

Anti-poverty work & Collective Care



Anti-Poverty Network SA Grassroots
Campaign School 2026
Session 7 handout/zine



This session handout/zine and the session it goes with is a very quick introduction to collective care in the context of anti-poverty work.

The purpose of both the session and this handout/zine is to facilitate conversation on collective care and reflect on the ways we look or could look after ourselves and each other within our network as we fight for a fairer, kinder world.

Our discussion and reflections on collective care will become the foundation of a collective zine we will make and produce together during the second half of the session

This zine was written and produced on Kurna land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and recognise that sovereignty of this land was never ceded. Always was. Always will be Aboriginal land.



Anti-poverty work is essential. It can be
meaningful, powerful and life changing.



Anti-poverty work can also be confronting, exhausting, and overwhelming. It can be traumatising, re-traumatising, and triggering.

The work is often done with limited resources by folk from marginalised communities. It often remains invisible, undervalued, and/or becomes co-opted.

Risk of activist burnout is high.

In this context, care becomes a question of sustainability and survival. Reflecting on the way we practice care as a network is necessary for the longevity of the network.



What is care?

Care is the ongoing and interdependent work of meeting needs and sustaining life.

Care and care work are necessary to sustain and protect people, the environment, relationships, and movements. There are many different types of care and many ways of giving and receiving care, but in this session and zine we'll be focusing on self-care and collective care.

But first, a few words about care as complicated and care as harm.



Care as complicated.

Care is a practice. A feeling. An expression. A concept. A form of labour (paid and unpaid). A multi-billion dollar industry.

Care is also political.

How we care, who gets cared for, and how care is organised (or denied!) is shaped by systems of power and underlying assumptions about who deserves to be cared for and how.

Care work is also very much gendered and racialised.

While collective care and other types of liberatory care philosophies and practices have the potential to sustain and fortify us in our fight for a just world care can also harm us (intentionally or unintentionally).



Care as harm. Care as violence.

When we talk about care it's important to recognise that care is not always neutral or "good".



Care can be used as a tool to control, coerce, and uphold existing hierarchies. This includes activists spaces and movements.



There are many historical and contemporary examples of care being used to gain or maintain power, regulate bodies, and enforce systems of oppression.

State violence, for example, is often framed as care, protection, or social responsibility. So-called "care interventions" are justified as being "for your own good", "for public safety", "for the good of society or the nation", or "for the betterment of humankind".

Violence, surveillance, and control are in this context presented as necessary (or even as benevolent acts of care).

"The plight of the white man."

In so-called Australia, paternalistic ideas of care and responsibility were used to justify the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities. Policies of assimilation and child removal were framed as protection and welfare by the colonial state, despite causing profound and ongoing intergenerational harm.

These ideas (and logics) still live on in contemporary Australian society. The over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system, and their removal from their families and communities, is a continuation of colonial control that is masked as care care and concern.

The current Australian welfare and social support system, in general, is an example of care that operates alongside practices of surveillance and control.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), for instance, is framed as promoting choice and empowerment with the promise that this will lead to better, more appropriate care.

Yet access to the scheme in the first place is contingent on meeting rigid criteria based on narrow institutional definitions of disability. Once accepted (or deemed eligible), participants must repeatedly demonstrate ongoing need and comply with regular reviews. Participants are also limited in their choice of support and they have to constantly adjust to shifting guidelines while also navigating a complex administrative system.

For many, the process (rather than supportive and empowering) is bureaucratic, exhausting, exclusionary and, at times, punitive and harmful. Care, in this context, functions not only as support but also as governance. It can be understood and experienced as (to varying degrees) both supportive and constraining.

Recognising these tensions is essential when thinking about care and care practices. These tensions also shape the need for and the practices of collective care.



What is self-care?



Self-care is the things we do to cope and function.
It can include:

- Rest in its various forms (including sleep and taking time off work, study, responsibilities)
- Food and nourishment
- Movement
- Pleasure and creativity
- Boundaries
- Time alone or with others
- Noticing glimmers
- Other practices and activities that make life more bearable

Self-care as a concept and practice has its origins in anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, Black feminist, disability justice, and liberation movements.

Self-care emerged as a response to deeply unequal patterns of care under systems of oppression.



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

-Audre Lorde

Lorde maintained that self-care should not be seen as a luxury
but a necessary survival tactic.

Self-care is not meant to replace collective responsibility or political action. Instead, radical self-care recognises that people living under racism, colonialism, ableism, capitalism, sexism, transphobia, and other forms of violence cannot endlessly give, organise, or survive without care and restoration.



Practising self-care enables us to rest, heal, survive, set boundaries, and sustain ourselves in often hostile and exhausting conditions. It can help create capacity to support one another, build community, and resist oppressive practices and systems together over the long term.

Regardless of its radical roots in collective survival, self-care has been steadily co-opted by capitalism and consumer culture.

Self-care has been repackaged and marketed as an individual lifestyle or wellness practice and turned into a product that can be consumed and/or done alone.

While individual self-care (as opposed to radical self-care) can help us cope, it risks becoming a way to endure, survive and perpetuate injustice /s rather than recognising and resisting systems and practices that produce injustice.

Self-care that focuses on the individual alone cannot change the conditions that harm and exhaust us in the first place.

We cannot self-care our way out of a burning house (or a burning planet) while the systems causing the fire remain unchanged and unchallenged.

From self-care to collective care.

Collective care moves beyond individual solutions, personal responsibility, and isolated responses. Instead, care is understood as shared, relational, and deeply political.

Rather than a coping strategy, collective care asks how we can change the conditions producing exhaustion, isolation, burnout, and crisis in the first place.

It invites us to rethink and re-imagine systems and practices of care in ways that challenge oppressive and exploitative structures.

Collective care is about building the capacity to sustain each other and our work over the long term.

It is how we as a movement/network can collectively support one another to survive, rest, resist, heal, dream, transform, and live with dignity in a world where care and resources are unevenly distributed.

This is not a new idea.

Collective care has deep roots in mutual aid traditions and the survival practices of marginalised communities.

It draws from Black feminist thought, disability justice, Indigenous kinship systems, queer and trans community care, labour organising, and collective cultures.

For many communities, collective care has always been necessary for survival.



Collective care often happens behind the scenes, as part of day-to-day everyday life.

Collective care is about sharing food, childcare, transport, skills, medication, housing, resources, and knowledge. It is making sure people are fed, rested and safe.

It is helping someone fill in paperwork so they don't miss out on disability support or study allowance. It's making sure a friend gets home safely after a night out. It's about packing an extra sandwich or piece of fruit in your child's lunchbox so it can be shared. It's about checking in on an elderly neighbour or family member.

Collective care is also about protecting and shielding one another from unsafe or hostile places, institutions, situations and experiences. This is especially important when formal systems fail to provide care, or are themselves a source of harm.

Much of this labour is invisible. It is often feminised, racialised, and undervalued (even as entire communities depend and rely on it).



Collective care is a conscious choice and practice to share the responsibilities of care outside the individual and the nuclear family.

It asks us to recognise that collective care is not separate from political struggle.
It is a part of it.

The Black Panther Party believed that freedom wasn't only about resisting political violence but also about meeting the everyday needs of their communities.

Their community survival programs were central to their political program and included:



FREE
BREAKFAST
PROGRAM



FREE
HEALTH
CLINICS



LIBERATION
SCHOOLS



FREE
CLOTHING
PROGRAMS



ELDERLY
SUPPORT &
TRANSPORT

These programs were not seen as charity.
They were acts of collective power aimed at meeting immediate needs while also building towards systemic change.

Collective care also demands that formal systems do better.

It pushes beyond informal support and calls for change in how formal care is understood, delivered, and resourced. Collective care is about holding people and institutions accountable and building culturally sensitive and safe(r) practices and spaces for everyone.



The movement to decolonise mental health responses in humanitarian contexts is a contemporary example of this in action.

By centering context, the movement challenges Western-centric individualised diagnostic models that frame distress as personal disorders and as a consequence tend to treat symptoms in isolation.

For example, rather than pathologising it as an individual issue, Palestinian distress is understood as a rational response to ongoing settler-colonial violence, displacement, and systemic oppression. This is in contrast to standard humanitarian mental health and psychological support (MHPSS) models that disregard and depoliticise cultural and political context by treating distress as an solely individual clinical issue (such as PTSD).

Decolonial approaches in contrast draw on local knowledge, community solidarity and concepts like sumud (steadfastness) to support people in ways that are culturally grounded and politically aware. Decolonial approaches to mental health, for example, remind us that there is no 'post' in trauma when violence is ongoing

Decolonial approaches also maintain that healing cannot be separated from justice, and that care must address the systems causing harm (in the case of Palestine this would be the ongoing occupation and genocide perpetrated by Israel), not just the symptoms people carry.



Principles of Collective Care:

- Interdependence and connection over independence and isolation
- Care and wellbeing as a shared responsibility
- Consent and accountability
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Dignity and respect
- Sustainability and rest





Collective care is a response to individualism and hustle culture that tells us we must do everything alone.

It is a response and challenge to capitalism which commodifies care, exploits care workers, and prioritises profit over people.

Collective care centres relationships and community. It does not insist on one-size-fits-all approaches and it does not exclude. Collective care reduces isolation and burnout (including within activist spaces and movements)

Collective care distributes the work of care more fairly (also including within activist spaces and movements!)

It is both a survival strategy in times of crisis and violence, and a practice of everyday life.

Collective care is how we build stronger, safer, more resilient communities

Collective care is how we keep each other safe.

It is also how we imagine and build more just futures — together.



Anti-poverty work & Collective Care.

Anti-poverty work, in itself, is a form of collective care.

But we need to make the practices and mechanisms of care visible and intentional.

It should not be an add-on or afterthought.

Collective care works best when it is purposefully built into our everyday practices, and it should be an essential part of how we organise, sustain each other, and imagine different ways of life and alternative futures.

Collective care helps us stay in the work long-term, support each other through difficulty, and build resilience together.

Collective care is shared, relational, ongoing, and often imperfect.

Collective care in anti-poverty work might include or look like:

- Checking in with each other
- Creating flexible ways to participate
- Mutual aid and other resource sharing (time, skills, money, rides, food)
- Collective care activities added into funding applications
- Making space for rest and emotion
- Conflict resolution
- Sharing joy as well as grief, and holding each other up
- Community kitchens, BBQs, and other forms of food sharing
- Skill sharing and collective learning (for example, GCS!)



Further reading.

Collective Care, Mutual Aid & Movement Sustainability

- Mutual Aid — Dean Spade: Accessible and practical introduction to mutual aid, solidarity, and movement organising.
- Emergent Strategy — Adrienne Maree Brown: On relationships, adaptation, collective transformation, and sustainable organising cultures.
- Pleasure Activism — Adrienne Maree Brown: Explores joy, healing, embodiment, and collective liberation within activism.
- Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice — Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: Powerful essays on disability justice, burnout, access, care networks, and collective survival.
- Beyond Survival — Ejeris Dixon: On transformative justice, community safety, accountability, and alternatives to policing.

Black Feminism, Radical Care & Liberation

- A Burst of Light — Audre Lorde: Includes Lorde's famous reflections on self-care as political warfare.
- Sister Outsider — Audre Lorde: Foundational essays on oppression, difference, liberation, and collective struggle.
- All About Love — Bell Hooks: Reframes love and care as ethical and political practices.
- Freedom Is a Constant Struggle — Angela Davis: Connects abolition, solidarity, Palestine, race, prisons, and liberation movements.

Disability Justice & Interdependence

- Disability Visibility — Alice Wong: Collection of essays from disabled writers on access, survival, care, and community.
- The Future Is Disabled — Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: On disability justice organising, interdependence, and surviving burnout and crisis.
- Mia Mingus — writings and essays on access intimacy, interdependence, transformative justice, and collective access.

Further reading.

Decolonisation, Trauma & Collective Healing

- The Wretched of the Earth — Frantz Fanon: Foundational anti-colonial text examining violence, oppression, trauma, and liberation.
- Decolonizing Trauma Work — Renee Linklater: Indigenous approaches to trauma, healing, and community care.
- Rest Is Resistance — Tricia Hersey: Connects rest, burnout, capitalism, and liberation.

Indigenous & Aboriginal Perspectives

- Aileen Moreton-Robinson — writings on colonialism, whiteness, sovereignty, and Indigenous resistance.
- Dark Emu — Bruce Pascoe: Challenges colonial myths and explores sophisticated Aboriginal systems of living and care.
- Children's Ground — community-led work grounded in long-term Indigenous self-determination and collective wellbeing.

Articles, Essays & Free Online Reading

- Creative Interventions Toolkit: Practical community responses to violence outside police/prisons.
- Project NIA: Resources on abolition, transformative justice, and community care.
- The Nap Ministry: Essays and resources on rest as resistance.
- Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: Resources on accountability and community safety.
- Disability Visibility Project: Essays, podcasts, and disability justice resources.



Collective Care is Our Best Protection 6, 2020 Favianna Rodriguez

“We are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s business; we are each other’s magnitude and bond.”

-Gwendolyn Brooks

We are all interconnected. By taking care of another person, you take care of yourself. By taking care of yourself, you take care of the other person. Happiness and safety are not individual matters. If you suffer, I suffer. If you are not safe, I am not safe. There is no way for me to be truly happy if you are suffering.

-Thich Nhat Hanh