

A

Peer

Learning

Syllabus



Exploring everyday abolition in organisational practice



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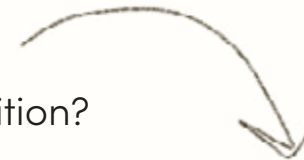
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A Peer Learning Syllabus

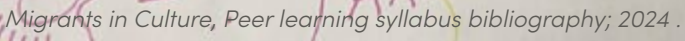
Exploring everyday abolition in organisational practice

The abolition of police, prisons and borders, alongside the logic of policing, imprisonment and bordering is often seen as an abstract and politically unrealistic task. Yet organiser and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us that ‘abolition is about presence, not absence. It’s about building life-affirming institutions.’ And in doing so, cultivating a world that centres on our collective safety and accountability, rather than the punishment and exclusion of racialised and marginalised people.

We are inspired by past and present efforts to transform and build institutions anew, to ensure we can provide care, resolve conflict, build practices that do not reproduce harm, and better understand what collective liberation might look and feel like in practice. In the UK, groups helping us to articulate abolition in everyday organisational practice include Dark Matter Labs, Rad HR, Cradle Community, Project Tallawah, Healing Justice London and many others.

Yet, the question of finding time, space or support to deeply re-organise the ways in which we work remains difficult for many. This is especially so for informal networks and small organisations operating precariously in multiple hostile environments. As alumni from the Civic Futures Fellowship, we wanted to find flexible ways to mutually support one another to grow and embed abolitionist principles into our organisations and ecosystems.

What follows is a description of a peer-learning syllabus, describing seven workshop approaches and processes we used, and the learnings we had over a period of nine months. We hope this syllabus can be a demonstration or a starting point to develop abolitionist organisational practices amongst peers.



Workshop Nº 1

Planning a peer-learning syllabus

Purpose

To gain a better sense of our collective needs and to plan how we wanted to learn together.

Materials

Time together in person, cups of tea & snacks

Prompts

What are our greatest needs / urgencies in terms of organisational practice?

How does an understanding of abolition help us re-shape our organisations and practices?

How do we want to use our time together?

What are some of our access, working and other needs?

How do we want to hold / facilitate this space?

What learning / information would be useful to capture?

Activity

An informal conversation, in which the above prompts helped us to build a learning syllabus. Consisting of seven workshops over nine months, we decided to focus time on growing a collective understanding of abolition, committing to a practical experiment, making space for external training and meals, and closing with a reflection of our learnings together. We each took responsibility for organising and hosting one workshop, documenting our conversations and learnings on a shared drive, and using a whatsapp group to keep in touch and to share resources.



Our Reflections

We organised the syllabus in this way to distribute responsibility across the group, to uplift knowledge that already existed within us and to gather at a slower but regular pace that could be easily incorporated into heavy work lives.

Go Deeper

[Practicing Everyday Abolition – Abolitionist Futures](#) – an article explaining the everyday nature of abolition in our organisations and lives.

[Abolitionist Toolbox](#) – rich resource to explore if you're thinking about how abolitionist practices may apply in your specific contexts.

Workshop N^o 2

What is our collective understanding of abolition?

Purpose

To build a collective understanding of abolition, resourced from the knowledge and experiences from within the group.

Materials

Cups of tea and pot, personal objects, pens and papers

Prompts

What existing knowledge and lived experience around abolitionist practice can we share with each other?

What can we learn as a community and resource amongst ourselves?

The thought: You are here, and that's enough

Activity

We invited each participant to bring in two to five objects that reflect on your current everyday abolitionist practice, related to our current work, our dream work or other areas. As well as one to two objects that say something about what we want to learn about abolitionist practices, eg. governance, care, conflict, trauma and more.

We brought a variety of personal objects including photos, books, posters, stuffed toys, memorabilia and more. We took turns introducing the objects and their significance, and laid them out on a table. We collectively re-arranged the objects by relevance to create a “map” of knowledge, lived experience and communities that we have around abolition.

The last part was fun: we each placed one hand in an inverted victory gesture as the mini ‘standing version’ of ourselves, then walked a path across the map we made – aiming to understand our individual learning journeys with the group. We wrote and shared this learning journey in one sentence as guidance for ourselves over the coming months

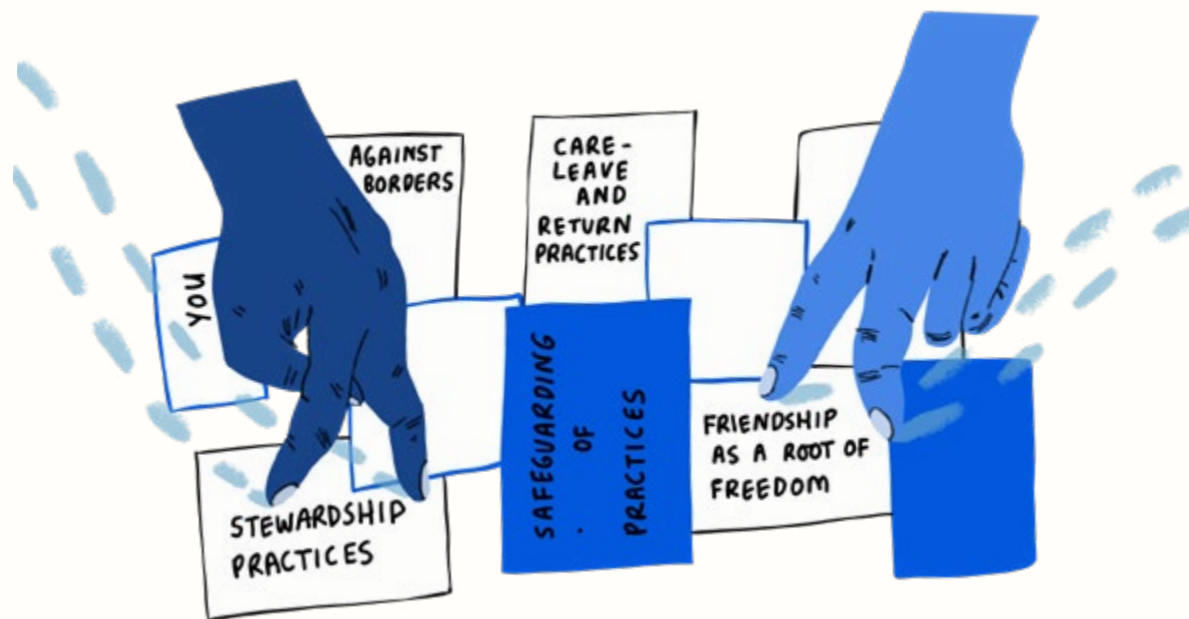
Three kinds of teas were drunk together at the beginning, middle and end of the workshop:

- Crystal sugar and passion fruit for a joyful communion
- Jasmine tea for clearing the mind/centring our energy
- Mint tea for celebration and a new start

Go Deeper

Resourcing Your Community: How To Sustain Social Movements Through Community Provision – A toolkit hosted on Decolonising Economics’s website written by Zahra Dalilah

From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition – A zine published by Movement Generation outlining the principles for a just transition



Our Reflections

Through this practice, we saw how we could create adjacency in our practice and what gaps of learning and knowledge we were keen to explore. We were reminded that there is no need to know everything as long as we share our practice and knowledge.

Workshop N^o 3

How can we imagine the route to abolition?

Purpose

To recall our 'journeys' from the first session; Unlock an individual and collective sense of imagination; Reflect, Communicate, Create (together); Have fun!

Materials

Pens/markers, index cards, scissors, glue, printed collage materials (ie. newspapers, magazines, coloured paper)

Prompts

What individual and collective experiences and perspectives do we bring with us on our journey towards abolition?

How can collective story-telling be used to reflect on our past and imagine potential future action? What are potential key events or moments we can move towards?

How can activities like this that revolve around play, joy and imagination be integrated into our own practices?

Activity

In this session, we explored tools focused on storytelling and imagining through a role-playing game called 'Microscope.' There are some basic rules to follow, however, it was up to us to steer our story as a group whatever way we feel.

The game began by agreeing together on a one sentence summary of the story (i.e. question to answer/situation to explore through the game), determining a shared set of rules (what had to be included and excluded) and determining a start and end point. The rest of the story was up to us to tell. While we played, we also made collages to reflect key moments from the game, which we collected at the end to illustrate the journey we imagined together.



Go Deeper

RPG Writeups — Microscope - an explanation of the role-playing game we used to model this activity.

Arte Útil / Projects - a collection of art-based projects and tools centred around play

Social Strike Game - a role-playing game imagining different forms of community organising

Our Reflections

The workshop chartered a multi-century story, beginning today and ending in a future where militarisation, surveillance and bordering are no longer necessary. This journey jumped between periods of time and key eras (the fading of the dominance of the english language; mass migration as a result of fire and drought, the decline of nation states as new organising units emerge) and defining events (repurposing of AI and creation of a new internet, mass resistance by nomadic people).

The workshop allowed us to reflect on contemporary dynamics and abolitionist practices that could inspire new ones and playfully imagine how these events could form stepping stones towards an abolitionist future. As every participant played an equal role in shaping this narrative and the structure of the role playing game alternates between the scale of eras (decades or centuries) to particular events (days or hours), the session proved valuable in reflecting on our own perspectives and use our own voices to imagine how, where and who could be involved in a future abolitionist project.

Workshop N^o 4

What organisational experiments
move us towards abolition?

Purpose

To explore an organisational practice or policy that will help us move towards abolition.

Materials

Yellow / Red / Green Card, Pens

Prompts

What organisational practice or policy do you want to pay attention to this year? Think about an area of work or one way that you work, which has a lot of impact on people. What are you most dissatisfied with or excited about transforming? If something changed, what impact could it have?

What is stopping you from putting this practice/policy into place?

What could support you putting this practice/policy into place?

Activity

During the session, we used a large table, and different coloured cards to visualise and map our reflections. We used yellow cards to write down our organisational experiments, red cards for our barriers and green cards for support structures. We did a round of sharing, reflected on the patterns between our barriers / support structures, and discussed resources that might support one another. We committed to checking-in on our experiments in our next sessions.



Go Deeper

Rad HR – a nuts and bolts resource of policies, processes and practices for social change organisations.

Beyond the Rules – recrafting organising and governance practices including employment contracts, partnership and funding agreements.

Our Reflections

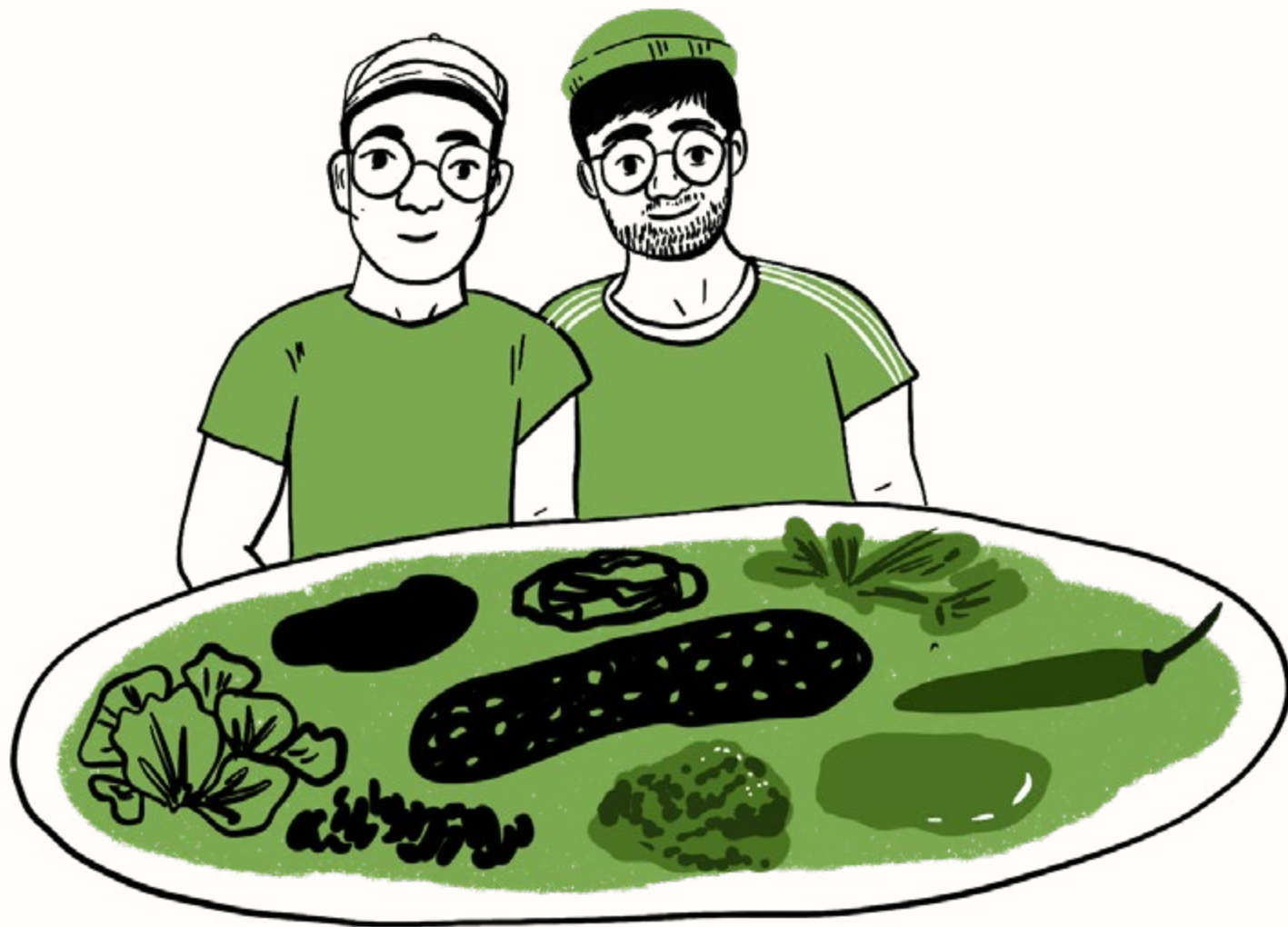
Our experiments varied from designing and resourcing caring/accessible structures for our teams, preventing burnout, prioritising partnerships aligned with our values, and navigating conflict and building processes for feedback and trust building.

Drilling into a tangible experiment focused our attention and capacity on what we could do towards abolition right now. A space to discuss our experiments supported an acknowledgement of the 'graft' of doing long term systemic work, and helped to build accountability for taking next steps on our experiments.

Eating Together

In between our focused workshops, it also felt important to enjoy eating and being together in a space that wasn't necessarily tied to an agenda. Over an Ethiopian feast, we listened to stories, we got to know each other better, and shared where we were at in our various roles, workplaces, and experiments.

Amongst topics, we discussed the challenge of trying to take an abolitionist approach when working in and with more traditional non-abolitionist structures and institutions, and shared what it felt like to be in a continual struggle without a firm answer but with a trusted community.



Workshop N^o 5

Navigating Conflict in Movement Spaces

Purpose

To learn non-carceral tools and practices to support us in navigating conflict, disagreements and ruptures within our organisations and movement spaces.

Materials

Large paper, post its, pens

Prompts

How do our nervous systems and bodies respond in conflict and what tools can support us to show up in ways that are generative and supportive of us?

What is the role of transformative justice in our organisations and movements as we think about embodying our values in relation to conflict?

What self-accountability and feedback systems do we want to build and try out if we are leading through embodied practice, non-disposability and relationality?

Activity

We invited Kelsey from Cradle Community to lead us in a workshop to explore navigating conflict in our movement spaces. We defined conflict as friction, rupture, “two tectonic plates colliding” and “mismatched fantasies”. We noticed the physical reactions we each had to conflict – from fight and flight to freeze and fawn. Together, we thought about where these responses were useful to us and where they halted us in moving through in generative ways. We also explored grounding tools that supported us in these moments, including: slowing down and noticing the details, somatic practices such as butterfly arms and arm sweeps, touch, humming or building capacity to sit in the discomfort.

We thought critically about how transformative justice tools can help us prioritise community in a world where we are encouraged to isolate. We also discussed the role of boundaries and consequences, rather than disposability and punishment.

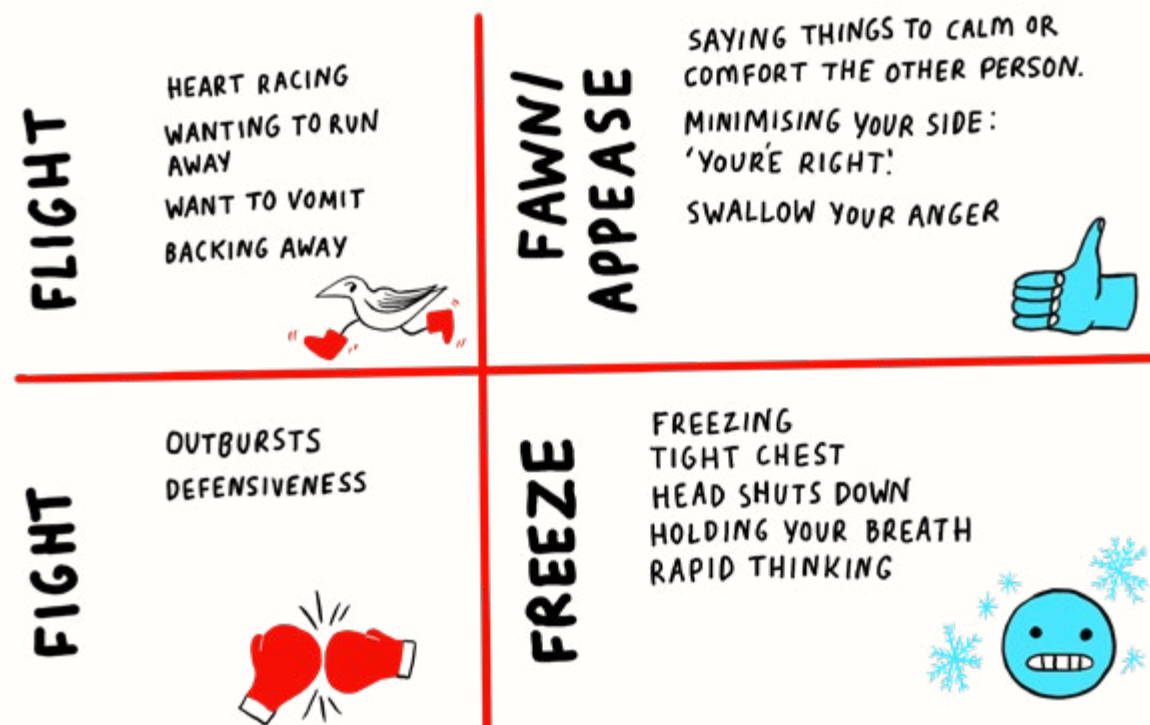
Some tools we explored were:

Maintenance meetings – a deeper check-in on the experience of being in the group / space to raise issues and “have awkward chats” / space to reflect together on our work, and our direction.

The forest fire model for understanding conflict (by *Resist and Renew*) – a model to map the spark (incident), fuel (unsaid disagreements), environment (systems of oppression) and flame (destructive elements) in a conflict scenario.

Centred self accountability – how to move away from over- or under-accountability towards a more balanced approach.

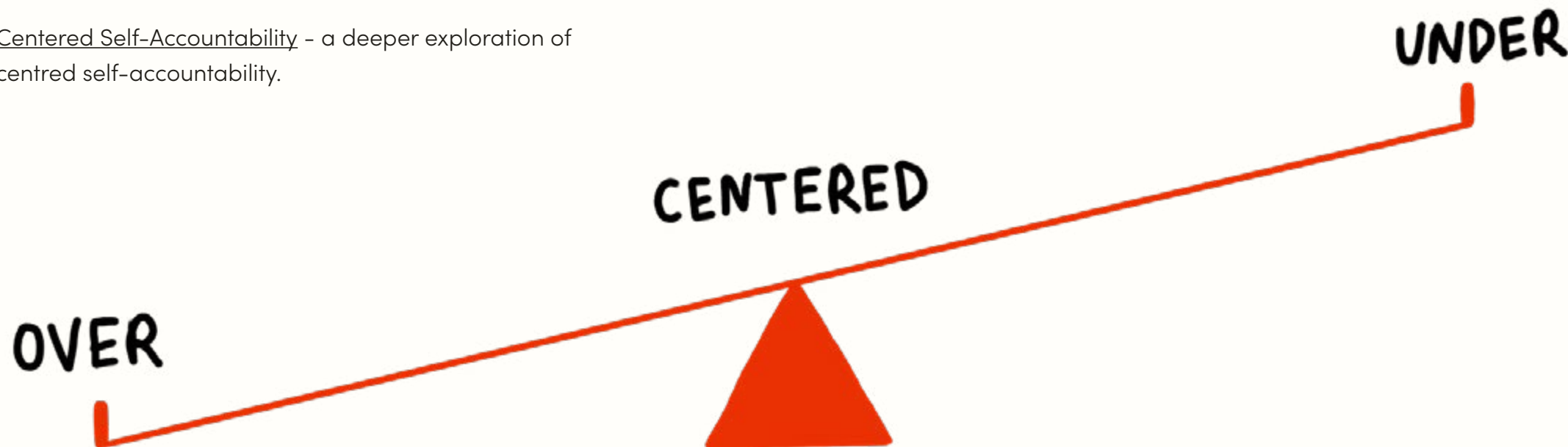
Rose, bud, thorn – a daily feedback system



[HJL Aftercare Menu - Healing Justice London](#) - some approaches to care for yourself in the way you might need in conflict contexts.

[Maintenance meeting agenda | RadHR](#) - a template agenda for regular group maintenance meetings.

[Centered Self-Accountability](#) - a deeper exploration of centred self-accountability.



Our Reflections

It was crucial for us to see conflict as something that is both inevitable and not necessarily a bad thing. We were able to explore how conflict has the possibility to be generative. For example, the forest fire model allowed us to see conflicts from a more holistic perspective and helped us think about generative conflict spaces as “controlled burns” (a practice that is often used by indigenous communities on the land to help avoid destructive fire). A reflection we sat with was that we are all capable of causing harm and, therefore, must develop practices towards accountability. Exploring a number of practical tools grounded us back into the everyday practices of abolition that we can really start to implement immediately.

Workshop № 6

Radical Safeguarding

Purpose

To explore the ways that safeguarding can be reimagined to better foster cultures of safety and care for the communities we work with.

Materials

Large roll of paper and pens to collectively capture a conversation

Prompts

What would it look like to reimagine safeguarding by focusing on what it means to strengthen our cultures of care?

What does safety mean for ourselves and the communities we work with?

What alternative safeguarding process and practice can support this?

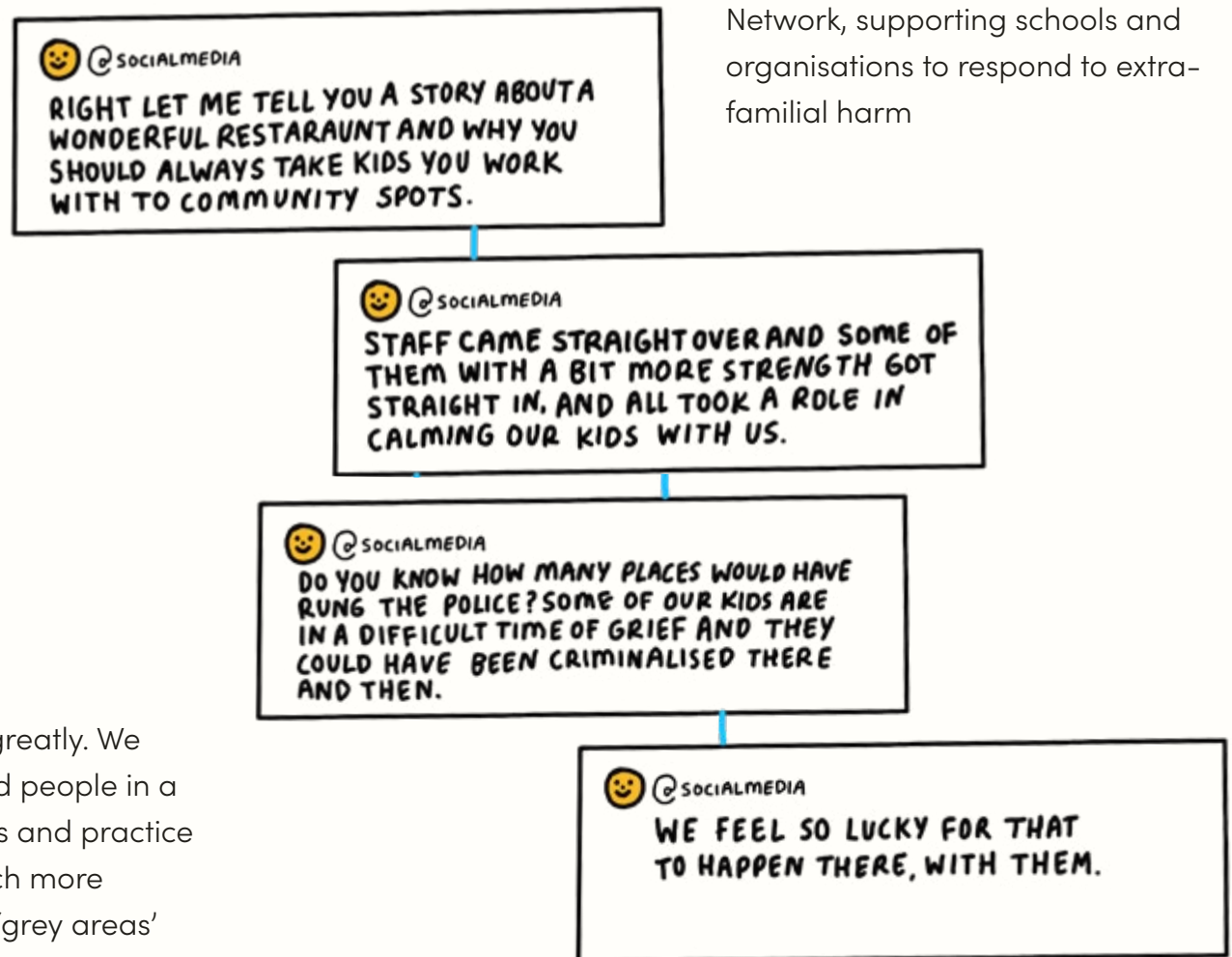
Activity

In response to the harm safeguarding policies often cause to marginalised communities, we invited Latifa Akay from Act Build Change to introduce alternative ways to understand and practise radical safeguarding. We discussed what it might look like to move away from conventional ideas of risk and surveillance towards re-rooting safeguarding in cultures of safety and trust.

Some of the conversations we had as a group included – How can we trouble ‘the lack of agency’ we feel in terms of safeguarding?; What is already supporting us to build a culture of care and safety? (eg. a curiosity to develop skills and cultures to de-escalate situations, care and soothe, and prioritising the agency of communities to define what safety looks like); and How can we build relationships of trust rather than surveillance between us?

Our Reflections

The workshop shifted our attitudes towards safeguarding greatly. We learnt to value how much we already do ‘informally’ to hold people in a space of care, which should be acknowledged as a process and practice of safeguarding. We realised that we actually possess much more agency than we thought to challenge and re-interpret the ‘grey areas’ of the law, and to prioritise a community’s ability to self determine what safety and support look like.



Go Deeper

Radical safeguarding – a workbook for practitioners, particularly in school contexts, who might be wondering how to start doing things differently when it comes to safeguarding.

Beyond Referrals Toolkit – a resource by the Contextual Safeguarding Network, supporting schools and organisations to respond to extra-familial harm

Workshop № 7

What are our learnings?

PEER LEARNING ON ABOLITION



WHAT DOES ABOLITION MEAN TO YOU?

WHERE BORDERS ARE NOT AN ANSWER.

LIVING & WORKING TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE FUTURE THROUGH ACTIONS OF SOLIDARITY, JOY, MUTUALITY AND CARE.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

BUILDING THE WORLD WE WANT TO SEE EVERY DAY.

CENTERING **JOY**

MAKING EXISTING INSTITUTIONS OBSOLETE.

HOLDING THE TENSION BETWEEN LONG TERM TRANSFORMATION AND THE NITTY GRITTY DEVELOPMENT OF: SKILLS, TOOLS + STRUCTURES THAT HELP US GET THERE.



AND

INTANGIBLE (THINGS WE WANTED TO GET FROM THIS PROJECT)

TO DEFINE/UNDERSTAND ABOLITION AND LEARN LANGUAGE TO SPEAK IT.

HOW IT MAY RELATE TO THE WIDER POLITICAL PROJECT IN WHICH I WORK/LIVE.

PRACTISES THAT I COULD IMMEDIATELY APPLY TO MY WORK - EXPLORE AND EXPERIMENT IN THE COMMUNITIES WE WORK WITH.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTISE ABOLITION IN A WAY THAT DOESN'T FEEL DISJOINTED FROM MY DAY JOB.

COLLECTIVE JOY + LEARNING AS A WAY TO GROW, BUT ALSO TO RESOURCE MYSELF IN DOING THIS WORK.

A SPACE TO PRACTISE TOGETHER

A SAFE SPACE TO FEEL THAT I AM INSUFFICIENT ON MY OWN, BUT AS A COMMUNITY TOGETHER WE HAVE MORE.

SOFT ACCOUNTABILITY.



INDIVIDUAL & COLLECTIVE JOURNEYS

A LOT OF UNSEEN WORK
BUILDING UP ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES THAT MEET OUR VALUES.

RECOGNISING THAT ABOLITION IS A POLITICAL PROJECT DERIVED FROM: EMPATHY, EQUALITY, LOVE AND JOY.

ABOLITIONIST PRACTISES COME FROM A QUEER & MIGRANT PERSPECTIVE (FOR ME) FROM A NECESSARY AND URGENT PLACE OF HOLDING COMMUNITIES.

HAVING LOOSE IDEAS OF ABOLITION, THINKING ABOUT HOW IT CAN BE APPLIED TO THE WORK WE DO.

BEING PROACTIVE AND REALISING I DON'T NEED TO WAIT FOR A PERFECT TIME OR SPACE TO EXPLORE THESE IDEAS.

THIS JOURNEY EQUIPPED ME WITH NEW TOOLS.

GAVE TIME TO NOT FEEL PRESSURE OR GET THINGS WRONG.

KEEP THE GENERATIVE JOURNEY GOING — LIKE COMPOST, YOU KNOW YOU'RE GROWING FROM IT.



WHAT DOES A CARING PRACTISE OR CULTURE LOOK LIKE?

MAKING FRAMEWORKS + DOCUMENTS AND SHARING VALUES.

BUILDING OF STRUCTURES AND CURATING OF SPACES.

COMMUNITY | REGULARITY, HELPING WITH FATIGUE ON THINGS.

NEEDING TO BE IN THE RIGHT SPACES.

PRACTISING CAPACITY IN ORDER FOR CAPACITY TO GROW.

GETTING HANDS DIRTY AND DOING THE WORK.



HOPES AND AMBITIONS FOR THE FUTURE



EXPANDING THE GROUP/NETWORK

CONTINUE CULTIVATING UNDERSTANDING OF ABOLITION.

PEER LEARNING ACROSS ORGANISATIONS

HOW TO EMBED AND BE MORE AMBITIOUS IN HOW WE BUILD ORGANISATIONS AND CULTURES.

SOME SORT OF CHECK-IN, A MEAL OR GATHERING, OPENLY AND INTENTIONALLY CHAT ABOUT ABOLITIONIST PRACTISES.

SHARING RESOURCES.

WORKING GROUP

HOST SHARED SPACE OPEN INVITE FOR PEOPLE TO WORK AND CHAT.

WHATSAPP / DISCORD / SLACK - PLACES TO SHARE QUESTIONS AND EXPLORE.



PELICAN HOUSE.

EVERYDAY ABOLITION IN MY ORGANISATION IS:



KNOWING WE GOT THIS. WE CAN GET THROUGH THIS.

SHOWING UP.

TALKING AND TRYING, EVEN WHEN IT'S HARD, EVEN WHEN I'M TIRED.

BEING WITH THE DISCOMFORT OF FUMBLING OUR WAY THROUGH.

AN EXPERIMENT AND MAYBE IMPERFECT, BUT A LONG TERM PROJECT.

DIVESTING FROM THE BINARY AND REMEMBER THE LEARNING IN SITUATIONS, PLANS, TIME.

Peer Learning Syllabus

Exploring everyday abolition in organisational practice

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