

Healing Justice Practice Spaces: A How-To Guide*



**A working document released on
December 18, 2014 in solidarity with
#BlackLivesMatter*

*Dedicated in the
memory of
**Charity
Mahouna
Hicks,**
who teaches us to
wage love.*

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What is a Healing Justice Practice Space?

A Healing Justice Practice Space (HJPS) is an all-gender, all-bodied, inclusive and accessible space for practicing and receiving healing that is built in partnership with social justice movement work and sites of political action. These spaces typically offer a wide variety of health and healing services, including (but not limited to) first aid, counseling and crisis support, mediation services, massage therapy, acupuncture, energy work, herbal therapy, divination, art therapy, nutritional counseling, and yoga. Sometimes they are aligned with public healthcare systems and sometimes they are independent. Sometimes they include opportunities for building analysis and sharing political education, sometimes they focus solely on individual and collective healing.

The work of creating "healing practice spaces" is not new, or newly created by us. It is ancient work that exists within multiple cultural contexts and communities. What is humbly offered here is an example that is emerging in this historical moment. The term **Healing Justice** as used within our movement refers to an evolving political framework shaped by economic, racial, and disability justice that re-centers the role of healing *inside* of liberation; that seeks to transform, intervene and respond to generational trauma and violence in our movements, communities and lives; and to regenerate our traditions of liberatory and resiliency practices that have been lost or stolen.

Healing Justice recognizes the role of collective trauma (such as the shared experience of slavery or genocide or ableism) **and historical trauma** (the holding and passing down of collective trauma from one generation to the next) as

causing or influencing community survival practices and endemic community health issues, and seeks to lift up these experiences for the possibility of resilience and transformation. Healing Justice also recognizes the role of individual and relational trauma and its impact on collective process. To that end, HJPS's often include crisis or safety teams to provide a frame and practice for dealing with triggers related to trauma experienced both within and outside of movement spaces.

Those of us who are helping to craft this guide have experiences building HJPS's in the context of the United States Social Forum, the Allied Media Conference (AMC), Occupy encampments, the 2012 Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity (BOLD) gathering, and other movement spaces. Our goal is to craft a guide that encourages flexible and regionalized development of HJPS's with strong local leadership centering black and brown/ disabled and chronically ill/queer and trans voices. This is intended as an accessible and short guide for setting up and managing a practice space, and so much of the relevant philosophy, background, and examples are beyond the scope of this offering. Additional documentation exploring the theory, practice, and history in more depth will be found at justhealing.wordpress.com as we add more information to the site.

Building a Team

A resilient and successful HJPS requires a strong team. We recommend building a team that **includes at least 3 (ideally 4 or more)**

Coordinators, and creating time and space early in your process to vision collectively regarding your hopes, dreams, and goals for the HJPS. Take time to assess the relative skills and strengths of each member of your team, and bring in additional folks if you find there are critical gaps.

Depending on the context in which you are setting up your HJPS, you may have different sets of needs. For instance, if you are setting up a HJPS as a part of a protest or action where you can anticipate a strong police presence, make sure you have a **Coordinator on your team with a medical background**, and experience handling triage and injuries that can result from physical and chemical weapons. Most HJPS teams benefit from including an **individual with experience creating and managing crisis or safety plans**. It's also really important to think about how the identities and experiences of the coordinators shape the HJPS, so **be mindful of centering Black, Indigenous and People of Color/disabled/queer and trans folks as coordinators and practitioners**.



Artwork by Fiona Avocado.

Who Is Leading?

Healing Justice work has historically been led predominantly by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color/Queer and Trans and/or Disabled Folks. This is no accident, for the work of Healing Justice is fundamentally a form of resistance against the displacement and co-optation of our traditional practices and the criminalization of our practitioners. We recognize that the industry of science and medicine has acted in collusion with colonization, and **so the definition of a “healthy body” as white, able-bodied, thin, cisgendered, heterosexual, and wealthy must be interrogated and resisted**.

We center the genius and leadership of black and indigenous and POC and queer and trans and disabled leadership, for what we know about surviving and resisting the medical industrial complex, so that we can reclaim our collective memory of survival, resilience, wellness, and safety and utilize these practices from within to transform movement building work.

The identity and experiences of the Coordinators shape the HJPS, so be mindful about centering black, indigenous, POC, queer, trans, and disabled leadership. **It's helpful to look at the demographics of your team, and make determinations about how many (if any) white folks you want to have on your team, or as practitioners in the space**. If you want to have a certain percentage of Coordinators, Practitioners, and Volunteers be black or brown, queer or trans, or disabled, then you need to put limitations on how many white people, able-bodied people, cisgendered people, etc., are invited and/or accepted as volunteers. It's ok to be clear about that in your

call- in fact, it can help build people's confidence and trust in the work you are doing.

Roles and Responsibilities

Coordinating an HJPS requires being able to manage a lot of moving parts. Some of the specific HJPS Responsibilities include:

- ★ practitioner application and recruitment process
- ★ physical space and logistics
- ★ supplies
- ★ resource generation (scholarships to support practitioners, see “**Resourcing the Work**” below)
- ★ coordinating with external collaborators
- ★ orientation/training of volunteers and practitioners
- ★ documentation

In the running of a HJPS, it helps immensely to have **clearly defined roles**. Beyond the Coordinators who are setting up the space and recruiting practitioners, there are other key roles to be filled. Some of the specific HJPS Roles include:

- ★ **Coordinators:** as a team, these amazing folks develop and manage the HJPS by:
 - ☆ developing/deepening relationships with the organizing context (i.e. protest)
 - ☆ raising resources to support the space
 - ☆ planning and managing logistics related to the HJPS
 - ☆ supporting the application, review, and selection process for Practitioners
 - ☆ developing the schedule of practitioners and time slots for receiving services

- ★ **Practitioners:** provide a specific health/healing service, usually in multiple shifts with breaks. Folks who provide health/healing services may or may not identify as “healers” or “service providers,” and there is a huge range of practices that can happen in an HJPS, from tarot readings to sound therapy to first aid. We encourage you to use open and inclusive language in your calls for practitioners and to be ready to have conversations with potential healers about “who counts as a healer?”
- ★ **Point People:** hold half-day shifts at the HJPS and provide on-site management (offering a much-needed break for Coordinators), including:
 - ☆ providing support and oversight to Space Keepers and Practitioners
 - ☆ run interference between HJPS and organizing context (i.e. protest, conference)
 - ☆ supporting practitioner health/wellness and logistical needs
 - ☆ maintaining a complete working knowledge of the schedule during/after shift
- ★ **Space Keepers:** These important folks hold the dual role of being vibes-watchers and volunteers. Scheduling multiple Space Keepers for the same shift means you have someone to work the registration table, greeting arriving clients and handling questions, and others to float in the space, assist practitioners, give a five minute warning before sessions end, and attend those who may be experiencing distress.

It is helpful for all volunteers working in the space, regardless of role, to be able to practice being calm and centered, engaging conflict respectfully, and seeking support and help when needed. Developing practices and trainings for how to foster these skills, as well as job descriptions for each role, goes a long way towards ensuring that things run smoothly. Check out past job descriptions at <https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/hjps-coordinator-job.pdf>.

Agreements: Principles and Practices

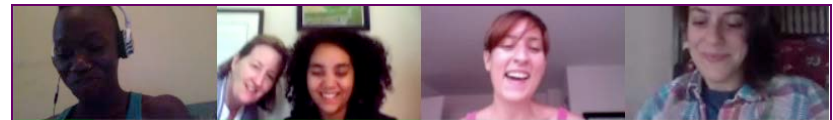
We have all found that in our work, developing a set of guiding principles and practices ensures that everyone working in the space, and people receiving healing services, can feel safe, seen, and heard in relation to their needs and gifts. Having a set of principles that shape how and why you organize can be especially helpful with tough situations and conflicts arise. The principles and practices form the foundation of an agreement that holds each practitioner, coordinator, volunteer, and client accountable for their own deep learning and awareness.

Keep in mind that the HJPS will likely attract the volunteer services of folks who don't necessarily talk about their health and healing practice in the same (often politicized) language that you and your fellow Coordinators use. The space itself has a stated goal of practicing health and healing in a radically different way than many of us are used to doing, and that in itself holds logistical, emotional, and political challenges. Use principles and practices to establish healthy boundaries for the safety and healing of all involved. To see some of the Principles and Practices others have used, visit <https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/hjps-guidingprinciples.pdf>.

Sustainability

Coordinators: Be real about the time commitment, and take steps to mitigate the impact. **Do an access check in** at the beginning of the work and throughout it, asking people to share what they need to be present in the space - childcare? stretches? a quiet break with low stimulation? Deaf accessible space? - and work together to create collective access. Sometimes the line between work and organizing is unclear and it helps to create boundaries. Ensure that each coordinator has days/times that are off, and then respect this time. Don't glorify overworking and being busy. Take steps to ensure that your coordinators, practitioners, and volunteers are informed and **centered around experiences of disability and trauma, and how those experiences and needs show up in the space of political action**. There is **amazing work being done within the disability justice community about how to make spaces accessible** - for example, <http://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/>.

Most of all, **think about how you want this work to feel! How can we do the work in a way that builds us, not burns us?** Some of our best practices are laughing, listening to each other talk about our lives and romantic drama before we get down to the nuts and bolts part of a meeting or call, and breathing, hugging and sighing with each other. These are important parts of the work, not add-ons, because they show and build how **this work comes from deep love for each other**.



AMC HJPS 2012 Coordinators, hard at love and work.

Organizing the Space

Location Considerations

There are many different ways to hold space for practicing healing justice. Spaces could take the form of roving first aid and trauma support at a protest, a pop-up space within an encampment, a temporary space set up at a conference or gathering, or a more dedicated, permanent setting. **This document focuses on pop-up and temporary spaces, but can be applied to other kinds.** The HJPS can take many forms, but the location shapes some of what can happen there, especially including what types of healing and how many practitioners you can host at a given time. You'll likely find that the most powerful spaces are those developed in line with local needs, capacities, and healing traditions. **Consider setting up meetings and/or listening sessions with local leaders, organizers, protesters and/or community members and organizations to learn more about specific health and healing needs.**

Working with Practitioners

Recruiting Practitioners: Once you have a sense of the basic logistics, including how many and what kinds of practitioners you'll need, it's time to get the word out. **Draw on existing networks, listservs, and groups.** You can use a **short email with accessible, inspiring language** that can also be shared on Facebook and other social media. Be sure to include a clear description of the space and what you hope to achieve and links to practitioner applications, as well as contact information for the coordinators. Depending on how much time you have, you may want to have an informational conference call.

Screening Practitioners:

The practitioner application should **ask about practitioners' contact info, availability, practices, and needs** (supplies, disability access, etc.). But, also, **screening practitioners is an important way to ensure the space is centered around Black and brown, queer and trans, and/or disabled leadership and needs.** This means asking practitioners to share information on their own identities as well as things like how they center racial justice in their work, how they understand trans bodies and their politics around fat and disability. You might decide to ensure the practitioners reflect a certain demographic (for example, mostly Black and brown folks).

Once the applications have been received, the coordination crew will want to review them and **flag any areas of concern** (say, cultural appropriation, or if there have been allegations

HJPS Application Evaluation Criteria (from the AMC HJPS)

- ★ Is the practitioner's practice rooted in a framework of liberation, social change, community and/or spiritual support?
- ★ Are they comfortable working in an integrative health/healing team model?
- ★ Is their practice community-based?
- ★ Do they have experience working with marginalized communities, in particular disabled/chronically ill people, people of color, and queer/transgendered people?
- ★ Do they speak another language besides English?
- ★ Do they wish to offer a practice that will fit within the practice space, both in terms of logistics as well as the broad vision of our work?

of sexual assault or boundary crossing by a practitioner). If someone realizes that a practitioner or volunteer has physically or sexually assaulted someone, it's important to check in with folks in their community to find out whether the harm has been successfully addressed or not, what the community safety needs are and whether the practitioner has made reparations and is behaving in a safe way. If you have an established Safety Team at your conference or gathering, it's a good idea to work with them on your response.

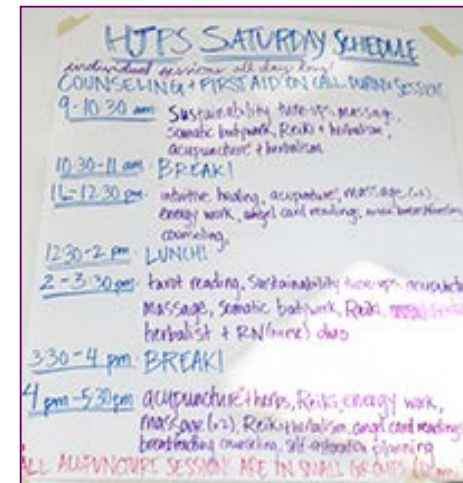
After discussing and assessing the concerns, you may want to **schedule phone check-ins to address these concerns with the practitioners**. Sometimes, these turn out to be practitioners who do great work but who don't same politicized language to talk about it as we do, and we learn across those differences. That said, **there may be a few individuals who are just not a good fit because of issues of emotional/physical safety and practice guidelines, and it's also okay not to accept them**. An HJPS should be a space where we work to create the healing with justice spaces we dream of.

Orienting Practitioners: The orientation can be a fantastic way to **share knowledge about the politics, integrity, and intention of the space**. If possible, try to offer the orientation in multiple ways – both via conference call and in person. Orientations have included important information on accessibility, creating a scent free space, scope of practice, and boundaries of participation, as well as a way to ground the space in the principles and traditions of healing justice.

Scheduling Practitioners: Some temporary HJPS's will last half a day, others might be in place for up to a week, and shift scheduling will depend on that. You will **always want to have a point person on site, as well as someone on call to provide first aid** (certification is important here for liability reasons). **Consider having these folks on shift for 3-4 hours, and having space keepers and practitioners on shift for 1.5-2 hours**. We have found limiting individual sessions to a half-hour can help to ensure the most people get access to meaningful healing. There will definitely be people who come to the space looking for an aspirin, or with a physical ailment, so it's useful to have first aid folks on hand to triage those concerns while more integrative and preventative healing happens in sessions. Try to **ensure a diversity of services available** at all times – massages and community acupuncture are among the most popular offerings. It's super important to **confirm shifts with practitioners, and to have a way for participants to sign up in advance** for their sessions.

Space Logistics & Supplies

Front Desk: Try to have a desk outside of the room or tent to sign people up, to minimize noise in the healing space. You may want to **make posters with 1) definitions of all types of healing being offered, 2) the day's schedule**



and 3) the principles of the space that all participants can see. Anyone working behind the desk (coordinators, point people, and space keepers) will also need to have access to some key behind-the-scenes documents. These will include a **master schedule with contact info for everyone volunteering, a centralized sign-up sheet for healing sessions, and blank and signed consent forms.** You'll also want to have supplies like tape, scissors, paper, markers, and pens. It's helpful to have an accordion file on hand just to keep everything organized and private, especially completed consent forms.

Room Set-Up: Unless you already have access to a space with dividers, or multiple small rooms, you will need to **figure out how to create small, semi-private spaces for healing.** After a few years of some pretty creative attempts at temporary dividers, **we designed some sturdy ones** that use materials found in a hardware store. Learn how at <https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/buildingportabledividersforyourhealingjusticepracticespace-doc.pdf>. Moveable dividers also allow for the space to be modified to allow for healing sessions for individuals as well as small and large groups. Larger booths may be useful for community acupuncture sessions (include comfy chairs!), for practitioners to rest and regroup, or for a community altar. A sample floor plan will soon be available on the resource section of the justhealing.wordpress.com.

Basic Supplies: In addition to some of the supplies listed above, you'll want to have **tables, chairs, first aid supplies, water, cups, juice & cookies (for raising blood sugar), and at least a couple of blankets. Herbal medicine, tea, and hot water are all good additions.** If your space will have an altar, you might want to designate a small table or box for

supporting it, cloth to cover it, and invite practitioners to bring sacred objects and offerings. If you're having **acupuncture**, you'll want to coordinate with the acupuncturists about providing needles, sharps containers, alcohol swabs, clean work surfaces, and other tools. **Massage therapists** may need tables and exam paper, and **yoga practitioners** may need mats and/or blocks. **Ask folks who will be offering healing services what supplies they will need** and identify which of those supplies they can contribute and which they will need support in obtaining. Here's a sample list (<https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/hjps-sample-supply-list.xlsx>) to consider.

Managing Liability

Health care liability law is beyond the scope of this document, but we encourage you to **learn about the local and national laws that may cover your HJPS.** You must **keep all information on participants private.** If your space is being donated or rented, be prepared for the owners to have liability concerns. At the AMC, we **use consent forms** to explain what the practice space is and is not, and participants waive all liability claims when they sign these forms. Feel free to model your consent forms on ours:

https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/amc_hjpsconsentform12pt.pdf.

Access Concerns

- ★ Please ensure that your space is **accessible to disabled folks** in wheelchairs and who use walking aids - in addition to having no stairs, and/or ramps and elevators as needed, this will mean doorways with a minimum clearance of 32" (36" if you have to turn to

enter the door), and aisles with 5 feet of clearance (which you can mark with masking tape). Please also ensure that there are accessible, gender-neutral bathrooms. A good access audit template can be found at <https://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/radical-access-mapping-project-vancouver/>. Don't just call an unknown space and ask them if the space is accessible—often they will say "yes" and when you get there, there will be steps to get inside, tiny entranceways, etc. If you are having a difficult time finding accessible space, try calling your local Center for Independent Living or disabled people's organization, or see if your community has created an accessible spaces googledoc. (If you want to start your own, a great example you can use as a template is https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jd9Y7zbkAGqyk7OMcrVw_hYRhb4ntmjiHtLwcmNLRr62o/edit#gid=0). Also know that some spaces that say they are accessible will turn out to be accessible to someone in a smaller manual wheelchair but not a powerchair or scooter user.

- ★ While some practitioners regularly use scent in their healing, this means that folks with chemical injuries, asthma, cancer and many other conditions will get sick and not be able to use the space. Check out this guide on <http://www.brownstargirl.org/blog/fragrance-free-femme-of-colour-realness-draft-15> on **creating scent-free spaces** from Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha that centers around femmes of colour. Educate practitioners beforehand about not using fragrance in their personal care products or healing products the day of. Also, do an fragrance audit of the space before you begin ([16](https://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/radical-access-

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[mapping-project-vancouver/](#)). You may need to replace fragranced soap in the bathrooms with unscented Dr Bronner's, remove plug ins, and talk to cleaning staff about switching out products (which you can provide.) Great links to creating fragrance free space can be found at <http://eastbaymeditation.org/accessibility/PDF/3-STEPS-TO-ORGANIZING-A-FRAGRANCE-FREE-EVENT.pdf>.

- ★ **Always ask for consent before engaging in physical touch**, including in the practice of hands-on healing, especially when working with survivors of violence.
- ★ Be prepared that **trauma may be activated** and brought to the surface by some of these modalities, especially acupuncture and body work, and be prepared to offer after care as needed.
- ★ **Don't assume**. Ask folks what pronouns they prefer, what they call their medical conditions or parts of their bodies, and how they want you to work with them today.
- ★ **Providing childcare** can make it easier for folks with children to attend. Solicit volunteers to help organize childcare and designate kid-friendly spaces if possible.



What to Expect, & How to Follow Up

Many people may be new to the types and formats of **healing being offered**, and point people, space keepers and practitioners should be ready to **talk about the offerings in an accessible way**. Recognize that **some people are going to come in wanting a lot more than the space can offer**.

Sometimes people who do not regularly access healing can experience a pouring forth of backlogged historical trauma because it's finally getting seen and cared for. Having **emotional support people on shift** can help participants to navigate these experiences, and it's useful to have information on hand about how they can **connect to ongoing accessible healing**. Being upfront and compassionate about the limitations and guidelines of the space, both with practitioners and participants, can help to manage expectations.

Folks will definitely have lots to say by way of feedback, and you'll want to give them a way to share it. It can take the shape of a written form, or of an electronic one that is circulated after the fact. As coordinators, taking a week or two to regroup and celebrate and then **coming back together to debrief has generated a lot of insight**. We have found that this kind of liberatory healing space creates a temporary community that practitioners and participants are eager to see continue. **Create mechanisms for carrying the momentum forward** - whether that's a listserv, a plan to meet again in a few months, or whatever else you dream up - and be sure to draw on emerging leadership to spread the work around in a sustainable way.

Resourcing the Work

Raising resources for the HJPS is a critical aspect of sustainability and accessibility. Much of what you need can be donated (physical space, supplies, and the time of volunteers), but in order to get what you need you need to develop a concrete plan for describing and promoting the nature of the space, and being as specific as possible about physical and logistical needs. For instance, the space itself needs to support multiple practitioners working with clients simultaneously, so you will either need a physical space with multiple rooms (or if outdoors, multiple tents), or a large room/tent with standing dividers. You also need to think about water access, restrooms, a break area for the practitioners, etc. Developing a "How to Support the HJPS" one-pager that you can spread around to community contacts will turn up many of the resources and support necessary. When doing this work in local communities, it is powerful to build with local organizations and collaboratives when thinking about resourcing. The more resources you can get donated to the space, the more visible the work becomes, and the more investment you will have in the protection and lifting up of this work.

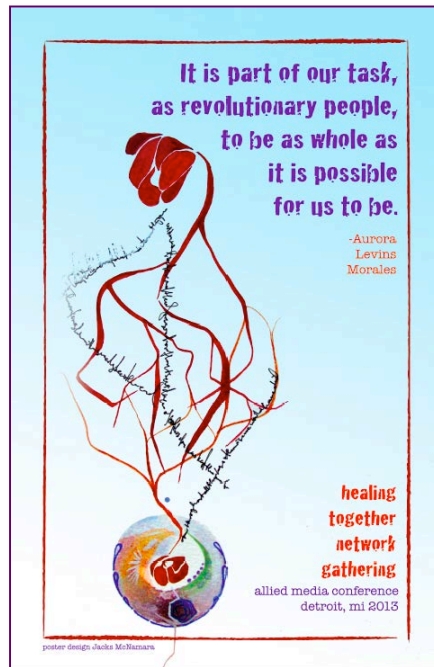
Once your donated needs are covered, there are a number of grassroots fundraising strategies you can use to generate cash to support healing justice. We recommend raising cash specifically to support scholarships or stipends for practitioners who are volunteering their time and services in the space. Knowing that many practitioners struggle financially, in particular those who offer reclaimed indigenous and traditional practices that are not afforded the same value within a capitalist context as medical services, we believe it's

important to recognize that “time to volunteer” is also an access issue, and that one way this can be alleviated is by offering some form of compensation for time or travel expenses. Additionally, ensuring that practitioners get fed, or have caregiving (for children, elders, and other dependents) costs covered during their time on site, goes a long way towards improving the accessibility of the space.

The following are a few tried and true grassroots strategies:

★ **Art or Product Sale with Donated**

Proceeds: Have allies donate artwork, or handmade herbal medicinals or other handmade products, as incentives for folks to give money to the HJPS. This fundraiser works well if you have a fiscal host (a nonprofit with 501(c)3 status) accepting funds on your behalf, because donors can get a tax deduction. It also spreads the word about the HJPS’ and healing justice’s work and mission in a concrete way, by providing beautiful posters with healing justice messages, or herbs or tinctures supporting folks’ healing.



Poster design by Jacks McNamara

- ★ **Crowd-Funding Campaign:** Using Indiegogo or another crowd-funding platform, you can generate income for the HJPS from supporters across your personal and professional network. Make sure you make a video (DIY is great!), because campaigns with videos get more visibility. This type of fundraiser requires you to have a fiscal host to accept the funding.
- ★ **Community-Supported Activism:** This fundraiser is ideal for supporting individuals who are giving lots of their time over a sustained period. It works by setting up recurring/monthly donations from donors (usually via PayPal or PaySimple) that go directly into the individual’s bank account, in this way providing individuals with ongoing financial support. Requires a strong personal network, and direct asks of donors, and a plan in place for following up and thanking donors for their support.

When we developed the HJPS through the Allied Media Conference, we utilized the “Art or Product Sale” model, and typically generated between **\$1000-1200 each year**. This translated to **10-12 travel stipends of \$100 per practitioner**, and we were flexible regarding the amount based on individual need. One of our Coordinators used the Community Supported Activism model to fund her work on the HJPS, and **raised over \$2000 to support her efforts over the course of a 6-month period**. Visit <https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/csaguide-raisingmoneyforactivism.pdf> to learn about how she made this work.

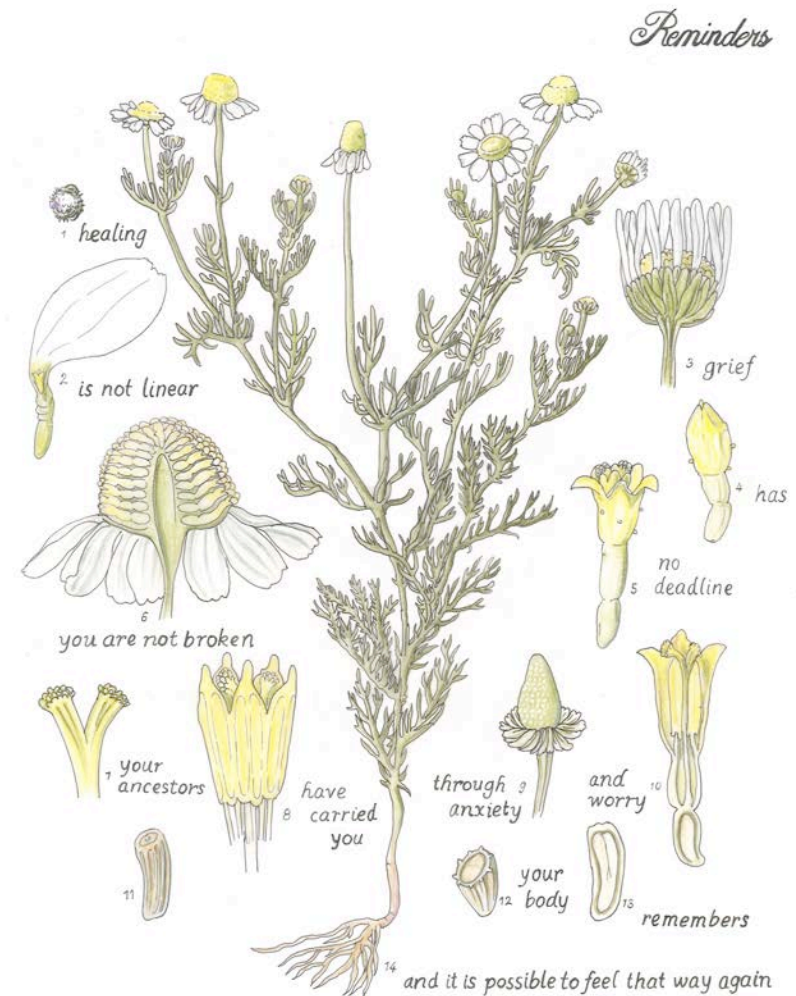
In Closing

We share the information above at a critical moment in social justice movement history, a time when the central role of

healing within liberation is becoming more broadly recognized. We want to name the open heartedness with which this information is offered AND emphasize that this is offered as part of a larger conversation in which we are all learning. We recognize that for all that is here, there is more that we are missing. We lift up the many traditions, known and no longer remembered, hidden in family stories and genetic chains, and stolen through colonization and dominance, that center what we now call healing inside of moments of transformation and change, grief and organization. We work with the understanding that how we heal ourselves is directly related to how we experience and interpret ourselves and the possibility for transformation. **We believe some of the most powerful work lies at the intersection of health, healing, and organizing. You are at this intersection today. You are part of this work. This is where we begin.**

Acknowledgments

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