

## The Need

Change makers are dying as a result of spiritual and physical deprivation from trauma, stress and unrest in our movements. Many organizers are either without health insurance and do not seek care or are not supported to sustain their well being as a result of overextended work cultures in our movements. We have seen an increase of suicide, depression and long term illnesses impacting organizers at much younger ages. We have lost many valuable people to illnesses, compounded by the stresses of organizing, that were undiagnosed, untreated or poorly treated. Our organizers are coming from communities most physically and emotionally affected by trauma and violence, and yet we are not given models of intervention and prevention to sustain ourselves, let alone the next generations of leaders.

At the same time, our communities are under resourced to respond to systemic conditions of trauma, violence and abuse. Western-based health models in the U.S. are based on profit-making privatization that isolates the individual from their community in the process of their healing or treatment. Often this model only relies on modifying the individual's behavior without addressing their social conditions. Simultaneously, many of our communities have been forcibly removed from land and resources that traditionally enabled us to communally respond to the emotional and physical needs of our communities. This loss of connection from our traditions has severed our cultural memory of how to build wellness into our daily practices.

Additionally, the health care crisis, caused by privatization of services, lack of adequate public health care, and the onset of dangerous environmental health conditions has reached a climax in the southeast. The aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita unveiled the disturbing reality of the state's inability and unwillingness to care for low- income communities of color in the Southeast. This same public healthcare system is riddled with a history of unethical practices and testing (eg. southern sterilization laws and the Tuskegee experiment) which pathologize women, people of color, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, and the l/b/g/t/i/q communities. These western based models that do not incorporate holistic modalities or natural care, nor do they offer collective models of wellness that reflect many of our political and cultural beliefs. As a result, our limited use of this "health care" does not empower the individual or community as a whole, keeping us further isolated.

In conjunction to this, low income communities, rural communities, and communities of color in the southeast have been targeted for sites of industrial waste and other unjust environmental practices. While the strategies of the environmental justice movement have expanded our response and political action for equitable and safer environmental conditions, there is still limited capacity for our communities to respond to the physical and emotional dis-ease and distress as a result of these pandemic practices.

Meanwhile, often out of necessity our movements and theories of practice are based on short term crisis based models of change which do not honor loss, memory, and trauma. In the wake of natural disasters that have devastated our region, or the incidences of violence and injustice as we experienced in the recent case of 'Jena 6' in Louisiana. How do we hold action with mourning or reflection for our southern movements on how these experiences take a toll on our organizing work and lives? We must generate models of prevention and intervention to de-escalate stress, isolation, depression, and burnout from trauma and the impact of crisis driven work culture within our movements.

Finally, the Southern Experience in particular has been rooted in a legacy of triumphs and trials, exploitation and genocide, slavery and resistance, organizing and resiliency. Based on the particular experience in the south of heightened conditions of poverty, and overt state violence, homophobia, religious persecution, and white supremacy, it is imperative that we find creative ways to identify and change the contradictions within our region to consciously reflect on how to shift unsustainable practices. Ensuring our emotional, physical, spiritual wellbeing is intrinsically connected to the sustainability of our communities and movements. We must hold spaces for healing, building accountable and authentic relationships, facing conflict and resolution, and transforming ways we work together.

## Strategies

- **Build a Network of Healers and Organizers in the South:** Organizers work with communities that are constantly experiencing the trauma of a militarized and fast paced consumptive culture. We are often limited in identifying our physical and emotional triggers in our work and organizing environments to know the cumulative effects and causes of our emotional, physical and spiritual duress and exhaustion. These conditions leave us unable to respond to and sustain the collective emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing of one another in our movements. **Kindred** will engage organizers to understand the legacy of trauma in our lives and create integrative healing models that both identify the impact of trauma and integrate practices that will increase long term mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing. We will also create opportunities that sharpen the awareness, intuitiveness and capacity of organizers and healers to collectively contain, respond and intervene to experiences of trauma and social conditions.
- **Connect Personal & Collective Wellness within Organizing Strategies:** Oftentimes organizers experiencing personal distress, trauma or dis-ease isolate themselves or leave their organizing work to heal. We will work with organizers and practitioners to imagine and create collective models of wellness that connect principles and practices of organizing to uses of body and energy work (yoga, meditation, nutrition, reiki, acupuncture, sound healing, etc.) and the healing arts for balance. This will build our capacity to seek and maintain wellness both within and outside of our political work.
- **Document Wellness Traditions in the South:** The historical moment of our movements is being defined more by the constraints of the non-profit industrial complex and bureaucracy and less by the heart and souls of our communities. We will document traditions and practices rooted in the experiences of our southern movements that are fostering a deeper connection to our physical, environmental, emotional and spiritual work, as part of political and social transformation.
- **Expose and End Eugenic Practices in the South:** By creating a political framework that seeks to transform models of wellness, we will offer a critique of current health systems. We will expose the stories of state medical practices that have pathologized and targeted women, disabled people, low income people, queer people, and people of color communities under the auspices of 'health' and 'genetic inferiority'. Kindred will build public awareness of these unethical practices, and promote critical action towards removing eugenic laws and practices on marginalized communities in the South.
- **Create Leadership Models that Promote Wellness.** Models of communication and leadership are often devoid of an analysis and critique of how organizers are engaging in abusive and isolating behaviors that

have been replicated in generations of leadership. This includes and is not limited to: using divisive and abusive language, a culture of overworking that undermines self and communal care and rest; a lack of reflective practice that enhances mental and intellectual clarity; power and abuse used to control individuals and motivate productivity through fear. Our movements are not using tools that build accountability and transparency within organizing processes and practices, and we are suffering without acknowledging and transforming these practices that have been modeled as 'leadership' and cultures of organizing. Kindred will create new models of sustainable leadership practices in relationship to our emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing.