

Act Build Change: Collective Care Programme

Over 2021 Act Build Change was commissioned to deliver a programme of work around collective care for Act for Change grantees and their young people. Alongside the delivery of 7 workshops, we also delivered wrap around 1-to-1 coaching and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

“I would like to celebrate that things from the previous sessions are still coming up for me 6 months later and I think they really have changed how I approach my work.” -
Practitioner Participant

Sessions

1. Intention Setting for Care and Wellbeing
2. Joy and Celebration
3. Collective Care as an Intersectional Practice
4. Hierarchies and Care
5. Healthy Boundaries
6. Apology and Healing
7. Rest and Recovery for Sustainability

The programme's learning cycle was intentional in building trust and relationship as the year progressed. Intersectionality, boundaries and power in hierarchies and apology were sessions previous participants had shared as key areas to explore. We ended the programme with a session on rest to, respect the year grantees have worked through, and to show how you can bring gentle, restful practices to public work.

“I feel so relaxed at the end of the sessions it really reminds me to prioritise myself - I need the space and the silence that these sessions give - I really enjoy that element of it.”
-Practitioner Participant

Themes

Key themes were shared as to why prioritising care in youth justice work is challenging.

- An individualised approach to “better managing” your own care was the dominant frame practitioners were navigating. It was acknowledged that an individual focus ignores the internal cultures and wider systems that prevent a collective responsibility to care and the harm that is caused by a lack of intersectional awareness.
- Care work as being seen (as some participants put) “woo-woo” or not real work
- Little specific training or support on what good collective care looks like
- Care being seen as one person's job or being forced to be taken up by one person rather than a collective responsibility
- A lack of an intersectional approach to collective care in the workplace
- Avoidance of discomfort from those with privilege
- Little support on boundaries because of small teams doing too much
- Guilt and shame around not doing enough and falling into burnout
- Accessibility to care being difficult
- Not feeling like you have enough power to influence change around care
- No space to think about care
- Working in a reactive environment that compromises care
- Funding was spoken about frequently as contributing to the lack of space to think about care due to short term projects and uncertainty of the future.

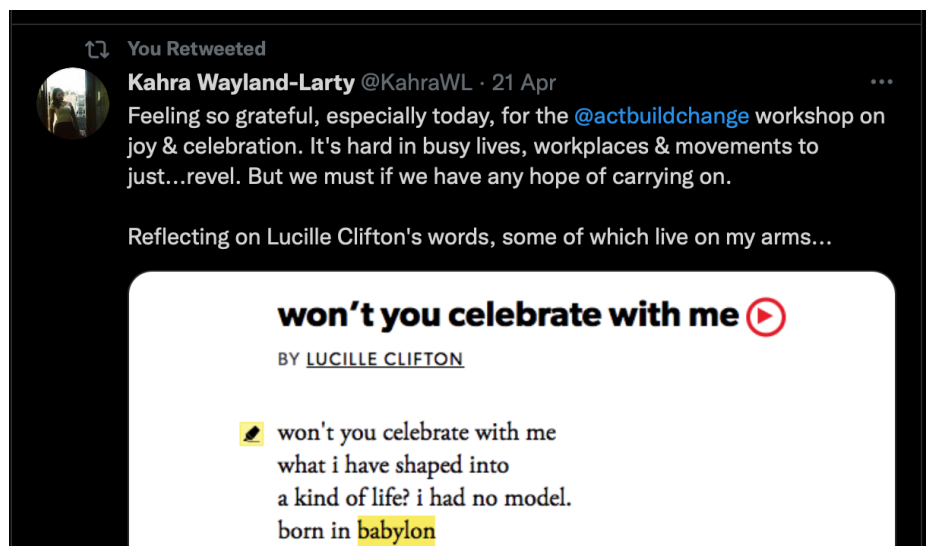


Outcomes

“This programme of workshops and coaching sessions has been so beneficial. I would recommend it to anyone who had the chance to attend. It has been an invaluable resource for me as I develop into my career and understand how to strike the tender balance of action and care. I am incredibly grateful to have been a part of such a welcoming space and I will carry my learning on as much as I can.” – Practitioner Participant

Our sessions did not aim to provide answers but to support people to have better questions for their organisations and provide some tools to put learning into practice.

- Participants shared the positive and practical impact attending the sessions had on them. Particularly, applying key learning into their professional work and personal lives.
- We had a core group of regular attendees who would return to sessions with ways in which they had tested out tools, brought up challenges and opportunities with their managers to think about how their organisation could be more actively thinking about care work.
- It was expressed that Act Build Change provided an accessible and caring space for professionals and young people to reflect on their practice and be challenged.



A Care-full Funding Processes

"I want to celebrate that a funder is willing to back this work. Meeting other people that value care has been really nice and getting the opportunity to figure some of this out." – Practitioner Participant

Participants shared how unusual it was for a funder to prioritise care. An initial feelings of distrust was shared, however by the end of the first session people gave feedback that this programme was refreshingly different to some workshop offers and were excited by the opportunity.

The groups felt current funding processes often prohibit being able to work sustainably. Short term project work often means organisations feel limited to what they can dream and strategise on. Programmes are prioritised before people. Also an unrealistic expectation is being forced on them. The felt funders pressure their work to be "new" and outcomes known, rather than a respect for good consistent work and uncertainty in where some efforts will go.

It was expressed that funding cycles suit the comfort of the funder and often at the discomfort of the grantee. For example, grant opportunities or grant evaluations being offered/expected during the winding down of work (Christmas and the Summer). More could be done to understand the cycles of practitioners. There were lots of suggestions for making processes easier so that putting in bids is as frictionless as possible. A care fund was also expressed as something funders could consider. It is often expected that care and sustainability work will somehow be delivered within a grant, but if it is not being measured by funders it will not be prioritised.

Recommendations

These recommendation come from evaluation forms and 1-to-1 feedback sessions from participants:

Engaging senior leaders to support transformational change

" More people need to do it – particularly management – as this would help create the conditions for more to be possible." – Practitioner Participant

A senior leadership presence is necessary in sessions. This will support those with decision making power to prioritise care and develop shared-understandings of the ways that internal working cultures and wider structures of oppression are relevant to thinking about collective care.

Having the contact details for senior leaders to arrange 1-to-1 meetings and introductory sessions with SLTs about this work could have helped boost their participation. We have done this for a new piece of work which supported attendance and understanding significantly. Another offer is running sessions specifically for senior leaders so they also have a trusted space to talk about difficulties and opportunities around care.

Prioritise Coaching

"I found the coaching sessions most useful for me as I could attend the group workshops, then get more specific, direct support. The coaching benefited me greatly in my work and personal life too!" – Youth Practitioner, Participant

Young People and Influencing their Care

More work could be done to support young people in their understanding of power and care. A session on power and care could open up a conversation for young people around "seeking permission" where it is not needed and exploring their power to act for care – could have been supportive in helping them to participate in new ways around collective care and advocacy.

Organisations committed to improving equity

Should this programme run again we would want to explore running the following additional sessions:

- Building Care-full Collective Power for Young People
- Processes of Care for Organisations
- Braver Conversations on Asset Based Approaches to Care
- Care for Senior Leaders
- Conversations on Race
- Loss and Grief
- Working through Conflict
- How to influence with care
- Intergenerational care

There was an appetite from participants to engage in conversations about how they make their practices more equitable, doing so with care and celebrating their wins internally and externally more often. It was mentioned that a lot of time is spent on what they need to improve or scale – recognition of rest can be neglected. We feel deepening this work and sharing tools more widely, would be a positive next step.

“This was the best training I have ever been to. I loved it. It made me think of all the ways we celebrate our achievements. So many workshops for young people feel like we are spoken down to, inaccessible for people who have disabilities or are boring. Here I felt heard and I got to have fun.”– Young Participant

To Conclude

Care work presents moments of discomfort and opportunities for joy and healing. This programme of work was a brave endeavor by everyone involved in making it happen; especially the participants.

A commitment to care and wellbeing is an ongoing process. To build a just and abundant future for young people, all of us need to be acting sustainably: It is the only path for lasting, transformative change. So, I urge us not to look at care work as a nice extra. It is one of the most responsible acts we can do. Thanks to all the participants who showed up with a curious spirit. We have learnt so much from your critical minds and hopeful hearts. Thank you Vivienne Jackson for trusting Act Build Change with this work. It could not have happened without you.

With warmth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephania', with a horizontal line underneath.

Director, Act Build Change