

HOME

IS
WHERE
THE
LOVE
IS



Leadership
Learning
Community

WHOLE COMMUNITIES PROJECT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	INTRODUCTION
7	WELCOME HOME
8	EXPLORING LIBERTORY LEADERSHIP
10	ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT – CTWO
16	INTERVIEW – Mizan & Sizwe
26	INTERVIEW – Greg Hodge
30	ESSAY – Kharyshi Wiginton
34	ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT – The LeadersTrust
38	FEATURE STORY – Elissa Sloan Perry
48	INTERVIEW – Felicia Griffin
56	ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT – Leadership Learning Community
62	INTERVIEW – Zulakya Santiago
68	ESSAY – Ditra Edwards
72	ESSAY – Sadia Hassan
78	INTERVIEW – Faliah Aisha Bidal
82	ESSAY – Ashlee Wimberly
87	APPRECIATIONS

DEAR READER,

If you are an organizer, activist, non-profit worker, healing or spiritual practitioner, student, or a leader at home...

This magazine is for you.

If the drags of leadership have burned you out, you are searching for inspiration or trying to gather your bearings in movement...

This magazine is for you.

Welcome to the Whole Communities Project ecosystem. Welcome home.

BIPOC freedom fighters have carried the world on their shoulders. We are the workers fighting tirelessly for social justice while also experiencing the brunt of oppressive systems and state-sanctioned violence within our bodies. We are often underpaid, overworked, undervalued, and applauded for how we divest from our

health to invest in our work. Emerging leaders are often shut out of necessary training and leadership development programs due to age, money, or a lack of seniority. Leaving many of us to learn through trial by fire which has a deep impact on our confidence, our trajectory in movement, as well as our organizations who don't have the degree of skills they need to sustain. A divestment from the people means a divestment from our organizations. Strong leaders- regardless of title and prestige- make for stronger organizations. Furthermore, for us to not only be strong but liberatory in our theory and our praxis, we must have the space to unlearn harmful patterns in our personal and organizational lives. The more access we have to training, resiliency tools, spaciousness in our schedules, and models for how people and organizations are embodying liberatory leadership, the more we have space to dream and scheme our way out of oppressive systems and into the

world we both want and deserve.

Launched in the Fall of 2023, the Whole Communities Project is a collaboration between the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), The Fund for Liberatory Practice launched by the LeadersTrust, and Leadership Learning Community (LLC) and was created to fill the void. Our mission is to connect liberation-centered leaders and organizations to life-affirming resources that support their emergence and sustainability in the work. To that end, we curate leadership development programs, funding, convenings, webinars, and communities of practice for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color leaders and practitioners. We believe that the strength of our relationships - our connective tissue- will serve us in the face of trials and tribulations. This is our mission, and we invite you to join us on this journey.

This magazine is for people firmly entrenched in their quest for liberation and adamant about bringing their formations and communities along. In it, you will find in-depth stories from leaders within the Whole Communities Project ecosystem and their offerings on how to deepen your commitment to liberatory leadership. We also provide tools and resources to support you on your path.

We make this offering with full knowledge that it comes in perilous times and that the call for leaders to meet this urgency is high. Stopping and considering how to deepen our commitment to liberatory leadership is not a quick, easy, or convenient process. However, if you take nothing else from this magazine, we hope you find community and a feeling that you are not alone within these pages.



W E L C O M E H O M E

Welcome to our home! A house crafted
by the promise of liberation.

In this place, the floors were formed by justice, and the walls, built by living values. There is love here. There is wholeness here.

Leave your shoes at the door before you come inside. You are welcome. As long as you uphold respect and care, you can bring your whole self in. The foyer holds an air of freedom. Listen with your soul, and you'll hear it humming inside you as you walk down the hall. The living room is an expression of life, holding the vibrancy of nature and the world that sits outside of our grasp.

The family room is filled with love, beliefs about what could be, and memories of what was. Seating is suited for individual needs, but no matter the requirement, everyone will be comfortable. The kitchen is cooking up new ideas, baking beautiful ways of being and greeting strangers with the scent of community.

Our pantry is packed with stories of rest and resilience, while the dining room is dishing up interdependence. There is no space in our house for hatred or discord, so take the oppression off in the mudroom and leave it at the back door.

In this house, bathrooms are beacons of comfort, and bedrooms are boundless opportunities for transformation. Our nursery is an area for imaginative play, allowing us to cultivate a world that works for everyone. And our laundry room lets us wash away despair and call in celebration and joy.

This is our house, a house of reflection and discovery, passion and triumph. We are liberatory leaders creating a home of hope, truth, and warmth. There's an abundance of friends and family, and there is enough space for all!

EXPLORING LIBERTORY LEADERSHIP

This magazine explores liberatory through the perspectives of new and established leaders, at home and within organizations.

According to the Liberatory Leadership Partnership, liberatory leadership theory and practice:

...invite us to lead from a place of love, wholeness, and interdependence. By valuing celebration over competition, we are able to access possibilities that can only emerge in community. The practice of liberatory leadership flourishes when we create space for rest, when we address power differentials in service of justice, and when we center those at the margins within our organizations and our work

Liberatory leadership invites leaders to operationalize this vision of personal and collective freedom, justice, and thriving through their individual approaches and through their organizations. It necessitates an internal interrogation of how race and power interact with our work. Liberatory leadership invites us to lead from a place of love and possibility.

Why did we choose home, and what does the concept of “home” have to do with liberatory leadership? The answer is really quite simple. As much as we would like to create dynamic liberatory leaders who are consciously stripping themselves of professional toxicity and leaning into transformation and as much as we would like to believe that those same liberatory leaders are capable of moving in the workplace, in their organizations, and through the world in such a way that the entities they are part of, and organizations they represent are reflections of that same liberatory work –We know that the real work starts at home.

Becoming a true liberatory leader is a result of the deep, intensive work that you do in front of your bathroom mirror, while sitting in your favorite living room chair, or enjoying a holiday meal at your grandmother’s dining room table. Embodying liberation is a reflection of the authentic, holistic, and healthy relationships we have with those closest to us: ourselves, our family members, and our friends. Once the places and spaces we call home are liberated, everything, everywhere, and everyone in our lives will begin to reflect that energy. For those reasons and so much more, we’ve asked our featured leaders to open up their hearts, minds, and lives to us for a brief moment and allow us to learn from the people they are at “home.”

Liberatory Leadership Praxis Cohort



For over 40 years, the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) has provided organizer-training programs, supported the creation of new organizations, and supported the building of movements across racial justice and economic justice sectors. In that time, we have interrogated in many capacities the question, “What is liberatory leadership, and why is it important?”

In the Spring 2020, CTWO transformed into a Hub comprised of three additional innovative, interconnected, but distinct training organizations - The BlackOUT Collective, The Ruckus Society, and Black Land Liberation Initiative. This transformation fortifies our mission to build and sustain a thriving racial justice movement led by communities of color. We support and build movements by providing individuals, organizations, and networks with the training, tools, and support they need to create and shift

power. These are essential in building sustainable social justice movements that create systemic change.

CTWO is exploring the characteristics and challenges of liberatory leadership and what it means to create a liberatory organization via policies, practices, and programs. In an effort to deepen liberatory leadership’s work and impact, CTWO sought to deepen relationships and create opportunities to support our learning. We do this work alongside members of the Whole Communities Project Partnership. Through this partnership, we have launched new programs and facilitated conversations with organizational development practitioners and philanthropic partners about radically reimagining what it takes to help liberatory organizations thrive. We are able to discuss and learn how Liberatory Leadership is defined and the organizational structures, frameworks,

tools, capacities, and practices needed to create true liberatory organizations. Since the early 1980s, we have seen many organizations form and fizzle and we know that for many of them, it is not because they fulfilled their missions. Organizations often close because it is very difficult to create an organization that allows leaders to not just fight for liberation as a goal, but truly invoke liberatory practices internally. As a newly formed Hub, this is a task we, too, are taking on and exploring. CTWO is applying what we learn and see, in real time, through the Liberatory Leadership Praxis Cohort. Started in 2021, The Liberatory Leadership Praxis Cohort is an opportunity to support Black-led organizations that are in the founding stages (years 0-5) of a new organization or project, in creating a values-driven liberatory organizational structure that allows them to thrive, develop as leaders, and prefigure the types of organizations that will get us closer to liberation.

In 2024, CTWO, with the support of the Whole Communities Project, launched year two of the Liberatory Leadership Praxis Project, dubbed Praxis Power. Praxis Power is a 24-month leadership development fellowship for emerging Black-led, base-building formations. We support young Directors (ages

18-35) to create a values-driven, liberatory organizational structure that allows them to develop as leaders while they build community power. Through Praxis Power, CTWO provides an organizational development coach, fundraising & grant development coach, program & leadership development coach, and financial resources.

35

OF SPRING RETREAT
ATTENDEES (2023)

Black Houston tour

MOST TRANSFORMATIVE
EXPERIENCE

40

OF FALL RETREAT
ATTENDEES (2023)

CUBA REFLECTIONS

“I’ve been part of movement for 15 years, have worked on campaigns, and won campaigns across sectors, but I didn’t believe a new world was possible. Cuba made me see that it is possible. There’s a way we neglect talking about the economy necessary for the new world. It’s possible to create a human-centered economy. One where people aren’t just served, but they are happy. The role of the US, what we do and how we act have direct impacts on the lived realities of Cubans. The behaviors of movement leaders don’t reflect their stated politics. Being in Cuba exposed the ways that power, capitalism, and white supremacy culture are embodied within us. How do we model and live

liberatory values daily wherever we go and in all of our relationships?”

“Cuba was a breathtaking experience. I learned so much about the people of Cuba- culturally, spiritually, and politically. Those experiences translated into intentional conversations with our cohort that pushed me to think critically about what transformative organizing looks like in my city and in our country as a whole.”

“The revolution is a living, ongoing process. If we really want liberation, how do we cultivate and incorporate it into our individual and organizational practices daily?”

“Coaching the Praxis Power organizations has been the embodiment of love and care within the movement - by way of listening to support the passion and fire of these committed, fierce leaders working relentlessly for the liberation of Black people; holding space for their vision and sharing knowledge and wisdom from my own experiences and studies to support their success. This is a role I honor and cherish as my responsibility and contribution to our collective healing and triumph. Praxis Power leaders are fierce, unapologetic, and on fire. They are ready for action yet willing to learn and grow their power collectively. They understand we will not win in isolation. We win together.”

– **COACH**

“This intentional way in which communal leadership is framed, grounded, and taught has been a key piece of growth for us, and being in praxis has allowed us to be grounded in the multitude of ways we can get to systems of power, see things we imagine and be in community and space to experiment our way to power freedom and love. We are honored to be on the continuum of Black Praxis and power.”



Being a member of the Praxis Power cohort has provided an opportunity to meet other organizers and learn from their experiences while deepening our collective skills and strategies. I've been inspired by the collective love for Black people and reminded that there are so many comrades doing the work of Black liberation, which gives me more fuel to keep going.

SOUTHERN MOVEMENT
COMMITTEE MEMBER

NOTEWORTHY INFORMATION

We are currently working on revisiting our mission, visions, principles, values, and our organization identity outside of the fiscal sponsor. We will be using the tiered leadership and the organizational governance chart that Liz provided.

The organizational governance segment, relationship building and, the BPP's vision, procedures, and organizing was the most valuable to our organization because we're in a season of reimagining how our organization should move forward. Six sites hosted in-person trainings including:

- 412 Justice (Pittsburg, PA)
- Southern Movement Committee (Nashville, TN)
- B.L.A.C.K. (Black Leadership Action Coalition of Kentucky)
- Harriet's Wildest Dreams (Washington DC)
- Barred Business (Atlanta, GA)
- Children of Marsha P. Johnson (New Haven, Ct.)

7

OF MONTHLY
MEETINGS IN 2023

6

OF
COACHES

11

OF GROUPS
GRANTED

**BLACK POWER VIRTUAL
TRAINING**

45

OF PARTICIPANTS

**BLACK POWER IN-PERSON
TRAINING**

6

IN-PERSON
TRAININGS

6

SITES

PRAXIS POWER ORGANIZATIONS

**Southern Movement
Committee**

**Barred
Business**

**Children Of Marsha
P. Johnson**

**Harriet's Wildest
Dreams**

412 Justice

**Voice
Buffalo**

**Philly Black
WorkersProject**

Arts In Action

**B.L.A.C.K
Kentucky**

Black Lgbtq

5

OF GROUPS WITH
SEVERE CHALLENGES

10

OF GROUPS
THAT CONTINUED

2

AVERAGE # OF MONTHLY
MEETING PARTICIPANT AND
ORGANIZATIONS

mizan &



sizwe

SPEARITWURX, A MEMBER OF THE 2021
LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP PRAXIS VISION
COHORT

WHAT DOES LIBERATION LOOK LIKE, FEEL LIKE, AND TASTE LIKE?

MIZAN –

Liberation is also when people around me are in their flow state, finding their harmony, their balance, their homeostasis, with nature, with the world around us, with each other, and in our relationships. We always talk about the internal, interpersonal, and institutional. I feel like liberation looks like all of those elements being aligned and balanced, harmonious, and just. Liberation is having all of our needs taken care of without replicating toxic systems, but really living, and letting love lead our way all the time. And that tastes good, that feels good.

SIZWE –

It feels like a flow state, where you're not really concerned with the past, present or future, you're just fully immersed into the now, and you know that all is provided, and all is taken care of. You know you're on your course. You know you're doing what is right. You know you're doing what is feeding your soul. Liberation is a knowing. You know that you're in that flow state. You know that you're right where you need to be. You have a sense of peace. There's a sense of ease. You know there is magic all around you. You feel the magic at your fingertips. You feel the magic in your words. You feel the magic in your thought process of manifesting, creating, and visualizing the world that you want.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME? WHY? HOW HAS THIS CHANGED OVER TIME?

SIZWE –

I feel home is where the love is, where I feel love, where I feel supported, where I can be myself. It doesn't always mean it's going to be comfortable. Sometimes people you love the most are going to tell you the truth, and you might not want to hear it at that particular time. But you know, it's still love. Home is where the love is, whether I'm in South Africa, Ghana, South America, or Oakland, California.

“
Home
is
where
the
love is.”

MIZAN ALKEBULAN-ABAKAH AND SIZWE ANDREWS-ABAKAH
AKA SPEAR OF THE NATION

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO SEEK LIBERATION IN ALL WE DO?

MIZAN –

Everything we do, consciously or unconsciously, is impacting our liberation. So, the way we wake up in the morning, the way we greet each other, the way we ask for help, the way we share our resources, they're all elements that are impacting our liberation. How we celebrate and how we take time to honor the wins that we've made over time impacts our liberation. Whether it's in our own personal, nuclear family or in the community that we built. Having that foundation of knowing and celebrating those wins are also acts of liberation.

SIZWE –

I was talking to one of my youngsters yesterday on the phone about where things are. Spearitwurx has been frontline, but we've never been social media frontline. We were never the sexy revolutionaries. And my youngster told me that's because we spent more time developing community as opposed to developing our brand. I was like, dude, you're right. It was never important for us to be the Marcus Garveys, the Malcolm X's, the Assata Shakurs of Oakland. We just wanted health, wellness, and liberation for our people and our communities.

That's why we got married. That's why we developed the family the way we did. That's why we raised our children the way we did. That's why we continue to move the way we move. And quite frankly, it hasn't always been easy. But, I give thanks for our path because it made us who we are and it helped us get to where we are and where we're going, I think sometimes a lot of us get into this work and it's self-fulfilling, like the healer wants to hold space because they want to feel powerful, as opposed to just really holding space for the goodness of the people in the circle.

WHAT DOES FAMILY MEAN TO YOU? WHO FEELS LIKE FAMILY AND WHY?

SIZWE –

Family is my first foundation. The jump off. Family is where I can see reflections of myself, sharpen myself and see the things that are inside of me. The family that I'm talking about is the family that we choose to create.

MIZAN –

Chosen or biological.

SIZWE –

Exactly. When I think of family it's more about who is your tribe. Who do you vibe with? What's your frequency? Who do you attract when you're out

in the world? It's that resonance, that eye contact, that vibration. Family is a vibration. It's a frequency. Family is the foundation of why we even got married. We know that this is a part of the struggle. This is part of the liberation. Part of our contribution to the world is producing human beings who are here to make a contribution. Human beings who are here to continue the legacy and pick up where we left off. We are thinking seven generations down the line.

MIZAN –

Our co-leadership in our household is the foundation of how we lead in the world. This is the foundation of how we support each other, support our young people, and support our children. Love is the way that we want to lead. Love is the way that we communicate with each other. We have folks who joke about watching us get upset with each other. It is not an argument. We don't be cussing at each other and stuff. Even how we solve our conflicts is with love. Folks who work with us and organize with us know, love is at the root always.

WHAT ARE YOU DEDICATED TO MAKING HAPPEN IN THIS WORLD? HOW DOES YOUR SENSE OF HOME INFLUENCE THAT?

MIZAN –

Our work with Spearitwurx is about inspiring intergenerational wellness and racial healing while creating experiences that transform lives. We are dedicated to creating space and opportunities for folks to tap into who they are, what they love, and what they value so that it becomes a way to interact within their relationships

or create policies and practices within their institutions that can really transform. We are dedicated to being creative, creating our retreat space, and using our art and culture to tell our story as African people through our Sankofa project and our affirmation card deck, All these different pieces that we are sharing in the world are really about spreading as much love and light as we can.

IN TIMES OF OVERWHELMING GRIEF, CONFLICT, AND STRESS, WHAT TOOLS DO YOU USE TO RECENTER AND COME BACK HOME TO YOURSELF?

MIZAN –

What's your morning practice? What's your practice before you step into a meeting or new class? What do we do before we eat or go to bed? There are all these times of the day that we can add ritual, a little power up, a little centering, whatever it might be that helps us come back to ourselves, and sustain the vibration that we want throughout the day.

SIZWE –

It makes me think about the tribe and how everything was built within the tribe in cultures around the world. We would have water dance rituals. We would be singing together, drumming together, planting together. A lot of the depression and other things that get caught in our bodies are because we are not moving. Back in the day, we were always moving. We were dancing, we were grooving, we were working. It was

harder for depression to settle in. It's easy for depression to settle in when you're just sitting down, scrolling, and not doing anything, you get

stagnant blood in your body. The key is to find those rituals and practices.



WHAT WE BELIEVE

LOVE IS HEALING

All communities deserve the opportunity to cultivate, experience and share the healing power of Love.

LOVE AT ALL LEVELS

Love is the journey (not the destination) and involves our active participation at the individual, interpersonal and institutional levels.

LOVE TRANSFORMS TRAUMA

Authentic love activates a Culture of Wellness that allows us to reflect and transform our historical, racial and social trauma. Wellness creates the conditions for us to thrive and fully express the greatness of our humanity.

HOW WE DO IT

Values and Practices

USE THE MIRROR

Be responsible, honest, and walk with integrity as we build our ability to engage in ongoing self-reflection.

SEE A NEED/ FILL A NEED

If you see something that needs or should be done, lend a hand to help make it happen. We are all in this together.

WE HAVE TWO EARS AND ONE MOUTH

Practice authentic listening and speak your truth to build transformative relationships, with self and others.

USE ACCOUNTABILITY WITH GRACE

Accept responsibility for one's actions and have compassion for people when they make mistakes.

POWER OF PRESENCE

Each moment matters, so be in it and watch the magic happen. You/ We are magic!

WELLNESS IS A PROCESS

We honor the journey of wellness with flexibility, fun and work life balance that supports the whole person.

CREATE BELONGING AND JUSTICE

Practice fairness, and create belonging that recognizes diverse ideas, culture, ethnicity, gender expressions.

TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE ROOT OF EVERYTHING!

We show up for ourselves and each other that brings out the best version of ourselves so that we can become better humans.

greg



hodges

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ELDERS, PRESENTER
AT LIVING LIBERATION CONFERENCE

Greg Hodge is a special brother. Our interview with him was full of wisdom in the true meaning of the word. He has a wealth of knowledge with enough lived experience to know when and how to apply it. When asked what it means to live into our values, Brother Hodge said:

I think that living into our values requires at least 2 reflections. The first is being clear about what values are the most important to us as progressives, as liberatory leaders. A critical value for me is integrity. To have relationships that are integral to our purposes for doing the work. Integrity often looks like keeping one's word as a sacred agreement. It means that your word is your bond. It means doing what you say you are going to do, when you agreed to do it. And if for some reason you are unable to keep your word, communicating to the other person why it didn't happen when you said it would.

The second aspect is associated with the idea of what “living” actually means when it relates to values. It represents the action or state of being in a purpose-driven life. If we don't breathe life into our values on a daily basis, as

much as possible, those articulated values are of little use or meaning.

Once, I had an older man who was one of my mentors and we were working on a joint writing project. After the third time I agreed to a deadline and missed it without saying why, he called me. After a brief catch up chat, he very bluntly asked me whether my word meant anything at all in the context of this project. I was a bit stunned that he was so direct about holding me accountable. It was a great lesson for me to understand this idea about keeping one's word as a sacred bond.

This orientation to a values driven, liberatory approach has played out in our organization over the last decade. The Brotherhood of Elders Network is committed to creating a future that is grounded in authentic African cultural values. That set of values is based on both a historic and contemporary view of how people of African descent relate to humanity, the natural ecology and the realm of spirit. We want to help our community live out compassionate, committed and competent lives of liberated service.



We reach transformation through adaptation, adapting is not a bad thing. When you have to adapt to a new physical, emotional, intellectual, or political environment, it's sharpening your muscles, it's sharpening your chops. If we look at examples in nature, nature is constantly adapting, and we as human beings, are a part of nature. Things don't stay static. Things have to change."

GREG HODGE

One simple example of how this plays out is the practice of acknowledging our ancestors at the start of all of our meetings and public presentations. The act of taking a moment to acknowledge the achievements and challenges of those who have lived meaningful lives before us sets the tone and the stage for whatever we do next. As we sit at the intersections of stolen land and stolen labor, we raise our awareness through combatting narrative erasure and restoring our agency to act in ways that align with the decades, if not centuries long struggle, for freedom, justice and peace in our lives.

He is a passionate storyteller committed to passing on his wisdom to younger people coming up behind him. We were in awe of how he used his understanding of parable, science, spirituality, healing, music, and history to embody what liberatory leadership is. We urge you to listen and watch our mini-podcast with Kharyshi Wiginton of CTWO.



“

Progressive leadership isn't just about having a progressive policy agenda. To be a leader and model what we need, means having healthy, thriving relationships driven by principles like respect, dignity, and integrity. That is what this moment requires. People often focus solely on political progressivism, but we frequently miss the opportunity to engage in the healing we need. We need to envision how we want to be for the world that's coming.”

GREG HODGE



kharyshi

SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER AT CTWO

Over the past few years, I have been deeply contemplating what it means to engage the world through a liberatory lens. When I think about the definition of Liberatory Leadership, I often consider these values and principles. I consider how they manifest in my daily and professional lives and what it means to not only live by these codes but also lead from them. To that end, one of the most significant areas I fight for liberation in is body autonomy.

Throughout my life, my body has been a main character. For over 40 years, someone else has

shaped how my frame has been perceived and how people have critiqued it. But more importantly, others have influenced how I've looked at my own body and how I've expressed myself. Despite this truth, I have spent just as much time resisting the oppressive narratives and subsequent treatment of my body that has enveloped me. These questions haunt me: What does it mean to be fully and truly liberated? To own yourself? To exist in wholeness? What does it take to think positively about your body and feel good about who you are? And what does it take to craft a world that is affirming

wiginton

enough to center the individual regardless of beliefs?

I have spent 40+ years living in opposition and fighting for body autonomy. And while there are many benefits to battling for the life I want, I am clear that resistance is not freedom. Though I have always rebelled against the messages, the treatment, and the unrealistic expectations set for me by entities like family and society, I am deeply tethered to the same oppression I despise.

I wanna be free! I crave deliverance, and not just for myself. I believe everyone has the human right to own, love, and direct their lives as they see fit. For the first time in my life, I understand the immortal words

of Bob Marley differently. He said, “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds.” Now I realize he’s saying, “Stop asking to be free, stop talking about choosing freedom, wanting freedom, or fighting for it, and simply BE FREE!

I am striving to be the personification of freedom! In Iyanla Vanzant’s words, “You are the light of the world. You are an instrument of the Divine. You are the greatest miracle in the world. Life is graced by your presence.” While embodying liberation in my skin, I will strive each day to “lead from a place of wholeness, love, and interdependence” because the more whole I am and the more I authentically love myself, the more I will inspire others to do the same.

LIVING LIBERATION PODCAST

Another facet of CTWO's exploration into Liberatory Leadership, is our commitment to share learnings widely and provide space for organizers and practitioners to do so. As a result, CTWO launched a virtual conference and series called Living Liberation. In 2022 and 2023, we brought together over 400 people for two days of panels, discussions, and workshops to broaden the discussion of liberatory leadership. Through the Living Liberation conference, we offer frameworks and tools to organizations looking to deepen their practice, and create spaces where people directly learn from each other as they too explore the mission of building liberatory organizations while also fighting for liberation every day.



Fund for Liberatory Practice

by The LeadersTrust

The LeadersTrust believes that a deep investment in the leadership and organizational capacity of change makers is critical for success. Its accompaniment model builds on decades of history as a core strategy of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund to provide responsive, long-term, high-touch investment in its nonprofit partners. Now an independent entity fiscally sponsored by the Tides Center, the LeadersTrust has expanded, and currently works with more than a dozen foundations to deliver support to the movement practitioners and leaders they fund. With a deeply held trust-based approach, LeadersTrust seeks to unlock the radical imagination and inherent power of leaders, organizations, and movements to achieve transformative change. It



Winning the transformative, structural changes we need requires a deep belief and investment in people, organizations, and their collective power.”

THE LEADERSTRUST

accomplishes its mission by virtue of its partnerships with consequential practitioners and organizations who give depth and leadership to the social justice ecosystem.

The Fund for Liberatory Practice (the Fund) was launched in 2022 by the Resilience Initiative and the LeadersTrust to help support and amplify the field-building and exploratory work of liberatory practitioners. We invited independent consultants, coaches and trainers with full-time nonprofit organizational development consulting practice of three years or more who named their practice as ‘liberatory’ to share about their work, and be considered for \$15K awards. Over 200 people, largely BIPOC and gender-non conforming individuals, made submissions describing their liberatory consulting, coaching and training work.

The body of submissions were inspiring, moving, and made very clear that significant work to innovate and support liberatory practice and leadership is happening across the country and in various disciplines ‘under the radar.’ We learned from the practitioners (awarded or not) that the very act of being ‘seen’,

of being able to recognize ourselves in our invitation, was itself an act of connection and uplift.

Twenty individuals were ultimately invited to accept \$15K awards for their general purpose. An additional 55+ practitioners have stayed engaged through intentional conversations. Both funded and unawarded practitioners have been invited to upload their profiles and join the existing Resource Hub managed by the LeadersTrust and Resilience Initiative. The Resource Hub is a staffed online database for nonprofit organizations to easily find up-to-date, values-aligned, and reliable consulting, coaching, and training resources in areas ranging from strategic planning to conflict mediation.

In the process of making awards, we saw the breadth of the need for support of liberatory practitioners, which goes beyond our capacity as one organization. Which is why, in the late Fall 2022, the LeadersTrust formed a programmatic partnership with Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) and Leadership Learning Community (LLC) called Whole Communities Partnership (WCP). Leading into WCP, we understood that an organization’s

ability to receive support is often tethered to their budget. Even when a practitioner is values-aligned, often the identities of BIPOC practitioners require them to hustle to survive, leaving the doorway to support for emerging Black-led grassroots formations to be really small.

Therefore, our focus in WCP is to connect the PRAXIS Project cohort participants and alumni to the practitioners supported by the Fund for Liberatory Practice and to the

LeadersTrust's Resource Hub, typically only open to LeadersTrust grant partners. We also share resources and opportunities for connection with practitioners from our Whole Communities partners such as CTWO's Living Liberation conference and LLC's Whole Communities gathering space and BIPOC Affinity group. With each connection, we work to strengthen the ecosystem of support for liberatory leaders and the communities they support.

BY THE NUMBERS

218

SUBMISSIONS FROM A WIDE ARRAY OF
INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FROM ACROSS
THE COUNTRY

\$15K

AWARDS FOR GENERAL
SUPPORT

20

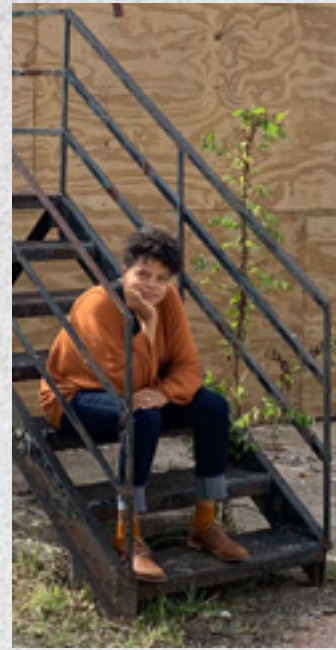
INDIVIDUALS
AWARDED

55+

UNAWARDED PRACTITIONERS
IN COMMUNITY

elissa
sloan
perry

CHANGE ELEMENTAL



Now I am oxygen,
transpiration and a means of
communication. Yesterday I
was shelter, canoe and tools
for defending and cooking.
Tomorrow my doing will be
another kind of medicine,
another kind of joy.

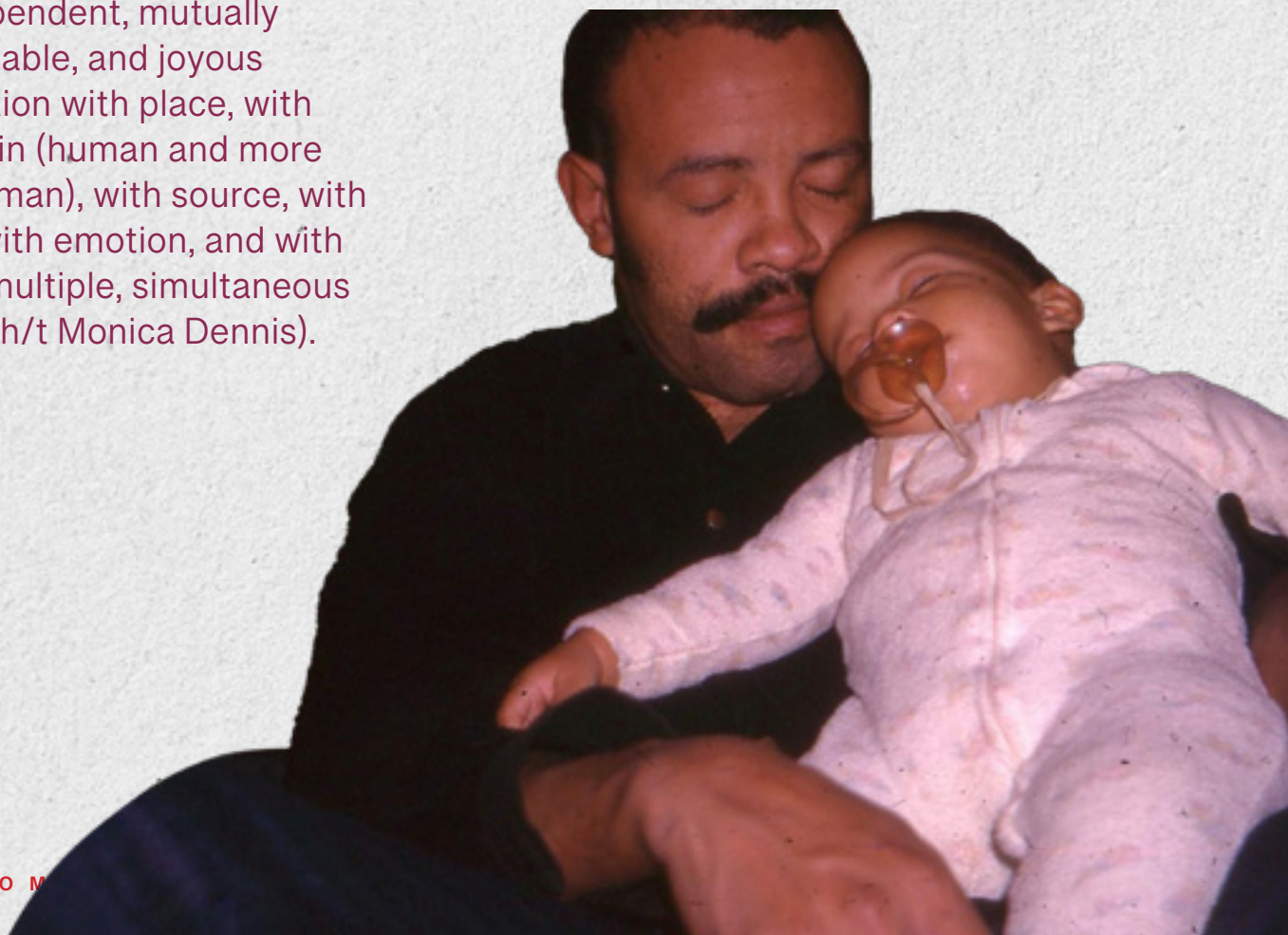
IN YOUR IMAGINATION, WHAT DOES LIBERATION LOOK LIKE, FEEL LIKE, TASTE LIKE?

Liberation feels like being rooted and expansive. Like being in interdependent, mutually accountable, and joyous connection with place, with all our kin (human and more than human), with source, with soma, with emotion, and with whole, multiple, simultaneous stories (h/t Monica Dennis).

“

I am dedicated to the sacred. My purpose is to be a call to the sacred in everyone.”

ELISSA SLOAN PERRY



WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME? WHY? HOW HAS THIS CHANGED OVER THE TIME?

With trees and with people who live interdependence (the third horizon), with deep understanding of our current context (the first horizon) and what led us here.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO SEEK LIBERATION IN ALL WE DO?

It is how we survive and thrive for the long haul. It is more than important, it is imperative.

WHAT DOES FAMILY MEAN TO YOU? WHO FEELS LIKE FAMILY AND WHY?

Family means many things to me. I have biological family, logical family, and magical family. Family are the ones I'll go the hard way for and who will go the hard way for me. The idea of kin influences and shapes my leadership more than that of family. Kin are who and what I care about and live (or seek to live) in interdependence with.



WHAT ARE YOU DEDICATED TO MAKING HAPPEN IN THE WORLD? HOW DOES YOUR SENSE OF HOME INFLUENCE THAT?

I am dedicated to the sacred. My purpose is to be a call to the sacred in everyone. I define the sacred as what's possible when we all have what we need to show up as our best selves, put ourselves to bed when we can't, and restore to that best self.

CAN YOU SPEAK TO A CENTRAL VALUE, IDEA, OR COMMUNITY AT THE CORE OF YOUR WORK?

Interdependent, mutually accountable, liberating practice. The rigor, the joy, the discipline, and the flow of love... of right relationship.

TREE SPOKE: A MESSAGE ON PURPOSE & BEING

Stop focusing on the doing.

Be what you believe – be the call to the sacred in everyone – and the doing will continuously show up and evolve and extend from your delicious, enduring being.

Now I am oxygen, transpiration and a means of communication. Yesterday I was shelter, canoe and tools for defending and cooking. Tomorrow my doing will be another kind of medicine, another kind of joy.

In all my days, sometimes upwards of 300,000 days at a time, I am my being. I commune, eat, drink, breathe, hear your stories and tell my own. I upend sidewalks and hold the earth together.

I weep for the hangings and offer my sap.

BUILD YOUR OWN HOME

Excerpt from *Ephemeris: Pre-Existing
Conditions*

On that night, the night that I thought would be the last night of too many scotches, the old lady came to me again. She looked like my great-grandmother from the one photo we had had of her. She wore a heavy scent like the incense in the church back home.

You will take a strange journey, she said to me. You will not be alone, and you will be the loneliest. Until you reweave your interior. There will be cold whiteness over everything and warm golds will curl themselves around you to protect you on the path. Draw the others into it. You will know them. Know two of them already. It will keep out the demons.

Only you can protect you from yourself. Not all white is bad. Not all gold is good.

On this journey, taste everything. Some of it will make you sick. Swallow a bit, anyway. Inoculate yourself from grand plummets. Explore all of the rooms in each house. Build your own home. Piece by

piece, book-by-book, country-by-country, soul-by-soul. Don't be selective, but don't welcome everyone. You will know the difference. Make your front porch sturdy. Able to withstand card parties, dancing, debates, men with shotguns, and neighbors with treats and suspicious intentions. Your home, once built, will go with you wherever you go. Fold it up and put it in your breast pocket. Tuck it behind your ear like a gardenia and slip it into your deepest crevice when you must. Once you have built it, it cannot be un-built. You will always have a choice.

Our conversation with Elissa felt like a warm, deep catch-up with a dear friend. The kind of call you have been meaning to make for a while that leaves you feeling full and satisfied. Elissa is brilliant, present, and grounded. A visionary whose energy feels as peaceful and ancient as the tree kin she shares so generously about. We encourage you to find a quiet space and soak in all the nourishment this conversation left us with.

Family. Yes, That.
“Big Mama?”
“Yes, baby?”
“I got the survival part, but can you teach me how to
cry?”
Our walking and our stillness together.
Not giving tree and selfish boy
But something else
altogether.
We have not been named by anyone but ourselves.
No dominion
No species
No genus
No order
No class
No phylum
No kingdom
Family. Yes, that.
Love?
Yes, love?
Will you dance for me
Delight me again with the magic of legs?
I find the music of wind in your hair.
Hear rhythm in xylem and phloem.
Move on smiling legs and eager feet.
Love?
Yes, love?
Thank you.

ELISSA SLOAN PERRY

You may find a new compass for wellness, strategies when encountering a bear, and a new language for family and home. Listen and watch our mini-podcast with Kharyshi Wiginton of CTWO.



felicia



griffin

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE

IN YOUR IMAGINATION, WHAT DOES LIBERATION LOOK LIKE, FEEL LIKE, TASTE LIKE?

Liberation feels like a cool breeze blowing on my skin on a sunny morning, sitting on my porch, sipping a hot, sweet cup of coffee, waking up my senses, and listening to the sound of the birds singing their morning songs. It is having no traffic in my mind - just enjoying the moment and taking in everything I can. Feeling the sun begin to warm my skin, knowing that those I love are safe and starting their days off in peace, joy, and knowing that they are loved.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME? WHY? HOW HAS THIS CHANGED OVER TIME?

I feel most at home in rooms full of BIPOC women and my family. In my early years, I found myself searching for financial stability and saw the pathway through white people. Making sure I spoke well, looked good, and could fit into their world was something I did. That process constantly left me depleted and feeling ungrounded in myself, my life, and my work. It wasn't until I found the space to reflect on myself, heal, and stand more authentically in what superpowers I bring, that I also learned that what I need to do that and make more of my dreams come true, is to be surrounded as many of my people as possible, folks that understand the journey of a woman of color themselves. Even with good white friends, I'm always trying to help them understand, which is exhausting, and with "us" I can put my feet up, be me, say slang when I feel like it, and refill my cup.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO SEEK LIBERATION IN ALL WE DO?

This is our true calling. Humans weren't supposed to conquer the world and all of its resources, we were supposed to live within it! All you have to do is look at the natural world and you will see perfect design of give and take, deep investment, beauty and systems that work for the greater good. This is the mindset and practices we need to be back in balance. We need to see each other and take care of each other – if we prioritized those things the world would be much, much different.

DOES THE IDEA OF FAMILY INFLUENCE OR SHAPE YOUR LEADERSHIP PRACTICE? IN WHAT WAYS?

Yes, I think we do deeper work when we are in deep relationship. The reality is not everyone I have ever worked with are people I wanted a familial type of relationship with. We often spend more hours of the day with our colleagues than we do our families – and I've found that when I and they invest in our relationship; the work is more fun and more sustainable. Now the problems come when nobody has conflict management tools – then things fall apart – just like in our families!

WHAT DOES FAMILY MEAN TO YOU? WHO FEELS LIKE FAMILY AND WHY?

My immediate family feels like family. My husband is a rider and a lover. We met young and just knew, it was us against the world. This beautiful Black man stands with me through everything (of course we have our moments) but in this life, I would pick him over and over again. What a gift from God after having such an unstable childhood. And my kids – right now I'm struggling with my two adult kids (20 and 25) – I question what I did wrong and why they aren't on the perfect path we tried to set them on, but at the end of the day, I love them and what they bring into the world. We also have two more in the nest, and yes, they are teenagers (15, relationship; the work is more fun and more sustainable. Now the problems come when nobody has conflict management tools – then things fall apart – just like in our families!

WHAT ARE YOU DEDICATED TO MAKING HAPPEN IN THE WORLD? HOW DOES YOUR SENSE OF HOME INFLUENCE THAT?

For my last chapter (I'm 51) – I want to invest in frontline leaders. I want to support them in transforming themselves, their organizations, and the ecosystems they work in. Not doing things as they have been taught by the white supremacist industrial complex, but doing things in the way they know they should be done in their gut, their intuition, drawing from ancestral wisdom.

CAN YOU SPEAK TO A CENTRAL VALUE AT THE CORE OF YOUR WORK?

We have to transform how we do the work - what we are doing and have done is NOT working to build the communities we all talk about in our grant proposals. To make that reality, many things have to change – starting with our own healing and relationships with each other.

HEALING LOVE: INTO BALANCE

Let's say the hard thing — embodying Liberatory values and practices can be difficult. It is normal to experience challenges while growing as a leader and as an organization, especially in a world where we are socialized to uphold capitalism, racism, anti-Blackness, ableism, xenophobia and more. When operating within the dominant culture, we are often valued and applauded.



Learning Space

by Leadership Learning Community

Leadership Learning Community (LLC) is a national organization that works with changemakers worldwide. We invite leaders, particularly those from historically excluded communities like Black, Indigenous, immigrant, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities, to live out the compelling vision of liberation - one which seeks power, joy, and thriving for all people. To do this, we facilitate and encourage the unlearning of oppressive structures, the engagement of communities of practice that create new cultural norms, and the development of tools and frameworks that allow us to align our values and actions. Together, we create spaces for leaders to run, fund, and study practices that are rooted in collective liberation (rather than systemic oppression). We call this liberatory leadership.

We joined Whole Communities Project Partnership alongside LeadersTrust and the Center for Third World Organizing to support awarded and unawarded practitioners and leaders from the

Fund for Liberatory Practice and the Liberatory Leadership PRAXIS Project.

OUR GOAL WAS TO

1. Resource BIPOC, women, and gender non-conforming-led movement spaces where equity, liberation, and a focus on systemic transformation are core.
2. Co-create a loving space for in-time learning, peer support, healing, and connection.
3. Build and deepen relationships between participants and strengthen the threads that make up a nascent network of liberatory practitioners.
4. Ensure BIPOC movement leaders and liberatory practitioners feel a sense of ease in joy in their work.
5. Invite leaders of the social good sector to move towards collective liberation which seeks power, joy, and thriving for all people

At our very first Whole Communities Affinity Space, we asked what would make liberation more possible for you and the people you love. One of our participants, Nafasi Ferrell, shared something that has stayed with me: “Liberation is possible,” she said, “if we refuse to give up on one another and we have the time and patience to do so.” What I heard in her reply was a call to action. Liberation takes refusal of dominant norms to succumb to organized abandonment. Liberation takes a commitment to each other, and especially to not give up on one another. Liberation takes time and patience and lots of chances to practice

a new way forward. My colleagues Ericka Stallings and Iman Mills-Gordon and I were moved by the clarity of her vision and excited to co-create a learning space rooted in joy, intention, power and empowered us all to do just work in just ways.



This virtual learning space has been a collective journey of connection, growth and transformation. Leadership is a shared responsibility and we must continue to lift each other up and support one another as we strive for liberation. Our time together has shown me that when we gather with open hearts and minds we can co-create a space where true transformation and healing is possible.

**NAFASI FERELL, PRINCIPAL
CONSULTANT & FOUNDER,
NARRATIVES UNBOUND LLC**

The Affinity Group has remained a space of love, healing, in-time learning, peer support and connection intended to honor the lived experience of Black and BIPOC liberatory leaders. In our monthly gatherings, we’ve shared family stories; held sacred space to honor breath

and reconnect to our bodies; learned from guest speakers and trainers eager to share different organizational models and tools that have shaped their own liberatory practice; time traveled to experience our liberatory visions for a new world come to life; explicitly named our work, our values and the communities we serve; written into new stories and recommitted to our shared vision of liberation; shared resources; and created many avenues of

participation for community members who were unable to join the monthly virtual learning series. We are thankful for the opportunity to create a gentle and intentional space held by Black women for Black women to deepen and expand the practice of liberatory leadership.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

TRUST DEEPENS TRUST

Through intentional check-ins and conversations about leadership practices rooted in care and authenticity, participants were able to cultivate relationships with each other that sustained them through difficult moments and supported them in celebrating progress. Our gatherings became a place where we were led by joy and embodied celebration over competition and vulnerability over stoic heroism. This became especially important as participants became resources to each other through peer support and skills-sharing. As one of our participants, Nafasi Ferrell, shared: "Liberation is possible if we don't give up one one another and we have the time and patience to do so"

HONOR BREATH

After recognizing the many responsibilities our participants were holding outside of our virtual learning space, we honored movement and breath every meeting by dancing, breathing, and drinking mindfully. Slowing down helped us access the stories shaping participants' understanding of their own leadership journeys. What emerged out of our conversations was a tapestry of healing, forgiveness, and a desire for brave spaces to more gracefully unpack

the grief Black women are holding as leaders, movement organizers, entrepreneurs, mothers, daughters, and community members.

STRENGTHEN UNDERSTANDING OF LIBERATORY APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

Providing a wide array of resources and programmatic tools for participants to deepen their learnings and honor their healing journeys allowed participants to feel recharged & gain tools to push back against burnout culture. We learned that participants both need to be resourced and feel supported in their particular leadership journeys for them to practice, iterate, and experiment in their liberatory leadership journey. We created space for participants to push back against definitions and share more about how they embody their values as they stretch their skills and find their edges.

BUILD THE BOAT AND THE BRIDGE

As much as we love a spaciouly held and tightly facilitated session, we learned that it was not enough to build the container that holds these important conversations, we had to also capture resources and skillbuilding moments and share them back with the community. We did that

by creating a resource hub as well as a newsletter that shared recaps from every session, job resources, report-outs from member organizations, and liberatory leadership development resources. Creating entry points of authentic connection so anyone can join and learn and share is important to this work and appreciated by those who are not always able to join monthly virtual learning spaces.

RESOURCE ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Because Whole Communities is a large network of over five hundred members across three member organizations, we had to get creative about engaging folks through as many avenues of participation to honor their needs. In addition to the monthly virtual gatherings, we invited folks to join our BIPOC Affinity gathering which also meets virtually and with a wider community of coaches, consultants and liberatory leaders from across the country. In addition, we freed up resources for members to share a meal with other whole community members in their area; engage a writing coach and share their leadership journey **with us via a blog series; and join our resource hub on Circle**. sacred space to honor breath and reconnect to our bodies; learned from guest speakers and trainers eager to share different organizational models and tools that have shaped their own liberatory practice; time traveled to experience our liberatory visions for a new world come to life; explicitly named our work, our values and the

communities we serve; written into new stories and recommitted to our shared vision of liberation; shared resources; and created many avenues of participation for community members who were unable to join the monthly virtual learning series. We are thankful for the opportunity to create a gentle and intentional space held by Black women for Black women to deepen and expand the practice of liberatory leadership.



The Whole Communities Learning Space Is doing such important work! They are reimagining what liberatory leadership can be today and in the future. From the moment of logging on to the video call through to closing reflections, each gathering has been special and I've left feeling full, seen, and having my leadership skills stretched and nurtured. Participating has tapped into my creative side and I'm understanding how that relates to my purpose as a leader.

**JULIE HURST, EDUCATOR AND
ADVANCED BREATHWORK
PRACTITIONER**

MENDING WORKSHEET

In 2024, Leadership Learning Community has been learning alongside leaders in the ecosystem focusing on leadership and race, navigating leadership transition and anchoring in our values. To support the leaders in exploring these nuances, we created this mending worksheet to help leaders slow down and reflect not their relationship topper while re-grounding in their values, practicing presence and honoring what feelings come up for them as they reflect.

Scan these QR codes for the mending worksheet from Leadership Learning Community to support your journey as a liberatory leader.



ENGLISH



ESPAÑOL

zulayka



santiaigo

EARTHSEED LAND COLLECTIVE & AWARDED
PRACTITIONER OF THE FUND FOR LIBERATORY
PRACTICE/THE LEADERSTRUST

IN YOUR IMAGINATION, WHAT DOES LIBERATION LOOK LIKE, FEEL LIKE, TASTE LIKE?

Liberation feels like a deep sense of connection and acknowledgment that a life force connects all living beings on this planet, regardless of geography and species. It's the antithesis to isolation and loneliness. It's a response to sometimes feeling lost in the world. It's a sense of finding home. Liberation is not too hot, not too cold, just the right temperature. It feels like my toes have the space to move and wiggle and feel the earth underneath my feet. Liberation tastes like Arroz Con Gandules, a comfort food for me from the Caribbean, it tastes like really nourishing home-cooked food.

WHAT DOES FAMILY MEAN TO ME? WHO FEELS LIKE FAMILY AND WHY?

As a person who identifies proudly as queer, as bisexual and having grappled with some layers of rejection, the sense of chosen family is also an important one. I have a close circle of sister friends. I call them my daughter's Tias, Aunties that I can't imagine living without, surviving without. They are part of my family. My other family are these humans that have been in this land collective experiment with me, this Earthseed land, collective vision, dream, mission, come to life. We've been at this for 12 years, although we've only been on the land for eight. With them, I don't say family only in the romantic sense, it's not always fun and games. Family that holds hard mirrors up for each other. Family that helps our children grow up together. of liberation is to understand that my kin comes in varied forms and varied species. The more I settle into that truth, the more expanded my heart becomes, and the more expanded my sense of connection becomes.

CAN YOU SPEAK TO A CENTRAL VALUE AT THE CORE OF YOUR WORK?

Love is a central value. Love as a force of transformation. Not love in the snugly, comfortable sort of way, though that is important, but love in the sense of being able to consider somebody with different views, with different perspectives, and see them as my family, as my kin. Being able to extend to them open-heartedness. This is a growing edge for me, and I think for most humans. Can we really embrace the idea of no enemy and have love be the connecting value, the connecting force across lines of difference? This is core in my life.

IN TIMES OF GRIEF, CONFLICT, AND STRESS, WHAT TOOLS DO YOU USE TO RECENTER AND COME BACK HOME TO YOURSELF?

Yes, I think we do deeper work when we are in deep relationship. The reality is not everyone I have ever worked with are people I wanted a familial type of relationship with. We often spend more hours of the day with our colleagues than we do our families - and I've found that when I and they invest in our relationship; the work is more fun and more sustainable. Now the problems come when nobody has conflict management tools - then things fall apart - just like in our families!

WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME? WHY?

I'm 49 years old, and the last time I counted, I had moved 38 times in my life. So home used to be wherever my mother was. Thank goodness my mother's still living and still feels like home to me. I've also grown my own family. I have a life partner of 14 years and a 12-year-old daughter. They feel like home. Our little four-legged friend, Chico BonBon, feels like home. Home also feels like being in the forest at Earthseed. Earthseed Land Collective is the group that I'm a part of. We have been exploring this question of what it means to be in relationship with a place. For the last eight years, we've been on this land, these 48 acres in North Durham, North Carolina. Home

has expanded to include my little sit spot in the forest where wild nature still reigns supreme.

In the forest, I'm able to breathe a little bit deeper. I'm able to greet my tree elders, who I love so much since I know so few of my human elders, those trees feel like home. The trees feel like family, like wise counsel. I'm learning to expand my sense of family beyond us humans, which has become an important part of my spiritual practice. An important part of my sense of liberation is to understand that my kin comes in varied forms and varied species. The more I settle into that truth, the more expanded my heart becomes, and the more expanded my sense of connection becomes.



REGAINING PERSPECTIVE

One evening I ran to the woods.
To the stillness, the quieting of human voices.
To the sense of full body connection that transports me
to what has meaning
in this wild and broken world.

This is the web that I want to be enmeshed in.
I regain perspective, rightsize my expectations, rest
into the moment.

It was here that the wood thrush serenaded me and all
other beings listening—
a song so poignant it shatters all notions of separation.

The sound reverberates against canopy and ribcage.
I am grateful and humbled to be witness to this concert
of delight.



OUTSIDE

I BREATHE FREELY

Gifts of Wonder, Reciprocity, and Praise
M. ZULAYKA SANTIAGO

Contained here is a collection of reflections, poems, photos, and essays. These were composed primarily over a three-year period of time while living at Earthseed Land Collective. The overarching purpose of this book is to encourage us to remember that we are not the only wise, sentient beings on this planet; to help illuminate the vast, complex beauty of the natural world; and to foster reconnection.

ditra edwards



SISTA FIRE

When I reflect on home, the first thing I think of is home in the context of my family. My roots are in Providence, Rhode Island. The four generations of my family here shaped me, created my foundation, and helped me be brave in life. When I reflect on home, I think about my relationships with the three people who most deeply created my world: my mother Adelina Gomes, my dad, Walter Edwards, and my older sister, Joy Edwards. Having my dad, my mom, and my sister was like having a three-legged stool, supporting me, giving me joy, challenging me, and keeping me rooted and understanding the world where I grew up. These deep feelings of home and family, and even Providence specifically, tie to SISTA Fire, the organization I co-founded with Chanravy Preung about seven years ago. As I grew up, my family made sure I knew that I had the right to be who I was and to stand in my confidence for who I was as a young Black woman. They made sure I knew

what it meant to be a Black woman growing up in public housing, what it meant to not accept what people thought about me as a Black woman, as a Black girl. When I didn't know where my anger and temper were coming from, my family helped me connect it to an understanding of the world that I lived in. My parents always pushed for me to understand that whatever was happening wasn't just about me, it was about everyone I was connected to and in a relationship with. They helped me understand that the work that we do together, no matter how big or small, is a collective responsibility. I was given responsibility at a pretty young age to be a part of this work--whether door-knocking for my neighbor who was running for city council or going to work with my big sister who was responsible for creating games at the neighborhood playground for children. I learned that our collective work was about what we were doing with and for our community.

When I think about SISTA Fire, I think about the grief that I held after the loss of my mom, and how I wanted to move beyond my grief. I thought a lot about what was important to my mom, and how many times over the years she had asked me to bring my work back home. My family home was Providence, of course, but where was my political home there? Even as I moved back to Providence, I wasn't sure what this would mean. Could I help create a space that really allowed and supported women of color in Providence to grow and to think critically about what was happening in the world? Could I create a space where we could think about how we could change what was happening in Rhode Island? And could I do that in a way that allowed for folks to show up as themselves, and be honored and loved and cared for, in the ways that my family did for me growing up?

In co-creating SISTA Fire with women of color and nonbinary folks, we were

trying to create a political home, a place where we could think critically and act around issues that are impacting us. For us, the idea of home doesn't separate self, family, place, and struggle. As we built SISTA Fire in relationship with our community, the more like home it started to feel, the more love became present, and love in the presence of fighting for what we believed in. That, for me, really showed up in how we moved, and how we continue to move in this state where we are becoming a force. Our power as women and non-binary folks of color is holding accountability for what we all know that we deserve.

A home isn't built by one person, and the same is true for SISTA Fire, my political home. Everyone has brought something to the process. We are trying to build this in ways that fully see all of us and our lived experiences. And being an organization of women of color and non-binary folks, we've had to unlearn a lot of shit for ourselves.

We've had to unlearn putting the work, so much of the work, on one person. We were trying to make sure we weren't burning people out, yet I was not always being honest about how much I was carrying and how it was making me feel mentally and physically.

At the end of 2023, I ended up in the hospital. I ended up there because I was constantly trying to make sure other folks had what they needed, but I wasn't thinking about myself. Talk about having to unlearn shit. It felt so much like the heavy lifting Black women so often do to protect and support our families. And I think as Black women in this work, we point these things out to other folks, we try to help others put down their loads, but often we do so by picking the load up ourselves.

The act of living your values and living your practice to the fullest has moments of deep challenge. When I came back to SISTA Fire in January after having been out because of my health, I had

to stand in front of our staff and our members and say, I can no longer do this. I cannot carry this on my back. I need for us to understand that we all have to step up. We have to decide what kind of institution we're going to be. Those of us women of color who are leading, carry a lot of weight. Speaking to our staff and members, I said we have to reflect on that. We have to figure out how to do this differently. We can do all of this fighting and struggling and pushing outside, but we also need to do it more internally, more collectively, and intentionally. Are we willing to do this together? And what does it look like? I realized that my commitment has always been about being willing to do the work, but my family had also raised me to understand that the solution lies in our collective work. If we are truly creating a new political home for women of color and non-binary folks in Rhode Island, we have to build it in new ways that honor our collective health and build our collective strength.

sadia

**LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP MANAGER,
LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY**

I am writing to you from my office which overlooks my elderly neighbor's garden. Tom's garden wraps around the front, back, and side of his property. Often, he invites me over to talk when he sees me idling on my stoop. Last we spoke, he regaled me with the story of how the maze of coneflowers, milkweed, foxglove and asters in his yard came to be. How, twenty years ago, when he moved with his wife into this tiny bungalow with its sprawling porch littered with plants, he knew nothing about gardening. He learned slowly, he said, accepting clippings from neighbors, rescuing ratty bags of wildflower seeds from the landfill and watching with surprise as his neighbors' flowers began to pollinate his lawn. I was impressed by how slow Tom was willing to go to learn. It took him at least five years,

hassan

he said, to figure out what plants thrived perennially and which were annual, which grew best in the spring and summer and which were better suited for autumn. We shared a good laugh then looking over at my little duplex. You know what's curious, he exclaimed, you all have got plants in the windows and none in the ground. I didn't find it curious at all. I was too lazy to get on my knees to pull the weeds. Still, what he said next has stayed with me: Y'all are sitting on too much good soil, he said, to not be growing yourselves something pretty over there.

When we decided on our theme for this year's magazine, "Liberatory Leaders, At Home," we wanted to capture the feeling of walking into your favorite room, slipping off your shoes, your hat, your coat and lighting your favorite candle. Not so much "home is where the heart is,"

but more "home is where the heart is free." We wanted to give readers a look behind the veil to give you a sense of what your favorite thinker, storyteller, community organizer, movement leader is dreaming of when they close the door behind them. Where do they rest? What brings them joy and inspires them to continue building? I've been reading Camille Dungy's memoir *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* and what has stayed with me is how much home is a gift we carry with us. For Camille, my favorite poet and naturalist, home is in the soil and the family she tends to lovingly, and with black gardeners who inspire her with their love of the land and desire for space to both play and be contained. For me, home is in remembering to come back to the soil of myself when I feel I've strayed too far. Liberation, to me, demands remembrance.

I have to practice being free in my first home, my body, so I can be free with others. To do that, I surround myself with beauty and leave myself tiny reminders (polaroids, plant clippings, knick knacks from travels) of all the lives I've lived. In a recent whole communities virtual gathering, a beloved participant reminded me that "movement at the pace of your life is part of the liberation process." She reminded me that getting free and staying free meant honoring the ebbs and flows of our daily lives. To do that, we must rest, reflect, invite dissonance and beauty and be willing to start over many times. My own home is often messy and still, I invite beloveds over so they can know me in all various states. As you gather yourself and cozy up to this labor of love, I leave you with a quote from Triscia Hersey, "If there is power in our collective rest and care, then with whom can you co-design loving and just rest practices?" If home is where the heart is free, with whom can you tend your garden? With whom can you walk home and often?

With love,
Sadia

LIBERATION POEM

Like freedom
We're meant to
Soar brightly

To grab life
With both hands
Determined

Self-guided
Mastery
Together

Not alone
You, me, us
We exist

Loving Earth
Space to breathe
Harmony

Each other
Intertwined
Breaking dawn

KHARYSHI WIGINTON

WEAVING THE WORK TOGETHER

HOSTED

2ND ANNUAL LIVING LIBERATION
CONFERENCE WITH APPROXIMATELY 450
PEOPLE IN ATTENDANCE

INVITED

OVER 800 PEOPLE TO EMBODY LIBERATORY
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INTO THEIR DAILY
LIVES THROUGH LIVING LIBERATION SUMMITS,
LLC LEARNING SPACE, AND THE FUND FOR
LIBERATORY PRACTICE

HELPED

TRANSFORM 10 ORGANIZATIONS, GUIDING THEM THROUGH IDENTIFYING LIBERATORY PRACTICES ALIGNED WITH THEIR VALUES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SAID PRACTICES

REGRANTED

\$600,000 IN FUNDS TO ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH CTWO'S PRAXIS PROJECT & \$300,000 IN FUNDS TO PRACTITIONERS THROUGH THE FUND FOR LIBERATORY PRACTICE

REGRANTED

\$300,000 IN FUNDS TO PRACTITIONERS VIA LEADERSTRUST'S FUND FOR LIBERATORY PRACTICE

falilah

TRANSFORMATIVE MOVEMENT CONSULTANT
FOR LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP PRAXIS
COHORTS, LLC AFFINITY GROUP PARTICIPANT



aisha bilal

Our conversation with Falilah Aisha Bilal was truly juicy and transformative. In addition to her words, we asked her two questions about how to weave liberatory leadership into the day to day work as a leader.

HOW DID THIS NEW FRAME SHIFT OR IMPACT YOUR WORK ?

How this shows up within organizations requires staff to hold a shared commitment to this value. We must sit in community to identify our collective values and let these values inform how we move with ourselves and each other.

WHAT DOES “LIVING OUR VALUES” MEAN?

Living our values means we are constantly thinking about what we value. We have to do the work to identify what is important and then take action to move forward from that value. It means we make mistakes, we try again and again. We redline the things we value and we come back to our core. Putting our values in practice is some of the hardest work we will do as humans. If we value love, compassion, understanding, peace then we must practice these values. We must choose friends, employment and work that reflects these values. This is not easy work, it takes deep effort. For example, when someone hurts us and disrespects us, we must not return that energy to them. Instead we have to show them and model love and respect.

BELIEF SYSTEM

I believe that we are all Divine Spirits.

I believe that we are having a human experience and this human experience is complicated, painful, and joyful.

I believe we deserve to have our needs and desires fulfilled.

I believe that while we are guided and shaped by many different forces each of us has a unique internal power. Tap into you!

I believe that trauma does have tremendous impact and we HAVE the power to manage, learn from, grow and heal from our personal histories of trauma!

I believe we all need to experience pleasure, joy, freedom and happiness!

I believe that life is worth living to the fullest!



Liberation tastes like water. It feels like water when I think about what water does, how it holds us, how it's the majority of the thing that makes us up as human beings. Liberation feels like water because it's the closest thing to our natural state, it's a conduit that helps move us. When we think about liberation, we are thinking about movement. We have a vision of what we see for our lives, whether it's economic, physical, interpersonal, political, or social. We have this vision. Water is the thing that helps move us."

We urge you to listen and watch our mini podcast with Kharyshi Wiginton of CTWO. She has us thinking deeply about the complexities of water, community, politics, family, and healing. She is the evidence of a generational tradition of love and keeping each other well.



ashlee

PROGRAM MANAGER, THE LEADERSTRUST

Throughout this magazine, we have been offered rich examples of liberatory leadership and how it is shaped by the concept of “home”. When I think of home, I think of places and people, but it also evokes a feeling. My home is in the South, specifically Georgia, where my family has lived for generations. Washington, DC, which shaped my personal and political identities, is another home. My nieces also represent home to me. The feeling of being “at home” goes beyond the physical; it means security, a sense of calm, and love. All of these things inform my work supporting liberatory leaders

through the LeadersTrust and as an HIV/AIDS educator and advocate. In this piece, I will explore one of the key ways an expansive sense of home and of family can inform our leadership journeys.

One of the core elements of liberatory leadership is the importance of connection, to our fellow humans, to the land, and to a higher purpose. Our leaders describe feeling a sense of connection and interdependence that opposes the isolation and loneliness that are often present in our society. Guided by a sense of home and rooted in relationships with family, kin,

wimberly

and community, these leaders are operating within their life's purpose — to move us all closer to liberation.

Family serves as a foundation for many of us. These relationships are often the first connections we form, shaping how we understand and navigate the world. In her article, Ditra Edwards shares that her relationships with her father, mother, and sister were “like a three-legged stool, supporting me, giving me joy, challenging me, and keeping me rooted and understanding the world where I grew up.” She goes on to state that this foundation fostered a sense of collective responsibility and connection with people in her community from a young age. This eventually led her to create her organization SISTA Fire.

Family can also be defined by shared values and commitment to a cause. Our chosen family and community are the ties that we intentionally create and sustain. In their interview, Mizan & Sizwe of Spearitwux discuss who they view as “family,” outside of the biological communities that they are a part of, as being based on meeting with likeminded people:

“The family that I’m talking about is the family that we choose to be and to choose to create. I guess it’s more when I think of family as your tribe. It’s who do you vibe with? Who do you tribe with? What’s your frequency?”

So how can we begin to practice and embody connection in our work? Using the three “I”s referenced by Mizan & Sizwe as a framework, I will offer ideas for the internal self and interpersonal self and connect that to our work within institutions.

On an individual level, we all have healing work to do. As Aisha Bilal discusses in her conversation with Kharyshi Wiginton, it’s not always easy to integrate all of the different parts of your past and identity, but it’s important work. Being firmly grounded in who you are and what you believe (and where your learning edges are) will improve your relationships with others. As we work together collectively in organizations, getting clear on what our visions for liberation are and operating within our values on a daily basis, is how we move closer to creating the world we want to live in.

When we do experience those hard moments, of stress, grief, and heartache, moments that knock the wind out of us, we need to have tools and practices to recenter ourselves. Our featured liberatory leaders shared the tools and practices they use to recenter during difficult times. They include:

- Dancing, shaking, releasing, breathwork, and other somatic practices
- Singing and sound/music
- Meditation
- Gardening, forest bathing/nature inquiry, and other ways of connecting with the land
- Nourishing the body (food and water)
- Reading, writing, creating art
- Seeking connection and support through family, friends, therapy

It's important for each person to find what works best for them. Also, taking time and space to really feel our feelings is key. This doesn't have to occur in isolation, but it is important to make sure we don't cause pain as we are moving through it.

As our featured leaders have noted, we can model the liberated world we hope to create through our current relationships. When thinking about the influence of family and home, love is the clear guiding principle for this work. Part of operating in love and maintaining healthy relationships is mutual accountability. The work we must do within our organizations and movement spaces is to set expectations and also have room for mistakes and growth. This quote from Kharyshi in her conversation with Aisha, hits home: "What's hard is that we often use language like family... and, to that end, we often replicate the toxic aspects of family in our organizations and in movement spaces ...what does that mean if you're disposable in a family?" This is an idea that I will continue to reflect on in my own relationships.

Our featured leaders are providing us with a healthier way of understanding how "family" operates within our organizing spaces. We should reflect on the question: who am I committed to and how do my actions reflect that? We don't have to agree on everything, but we can co-exist and work interdependently and within our values as we work toward our collective goal of liberation.

“

I feel home is where the love is, where I feel love, where I feel supported, where I can be myself. It doesn't always mean it's going to be comfortable. You know, sometimes people you love the most are going to tell you the truth, but you don't want to hear at that particular time. But you know, it's still love.”

ASHLEE WIMBERLY

APPRECIATIONS

We are grateful for the work of the Liberatory Leadership Project and its partners for deeply exploring liberatory leadership and providing the foundations of this work. The Whole communities Project was made possible by Black women who worked closely with cohort members, workshop participants, and grantees and remained steadfast in their commitment to liberation and transformation, namely:

HOLLY DELANEY COLE

IMAN MILLS GORDON

SADIA HASSAN

JUSTINE INGRAM

NIKITA MITCHELL

KIERRA SIMS-DRAKE

ERICKA STALLINGS

TRISH ADOBEA TCHUME

CHINYERE TUTASHINDA

KHARYSHI WIGINTON

ASHLEE WIMBERLY

We hold deep gratitude for your thought partnership, grace, and mastery.

In the words of Iyanla Vanzant, “Inside of you, there is a place called home.” Through this Magazine, we asked amazing liberatory leaders to open your homes and show us yourselves. You did just that! We would like to thank all of the participants who contributed to this project.

MIZAN ALKEBULAN-ABAKAH, MPH

**SIZWE SIZWE ANDREWS-ABAKAH AKA SPEAR OF
THE NATION**

GREG HODGE

ELISSA SLOAN PERRY

FELICIA GRIFFIN

ZULAYKA SANTIAGO

DITRA EDWARDS

FALILAH AISHA BILAL

A special thank you to Creative Director, **NONI LIMAR** and Graphic Designer, **DEVAN KING**, who listened to our stories and curated this magamagazine which invites all of us back to liberation.



HOME IS WHERE THE LOVE IS
Whole Communities Project