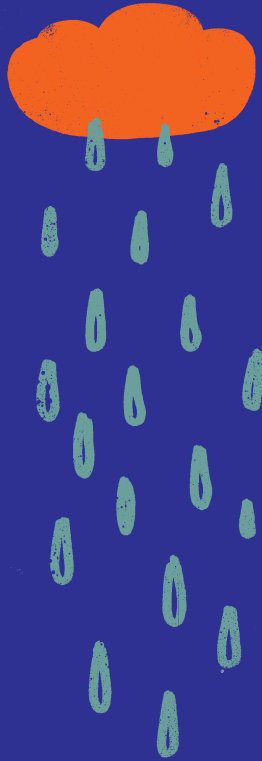


CARING *for*
YOURSELF
is a
RADICAL

ACT

Self-Care Guide
for Youth Working
in Community





“My motivation to start taking out more time for myself, was due to feeling burnt out and stressed from work. I was tired of letting my work life affect my personal life. I didn’t want to bring my issues from work home. Being in the social sector, you’re constantly taking on other people’s issues and burdens which slowly invites vicarious trauma to take space in your life. Dealing with murders, crisis, evictions, unemployment, and so many other issues has a toll on you after a while. You have to take care of yourself first, before you can take care of others.”

AMEERA MCINTOSH

CARING *for* YOURSELF is a **RADICAL** ACT

This guide was created with a lot of love for youth workers holding down our communities. In 2013 ArtReach Toronto gathered youth workers together for two workshops on self-care. We heard lots of different ways people were healing on their own and with community. From this came the idea to create a self-care guide with youth workers. With the support of an amazing youth advisory committee, we worked to make this guide relevant and accessible. Thank you deeply to all the community members that shared their stories, challenges and tools.

Self-care is about creating and maintaining practices that help you sustain your energy and spirit in whatever life path you choose. It also makes you a better friend, community member, lover, partner and caregiver. When you give to others but neglect yourself, feelings of resentment can arise because you sacrifice your own needs. Taking care of yourself allows you to enjoy time with others while also sustaining yourself. Self-care is not selfish. Self-care is being intentional in your day to reflect, nurture your body, remember your heart, grieve your sorrows and attend to your daily needs.

As youth workers we often make time for everything, and everyone but not intentional time for ourselves. Our work is often underpaid and undervalued with high amounts of stress and trauma. Some of us end our careers in the field early or we burn out slowly. This guide is an opportunity to engage with your own bodies, hearts, and minds to elevate your current self-care practices and reflect on how they can be expanded.

The guide combines information about trauma and self-care with practices and exercises you can use in your daily life. It's a living document, something to help in our ongoing journey to self-care and community care.

There are daily invitations for you to reflect, pause, journal, dance and sing while attending to your needs. We hope that you use the exercises, reflections and practices to think through intentional self-care. You can do them under the covers, with a loved one or in a crowded subway.

A NOTE ABOUT JOURNALING:

You can do this anywhere and in many forms.

A journal can be old-school paper and pen, your cell phone or a laptop. Or it can be in your own head. It's a process of reflection where you can use whatever format and tools that work for you.

“Self Love: When you feel whole, caring, invested in & feeling powerful about who you are & your life aka self liberation. Self Restoration: the intentional steps you take to achieve self-love from an “unwhole” place.”

ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN

Take a deep breath, open your heart and listen to its rhythm.

This guide is a ‘choose-your-own-adventure’ format, so you decide where you want to begin and what you would rather attend to later. There is no right or wrong way to go through this guide.



12

Why Self-Care?

What is self-care?
Finding the time.
Getting Started



20

Reflecting on the Systems We are Working Within

Understanding how systems affect self and community care.



26

Disability Justice

Reflecting support of disabilities and chronically ill folks.



30

Understanding Trauma

What are impacts and responses to trauma?



50

Boundaries

Exploring Boundaries. Creating Space.



56

Self-Care Practices

Week-by-week practices to try out.



90

Reflection Practices

Journaling activities.



94

Celebrating You

A thank you for all that you do.

PAGE 99 - RESOURCES, PAGE 101 - REFERENCES

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GOAL & ArtReach

This guide is part of the larger GOAL (Grassroots Organizing and Leadership) Youth Workshop and Resource Series presented by ArtReach in partnership with Grassroots Youth Collaborative, City of Toronto, For Youth Initiative, and Toronto Community Foundation. Through the GOAL project, ArtReach provides free workshops across the city of Toronto as well as a comprehensive set of toolkits, videos, and other resources — of which this important guide is just one. More information about the services offered by ArtReach can be found on our website, artreach.org.

We would also like to acknowledge our two funding partners, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Laidlaw Foundation, without their support this project would not be possible. We greatly recognize the Laidlaw Foundation's special investment into making sure that the diverse voices of our youth population were heard and reflected in this guide.



Why Self-Care?

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” **AUDRE LORDE**

Our work is challenging. We are going from our homes to community meetings, to events, to school, to daycares, to care for ailing caregivers. Self-care is about giving ourselves a moment to pause and be intentional about our needs.

As a youth worker, think of self-care as recharging a player in a video game. You cannot make it to the next level with no energy cubes; you must stock up to sustain your energy. When we attend to our own needs, we can care for others. We need to create daily sabbaticals from our work. It is more effective to take a break when feeling overwhelmed, so you can connect with yourself, stay grounded and approach your work mindfully.



Prioritizing You

As youth workers, you face a lot of pressure. It can feel like you are working 24/7 and that there isn't enough time to meet all the demands being placed on you, let alone to take for yourself. This is a systemic problem:

*"Unless other things let up in someone's life, asking them to focus on their own health and wellness adds additional pressures on them: "In this industry, sweat equity is assumed. It's counted on that you will go above and beyond. Wellness is seen as just another thing we're expected to do."*¹

We've all felt conflicted and confused when we try to think about our own needs when faced with complex and ongoing issues facing our communities. It's ok to grapple with what it means to take care of yourself, when our communities are continuing to face systemic issues. But, we believe that your health and wellness matters, and that taking care of yourself is a radical and necessary part of social change.

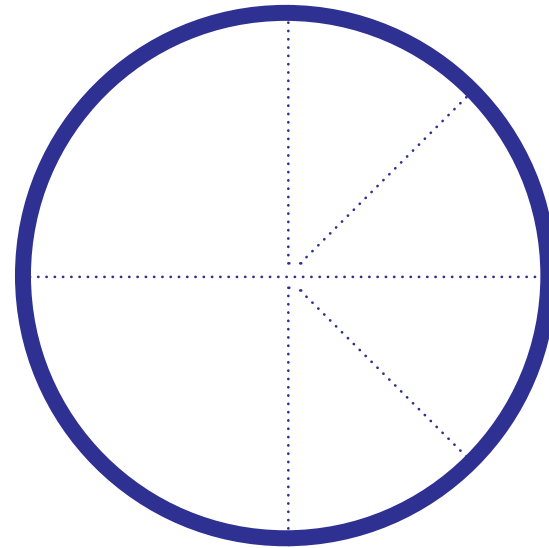
¹ Ana Skinner, 2013

Being Intentional

To commit to self-care is to make time for it. With so many responsibilities and commitments we say, “I have too many commitments - I don’t have the time!” Self-care can become another item that you avoid or something that is added to the long list of things. Make the time.

“I’m definitely not very good at prioritizing self-care but there a lot of little things I do that help — even unusual things like washing dishes, listening to my favourite song of the moment on repeat, or boxing at the gym. One of my many side hustles is DJing and I throw a regular monthly party that also helps me recenter myself even when I’m really stressed. Trying to be conscious of how positive these things’ve been to my emotional well-being has made them so much more powerful for me. Obviously these strategies aren’t available to everyone, but remind yourself how important all of the tools in your own kit are — no matter how strange or simple they may seem. We are all our own superheroes and no one else has the right to define what adamantiums make us indestructible.” **IRFAN ALI**

Reflect on how you currently use your time. Where does your energy go? Envision shifting your time to create space for practices that nourish you. You can do this on your own, with a trusted friend, mentor or a counselor.



For example:
50% work time
15% family time
...and so on.

Let Go of Judgment and Be Gentle with Yourself: Using a Harm Reduction Approach

Self-care is about self determination, you define how you will take care of yourself and what your needs are. Using a harm reduction approach means that we look at the ways we cope not from a bad or good lens. It is recognizing that how we deal with trauma might not always be nourishing for us; we might be able to cope in safer ways. Harm reduction is trying to think of ways we can be in control of our choices and make the best decisions we can in every situation. It is about honouring the ways we survive under systems we did not create. In this guide you are encouraged to use a harm reduction approach when it comes to current self-care practices.

“As a community, we have to be careful not to pass judgment on the ways in which we take care of ourselves and manage our trauma. We need to be supportive of each other to make decisions for ourselves in ways that are affirming as opposed to believing that we can or should be making decisions for each other.”

KIM KATRIN MILAN²

² Shameless Magazine, November 2012

Think of your current self-care practices. What are the ways that they could be slightly shifted in order to be safer or more nourishing to your body, heart and mind? What are the ways you could expand these practices?

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Reflecting on the Systems We are Working Within



“I get tired of folks saying that stories have burnt them out; it is systems that burn people out — and how do we systemically care for people in our movement and communities.” **THEODORA RANELLI**

Our communities and workplaces are shaped by funders, government policies and broader structural issues of violence. Unpacking the contexts we work and live in is messy.

For example:

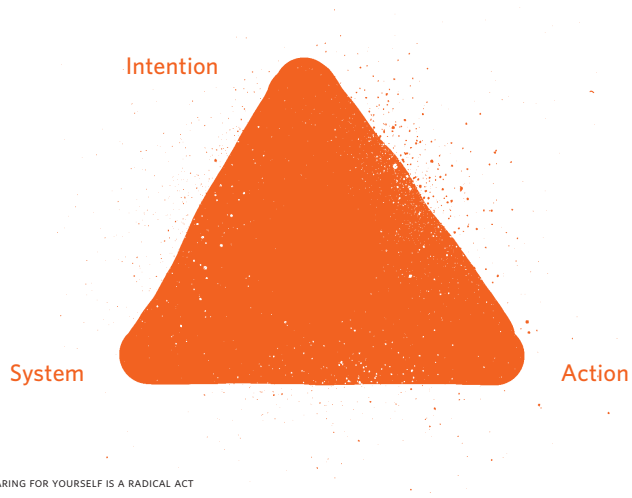
DOES IT EVER FEEL LIKE where you work is more focussed on their funders needs than the actual needs of the community?

DOES IT EVER FEEL LIKE the community is being blamed for issues of violence instead of recognizing the systems that create the conditions that cultivate poverty, inequity and isolation?

DOES IT EVER FEEL LIKE you are filling in gaps in services and that there are fewer supports in place for the communities your work with?

Institutions such as health care, justice, education systems as well as not for profit agencies shape and contribute to conditions of marginalization in our communities. They can create policies, formal and informal procedures that control how we access tools, safety and resources. Often, it can feel like communities and residents are being blamed for poverty, lack of opportunities and violence.

These impact our ability to focus on our own health and wellness as well as our communities'. We can have the intention to do a specific self-care practice yet when we attempt the action we bump up against systems such as capitalism or racism that create barriers for us.



“As people who work directly with youth, we see the systemic barriers they face and we are determined to take them on. At the same time, many of us are dealing ourselves with the effects of systemic racism and oppression. Many of us are suffering from unrecognized trauma and vicarious trauma. And many of us feel burnout.”¹

Understanding that you are working within a system, think about ways in which systems including funders influence how you work and attend to self-care. We did not create the systems to which we work under however they shape the experiences of our communities and ourselves.

¹ Frontline Partners with Youth Network, 2013

You Give a Lot of Yourself

"I speak from the perspective of an able-bodied, cis womyn of African descent who has inherited workaholic tendencies from her mother. I asked my mom about self-care and she said self-care is about self preservation. Capitalism will have us working in the name of "productivity," and some notion of "success." It would have us believing that only people with money deserve nice things. Sometimes I feel like the hamster on the wheel, running from place to place, not feeling like I can take a break. Make no mistake, breaks are important, more than important, they are necessary. During that time of rest from our many responsibilities of the world, take time to do the things that fill your being with joy. Work toward scheduling this time like it's a job. It is a job! A fun one. No need to beat yourself up if self-care gets missed. Just keep trying. Do it for your soul. Do it for your ancestors who dreamed of a better life for you. Capitalism will bleed you dry and leave your body, mind and soul to rot. It doesn't care about you, but you need to take care of you. Self-care is essential, it's revolutionary for people of colour." **SEDINA FIATI**

As youth workers, you play an essential role in our communities, reaching young people and community members that many other services do not. You are vital, but too often youth workers are undervalued.

"There is an assumption that 'of course frontline work is a burnout job and that frontline workers assume stress as part of their role'. This assumption is a set up for frontline workers as it then falls on them to deal with what is seen as part of the job. And an inability to do so is seen as the individual's shortcoming."²

We can often be under stress when we are addressing trauma in our neighbourhoods as well as workplaces, and are working in environments that often do not prioritize us. Self-care is part of the work and we need tools to care for ourselves. Your health and wellness matters.

2 Ana Skinner, 2013

Disability Justice



Disability Justice is “centering the genius and leadership of disabled and chronically ill communities, for what we know about surviving and resisting the medical industrial complex and living with fierce beauty in our sick and disabled bodies. We say no to the medical industrial complex’s model of “cure or be useless,” instead working from a place of belief in the wholeness of disability, interdependence and disabled people as inherently good as we are. We understand that there can be no healing justice without disability justice.”

BADASS VISIONARY HEALERS¹

Self and community care in our work must be inclusive of folks that are disabled and/or chronically ill. There can be a fear of naming that we need time off to address our health or identifying accessibility needs that we require within our workplace. Community care means not expecting individuals to address self-care but to see it as the responsibility of the whole group. What are ways that you and the places you work address ableism as a community?

¹ <http://badassvisionaryhealers.wordpress.com/healing-justice-resources/>

Self-care Invitation

Check out this post “The Chronic Pain PSA” by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha which speaks not only to disability justice but community care in our relationships with people with chronic pain.

What sort of post would you write?

To friends and folks:

Hi. As many of you know, I have a chronic illness. It means I live with chronic pain. Sometimes the pain is worse; sometimes, it's better. I've had this stuff since 1997, and there is no cure, there's just stuff I do to manage it. Sometimes, I fly or the weather gets cold and damp, and my pain gets worse.

Some things to keep in mind when I have a pain flare

NOT GREAT RESPONSES:

1. Boooo!
2. Well, that's a drag!
3. OMG! What happened!
4. Uncomfortable silence
5. Looking totally uncomfortable and freaked out.

2 <http://www.brownstargirl.org/blog/the-chronic-pain-psa>

BETTER RESPONSES:

1. Sorry to hear that! Is there anything I can do? Do you want me to pick you up some food? Give you a ride somewhere? (Even if this shit happens pretty frequently and I seem to have a handle on it, even if I don't ask, even if I say no, I appreciate this.)
2. Oh man, I'm sorry. How bad is it today? (Normalizing it and just asking is cool. Freaking out about OMG YOU ARE IN PAIN isn't so helpful, but acknowledgment is nice.)
3. Offer to come by and do something low key- like watching videos, read in bed together, eating, is great. Often people want to “cancel til I feel better”, and while I appreciate this, I'm gonna feel this way every two months til I'm dead, and if we cancelled everything every time I'm hurty, I'm not gonna see anyone. Sick isn't an all or nothing dichotomy for me, with wellness on the other side- it's a way of life. Sometimes I do indeed need alone time to chill, but sometimes, I like it if you come over.

Many of these things may also be true for other chronically ill/in pain/ disabled friends you have. Or they may not. Asking, hey, how can I be in your life in a good way when you're hurting? and listening to what the person says, is always a good way to show up for sick and disabled folks in your life.

PS: Telling me about a magic cure or telling me I should slow down or if I just did X thing everything would be fine also doesn't work.

Understanding Trauma




As youth workers, we engage daily with people who have been harmed by systemic and community violence. It is important that we understand how it operates so we can incorporate daily practices to soothe and heal ourselves.

What is Trauma?

“Trauma is not a disorder but a reaction to a kind of wound. It is a reaction to profoundly injurious events and situations in the real world and, indeed, to a world in which people are routinely wounded.” **BONNIE BURSTOW**

Trauma is when individuals and/or communities experience, witness, or learn of profound events that involve actual or threatened death, or serious injury to the integrity of self or others such as murder, community shooting, rape, racism, and war.



TRAUMA CAN BE A
RESULT OF MULTIPLE
FACTORS SUCH AS:

Oppression
(racism, ableism,
poverty, transphobia,
heterosexism etc.)

Involvement in
an accident.

Witnessing, or being
a part of physical or
verbal violence.

Intergenerational,
ancestral or
historical trauma.

Family violence
(witnessing or
being harmed.)

Interpersonal or
community violence
including rape, assault,
child abuse.

Suicide of a
community member.

Severe injury.

Sudden death
(by accident, murder
or 'natural causes') of
family or friends.

Natural disasters.

War.

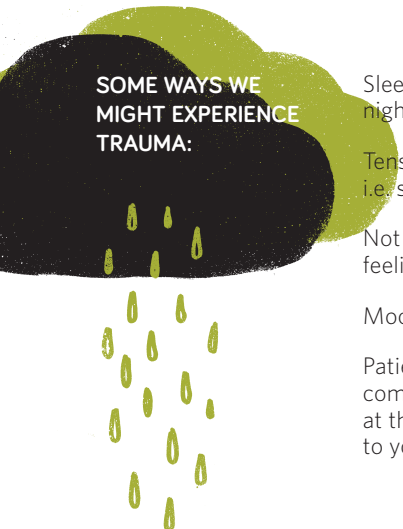
Colonialism.

Trauma Response

“Not everyone is okay with living like an open wound. But the thing about open wounds is that, well, you aren’t ignoring it. You’re healing; the fresh air can get to it. It’s honest. You aren’t hiding who you are. You aren’t rotting. People can give you advice on how to heal without scarring badly. But on the other hand there are some people who’ll feel uncomfortable around you. Some will even point and laugh. But we all have wounds.” **WARSAN SHIRE**

The ways we experience trauma are not always obvious or recognized by other people or even ourselves. Attending to trauma with appropriate practices, interventions and support immediately can significantly reduce its impact. A traumatic event may become stored emotionally, psychologically, and physically in our bodies, resulting in a learned trauma response to future situations that remind us of the original trauma.

Here is a list of ways we might experience trauma. It is not exhaustive and also might not speak to your experience. You determine what this list means to you.



**SOME WAYS WE
MIGHT EXPERIENCE
TRAUMA:**

Sleeplessness or nightmares.

Tension in your bodies i.e. shoulders, wrists.

Not eating, not feeling hungry.

Mood shifts rapidly.

Patient with community but snap at the people closest to you.

Feeling very tired and sleepy — no energy.

Hyper alert and buzzing.

Disassociation: you're here, but you're not.

Are there parts of this list that speaks to you? What are ways that you currently care for yourself when you start feeling this way?

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GROUNDING

Grounding is a way to root ourselves when we feel activated or unsafe. Think of a tree, how it's root system not only keeps the tree steady in the face of changing weather but also sustains it with nourishment. Grounding helps to calm our nervous system so we are able to become present when we are ready. It can be through affirmations, our senses or visualizations.

Attending to Trauma in Our Bodies, Minds and Hearts

A learned trauma response could be in the form of body memories, triggers, flashbacks, and panic attacks. You might experience trauma in completely different ways or experience these not as a result of trauma. You determine what this list means to you.

BODY MEMORIES: the body, as well as the brain, is capable of storing memories. It could come in the form of migraine headaches, abdominal problems, heart palpitations, light-headedness, dizziness, hot/cold flashes, fibromyalgia, muscle spasms, tremors.

Think of a couple of ways you could care for yourself when having a body memory.

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TRIGGERS: A moment or experience of an event that jumps into the present and reminds you of what happened in your past.

What are ways you have cared for yourself when feeling triggered?

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WAYS TO GROUND YOURSELF:

Picturing people who care about you and treat you with respect.

Remembering the words to an inspiring song, quote or poem.

Cooking food that smells and taste comforting.

Holding something that gives you strength i.e. a crystal, stone or animal.

Repeating out loud today's date, time and month.

PANIC ATTACKS: Can be body reactions and sensations, feelings of fear and anxiety, thoughts (expecting a panic to occur, predicting it will occur) and behaviours (avoidance, hyperventilation).

Think of three ways you can care for yourself during and after a panic attack.

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FLASHBACKS: A past memory that enters into your present experiences and makes the past seem like it is happening in the present.

List a couple of ways you can care for yourself during or after a flashback.

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WAYS TO GROUND YOURSELF:

Sharing with yourself a list of sports teams you love.

Reminding yourself where you are, the time, the place, who you are with.

Breathing deeply.

Hugging yourself, being held by a loved one.

Telling yourself "I am loved."

Reliving your successes and what brought you there.

Self-Care First Aid Kit

"I have a list pinned on my bulletin board called 'Self-care Plan: Things to Do When I Feel Rotten' to help me remember all the things that when I do them can immediately make me feel better." **AMANY KILLAWI**

Keep a list of ways you can be cared for by others (joke around with me) and care for yourself (breathe deeply) when feeling ungrounded.

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SUGGESTIONS

Friend that you can connect with.

Object that you can hold onto.

Song you can hum that soothes you.

Ancestor that inspires you.

Reminder to breathe deeply.

Online community i.e. tumblr.

Supportive phone line.

This Work Will Have An Impact

Vicarious trauma is a reaction of stress that can be experienced by healers, community workers, youth workers, counsellors, therapists, teachers, volunteers after being exposed to traumatic disclosures or events. As we support a community member to share their stories of trauma, we bear witness to the violence that has been enacted on them. As witnesses and healers, we can't help but to take in some of the emotional pain. By the end of the day, we have been exposed to various accounts of trauma. As a result, we may have images in our mind or intense feelings running through our body.

Recognizing that it is a part of the work to be affected is the most important coping skill that you can give to yourself. It's okay to feel outraged, horrified, shocked, saddened, exhausted or vulnerable. Putting self-care practices in place allows for you to actively address some of the impacts of the hard work you do as a youth worker.

Ways We Might Experience Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma changes the way you think about the world and yourself. The following are some examples of vicarious trauma.

Guilt regarding your own survival and/or pleasure.

Feeling like you never have time or energy for yourself.

Feeling disconnected from loved ones, even when communicating with them.

Experiencing the "silencing response" - finding yourself unable to pay attention to other's distressing stories because they seem overwhelming and incomprehensible. Being irritable, intolerant, agitated, impatient, needy, and/or moody.

RECOGNIZING THE IMPACT

Review the list on the left, circle what jumps out at you and think of what you would add.

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Community Care Invitation.

"We must not only heal the suffering that oppression causes, but we must also heal the oppression caused by suffering." **STERLING TOLES**

Self and community care are not only to address the harm enacted on us and those we care for but also to address the harm we can cause. Part of our work is learning how to heal ourselves and be accountable to the hurt we participate in.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY:

Practicing the the art of apologizing. There is a great video on this by Franchesca called "Getting Called Out." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8xJXKYL8pU>

Listening, not to respond but to take in.

Understanding our ancestral experiences of trauma and how we are connected to them.

Connecting with counsellor, healer, elders for both individual and community healing.

Addressing the forms of violence we might be participating in our intimate relationships. A great resource to learn more about this is "The Revolution Starts at Home". Check the resources section for more information.

Self-Care Invitation for Addressing Depression

You can speak to a counselor or your doctor if you are feeling depressed. You also can do some practices on your own. The following list comes from the Young Women's Empowerment Project, "Healing In Action Zine" created by Tanuja Jagernauth, Stephany Cannon and the YWEP outreach workers.¹

SELF-CARE IDEAS:

Supplements to incorporate intentionally into your routine: Vitamin D, B12, Iron, Vitamin E.

Give yourself a regular chest massage with essential oils like peppermint, eucalyptus, and lavender to open the chest.

Diet may be a crucial part of self-care for depression. Consider reducing the amount of dairy, wheat, beer, caffeine, and spicy food that you consume.

Consider increasing your water intake to at least 8 glasses of water per day.

Consider allowing yourself time for movement, however that looks like for you. 10-30 minutes per day of intentionally elevating your heart rate will allow the movement of blood, reducing levels of stagnation and improving how you feel.

Get fresh air: open a window, go outside, embrace nature.

¹ Healing in Action Zine, Young Women's Empowerment Project, 2011

Self-Care After the Loss Of A Community Loved One

“Over ten years ago my best friend was murdered I had to find ways to openly talk about what he meant to me. In the neighbourhood we grew up there was youth worker I could go to on a regular basis. He helped me, never gave me any answers for how I felt just gave me space to talk.” **TAIWO BAH**

We live and work in communities where we lose people we care about. Not only do we have to ensure that there are spaces for grief and healing for people, we also have to create practices to attend to our own. One of the best advice I received from an elder in my community was to remind me to slow down, mourn, then act.



“Death brings a whole gamut of emotions with it, and none of them are wrong. Every emotion is valid and worth expressing. Just be gentle and patient with yourself and the other members of your community - you’re all going on the same journey together, but some of you are taking different, although equally valid, paths. ”

ANNE THÉRIAULT

What are ways that you attend to grief and loss?

In community?

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On your own?

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Community Care Invitations

COMMUNITY HEALTH ACTION TEAM (CHAT): This Toronto group came together in 2013 to fill the gap of support for youth workers facing traumatic events in their community. The group is made up of community workers, artists and counsellors who work to support community workers and address the impact of the event has on them.

HEALING STATIONS IN FERGUSON, MISSOURI: After the murder of Michael Brown, Elizabeth Vegan along with a team of women, created healing stations on lawns, in the streets, spaces...

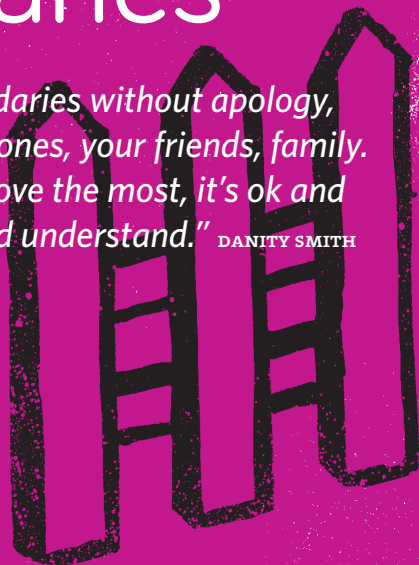
“where youth could come to grieve, scream, cry and be held and heard in love. Mighty work.”

DREAM HAMPTON

Boundaries

“Hold onto your boundaries without apology, even with your loved ones, your friends, family. Even with those you love the most, it’s ok and they really will/should understand.”

DANITY SMITH



Answering a text at 2 am after work hours? Working 15-hour days with no break? Being accessible 24/7? Fearing shutting off your phone when you sleep in case a crisis emerges? Creating boundaries between our life and our work that is sustainable can be a challenge.

Setting boundaries can be difficult especially when we work in communities we live in or are a part of. It can feel nearly impossible, especially because there aren't always clear distinctions between work/home/community.

“When do you unplug and take off your work hat knowing that you can’t wear your superhero cape all day. As youth workers we should be able to tell ourselves and others ‘no’ without any explanation or feeling bad about it.”

SEGUN AKINSANYA

Boundaries do shift over time and in the context of a situation, person, and place. One way to set your boundaries is let people know where you are at. Maybe it is talking to a friend or posting on social media like community artist and organizer Amanda Parris did on her social media:

“Many apologies to all my friends whose dope events I’ve missed. Right now is grind time but plz know the support is consistent <3”

Setting boundaries takes practice and time. It’s a process.

EXAMPLES OF BOUNDARIES:

Valuing and speaking to my feelings including anger, grief and rage.

Becoming aware of when inappropriate, micro aggressions or questionable remarks are made towards me.

Disclosing to others parts of my life only when I feel comfortable doing so.

Understanding my personal space needs and expressing them.

Becoming aware of my needs and wants in my relationships.

Your Current Boundaries

Take a few minutes to list the current boundaries you have in place with your workplace, friends, and family. Is it a challenge to say yes to nourishing activities and an instinct to never say no when others ask of your time? What are your current:

Financial boundaries? Physical boundaries?

Emotional boundaries? Social boundaries? Time boundaries?

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Looking at your list of boundaries, are there some you want to strengthen in your work? What are some supports (spiritual, community, cultural, friends,) that could encourage you to strengthen your boundaries? Knowing that as a youth worker, our boundaries are informed by not only legal rights and responsibilities as workers, but the rights of the youth we work with, how can our workplaces help us maintain our boundaries?



Reflection Invitation

What beliefs and ideas about myself and my relationship to my family, community, workplace make it challenging to set boundaries?

What I am willing to do to challenge those beliefs?

What supports (spiritual, community, cultural, friends) encourage me to strengthen my boundaries?

Self-Care Practices



We all want to find time and to take care of ourselves. But that doesn't mean it's easy or that we know where to begin. Here is a week-by-week guide to integrating self-care practices in your life. Each week has a theme, and you have many suggestions to pick from. Try out a few and see what habits and rhythms develop. This is not an obligation, but an invitation to bring attention to your own needs throughout the day.

Week One: Thinking About Your Current Self-Care Practices

“My self-care strategies consist of a variety of things. Depending on my cash flow, time and level of need. On a weekly basis I make sure I exercise when I first get up out of bed and before I fall asleep. My exercises aren’t intense or long. I simply take 2-3 minutes of deep breathing (inhale through nose and exhale through mouth, then reverse). Make sure to do a big baby stretch when getting out of bed, releasing any tension I may have, rotate my shoulders slowly in a circular motion, my wrist and ankles.” **AMEERA MCINTOSH**

We need to celebrate and expand the daily practices that support our well being as youth workers. Self-care practices are what works for you. Some questions to get you thinking about you what you want:

How do you currently use your time?
Do these activities nourish you?
What makes them feel good.
Are they numbing?

How do you want to be cared for by your community?

What are practices of friends you admire? Could you incorporate them into your life?

Who are your people? The ones in your life who energize you, nourish your heart?

In the chart provided include some of your current self-care practices.

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Suggestions of Self-Care Practices:

What would you add to it?





REFLECTION INVITATION 1:

What is My Vision?

When we are aware of ourselves we are able to be more adept at identifying when something within us is not quite right and addressing it instead of letting it go until it spirals out of our control. As we honor and cherish ourselves in self-care, we tap into the hopes and dreams that holistically speak to all of our needs.

Create a vision board that contains images and words that speak to your principals, passions and dreams. When creating it think of the following questions:

What brings you joy? What do you love? What are the principles that guide you? Self-care Invitations

Self-Care Invitations

INVITATION 1:

Nourishing Ourselves with Food

Exploring cookbooks at the library, food blogs for recipes.

Meal planning with your colleagues, sharing the creation of lunches.

Reading up on foods and herbs that heal.

Checking in with friends, elders, community members for their favorite recipes.

Hosting cooking hangouts with friends and fam to learn ways they create nourishing meals.

“Speaking to a lot of folks in my circles and communities, particularly women, our conversations around food can be loaded with all sorts of issues surrounding bodies, poverty, health and beyond. There is one thing that is recurring. We think of food as a blessing, for sharing and gathering and healing. However, many of us echo the sentiment that ‘When I am alone, I just eat whatever, but if I am eating with friends, I cook my favorite things’. As part of my self-care practice, I try to be intentional and loving in the things I feed myself. The same way I want to feed my family and friends and community delicious foods. I share inexpensive, easy recipes among the folks in my life, and they do the same. I always take the time to cook for myself, and invest in my nutrition and my enjoyment of food. This is particularly important as an act of loving my big black body.” **RANIA EL MUGAMMAR**

INVITATION 2:

Taking Breaks from My Practice

“The forms of self-care prescribed to me were not realistic for my career and socioeconomic reality. So I made some up. To me self-care is anything that makes me forget my art and that I am an artist. Its finding the things that don’t engage my brain in the same way that dance does. And contradictorily, finding something that gets me to inadvertently use my art without me knowing that I am (ice dancing along to Beyonce).” **RODNEY DIVERLUS**

INVITATION 3:

Quieting Your Mind

“Create rituals for yourself: a morning movement in your wheelchair or a walk, writing in your journal for five minutes before bed, a video of yourself speaking in sign language, a long shower. Create intentional periods of time where you can be alone with your thoughts and reflect. Take time to have a digital technology detox. Block websites like Facebook or Tumblr if you need to in order to create a space without distractions.” **KIM KATRIN MILAN¹**

What are ways that you quiet your mind or take a break?

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¹ Shameless Magazine, November 2012.

INVITATION 4:

A Self-Care To Do List

Think of yourself as already successful, important, cool, hip, stylish, beautiful without comparison to anyone else. Because you are all those things and more.

Call an old friend and talk on the phone, catch up on each others lives, hear each others voices.

Read a good book and don't buy into that 'high brow/low brow' bullshit. Books carry stories. Stories matter.

Look at your reflection in the mirror and kiss your own beautiful self.

Dress up for no reason.

DAINTY SMITH

INVITATION 5:

Get Physical

"For me, self-care has to be routine or I'll neglect it — plus, I find routine soothing. A significant part of this routine involves getting out of my head by sweating while doing something repetitive and physically engaging (bike rides, yoga, swimming). I try not to go more than every other day without intentionally breaking a sweat by moving my body, and to get into water for a swim at least once a week (ocean is best, lakes are good, and pools will suffice). I NEVER thought I was going to be someone who exercised to level myself out, but it turns out I can still surprise myself from time to time!" **BETH LYONS**

INVITATION 6:

Make Your Own Tools to Heal

This list comes from the Young Women's Empowerment Project in Chicago, "Healing In Action Zine" created by Tanuja Jagermath, Stephany Cannon and the YWEP outreach workers²

How to Make a Compress With Ginger — it's good for aches and pains in the body

Materials needed:

4 Litres of water (filtered preferably)

Large pot

5 - 15 cm ginger root.

3 towels

Instructions:

- Boil water in a large pot. Reduce heat to simmer
- Grate or chop the ginger into slices.
- Add ginger to simmering water. Simmer for 5 minutes. Turn burner to low, and remove the ginger.
- Place one towel over the area of your body that you are treating, such as the abdomen or lower back to treat your kidneys or back pain. Dip the second towel into the ginger-water and wring out. Place the ginger towel over the first towel. Cover with the third towel to retain heat.
- Change the ginger towel when it cools down and repeat until your skin feels warm and looks glowy.
- Save the ginger water. As long as you don't boil it, you can reuse it throughout the week for additional ginger compresses.

2 Healing in Action Zine, Young Women's Empowerment Project, 2011



INVITATION 7:

Attending To Your Spirit: Creating Sacred Space

“Depending on your living situation, ways of creating a sacred space will look very different. If you are street-involved, the space you create might come from a few things you can carry with you or even just a poem, in whatever language you speak, that feels right or which you recite quietly to yourself in order to bring magic to your space. Sometimes the only space we can create is in our imagination, and that is an entirely sacred space. If you are in a home, think about an altar where you keep cards, images, flowers, anything that is of value to you and affirms your existence.”

KIM KATRIN MILAN³

3 Shameless Magazine, November 2012

What are ways you could attend to your sacred space? Are there objects you can carry with you? Are there practices you could try?

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Week Two:

Starting Your Day Practices

Whether your day starts at 7 pm or 7 am setting practices of care will help you stay grounded and clear about your intentions. Before you get out of bed, close your eyes and think about what kind of day you want to have, maybe choosing some positive words to keep in mind for the day. Listen to your heart and what it is telling you.

Self-Care Invitation

WATER: Hydrate your body and give it the start it needs.

INTENTIONS, GOALS & GRATITUDE: Set your intentions for the day, how you wish to be in the world. Also set your goals, what you wish to accomplish for the day. Most importantly meditate on what you are grateful for today.

STRETCHING: Wake up your muscles and breathe care into your body.

RITUALS: Create a grooming ritual that honours your body and heart. This could be attending to hair or putting lotion on your feet.

FOOD: Nourish your body with food that gives you energy and joy.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Check it out for five minutes. Note the messages that can wait until later in the day and what could be easily addressed now.

*What practices would you add to this?
Are there practices you would want to try out this week?*

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Self-Care Invitation

- Create a budget and save money to go towards something you really WANT to do as a treat to yourself i.e. vacation, but a nice watch or purse, weekend getaway out the city, salon day, massage, etc.
- Understand how banking systems work so you can plan your finances.
- Plan a special outing: if money is a barrier (which it is for many of us) be creative.
- Perhaps do an exchange with a friend, checking out opportunities for youth conferences that you can travel. Also look at deals online for almost anything (trips, salon packages, go karting, movies, musicals, painting classes, fine cuisine, etc.)

AMEERA MCINTOSH

Week Three: Self-Care at Work

Set an intention to incorporate self-care practices when you are at your volunteer, work or artistic spaces. Commitments can feel overwhelming especially when we are impacted by the work we are doing. Making sure to have self-care practices can help contain the impact, as well as sustain our energy. Choose some practices from the list below that you think would be helpful. Don't be afraid to change, add or modify any of the suggestions to speak your truth.

Start Your Day

SET INTENTION: Enter the workplace with a daily intention i.e. I intend to bring joy into my interactions today.

EXPRESS GRATITUDE: Before entering your work, say three things that you're grateful for. You can also do this as you start your commute for the day.

Attend To your Health

UTILIZE YOUR BENEFITS IF YOU CAN: Access health care by checking if you have benefits and what they entail. Make use of them. Make the time.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS: Check in with a community health centre in your area. What can they provide you with or refer you to that would help your health? Are there people you can offer a trade with or volunteer with to access health services i.e. front reception in an acupuncture studio in exchange for acupuncture.

Time

CHOOSE: Make intentional choices of when you will take on work that is unpaid or for a small honorarium.

BE PRESENT: Not everything is urgent or a crisis, prioritize what is urgent. Divide it from what is non-urgent, or what needs to be done today versus what can feasibly be done tomorrow.

Mini Breaks

TAKE THAT BREAK: Within your work there are policies regarding the amount of time an employee must have for lunch and breaks. Make sure you are taking them, not in front of your computer or working.

BREATHE: Close your eyes, and take five deep breaths. This is all you have to do in this moment. Breathe. Allow your breath into your body and breathe out. This is all you need to do in this moment.

EAT: Pack a nourishing meal or snack to munch on during the day

MOVE: Make time to move your body during the day. Invite your co-workers to participate in your mid-day dance party.

End of Day

TRANSITION RITUAL: It can be difficult switching from work to non-work or home mode. Having a transition ritual is a useful way to help you to mindfully put your work away when you arrive home. Some transition rituals include listening to your favorite music on your commute home, changing into comfortable clothes or going for a walk.

CLEAN UP: At the end of the day, take a minute to clean up your workspace. Maybe splurge on some fresh flowers to put in a vase to brighten your day.

Pick a few practices to try out for the week.

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Additional Practices

INVITATION 1:

Community Care in the Workplace

“If we are truly committed to ending oppression and violence, then we must be committed to each other. Then we must live out of the simple truth that we need each other. We need each other.” **MIA MINGUS⁴**

4 Mia Mingus, 2012

Knowing that our self-care practices are only as strong as the other people in our team, ensuring that you have collective care for all community members in really important. In your journal, reflect on current community care practices in your workplace. What has worked? What has been challenging? Where are the opportunities to shift and change?

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY CARE IN THE WORKPLACE

Holding weekly check ins for each member of the team.

Eating food together or having team potlucks.

Making space for meditation or yoga practice for all team members during the work day.

Cultivating a culture of calling one another in, not out, when having difficult conversations.

Educating each other about identifying the signs of vicarious trauma as practicing self-care.

Enjoying moments of laughter.

- Take time to attend to my holistic health including mental, physical and emotional i.e. personal day for rest or ability to attend my doctor appointments.
- Laugh, joke, have time to unwind.
- Have supervision both individually and with my peers that supports my growth as an employee.
- Have access to materials and training at work that addresses vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. Be assertive with feelings and concerns.
- Have a confidential space either with my co-workers, community, counsellor to talk about things are emerging through my work.
- Have a safer work environment.

INVITATION 3:

Creating a Peer Support Network

“I seriously feel there needs to be a self-care coach that works to support the workers on all these things. Because we all get lost in our work and self is eliminated. We need someone to remind us of it before its too late and our body begins to scream at us.”

SEGUN AKINSANYA

When I started to work at a community centre, I realized I was one of the only youth workers and felt really isolated. I started to reach out to my peers in other centres and made sure to connect with them at least once a month about what was happening in our workplaces, things that were coming up for us and ways we were addressing them.

What sort of networks both informal or formal could you create to provide you support?

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INVITATION 2:

Know Your Rights

Be your own advocate. Know what your current workplace policies and procedures are including what are your entitlements regarding holidays, breaks, educational opportunities. You also want to know what your job requirements and responsibilities. Always ensure that you are clear on the policies, procedures and what your job entails. You can speak to your management when the responsibilities given to you shift from what was the initial expectation.

To learn more about young people's rights in the workplace check out the Government of Canada What Young Workers Should Know hand out found here http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/factsheets/fs_young.php

There is also Know Your Rights Guide by the Workers Action Centre found here <http://www.workersactioncentre.org/know-your-rights/>

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_05a11_e.htm

If you worried about challenging your workplace culture or management about addressing self-care - enlist support. This could be a mentor or an organization that focus on workers rights. A fantastic one in Toronto is the Workers Action Centre (WAC). WAC staff, members and volunteers support workers who are experiencing a problem at work. Workers call Workers' Rights Info Line to get information about their rights and help with strategies to resolve the problem. Workers can also attend Support Clinics to get more information and one-on-one support with their workplace problem. <http://www.workersactioncentre.org/>

Below is a sample list of Rights of Youth Workers in Place of Employment. What would you and your co-workers add to this list?

RIGHTS OF YOUTH WORKERS IN THE WORKPLACE

- Manageable workload that I share with my co-workers.
- Know and set boundaries as well as express my limits.
- Work within a team approach so no situation is solely my responsibility but that of the community in which I work.
- Have a workplace that understands and actively addresses ableism.

INVITATION 4:

Reflect and Unload

Unload! An important part of not burning out is emptying your cup. As a community artist, you are often playing multiple roles; homie-counsellor-artist-crisis manager-friend. In your work you meet all kinds of beautiful souls with heavy baggage and in the process of your work end up absorbing more than you might realize. Before you can go home and really unwind, try and spend 30 mins unloading on paper all that happened. What was amazing, what was not so good, what makes you feel sparkly about the work? What makes you feel heavy? Having this all on paper is a way of allowing your brain to chill without feeling like you have forgotten (because you need to hold this information to better your future workings) but that at least it doesn't have to sit close to the front part of the brain.

**Tip* Bring a notebook, and either plan to hang out with one of the staff you are working with for a coffee post session to debrief or make plans to meet with a friend.*

NARMEEN HASHIM

Week Four: Sleep Practices

Sleeplessness can definitely be a part of vicarious trauma and burnout. One way to address sleeplessness is to incorporate bedtime rituals into your practice. Look over the following practices and chose a couple that resonate with you to try to incorporate into your daily practice.

CLEAR YOUR BED: Keep electronics out of your bed including laptops and phones. Unless you are a crisis worker that is being paid to be on call, your phone does not need to be in the bed with you.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Before you go to bed, go through all your social media accounts one last time. Set your alarm and put your phone on silent or airplane mode. There will always be crisis, a new album dropping, a friend in need.

REFLECT: This could be through creating a comic of the day, writing lists, drawing, marking your learnings. It is a way to unload about your day and put to rest any concerns you might be grappling with.

VISUALIZE: While breathing deeply, take time on your bed to vision about the good sleep you will have, your dreams and hopes.

STRETCHING: Make time to gently stretch out your body, relaxing your muscles and giving it a reminder that you will be resting soon.

READ: When I was a kid, one of my favorite things was a bedtime reading with my mom. I use that now as a part of my bedtime practice. I choose books that are lighthearted to avoid stimulating my already active mind.

SLEEP: Give yourself time to sleep. The days of staying up all night getting work done just don't cut it. Try for at least 7-8 hours a day. Sleep gives your body time to recharge and your mind time to rest.

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Reflection Practices

It can be hard to see how your own experiences of stress, burnout, grief and trauma are connected to bigger systemic issues. There are lots of things beyond your control that affect the young people and communities you work with, and affect you.

Taking time to reflect can be powerful.

REFLECTION INVITATION 2:

Vision in Action

Reflect in your journal on how this vision would be encapsulated into the perfect day. What would it encompass? Who would be there? What would the day consist of? What would you be doing? Where would you be? Don't censor yourself and continue to write for at least ten minutes. If you get stuck repeat the words over and over again until something new emerges. Give yourself permission to dream big and create an image of a day that exemplifies the life you want.

Read the letter out loud. You might want to try recording yourself. If it feels safer, share it with a friend with no interpretations or questions; just give yourself space to breathe out your dream.

Open up the journal again and rip out a page. Write a list of all the reasons or messages that emerge that hold you back from having such a day on a piece of paper. Read those messages through.

In your journal, write a letter to yourself about the day. Respond to the list of reasons: how can you give yourself permission to create this perfect day?

REFLECTION INVITATION 3:

Healing Justice

WRITING REFLECTION: When I care for myself, I am living the dream of my ancestors, affirming my right to heal my heart, body, and mind.

What are practices of self-care that I have witnessed my family (both bio and chosen) enact? What can I learn from these practices? How can I incorporate them into my own life?

Being committed to healing justice means finding ways to heal and bounce back from things like violence - things that harmed or harm us, our families, or our communities. It means that we work together to find ways to stop cycles of violence coming from the state or systems of power. Healing justice uses tools that have been around for generations in our communities to heal bodies, hearts, and minds without leaving a part of ourselves or our communities behind. Healing justice helps us remember that oppression is big and we deserve to take care of our people and ourselves in the best way we know how.

In your journal, create a collage or list your ancestors, community members, fictional characters that you admire. How do they show love for themselves? What are statements they have said that inspire you? How could you embed those statements into self-care practice?

REFLECTION INVITATION 4:

Putting Away the Super Hero Cape

Create a reflection from the following statement
"If I don't do it no one will"

In our work we can feel isolated and overwhelmed. It can feel like we are the only ones doing this work. But we are not, there are others in our communities or online or elders who are doing this work. A part of self and community care is sharing the work as well as building capacity of others to carry out their visions for community justice and healing.

"I'm learning to be more comfortable with disappointment, with letting others down and being let down by others. I'm trying to scrutinize stereotypes based on my race and gender that cast me as being competent, reliable, and strong — characteristics that I've internalized and base a lot of my self worth in, but that show up in fluctuating degrees depending on what is going on my life. On good days I will come through for people, many days I will try but miss the mark, and some days I will not even be able to think about trying. Being gentle with myself when I am letting others down makes me more understanding when others disappoint me, and vice versa."

UNA LEE

REFLECTION INVITATION 5:

Affirmations Journaling Exercise

One impact of working in community is that we might feel that the need to create justice for others supersedes our own self-care. Make a list of statements that we are told/that we tell ourselves that stop us from our self-care practices.

How do these responses affect your life? Although artists, frontline workers, and youth workers do important work, our work is frequently undervalued and not paid a living wage. And sometimes youth are not valued as worthwhile beings simply because we are youth. Recognize that these are forms of discrimination, ageism. One of the ways to challenge this is to change and rewrite the negative messages we have heard and believed.

EXAMPLE STATEMENT: *Who do you think you are?*

RESPONSE: *I am someone, I am important. I am worthy of respect, care and love.*

STATEMENT: *You're so emotional!*

RESPONSE: *I'm glad I have feelings. My feelings help me sort things out and they remind me that this work has an impact on me. I will attend to my feelings to ensure I can do this work from a grounded place.*

Try out some statements of your own.

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Celebrating You

The work you are doing in your communities is complex and vital. The world needs you. But we know you might not get to see the impacts on the people you work with immediately.

“There are some activities where you can put the time in and it’s ok because it will come to some clear fruition...for example cooking a meal. But in so much of this work, you don’t get to see whether it comes to fruition. Finding a balance point with that is hard.”¹

Know that in quiet and loud ways, people value you and believe in what you are doing. And we believe that more needs to be done to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions you are making to the world around you. Your health and wellness matters. It is vital.

A Salute, by Rakhi Mutta

“For answering calls at all hours and for never turning off your personal cell phones because you know your ‘clients’ lives don’t shut down at 5pm.

*For waiting in emergency rooms and jail waiting rooms.
From courtroom visits to psychiatric ward visits.*

For every funeral you’ve ever attended and for every weekend 7am conference you have ever attended.

For being overworked and underpaid.

¹ Ana Skinner, 2013

For working contract to contract with no benefits because the gov't doesn't deem your job valuable enough.

For every grant you've written that wasn't funded, every article you wrote that wasn't published, any art you created that wasn't celebrated because it wasn't mainstream enough.

For not turning away participants who didn't live in the catchment area and for not discarding participants from programs at the one year mark because some funder told you to do so.

For running programming from the overdraft of your bank account and for struggling to find a way to be fed and to do the work.

For cradling victims of abuse and victims of violence in your arms, for listening to countless stories of hurt, pain, anguish, abuse, violence and discrimination.

For feeding hungry children and youth when you live paycheck to paycheck.

For letting young people seek shelter in your homes because the city has waiting lists. For the countless nights you have stayed awake

worrying about your participants because everybody knows that your feelings don't shut off when you step off work property.

For every tear you have ever wiped, every hand you have ever held, and for every smile you brought to someone's face.

For all the thank yous you never received, for all the vicarious trauma you silently dealt with and for all the broken hearts and broken bones you helped heal.

Finally for all the sleepless nights you laid awake wondering if the work you were doing made any difference at all ...

This is my thank you to you. For making the world a better place than you found it, for being the change you want to see, for providing opportunities that were never provided to you. For your labour of love not labour for paycheck, for being on the front line of the movement not the arm chair revolutionary.

Our approaches to our work may be different, our philosophies may not always align and our lenses unique but it is the diversity of the colours in the rainbow that makes it beautiful. You are the true soldiers of change, and for that I salute you."

RAKHI MUTTA, JANUARY 23, 2013



*Write a salute to
yourself...*

*What do you
celebrate*

Love

Cherish

About you?

Resources

KIDS HELP PHONE: This is a free, confidential, anonymous if you like, 24/7 service for individuals ages 20 and under. Please feel free to call it anytime regarding any issue. 1.800.668.6868 or www.kidshelpphone.ca

ASSAULTED WOMEN'S HELPLINE: This is a free, confidential, anonymous if you like, 24/7 service for self-identified women. Please feel free to call anytime regarding issues of violence, 416.863.0511 or dial #SAFE (#7233) on your cell phone, or www.awhl.org

DISTRESS CENTRE OF TORONTO HELP LINE: This is a free, confidential, anonymous if you like 24/7 service for anyone in the City of Toronto in need of emotional support or in crisis. Call 416.408.4357 to reach the 24/7 crisis line or www.torontodistresscentre.com

RAPE CRISIS CENTRE: This is a free, confidential, anonymous if you like 24/7 service for anyone in the City of Toronto in need of emotional support or in crisis. Call 416.597.8808 to reach the 24/7 crisis line or www.trccmwar.ca

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