Community Care

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What does community care mean?

Community care is the principle of making sure the community is healthy, not just its member separately (even though that is a hugely important part of it), but also that the community as a whole functions as a large group. That there's structures in place to reconcile differences, take care of one another in an empathetic way, and that no one regardless of social status, racialisation, disability, or anything else is left by the wayside and forgotten.

Community care is above all a responsibility, not one that should be taken by only one or a few people, but everyone in the community. But one that is often lacking or completely missing in modern communities, this zine hopes to help remedy that and help you make your communities safer, more robust, and overall more caring.

The importance of community care in ALL communities

You might think to yourself that your space doesn't need community care, or at least not anything formal. That things are fine in your activism circle, or your hangout spot like a bar or community center, or even at home in your family. But communities might not always visibly need care; harm might be hidden from you, or even when harm isn't present yet—it almost certainly will be in the future.

It is best to plan out and work with your community to set up the structures that can heal and prevent harm **before** the harm happens, so that victims know they will be taken care of, so that the community can heal without banishment or overly harsh punishment of other sorts, and people don't feel threatened to admit wrongdoing.

Formation, and upholding, of community

Communities can form in one of two ways: either intentional (e.g. hobby clubs, activist circles, or through shared social circles) or happenstance (e.g. families, neighbours, or coworking spaces). Both of these spaces need care and a form of management, not management in the commonly perceived sense of authority, but in a purely utilitarian sense of needing structures and procedures to manage people and emotions and safety when things inevitably break down.

How do we uphold our communities then? We first formalize how we manage our conflict (from within the community and without it), then we create guidelines for trying to prevent as much harm as possible (prevention is the best cure after all!), and finally we communicate how we want to make our community interactions and spaces as safe as possible together (not just once, but regularly reflect!); the next three chapters will be about those subjects.

Managing conflict and abuse

A zine is too small a format to give an exhaustive explanation about how to properly and carefully deal with conflict and abuse, this is the basic overview, there is extra expanded sources available at the back of the zine. First we want to make sure we let go of how a lot of western societies deal with conflict; we see any harm done as sin, and any harm doer as a sinner. This ironically doubles the harm done to victims most of all, any person with structural privilege (which can include just someone who has been there longer, or is socially quite likable!) will be protected from being called out structurally.

Yet we also have to consider how we deal with people that truly make mistakes, while a serial abuser can genuinely need to be excluded from our spaces, and we should always listen to victims first and most in situations of abuse, we also need to create space for transformative justice to not fall into creating a punitive system that recreates our carceral society.

Help with creating safe(r) spaces

Aside from having a process for managing conflict and abuse, it's is important to make sure you prevent as much harm as possible before it happens in your communities. This is an ever evolving process that can take many forms, but we will give some examples to help you along in creating your own framework for your communities.

Firstly you will want to create social norms to include as many people as possible, for instance: signaling your processes clearly and including (without overwhelming your processes!) as many people as possible into community decision making, or making sure you have formal rules and guidelines for the community, as well as clear consequences (not punitive ones by default!) that take effect when those are broken (repeatedly), or having a group of people that people can talk to who have intimate knowledge of both the community processes and know how to handle conflict well (you can think of mediators but this role can take several names).

Privilege, space, and safety

Any community should strive to be as accessible as possible, a part of community care is literal care for other people. That can be making sure spaces are well ventilated/people masking to prevent spreading disease, taking physical care of people with illness/disability/injury, or people fighting bigotries: from ableism to racism to queerphobia. It's important for any community to be as open and accessible as possible, and to make sure any harm that's caused because of marginalisation be taken seriously and addressed so that it's (hopefully) prevented from happening again!

An important and often overlooked part of this is the space (in a figurative and literal sense!) that privileged people take up in communities that minorities are not afforded. Make sure to pay attention to people talking about their own oppressions, but make sure people don't deflect responsibility using this method (we see racism is an ignored issue quite often in very white spaces, even in e.g. queer spaces!)

So, what now?

As with any change in the world, the first step is to actually start making change yourself: start talking to your community and create a group/meeting for improving the community care. This is especially important if people are burning out, feeling excluded, or there are no structures in place to prevent harm outside of banishment and punishment.

You can also read more about how to deal with abuse and harm in communities, a few books we recommend are:

On Repentance and Repair by rabbi Danya Ruttenberg

What Does Justice Look Like by Waziyatawin