will to some organization you believe in. There are so many ways

to transfer power without even hurting you, and then to be able to do so in a way that might hurt you, is the next stage, but the work that is being done by allies and partners together – I think it really expanded new ways that some organizers find there is no need actually to recruit allies.

Offentimes the first thing is, people are like, how do we get outside the choir. How do we preach outside of the choir? You know, the choir can rock just fine on our own, sometimes. So the space to be able to have refuge and to resource, that not only just within homes but changing how we define community to be inclusive of those who don't benefit from wealth transfer, particularly queer folks who don't very much benefit from the wealth transfer within their families. I really encourage people to think through – there are wonderful supports through Resource Generation and other spaces. And absolutely thinking through how communities can contribute.

So with the work with the elders and bringing elder spirit into our community. We pushed elders out. Little Earth Protectors is this wonderful group from Minneapolis, a housing complex with over 70 different Indigenous tribes represented in this housing complex. And every night the cross-generational group goes and they are walking the streets and complex to address safety concerns, no matter where they come from. How can we resource those folks who have been on the ground, our neighborhood watches, our building call centers, to incorporate and integrate a frame and a vision of liberatory care that those of us who may have had a little bit more, at least I know myself, a little more educational privilege and access privilege to be able to learn these mechanisms. So it's happening.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you so much. Vesper, we haven't heard from you. Do you have your brilliance in one minute?

>> VESPER MOORE: I think it's reaffirming that a lot of these things exist. It's reaffirming that we continue to do the work and that we are dedicated to it. I think that the fact that we are even having these conversations now is an important aspect to that. The fact that we continue to have these conversations is what is really going to move us forward in this particular direction. And when I think about community based alternatives, what's hopeful about that is the sharing of Indigenous knowledge. I think that's really what we're talking about. When you think about working through emotional distress and your struggles, I think of the Dagara tribe, I think of my own tribes and the Quisqueya and a lot of our elders guiding us through that. Talking about our experiences, sitting in that space, it all exists. It is all there. And I think we can continue to do the good work and understand it is in collectivism that we find liberation.

>> MAYOWA OBASAJU: Thank you Vesper for those words. I think in many ways that helps us, as we are sadly closing this conversation, but underlying what everyone has been talking about. How do we collectively get free? And hopefully folks have heard from the panelists the different strategies and tools, and the different ways of being and connecting and visioning and creating that have been happening, will continue to happen. And hopefully we can each, with our ability to remember – remember our own histories and rituals and ancestors and cultures and realities, our own brilliance and wisdom and our own messiness, our own “we are not perfect but we are in this work and doing this work and learning constantly.” The amount I have grown in this conversation, cannot speak to. So the hope is that you are all out there being able to hold the learning, the relearning, the connecting, the sharing, the interconnection, the humility and the curiosity.

I would love to tell you all to please stay for one more minute – we have an important and exciting announcement about IDHA's work and the opportunity to keep exploring and learning about this theme of community. Before we do that, to thank you, thank you, thank each and every one of you, thank you for being here and sharing your wisdom and honesty. Thank you for your resources and thank you for your energies and your very being.

>> JESSIE ROTH: Thank you so much Mayowa. I want to echo that gratitude to all of the panelists for the brilliance and wisdom, for the tools and strategies. I'm excited to keep coming back to this recording to continue to learn and grow, with all of you. And I want to shout out gratitude to the access team, our interpreters, captioner, tech support and the entire IDHA team behind this. We are going to throw a slide on the screen in a minute and please hang on before you leave, because we have an exciting announcement about how you can keep learning around these themes and so much what has been shared this evening and what I have seen people longing to learn about in the chat is exactly what we are going to be able to share with you all.

Alexa, if you are able to share your screen we will keep it really brief. Here it is. So basically, this announcement is that IDHA, we are launching right now – as of this second – Cultivating Community, Creating the Conditions for Care, which is IDHA's Spring 2022 virtual training series. It's going to be running between April and June of this year and Loa is dropping the links in the chat. I think there is an Eventbrite link as well that will take you there, and if you go to the next slide just to give you a little preview of some of what we'll be talking about. Again, it really resonates with a lot of what we've been learning this evening.

We're going to be talking about how we can shift the healing paradigm, from individualism towards collectivism. How we can equalize power, we're talking about access and interdependence. How we can nourish relationships through practice of trust, intimacy, and consent. Centered belonging, how do we hold space for belonging and connection. A closing session on how we can hold difference – there's a lot of conversation about both/and, polyphony, and multiple truths. That class is about how we can lean into general conflict to move towards liberatory futures. Links are in the chat, we'll drop them a couple more times. We would love to have you learn alongside us and learn from you this spring, and we will offer scholarships and it is linked on the landing page below. We have 25 positions that are open and you can apply on the website, and we will put the information in the email. Just a huge shout out to IDHA's training committee who has put in an enormous amount of love, care, intention, and labor into this. And all of the panelists and all of you whose wisdom is feeding into this.

Our last slide is to say you will be receiving a follow up email from us in the next couple of days with the recording of this event, all of the links to the amazing resources that have been shared, and how you can stay in touch with IDHA and the panelists and we hope you will continue to be engaged. We also have a membership program, and we would love to see you in some capacity. You can take down the slides and I invite everybody on the panel and organizing team if you want to come off video and just wave in gratitude. Thank you all so much. Just a wonderful conversation this evening. Thank you.