Self Care and Community Care within Social Movements
Compiled by Tina Eshaghpour
For Rose Foundation's CLP Community Grantees

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.
–Audre Lorde

"How do we cultivate a work environment where we support each other in taking care of ourselves, and plan and execute our work in strategic and sustainable ways? How do we practice collective or community care?" asks author Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward in "Rethinking Work Culture and Self-care in the Nonprofit Sector."

Here are a compilation of recommendations that emerged in Rose Foundation's review of current literature and outreach to colleagues to share ideas and best practices:

- **Schedule in lunch time and real breaks**. Get up and move around. Take a break from your desk and phone to regroup. Nourish your body.

- **Get outside**. Breathe in some fresh air, even for 10 minutes, in the middle of the day.

- **Shut it down every day.** You don't need to always be "on." Carve out daily time to be off the clock (no phone or email).

- **Identify a small group of like-minded, positive-thinking colleagues**. Get support and advice and share stories with others in the nonprofit sector who are also hard working, passionate individuals. Meet for breakfast, lunch or drinks after work.

- **Plan ahead.** Use your calendar to set aside ample time to work on projects and also carve out time for yourself.

- **Acknowledge accomplishments.** Cross of things off your "to do" list but don't remove them entirely until the end of the day or week so you can see how much progress you've really made.

- **Go away and learn.** Attend a conference to interact with peers, get inspired, rejuvenate, and get professional development.

- **Clue your boss or co-workers in.** Before you have a break down or quit, communicate with your supervisor or mentor that things are getting hectic. Seek their support or thinking through a project or work dilemma.

- **Aim for efficiency.** Take time to really think about what is critical and what isn't. Avoid feeling scattered and ineffective by prioritizing what is important not merely urgent. Keep your effort aligned with those priorities.

As a manager or supervisor, here are some additional ideas that can have organization-wide impact:

- **Encourage employees to not work extended hours.** Leave the office after the work day, go home, disconnect from work. By sending a clear message that you value employees as entire people rather than just as workers you can send the message that they feel valued and cared for, and also give them the freedom to feel like they can put healthy work-life boundaries in place.

- **Offer paid time off.** Floating holidays, Mental Health days, etc. can be costly but ultimately cheaper compared to staff turnover, burnout and illness.

- **Take Organizational Breaks.** Once a day do a quick activity together. Each time someone volunteers to lead a quick exercise/yoga/squats. Consider having a masseuse come in and provide 10 to 20 min chair massages.

- **Identify a Wellness Advocate.** Designate someone on staff work to with individual staff members to help them set goals for personal growth. Send out weekly communications to think about, like healthy recipes or yoga poses or tips to overcome stress.

- **Provide Wellness Accounts.** Set aside funds for staff ($100 to $300/year per person) that they can use for mediation or yoga classes, books, gym membership etc.

- **Schedule Time to Check in with Staff.** Talk with your employees about shared vision and values, and open up discussion forums for them to express how they're doing and offer constructive suggestions for how the pressures of their work could be managed better. Ask, "What are some ways we could be working, or organizing work that might help you function at your best?"

- **Establish a flexible workplace.** Maximize staff productivity by acknowledging the need for flexibility when staff work at the office. Set clear expectations but also invite their feedback on how to achieve better work-life balance. When people are highly stressed they may not be fully aware of how their experience impacts others. Offering direct but supportive observations might be valuable feedback.

RESOURCES

[Being Progressive Shouldn't be Hazardous to Your Health](http://www.alternet.org/story/154191/being_progressive_shouldn%27t_be_hazardous_to_your_health%3A_here%27s_how_to_avoid_our_culture_of_overwork)
(Making the case for why we need to prioritize self care in nonprofits; long article but interesting)
http://www.alternet.org/story/154191/being_progressive_shouldn%27t_be_hazardous_to_your_health%3A_here%27s_how_to_avoid_our_culture_of_overwork

Working for Social Change? Make Self Care a Priority
(author provided a perspective from her experience and provides some practical tips)
http://idealistcareers.org/working-for-social-change-make-self-care-a-priority/

Rethinking Work Culture and Self-Care
(provides both an overview and tips plus includes links to other articles, should people want to read further)
http://idealistcareers.org/rethinking-work-culture-and-self-care-in-the-nonprofit-sector/

11 Ways to Make Work Fun
(a list of fun, low cost, easy ways to infuse fun into the workplace)
http://www.inc.com/jay-steinfeld/11-ways-to-make-work-fun.html

An End to Self-Care
(this is thought piece challenging the notion of self-care; certainly generated some discussion online: pro and con)
http://www.organizingupgrade.com/index.php/blogs/b-loewe/item/729-end-to-self-care

Rose Foundation's
CLP Peer Networking Lunch: Self Care
August 28, 2014

In attendance: **Antonio Diaz**/PODER; **Kelly Carlisle/**ACTA Non Verba; **Keiko Kubo** and **Monica Hastings-Smith**/One Fam-Bike 4 Life; **Sherri Norris**/CIEA; and **Rose Foundation** staff (Tim, Karla, Jasmine, Danielle, Marion and Tina)

Tips/Suggestions from the Group

- Don't be afraid to say NO; set boundaries so you don't stretch yourself beyond your capacity
- Check in with yourself
- Be comfortable in what you're wearing (challenge: overcoming 'what do others think?')
- Flexibility in schedules: work is important but family is, too
- Be intentional about taking vacations
- Paid time off over holidays without tapping vacation time
- Provide health benefits and retirement plans
- Provide a generous vacation plan (tied to seniority)
- Release stress with end-of-day office dance
- Get outside and move: walk around the lake; rollerskate with colleagues
- Office Health Day: take the day together and do an outing (hike, picnic in park)
- Enjoy a meal together
- Remember important occasions: staff birthdays
- Make your meetings fun, engaging

Ten Practical, Low-Costs Steps to Build a Culture of Staff Care

The following are some tips for building a culture of care in your organization and lowering stress.

1. Recognize and appreciate colleague's good work, extra efforts, etc.

2. Managers model good self care, demonstrate work-life balance.

3. Celebrate special occasions, holidays and acknowledge transitions in people's lives (e.g., births, deaths, birthdays, promotions, new jobs). This doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive!

4. During times of high stress, be mindful of each other's well being. Spend time checking in with each other and actively listen to responses.

5. In a high threat environment, provide information in a timely, accurate and consistent manner.

6. Compile a practical "what to" and "how to" organization handbook (e.g., around relocation, orientation issues, and important organization contact details).

7. Use newsletters, emails, meetings to provide information about stress and resilience. This helps normalize people's experiences and expand their repertoire of coping strategies.

8. Host a party or social event that includes family members.

9. Encourage staff to take mini-breaks during the day. And managers, set a good example and take them yourself.

10. After work-related travel, especially if intense, encourage staff to take some down-time.