

## Healing Justice at the US Social Forum: A report from Atlanta, Detroit & Beyond

In December 2013, the US Social Forum organizing committee announced plans to hold the third US Social Forum in 2014. We received this news with great excitement. The US Social Forum continues to be a significant space for US-based justice and liberation movements to come together, share strategies and tools, and to practice the things we are seeking to create. It is with this intent that we share this reflection paper on the Healing Justice work - both the practice space and the Healing Justice PMA - from the 2010 USSF in Detroit. Knowing how much momentum has been building since 2010 Detroit and the critical healing justice work that continues to expand in our communities (including Allied Media Conference, SAGE Collective in Chicago, etc.), we share this reflection early in the process hoping to build towards a more integrated and thorough healing justice practice at USSF 2014. We reflect a national team of leadership led predominantly by Indigenous & People of Color and Two Spirit, Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Gender Non Conforming People of Color.

\*\*\*\*\*

*There is nothing we talk about in movement building work that is only an "issue." These are things we have experienced. Our bodies, our communities, our memories carry all of the times when we experienced or witnessed violence, systemic oppression or displacement, oppression, disrespect, and marginalization. When we are working together to change systems and beliefs, we are also carrying the long-term impact from those systems and beliefs inside our selves. For all oppressed communities there is a particular experience of historical trauma passed back to use from slavery and genocide. We have learned from much of the studies of First Nations and Two Spirit communities that have brought this work to the forefront. For many of us, creating wellness & safety is holding space that physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, environmentally and psychically can hold or witness, or respond to this truth.*

*We hope this document is both reflective in showing lessons learned as well as inspires and incites more critical action for our collective wellness and safety. We know there is a legacy of work to build onto towards our future and that what happened at USSF does not reflect all of the width, depth and breadth of work that is happening on a global level to sustain traditions and practices of wellness, resiliency and response within our liberation movements. We thank all of those healers, rootworkers, cultural workers, health and healing practitioners who have come before us and those who will come after us.*

Everything we want to change in the world around us also exists right here in our bodies. We carry the histories of our people's trauma and our individual struggles. They are here, both strengthening us with what they have taught us and also holding us back as our fears, anxieties and survival strategies keep us away from the things that could most support our liberation.

But this is not all. The western industry of health and medicine - or the systems of wellness or health we have to turn to when we are experiencing illness, sadness and despair - are themselves sometimes the root cause of generating traumatic experiences by pathologizing and practicing involuntary testing on our bodies in the name of advancing the industry of science and medicine - or, sometimes, colonization. At the same time, the medical industry through an oppressive lens often defines 'healthy bodies' as Christian, white, male, able bodied, heterosexual and wealthy and so all other bodies are expendable if not able to produce labor.

Healing justice responds to these things. It was a framework used at the USSF to center the long-term impact of generational trauma and violence within our movements. This framework was informed by a long history of political liberatory frameworks including racial, economic justice movements to newer movements of reproductive justice, community led safety strategies/transformational justice and disability justice on how systemic oppression, violence and trauma have impacted our collective bodies, lives and dignity. In particular, healing justice refuses to allow the displacement and co-optation of our traditional practices, and the criminalization of our practitioners. Healing justice reclaims our collective memory and infrastructure that has built our survival, resiliency, and mechanisms of wellness and safety outside of depending on the state.

We resist the buying and selling of our traditional medicines and practices for profit outside of our communities. Through a healing justice frame we asked the question: how can our movement building work sustain us and help us to reimagine how we create social change inside of our collective well being and an integral response to trauma in our individual and collective lives? Healing justice says that if we are not including work that addresses this in all of our movements, only then we cannot make the changes we want to see happen.

## **Working Definitions**

For the purposes of working in a large collaboration to create mechanisms of wellness and response, and safety at the US Social Forum in Detroit we created working definitions so that teams of health practitioners, emergency doctors, health activists, organizers and healers could work together with some shared analysis. We also came up with shared working principles and values which became integral to our process.

We are choosing to define a **healer** as someone who works with both the individual body and the collective body towards shifting patterns that cause disconnection. "Patterns" can refer to different functions of the body or functions between people or within a community such as societal patterns including oppression. A **grassroots healer** is a healer (or practitioner) that is committed to an anti-oppression framework and community based practices that seek to integrate individual/collective healing and resiliency to transform and heal our communities and our conditions through an economic and racial justice lens. **Healing justice** refers to an

evolving political framework shaped by economic and racial justice that recenters 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. *Though there were many critiques and concerns on using the term 'healing' based on religious fundamentalist & colonialist practices used to 'heal' many of our communities we were intentional in trying to reclaim and redefine what 'healing' had meant to our own collective resiliency and survival. This still will need to be more defined.* **Collective trauma** refers to when any kind of community of individuals shares an experience of trauma such as those sharing the experience of the institution of slavery, sharing the experience of genocide, or witnessing an event of state or communal violence against another individual or community and so on. **Historical or generational trauma** occurs when this held and usually collective trauma is passed down from one generation to the next, sometimes showing up as specific cultural practices that support survival under traumatic conditions, sometimes showing up as high blood pressure, diabetes, or other health concerns, sometimes showing up as a history of "broken" families, high levels of violence or suicide, high levels of substance abuse and more. **Trauma** is a function of our daily lives as we constantly living with the ongoing impact of oppression---both generationally and in our current state. When trauma cannot be integrated and released, it is called "held trauma." **Resilience** means the ability of an individual and a community to recover and bounce back from traumatic experiences. **Transformation (in the context of wellness)** is what happens when traumatic experiences are integrated, released and then the individual and/or the community is able to shift into something more grounded & self determined in wellness and liberation. **Medical Industrial Complex** is the industry of medicine that puts profit over people, and seeks to limit, displace and or completely remove our communities' ability and capacity to access, create and sustain our practices and traditions, and our own systems of communal wellness outside of state or privatized systems of 'health'.

## **Health and Healing Justice at the 2010 Detroit US Social Forum: planning the vision**

Healing Justice provided for us a political framework that brought anti-oppression analysis to the role of healing and wellness inside of liberation. In particular, healing justice seeks to support our resiliency practices as tools and traditions of liberation, survival and resiliency. Resiliency, in this context means a way to bounce back and respond to an incident that is traumatic. Within the 'healing justice' framework we use resiliency to mean our collective and individual capacity to hold, respond to, intervene or transform struggle and grief while still staying rooted in who we are, where we come from, and how we envision our future. We entered believing that the 'healing justice' frame can both support our movements to push towards political strategies that understand the greater impact of collective trauma as a result of generations of oppression and genocide; and to re-center the role of the practitioner and healer as integral to our collective liberation. We also tried to root our work as an extension of other critical movements including the Labor Movement that has fought for better working and health conditions in factories, to the Environmental Justice Movements

that have sustained a critical voice in challenging the systemic exposure of environmental toxins and incidences of unethical corporate practices on our land and bodies; the Indigenous Movements that have fought for the preservation of healing traditions and have sought to both create testimony and a narrative on the long term impact of historical trauma and genocide as an extension of colonialism. As well as more recent movements of the Reproductive Justice, Trans/Gender Non-Conforming/Two Spirit/Lesbian/Gay & Bisexual People of Color Movements, Disability Justice & Anti-Prison Industrial Complex Movements that have fought for the dignity of all bodies; that do not presume 'healthy' as white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, and able bodied and valuable outside of the production of labor and profit. We humbly entered this process knowing that historically, many global communities have held practice rooted in responding to historical and generational trauma and that we are only a part of that legacy of work.

### **The road from Atlanta to Detroit**

In Atlanta, 2007, a group of people came together to begin the first US Social Forum (USSF) that would integrate mechanisms of response and wellness throughout the USSF; from water stations, to food and wellness/rest spaces to comfort aid stations. As organizers some of us also imagined a space to respond to increased burnout, suicide of organizers in the South specifically, the rate of illness, depression and stress inside of our organizing work. Using the World Social Forum, 'Another world is possible', if another world was possible, we wanted to dream what would we want for our collective wellness inside of our collective liberation. Doctors, environmental justice organizers, healers, and health practitioners, health activists, midwives, yoga practitioners, breath and sound cultural workers, spiritual leaders, massage therapists and others gathered together as the Health, Healing and Environmental Justice (HHEJ) Collective. What evolved was a multi-pronged approach to mechanisms of wellness, reflection, spirit and environment. We organized comfort aid stations with western-based medicine and medic street teams that facilitated any kind of first response care that came up. We created a healing and spiritual practice space led by Stone Circles, Kindred Collective and local based practitioners in Atlanta, and nationally, to offer a shared interfaith space of many practices, and offering forms of healing for free, such as body, energy and earth-based traditions. We asked permission of the local Indigenous communities on what would be appropriate for any kind of practices on the earth. We also built a memorial to honor our ancestors and those we had lost in the struggle. In partnership with the local Healing, Health & Environmental Justice USSF Working Group we designed a health healing/environmental justice tent with testimonials and a timeline that showed communities responding to environmental and health oppression and violence through transformative organizing. All of our work, from the healing & spiritual practice space, to the comfort aid stations, to the Environmental & Health Justice tent was centered around the principles of environmental justice. This led to what we defined as a mapping that would show community led responses and liberatory strategies that were tied to healing, spirit, land and transformation. Finally, the collective also organized water sites throughout the Atlanta USSF, stations where free water was made available.

As the USSF organizing team was beginning to plan towards the second US Social Forum in Detroit, the Kindred Collective, a southern healing justice collective and a core organizer in Atlanta's Social Forum with the Health Health and Environmental justice was invited by Project South and local organizers in Detroit to work in partnership with healers and health practitioners to build mechanisms for safety and wellness at the Detroit US Social Forum. To do this, the Kindred Collective pulled together a national team of about 20 people – herbalists, bodyworkers, energy workers, yoga and massage and breath workers, nurses and physicians practicing integrative health. We were led by organizers and healing practitioners on the ground in Detroit who had already been facing for years the life threatening conditions of having the largest trash incinerator in the world operating in their city. This defined an urgent and creative moment for creating an integrated healing response team that would imagine new systems of wellness within the context of environmental, economic and racial justice happening on the ground in Detroit. This is where we chose to use the beginning framework of "healing justice" to name the particular role of healers and health practitioners as a part of our liberation struggles for environmental, mental, emotional, spiritual, psychic and physical well being. The 20 people and organizations coming together became the Health and Healing Justice Collective (HHJ); though still informed by the tenets of Environmental Justice, we knew that there would be other groups specifically holding EJ work and we committed to joining their actions and demonstrations against the trash incinerator and local power company. HHJ started out by creating a series of organizing principles to create the platform for healing, wellness and safety at the USSF. These organizing principles guided every step of the process and our purpose.

### **Organizing Principles created for the Detroit USSF**

- We are committed to People of Color & Indigenous leadership, in partnership with our allies, on building healing justice work at the USSF.
- We will lift up the leadership and conditions of Detroit to define the healing justice practice space and other programming for healing justice inside of a national context.
- We enter this work through an anti-oppression framework that seeks to transform and politicize the role of healing inside of our movements and communities.
- We are learning and creating this political framework about a legacy of healing and liberation that is meeting a particular moment in history inside of our movements that seeks to: regenerate traditions that have been lost; to mindfully hold contradictions in our practices; and to be conscious of the conditions we are living and working inside of as healers and organizers in our communities and movements.
- We are building national relationships and dialogues to cultivate knowledge and to build reflection and exchange of our healing, transformative and resiliency practices in our regions and movements.
- We believe in transparency on all levels so that we can have a foundation of trust, openness and honesty in our vision and action together.
- We believe in open source knowledge; which means that all information and knowledge is to be shared and transferred to create deeper collaboration and cross-movement building strategy.

- As we continue to create spaces for healing and sustainability throughout the US Social Forum and beyond; we will keep ourselves in mind as well as conscious of our own capacity and well being.
- We believe in movement building and organizing within an anti-racist and anti-hierarchical framework that builds collective decision making, strategies, vision and action and does not seek to support only one model or one approach over others.
- We believe that there is no such thing as joining this process too late; as we move forward, anyone who comes in when they come in are welcomed; and we will always remember that we are interconnected with many communities, struggles and legacies who have joined healing and resiliency practices with liberation in their work for centuries.

For a little over a year, the HHJ met through conference calls and face to face meetings to begin creating our presence at the USSF in Detroit. We continued also to meet with Detroit organizers and the USSF National Planning Committee to guide our work. Based on this, the HHJ created two different strands of the overall healing justice lens: the Healing Justice Practice Space and the Healing and Health Justice Liberation People's Movement Assembly; a political process led by Project South.

### **The Healing Justice Practice Space**

Healing justice practices spaces were literally the point of practice for where our organizing principles and community healing would come together. Practitioners were there to create a cohesive network and system of practice for the Social Forum at large, and potentially inspire ways for each other to build communal practices and mechanism of safety in our respective communities and movement spaces. Certainly we were building on a legacy of practices that has already existed, we knew political spaces already had healers, and practitioners on call we just wanted to move a particular analysis forward on how our collective practice would speak directly to generational trauma and violence. This space was envisioned to be a place where people could come and get out of the high stimulation of thousands of organizers sharing knowledge and information. It was to be a place where anyone who had been triggered, who had experienced physical, emotional and/or spiritual violence in the past or at the USSF, or anyone who felt unsettled or struggling could come and receive support. We were very intentional in working with an integrative team of grassroots social justice healers, health practitioners, and therapists seeking to transform the idea of what spaces for safety, wellness and resiliency could be. This was to be a free space that was inclusive of all genders and all bodies, a place where community, including the broader Detroit community, could come and experience energy, body, creative and earth-based practices including touch, meditation, yoga, art therapy and other forms of movement. For many, this was the first time these practices were experienced inside of a social justice space where the practices were designed to support and sustain our liberation struggles and respond to individual and collective trauma. It was also a space where all practitioners were trained in a protocol guided by the organizing principles, bringing a

political strategy to the work of meeting someone from a place of support. This included a large one-on-one and group practice space; drop-in spaces for one-on-one and group sessions, as well as on call practitioners for response for safety.

We had applications for all practitioners to make sure all practitioners brought an analysis and understanding of racial, gender and disability justice specifically. We also strongly considered that everyone be rooted in their practice in community and understand the history of their practice and how it may have been stolen or coopted. We held an extensive orientation process to ground all practitioners in the healing justice framework (which at that time was defined as the displacement of communal wellness traditions, and sought to respond to the social construct of 'healthy' as white, able bodies, male, wealthy, heterosexual, and Christian based on a public health ethnic cleansing model.) We oriented everyone to the history of how we got to Detroit, principles and protocol for the space and the conditions Detroit organizers and health practitioners had been responding to in their work. At the end, we had over 40 volunteers and over 450 people receiving support, safety\* and wellness through the space. Kindred Collective and others maintain more detailed reports on the actual activities and infrastructure for the space. (<http://kindredhealingjustice.org/>)

We were able to provide over fifteen modalities. It is estimated that we served at least 450 people in either group classes or individual therapies, for 3.5 days of the forum. Services provided included four types of massage (deep tissue and others), craniosacral therapy, reiki, energy work, sound and vibration healing, nutrition counseling, earth-based traditions healing, aerobics classes, five different kinds of yoga (in classes and one-on-one sessions), acupuncture, freestyle movement classes, cardio kick-boxing, freestyle art creation stations, a rest space, and workshops on birthing & reproductive justice.

The Healing Justice practice space started with a team of twelve volunteers, and as the US Social Forum began we became a strong team of forty volunteer practitioners. All were educated and informed about the impact of the common environmental and health issues in Detroit, and they all felt oriented to the conditions of Detroit and the purpose of their role as healers at the US Social Forum due to this extensive orientation process.

We noticed that as the days progressed, word of the Healing Justice Space spread more deeper into the Forum itself. By the end of the Forum, practitioners were needing to turn away twice as many people as we could work with.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **The Space**

It was critical to have a location that met a multiple set of needs for different wellness and safety practices (including one-on-one drop in spaces for de-escalating triggers and conflict). In Detroit, we were located in The UAW Building who worked with us to accommodate as best they could; including trying to maintain gender neutral bathrooms. However there was still a misconstrued notion of 'safety' vs. 'security' and

there were moments when participants were inappropriately targeted as problems. In retrospect we would have wanted more time to extensively train and build with UAW staff to define safety and wellness.

The prioritization of all kinds of access is crucial to any space upholding safety and wellness, For the Healing Justice Practice this included accessibility in both the exterior and interior physical space permitting for mobility for all types of bodies which allowed for people with different abilities to have full access to the space comfortably. We also integrated language interpretation when we could based on needs of participants. The majority of our materials were available in English and Spanish. We also prioritized breakout spaces including a quiet room for all practitioners to rest between sessions.

We learned at the Southeast Social Forum in Atlanta to separate recognizably religious or spiritual imagery or practices from the healing justice practice space, to better hold the contradictions of many who have experienced 'healing' used in the context of exclusionary and/or abusive practices. We decided to have at least a reflective practice space in the healing justice practice space that did not have a denomination nor spiritual specificity, but was merely there for respite, reflection and grounding the space. We also found lighting, blankets, food were invaluable in making a space less clinical and more welcoming.

### **The Practice**

Having shared principles to uphold a practice space especially where people do not know each other was critical to building a team and shaping a shared vision. We found many practitioners are not necessarily socially justice oriented nor sometimes interested in responding to collective trauma in the context of oppression and genocide and that was our focus for this space. So we were forthright and transparent about what we wanted to create outside of just serving the movement.

There were several times when we were called on by USSF National Planning Committee staff for healing and we provided care for them as comprehensively & as quickly as possible. In hindsight we would have set up a separate process with the USSF organizers at the beginning of their planning to build mechanisms of safety and wellness for the organizers of the USSF.

### **The People**

The leadership and organizing experience on the Healing & Health Justice team coordinating the space from the beginning created a political container that was strongly rooted and a healing justice frame that upheld anti-oppression values and practice, and always returned to an economic, racial and transformational critique of how we remember the role of wellness and safety in our liberation movements.



The organizing team of the Healing Justice Practice Space was incredible, because it was their ability to build fast trust, be adaptable, accountable and show up on so many levels doing both practice and supervision of the space. We shared responsibility for all coordination of the physical space, scheduling practitioners and holding safety and wellness inside and outside of all practice spaces. If a situation of conflict, emotional duress or physical triggers arose practitioners and support volunteers were on call to alternate roles and fill in where needed, outside of their rest periods.

### **Healing Health Justice & Liberation Peoples Movement Assembly**

In partnership with health, healing and medical practitioners we created a national convergence on the role of healing and wellness as a tool of liberation at the US Social Forum. We sought to honor legacies of collectives and individual practitioners that held space, vision and liberation in many social movements globally, but were often behind the scenes and unmentioned. We wanted to honor the root workers, the birth workers, the energy and bodyworkers, and medicinal workers that helped to manifest and sustain the well being of our communities and movements despite the genocide and generational trauma and violence used to control and disappear our communities. We understood that we would not only be able to recognize a healing justice practice space without uplifting the role of practitioners within social and political transformation. This led us to become one of the 50 plus people's movement assemblies guided and inspired by the vision of Project South and the USSF People's Movement Assembly Organizing Committee at the 2010 US Social Forum.

### **The Practice:**

Inspired by the Social Movement Assembly model at the World Social Forum's the People's Movement Assembly was begun as a call for new strategic plans of action to meet a new political moment in our social movements. "This process, through which we converge our communities and spark action, has been growing in the US over the past five years. At the 2nd US Social Forum in Detroit in June 2010, over 100 Peoples Movement Assemblies convened over 10,000 people and produced a Social Movement Agenda for Action.' (peoplesmovementassembly.org). Each assembly was charged to produce a resolution for collective action. We were seeking to create a specific resolution for, by and about the role of healing, and wellness inside of liberation for all of our movements. We hoped to include the many voices of harm reduction, disability justice, reproductive justice and transformative justice that brought us to a particular moment to shape and guide this political process.

### **Our Goals towards a Resolution**

#### **Goals:**

- To unpack & transform how we think about well-being & 'health'
- To map the conditions and contradictions around well being and 'health" in different spheres.
- To produce clear resolutions that describe the current conditions, set direction for solutions and identify actions

### **The People & Outcome**

Over 100 healers, organizers, school nurses, doctors, social workers, birth workers and other practitioners from all over the US attended the Healing Health Justice & Liberation

Movement Assembly. While there we began to unpack (which includes but was not limited to): the role and impact of the privatizing of medicines; the corporate take over of public hospitals; the implicit role of state on blaming our health on genetic make up without looking the environmental conditions we were living in, or oppressive factors impacting our well being. We grappled with how to define the Medical Industrial Complex, which seeks to value profit over people's well being and seeks to pathologize and isolate individuals for their mental/emotional/physical/developmental and environmental experiences outside of a communal context.

Through small group work and the mapping of a timeline (see foldout) of health community injustices the movement assembly reflected on both current conditions and the ways in which people have fought and/or transformed health injustices; including confronting any notion of state, communal and private institutions that have touted only one kind of body as 'healthy' which is always deemed white/male/able bodied/Christian/heterosexual and wealthy. As a large group we then focused on shared values and practices which could be used to move into national and regional strategies. Strategy and vision were divided by region with each breakout assessing what conditions they were responding to and what resources and response were possible given a regional context.

In the regional small groups, in order to define their regional political landscape and define a strategy for movement the following questions were used:

- How do we redefine and unpack 'healthy' and 'healing'?
- What are state/family/community/private-corporate movements doing to promote well being/quality of life?
- How are we going to sustain/support and build healers/organizers/collectives and communities to maintain and resource healing practices within a liberator, historical and political framework?
- What are our shared understandings, memory knowledge of the role of healing practices inside of liberation?
- How do we transform systems of medicine and wellness into mechanisms of response to our conditions and generational trauma and violence?
- What is the role of collective wellness and safety inside of liberation?

### **Lessons Learned**

These reflections about the sites of justice and injustice in our regions and communities identified issues such as: access to dignified care, environmental factors, the stigma of mental health, the consequences of historical trauma on targeted communities, food justice issues, access to basic information about care and medicinal practices rooted in our communities and the historical context of how our practices were stolen.

It was agreed that further work needs to happen, or differences are most likely to arise, over clarifying what modalities or practices we are referring to under the term "healing justice." There was still a valuing in many directions of some models of health and healing over others. There was disagreement over whether or not we should be

dependent on the state for resourcing health and healing justice work or not. The regional groups reflected the broader issues of harm in their local /regional communities, and also identified types of strategies that were currently being implemented in each area to create and promote multiple forms of wellness, and healing. From there, we looked for places to further the work-to fill in the gaps between what we need, and to strengthen the work we already do. We recognized in the end that there were more questions than answers and we were not ready to make any resolutions. Instead we agreed to focus on two outcomes: 1) a vision and values statement to guide our regional and/or national collaborative work (see attached) and 2) a statement from the HHJL People's Movement Assembly to be shared at the larger US Social Forum's Movement Assembly process. (see below)

### **Statement of healing justice shared at the closing of the US Social Forum**

#### Because these conditions exist-

- Separation of Mind and Body
- Health is commodity
- Our health is genetically defined at birth based on race and immigration status and class status
- Industrialization of birth
- We are fighting the idea of the perfect body-hetero, white, able bodied males predisposed to be wealthy
- The intersections between historical, family and generational trauma
- Healing traditions are stolen, appropriated and criminalized
- Privatization of hospitals, cost of insurance and closing of public institutions
- Health is defined by your ability to produce

#### Because these opportunities are possible we will:

- Work together regionally and nationally to use alternative economies to provide access to healing services that will create safe spaces for wellness in our personal, communal and organizational spheres.
- Build a national/regional health healing justice network that will
  - o develop multimedia approaches (eg. E-zine) to document and raise awareness on the impact of wellness and healing strategies in our communities and movements
  - o build regional convergences that cross-pollinate and leverage resources for safety and wellness nationally
  - o create dialogues to transfer information and traditions of resiliency and healing practices between generations

### **Moving towards the Next US Social Forum & Beyond...**

We are tremendously grateful to the visionaries of the PMA process (especially Project South) and the US Social Forum organizers. In our own debrief as organizers of both spaces (the PMA and the Healing Justice Practice Space) we recognized that we still did not have enough infrastructure, nor real understanding of what we were trying to create for another world possible that holds all types of mechanisms for wellness and safety for our communities. In particular, the early vision for this work were to bring an integrative team of medical and grassroots healing and harm reduction practitioners to practice together at the USSF in mobile teams of response. We saw this as integrated

throughout the USSF, joined as part of the mission of the convergence. For 2014, our strong suggestion is that healing justice is one of the lenses integrated from the start and that a goal of USSF 2014 is to foster healing and transformation as part of strengthening strategies, visions and relationships.

In USSF 2014, we would like to see models and mechanisms for collective response and safety that meet the needs of participants at the USSF including the inclusion of more community members in the host city as well as the organizers of the entire US Social Forum. What would it look like, we wonder, to meet the mental/emotional/physical/psychic/ environmental needs of participants before, during and after the Social Forum and beyond, in our communities and movements? We believe it could start with the following:

- o Create mobile integrative teams of medical and healing practitioners and a healing practice space that is close to and integrated with the comfort aid station.
- o More intentional institutional support to coordinate a logistics team for medical and healing work.
- o Create a mechanism for providing healing services for the organizing staff of any convergence like the USSF which is ongoing during the whole preparation process as well as during the USSF.
- o While we created on-call teams of people who were skilled in violence reduction, harm reduction, sexual abuse response services, next time there needs to be greater value placed on these mechanisms.
- o It will be important to cross-train practitioners and organizers on such themes as harm reduction; physical and emotional trauma; disability justice; how to safely provide youth only & lgbtq only spaces.
- o Conflict resolution teams need to be created and placed on the ground with strong capacity. Healers and medical practitioners should be additional to the needs of a mediation/conflict team not one in the same.
- o Dropout spaces for instances of abuse, trauma, and dealing with conflict that are separate from the healing justice practice spaces are key.
- o A commitment at least 9 months to a year prior to the convergence to build and support local community practitioners; understanding their conditions and creating resources and/or infrastructure that can be long standing long after the USSF leaves for the community that remains.

In closing, we were committed to a principled process that would transform our ways of resourcing collective emotional/spiritual/physical/psychic/and environmental well being for our communities and movements.. The Healing & Health Justice Collaborative team of grassroots healers, medical practitioners, social workers and more, believed that we could create these spaces to both learn from and honor the legacies of healing and health inside of our liberation movements. Thank you to the local Detroit team, and all of the practitioners who showed tremendous leadership and comradeship at the Forum, and for all those who used the space and all those who attended the PMA. We know that we are not at the beginning or the end of a legacy of

wellness/healing/resiliency practices inside of liberation. Yet we were honored to be a part of imagining another way; another world; another principle and practice that remembers and honors our communal medicines and practices that have sustained our traditions of resiliency to survive.

This report was written by Cara Page and Susan Raffo. All of the work referred to in this document and parts of the document itself were created in partnership with the planning committee of:

Jacoby Ballard  
Mara Collins  
Will Copeland\*  
Stacy Erenberg\*  
Molly Glasgow  
Sage Hayes  
Charity Hicks\*  
Micah Frazier Hobbes\*  
Tanuja Jagernauth\*  
Daniel Llanes  
Telesh Lopez  
Tamika Middleton\*  
Yashna Padamsee  
Cara Page\*  
Jeanette Perkal  
Susan Raffo\*  
Kris Roehling\*  
Sonali Sadequee  
Anjali Taneja\*  
Alejandra Tobar-Alatriz

Special thanks to Project South, Rita Valenti, the Detroit Based USSF Organizers who welcomed us in and the 2007 Atlanta USSF Healing, Health & Environmental Justice Working Group and the USSF Coordinating Committee.

\* Signifies core organizing team (supporting the year prior on strategies, admin, and implementation) the others provided on-site coordination and support.

## **APPENDIX: Integrating Healing & Health Justice with the Medical Team**

One of the goals of the beginning planning for the US Social Forum in Detroit was to integrate healing practices with medical care to provide coordinated care and support throughout the convening. These observations were compiled by Cara Page and Anjali Taneja on the success of this integration in Detroit with suggestions for future work.

This is not a full report on the Medical Team's activities, but a focus on the integration of the two.

### **Goals of the Medical Team**

- Provide comfort aid to participants of the US Social Forum
- Ensure rapid access to medics, doctors, other healthcare providers, spread out over the large indoor and outdoor social forum area, as well as at outdoor rallies and events of the USSF.
- Equip all official comfort aid stations with adequate supplies, adequate advertising about the space, and the ability for rapid communication (designated cell phones etc).
- Provide volunteer docs, nurses, and first responder with appropriate information to allow them to respond confidently out in the field (this includes having adequate supplies for the mobile medics, providing know-how on when to do comfort aid and when to send to urgent care, providing contact info of medical team leaders).
- Ensure that in addition to knowledge and practice around comfort aid, providers are culturally appropriate, anti-racist, queer-friendly, informed about trauma, and open-hearted and empathetic.
- Provide for enough supplies for minor wounds, triaging, resting, and medical care
- Interface naturally and positively with the Healing Practice space practitioners
- Be present at each others' spaces, have good communication with each other
- Refer participants to each others' spaces
- Create algorithm and infrastructure for immediately transporting sick or injured participants to Detroit Medical Center (urgent care or emergency room).
- Provide ambulance services (two ambulances) each equipped with two EMTs, outside convention center during busiest 10-12 hours of forum each day.
- Provide an ambulance for the major opening rally of the USSF.

### **Goals of the Healing Justice Practice Space**

- Locate a space(s) on the ground in Detroit for providing modalities of energy and body wellness techniques that respond to cumulative affects of trauma and oppression in our lives
- Identify conditions/health needs in Detroit specifically for healers to respond to (including acute asthma, diabetes and nutritional illnesses)
- Be a liaison between Health, Healing & Environmental Justice Local Team in Detroit and a national network of healers coming to Detroit to

volunteer and build mechanisms for wellness, safety and response at the US Social Forum

**Planning forward to bring the Medical & Healing Justice Practice Space Teams Together:**

- Our intention was to create mobile integrative teams of medical and healing practitioners, and the healing practice space was so far removed from the comfort aid station. Ideally for next time we would be working in conjunction more with each other and able to set up mobile teams and other safety mechanisms of response.
- That we review applications and pre-team selection for both the medical team and the healing practitioners together to understand shared capacity to provide different types of care based on expertise; as well as a combined orientation
- In the future, it is imperative that there is more intentional institutional support. Their needs to be a hired staff member who is responsible for coordinating a logistics team for medical and healing work.
- It would be ideal to have a mechanism for providing healing services for the NPC staff during the whole preparation process for the USSF too (instead of only being called upon during the USSF).
- We created on-call teams of people who were skilled in violence reduction, harm reduction, sexual abuse response services, but next time there needs to be greater value around the need for having these mechanisms in place. It will be important to think these things through a year out and do some cross-training on such themes as harm reduction; physical and emotional trauma; and what kind of trauma are we expecting to hold at the US Social Forum appropriately?).
- Conflict resolution teams need to be created and placed on the ground with strong capacity. Healers and medical practitioners should not be called to mediate things or deal with conflict resolution while holding a bodily harm/medical support role.
- There needs to be dropout spaces for instances of abuse, trauma, and dealing with conflict. That needs to be a separate team, OR a larger capacity given to the healing and medical teams (more staff, more skills)
- A national collaboration for Health & Healing Justice organized really intentionally for 9 months; including building Detroit; understanding the conditions; really imagining creating political analysis and practice for wellness and safety response at the USSF

**What are the political implications of what happened in this area as we move forward?**

We know of spaces that have co-created medical and wellness spaces that were met with less hostility as what we experienced with the first medical practitioner leader who walked away based on fear and mythology. Some of the best feedback from the USSF was that there was a healing justice space and that there was communication organically between the medical teams and the healers. This is what we had hoped would have been more institutionalized but it happened anyway because the two teams wanted to create something different. Our vision was to not only offer medical care and wellness as a service but to offer a culture of well being that interrupts the traumatic and stressful lives we are living. We imagined having more cross-dialogue between medical and healing practitioners to understand the capacity of how to build within our communities around wellness. The People's Movement Assembly became the only place -- and an important place -- to have that dialogue. IF another world is possible we wanted to imagine alternative economies lifting up and regenerating our traditions not only to provide service, but to shift culture about what is capacity to honor and sustain our collective well being.

We didn't pathologize or judge any of the participants' healing or medicinal needs in either the medical space or healing space; every practitioner was culturally appropriate and sensitive. Most of the volunteers had inadvertently done some work with trauma. People weren't being blamed for their symptoms, discomfort or dis-ease because practitioners came in with a political awareness of the socio-economic situations in Detroit and had humility for how acute and chronic illness manifests based on institutional oppression and was not blamed on the individuals themselves.

### **Moving forward what can we create?**

Every Mechanism for wellness, safety and response as part of the US Social Forum needs to be political in and of itself, from how we are selecting our wellness response teams to how we build systems of wellness, safety and response in synch with the political visioning and practice of the USSF. This includes supporting the well being of all staff and volunteers building up to the USSF. Next time we should create a system for gathering supplies for seeking donations so that we are overflowing with supplies (begin that process six months out at least) that could last for other safety and emergencies for the local community site of the Social Forum.

We were committed to a principled process that would transform our ways of resourcing collective emotional/spiritual/physical/psychic/and environmental wellness. The Healing & Health Justice Collaborative team of grassroots healers and medical practitioners believed that we could create integrative wellness teams that shared organizing principles of how to build spaces of wellness that are held with the honor of the legacies of healing and health inside of liberation. (See Healing & Health Justice Organizing Principles & Schematics).



For the future we want to see more institutional support by the planning and implementation of the US Social Forum overall towards this same vision.

**Thank You again for this opportunity to build, learn and shape a vision for another 'wellness' that is possible!**