

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

AMELIA BONOW:

Hi, everybody! Hello! Hello! We're going to let folks filter in for just a moment before getting started.

Hi, everybody! Thanks for being here. We're going to get started in just a sec. Love whoever just is smashing that heart button immediately. We love that energy here at Abortion Academy. Alright. I have a fairly long intro today so I'm just going to get started. And folks obviously can join as they do.

Hello, everybody, and welcome to Abortion Academy. My name is Amelia Bonow. I use she/her pronouns, and I am the executive director of Shout Your Abortion, which is a nationwide organization working to normalize abortion and elevate paths to access regardless of legality, we make resources, campaigns and media intended to arm existing activists, create new ones and foster collective participation in abortion access all over the country.

Today, we are deeply honored and super excited to be talking to writer, activist, and organizer Dean Spade about mutual aid building solidarity, community care and orienting ourselves in the unshakable reality that we have everything that we need right here and right now. And really quick, if you're not familiar, Abortion Academy is a monthly Webinar series where one of our brilliant colleagues takes a deeper dive into their area of expertise, and we've had a lot of incredible guests over the last year and a half, and all these sessions are available on SYA's website if you go click the take action tab in the menu. Really and truly, these sessions and our guests absolutely rip, so if you're looking for something to put on in the background while you're folding laundry or whatever, these sessions help people sort of connect dots between the issues that they're navigating regionally and locally to stuff that's happening at the national and even international level, and just give you fresh ideas to take back into your community. So please check out the archives.

So housekeeping stuff: Audience members will be off camera and muted for security reasons throughout the session, but you will be able to ask questions in the chat throughout the session, and Dean is going to talk to us for about an hour about mutual aid, and then we will have a Q&A. And also we have live Spanish translation available. Shout out Diana and Maria. So if you haven't used that before, you just go down to the Zoom navigation bar, and on the right hand side, there's a globe that says interpretation. You just click that and select Spanish if you'd prefer to listen in Spanish.

Another quick housekeeping item: SYA is currently running an art contest to elevate our new website, you always have options. You can learn more about the contest via our website. The submission deadline is May 1st and first prize is \$1,500, and your design on an SYA T-shirt. You still have time to enter. We are so excited. Please check it out and send it to the creative folks in your life.

Okay, folks. So today we are talking to Dean Spade. Dean has been working in movements for queer and trans liberation, anti-militarism and police and prison abolition for the past 25 years. He's the author of a number of books, including *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis and The Next*, and the brand new title, *Love in a Fucked up World: How to Build Relationships, Hook Up and Raise Hell Together*.

And today I'm going to be handing off facilitation duties to the one and only Jex Blackmore, SYA's organizing director and founding member of the Hydra Mutual Aid Fund in Detroit which works to eliminate barriers to abortion access throughout Michigan, where Jex lives. Jex has over a decade of community organizing experience and just lives and breathes community care, and I think that they are the perfect person to get into it with Dean. And I love Dean's work and voice very, very much, and if you've been following SYA's work for a minute, you know that we are 1,000% aligned with this ethos of community care. And as I was thinking-

-God. Dean, I cry every single Abortion Academy, and I can feel it percolating way sooner than usual because this is just... this is really our shit. And I was thinking back to SB8, to the summer of 2021 when Texas's SB 8 went on the books. This was, of course, the law which enforced a six week abortion ban a full year before Roe V. Wade was overturned, and they did this in a very creative way, and that was by relying on enforcement by private individuals through civil lawsuits. So, specifically, SB8 made it so that anyone who was suspected of aiding or abetting another person's abortion could be sued for \$10,000, and SB8 was blatantly unconstitutional, but it was incredibly effective, and not because there was a wave of litigation or other enforcement by the courts. SB8 was effective as a deterrent that made people afraid to help each other.

Ultimately, the government cannot stop us from having abortions, and they cannot stop us from helping each other have abortions. What they can do is make us afraid to help each other and look, fear is reasonable. This shit is terrifying. It's supposed to be, because, broadly speaking, the fear is the enforcement mechanism. But whether we are talking about abortion or ICE raids or Palestinian solidarity, the government is going to do their very best to make us afraid to help each other so that we just stop. And we have a moral obligation to learn to protect ourselves and the people that we are helping as best we can, and to do it anyway. And I believe in us completely, and I know that Dean does, too, and that's and that's why I'm really excited to talk to you today, Dean. Let's see, I'm seeing now that we're having some...a convo in the chat. I'm wondering if I'm missing something.

So... oh, oh, I see, Dean! We're talking about how to facilitate, and so, Dean, you'd prefer to take questions throughout?

DEAN SPADE:

It's not questions. Well, the way that I facilitate this particular workshop includes periods where people in the chat are brainstorming answers and naming things that are meaningful to them on some charts I'm going to share. It's the way that I make this participatory, even though we're in the webinar format. So get to that part for the first 15 minutes or so. So if Erin's open to working

on opening the chat, then it'd be great if then we'll hear from people more, and maybe we can deal with any security issues by kicking them out if alot of people act weird.

AB:

Okay. I mean, yeah, I think, if you wanna jump in and then Erin can try and finagle that, and we'll we'll kit about that. Yeah. Okay, take it away. Dean.

DS:

Okay, thank you. I'm so sorry that I didn't know. And I should have thought that this is the work this group does is...it makes sense that a lot of times you would probably have a close chat. So-

AB:

-No sorry is allowed.

DS:

But very grateful for the effort.

Okay, I am going to bring us to my slides. I'm so glad to be here. I am so grateful for the work that Shout Your Abortion and Abortion Academy are doing. So happy to be part of it. I have previously gotten to collaborate with Jex, because I heard Jax's amazing presentation on the Final Straw podcast which I just want to recommend to everybody. It's an incredible presentation. A great like it was... I listened to it, and I was like, I have to share this with my students, and then Jex generously came to my class to also answer my students questions and talk about their broader work. So I just want to really recommend that particular presentation as like something I feel good for like community screenings. Good for, like, you know, yeah, listen to it while you do your laundry. Share the information with other people, you know.

Anyway, I'm really happy to be here. Yeah. And I'm just gonna do a bit of mutual aid 101 that I think will be useful even for people who already know about mutual aid, and also for folks who are newer to that framework for thinking about the work that we all need to be doing during this like super intense time of attacks on our communities and our basic necessities. And I'm also going to get in a little bit to the weeds of some of the hard stuff that comes up when we do this work. And some of the skills we have to build to do this work. And I'm going to talk more slowly, because there are some wonderful people interpreting. Sorry about how fast that was. Lifelong goal to learn to speak more slowly. Yeah, I'm joining you all from Portland and... yeah. Just glad to be with you. Okay.

So, a couple access things that I like to offer that help some people. One is that it's fine to not participate in the chat if and when we open the chat. I will read aloud some things like, if you're someone who needs to not look at the screen during this, you'll still get to hear some of what's going on. And usually when I do these, and there's a you know, group people like this, I think we have, like, you know, over 40 people, I don't read every single thing in the chat out loud, but I will like give some samples, and you'll get a sense of what's going on. I'll read what's on my slides. So if you're not looking at the screen, you'll still know what's going on, and I'm also going

to share the link to the slides after so you can look back at them later, if that's useful to you or use them in any groups you're part of. I encourage people to take breaks when they need to. It's being recorded, so if that helps people with any access needs, I hope you know just the sense that this is all available later.

Okay. The things I hope to get through: basics of what mutual aid is, some common problems for groups that come up doing mutual aid work, and what helps some principles that underline mutual aid work, how to avoid charity tendencies that can come up when we do this work, how to create group culture intentionally, dealing with procrastination and perfectionism, which I find can be generators of some pretty big conflicts inside mutual aid groups, and figuring out how to find some joy in working together for liberation, even though we're living under really, really difficult conditions and doing work where there's such high needs that it can be easy to stress out.

So just for getting our feet wet around mutual aid, here's some images. This is an image from, you know, 2020. There were all these big mutual aid food projects, and this is an image from that time.

Great. I think that we just made it so that that webinar chat is open. Thank you so much.

Another image from 2020. Kind of food mutual aid projects that people were really seeing a lot of media coverage of, and a lot of people...a lot of people who'd never done any organizing work before became part of mutual aid projects in 2020 when Covid began, and like learned a lot of skills on the fly and like tried like really beautiful things in their communities. A lot of people made these free fridges. These are some of the ones from New York that a lot of them still are going. I love how beautifully painted these ones are. They really show the underlying feelings that we're trying to create in our communities of abundance and care.

Another, you know, vital example of mutual aid that a lot of us run into day to day is mutual aid that supports other forms of organizing. So street medics are an example. When people are out in the streets protesting and confronting the institutions that are trying to kill us. Street medic projects are often helping that be possible. There's an image here of someone treating somebody for tear gas. Street medics often have masks and water and support people if they get attacked by right wing counter protesters, and they're just like a really beautiful mutual aid project that allows people to more safely do risky tactics in the streets.

This is an image from 2020. You might remember, in Seattle, where I live, there was a police free zone. The police left the precinct, and then there was this whole zone that was like very, you know, compelling political space, and a lot of people showed up who'd never gone to anything before in their lives, like I met people who like drove there from, you know, the middle of Montana or Idaho, and they were like, *I want to join a movement. I've never been part of anything.* And what you see when you arrive at a zone where people are kind of occupying public space is, you see, mutual aid. Mutual aid is the infrastructure of spaces that our people take over. So here you see a lot of free food. This no cop, co-op. Everything is free. Very cute.

Oh, I actually, I usually show another image after that. But there's a kind of like way that when people show up to our movements, they want to do something, they need to meet and someone to talk to them. And we don't have a welcome desk at most, you know, movement spaces. And so actually, mutual aid tents are that. They are like people's first contact with this space where they're looking for belonging, so they're really important in that particular way as well.

This is an image from when the wildfires happened in Northern California, and a huge number of people were displaced and living in the Walmart parking lot. You can see all the smoke in the air, and you see people giving out tents and blankets. This was a really profound moment, because the Walmart parking lot let people live there for a while, and then a lot of people who were more upper class or who had more family support, eventually landed some kind of housing, went to stay with their family or whatever, and then, when it was more poor people left. People who had already been insufficiently housed or itinerant, then the cops came and kicked everyone out. And so there's also just this question about like, when does mutual aid become criminalized? When it's serving who? Kind of the long term trends of criminalization of mutual aid which I'll talk more about later, and it's highly relevant to abortion and contraception work that we're all concerned about here.

This is an image of people saving each other. I think this is during Hurricane Hugo. You know, we see a lot of this like when really big disasters happen. The government doesn't really show up, you know, especially more and more. FEMA, you know, does nothing at all, or offers homeowners loans, like after Hurricane Sandy, they offered loans like who needs more debt when you just lost your house in a hurricane caused by ecocidal states and businesses. But what really happens is people just show up for each other like people are relentlessly generous in the face of acute disaster. And we see a lot of images like this during every flooding and storm.

Okay, so mutual aid. What does it mean to me? It's the part of our movement work where we offer each other material support to survive existing conditions. So there's lots of parts of our movement work. There's parts where we block their pipelines. There's parts where we organize campaigns to stop them from building the next extraction project or jail. Mutual aid is the part of our overall movement ecosystem, which often overlaps with other parts where we're meeting each other's basic needs to survive.

And it's only mutual aid if it's based in a shared analysis about the root causes that the systems are to blame for these crises, not the people in crisis. So it's not that you're bad for being unhoused. It's that there's a racist, capitalist housing system, and we're going to help people get what they need as much as we possibly can in the face of that. And it's not mutual aid, in my opinion, unless it includes an invitation to collective action like, *hey, you know, here we are giving out tents. Please take a tent if you need one, or water, or whatever, and also like. Would you like to get involved? Would you like to be part of our project and give out tents to other people? Would you like to join us next week at? We're going to go protest at that landlord's house like, do you want to be part of this?* And you don't have to say yes. We'll still give you the

tent, you know, but it's an invitation to collective action, because in the context of mutual aid, we believe that this isn't going to change through like you becoming a person who doesn't need a tent somehow, like right, like a charity model like you just need to go to church or not take drugs or whatever. We believe that this is only going to change with all of us getting together and destroying the systems that are hurting our people and leaving us in crisis.

So we're talking about mutual aid as opposed to charity. Charity is something that celebrates rich people. Charity is like *look at how amazing Bill Gates is. He gave money*, you know, whatever. It's always been about lifting up the rich and being like look at their generosity instead of like, look at how the concentration of wealth produces crisis for the many.

Charity operates in a way that blames and controls people who are in crisis. So it's like, what's wrong with you that you're homeless. You need to take this class. You need to go through this training. You need to pee in this cup. You need to, you know, whatever. And it separates people into deserving and undeserving like you can't get this because you are undocumented, or you have a felony on your record, or you have too many children, or you don't have children, or like whatever. So charity is a framework that blames people for being in crisis, and sets up an idea of the deserving and undeserving poor. And this is something we always want to really avoid noticing this tendency, like, is it coming up in any mutual aid group. Ultimately, charity is about justifying and legitimizing the existing systems, like *the system is fair. Oh, there's a few people who are deserving. We'll give them housing, or whatever*, put them on a waiting list, more likely, but not actually resolving the underlying causes right, and instead saying those causes and the people who benefit from them, the rich are like, good and okay.

Some myths that, like our backdrop in this whole, all what I'm talking about there's a mythology that we have that social change comes from government, corporation and corporate media and elites. That myth, you know that, like we should wait for them to deliver what we need, and then we just need to convince them. And if just the right article was in the New York Times, or if the right judge made the right decision, like that kind of like passive passivity, is produced by that. We're also told that our movements should be like charismatic leaders who appeal to these elites and like, make the right speech, and then they'll like, be convinced, and that's how we'll get change. That's a very top down story. And in that story, we're told that ordinary people can only participate in this removed way like vote for those people, donate to those people's nonprofits, post on social media maybe march once in a while, but mostly that we have a passive role, and that like the action is somewhere else. And the reality is that social change only actually happens when huge numbers of ordinary people organize to fight back, to disrupt business as usual, and to make it impossible for these systems to continue what they're doing.

The key thing here is that injustice is not a result of misunderstanding like Liberalism has this myth of education like if everyone knew, then it would stop. It's like everyone knew that the war in Iraq was based on lies, and it continues till today. Everyone, you know, like the world knows, you know, the plight of Palestinians under settler colonialism, yet, it continues today like there's, you know, everyone knows that Ecocide is the result of these emissions, and yet they expand. So injustice is not a result of misunderstanding. It's a result of domination. We don't need to

convince our captors. We need to destroy them right like, upend their systems and take our lives back. And so, you know, our movements are actually not about whether we have a good electoral strategy, can get the right person, you know, elected. That's not going to work because it's their system. Our movements are actually made of our relationships and our ability to move together, trust each other enough, and provide for each other and fight back.

Okay, so the reason this matters the reason I put this in here, and like how it directs us towards mutual aid, is that those myths are really demobilizing. They encourage us to limit our resistance to passive or symbolic acts. The call for mutual aid is a call to take material action, to like, actually like, if we think people should have access to reproductive care, to actually give it to them, and organize that ourselves in our lives. If we think people should have access to trans healthcare, like to actually organize that ourselves, instead of hoping that lawmakers or hospitals or somebody will start doing the right thing. They're not gonna save us. And the myths we've learned really discourage bold, collective action. They encourage us to wait around and wring our hands and be like, oh, no, you know, trans people in Florida or Texas aren't getting what they need when I could actually just like, realize that there's unhoused trans people coming out of foster care and prison and jail in my own community, wherever I live, who are not getting what they need, and I can take immediate action to support them.

One of the examples I like to use is the Montgomery Bus Boycott. I feel like I was taught this in school as like, you know, Rosa Parks didn't give up her seat, and then Martin Luther King made speeches, and then segregation ended. But reality is that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a giant mutual aid project in which working class black women coordinated transportation for thousands of people, tens of thousands of people for 18 months. And a lot of that they did, the picture you see on the left, they did these huge food projects where they sold all this, cooked and sold all this food to buy cars to drive people around. And then they walked with people in groups because it wasn't safe to walk on the streets because white people were like going to attack you, for you know, because they hated the boycott like it was such a massive mutual aid project, and all of that is erased in that story we're told where it's just like a charismatic leader will make a speech, and that'll end oppression as opposed to thousands of people or any people whose names you've never heard will work together to provide what people need.

Another really famous mutual aid project, of course, is the Black Panther Party's Free breakfast program. They also had an ambulance program. They had health clinics. They stood for the idea of black liberation and black power, black autonomy. They were interested in armed self-defense. They took this massive radical action of naming that the United States is at war against Black people and saying that Black people can meet their own needs. And these breakfast programs were a space where families would come and find out that, like they're, you know, I've heard these beautiful interviews with people who were children who came and got food there like this feeling like our poverty isn't like a result of our failing. It's a result of white supremacy, and we can join a group that is going to stand up against that, right? And so this destigmatization, which there's so much stigma when you're the person in poverty or crisis.

Another picture from the Black Panther Party's free breakfast programs.

Thinking about reproductive health, mutual aid. You know, examples that obviously come to mind, people actually working to give each other abortion and contraception access including breaking laws to protect, to get people medicines and procedures, right. This is a lot of what's on our minds now. And there's a long history of this. I'm thinking about people who've worked really hard to get condoms into jails and prisons or like, I work on a Catholic campus where people are not allowed to distribute condoms, still. People who have actually gotten each other unlawful abortions. We'll talk about that more. Birth work, right, is a huge part of our mutual aid and our reproductive health movements right supporting people to have care around birth that's anti-racist, that's not transphobic, that's available to people who are poor, that's not centered in patriarchal norms. People doing hormone distribution, not through doctors, people doing it DIY. There's a lot of projects like that emerging now as trans healthcare becomes increasingly criminalized and excluded. Sex worker support and sex worker organizing like vital work around supporting criminalized workers and around bodily autonomy. And I'm thinking a lot about... I live in Seattle where there's a really beautiful massage parlor worker organizing project that supports immigrant workers in massage parlors who face ICE raids as well as exploitation by their bosses. So that kind of sex worker support. Obviously childcare. Huge part of our reproductive health and wellness in our movements, and has a long history in all of our movements as a politicized type of mutual aid.

And I'm curious, if the chat is working for all of us, if people would list in the chat examples of reproductive health mutual aid projects that inspire you. Let's see if it works. Are people able to chat from the group? Condom Fairy, Hydra Fund, Sex Worker Organizing Project. Love it.

Oh, actually, I think people are. Some of some of you are chatting just to the host and panelists, and maybe you mean to be chatting to everyone. The Breadbox Project in Kentucky, the Yellowhammer Fund. So If you want to make sure...if you want everyone to see your chat, make sure you're chatting to everyone and feel free to put links in-

-Las Libres. If you want people to learn about these projects who may not know about them yet. Looks like there's some accompaniment networks happening in Mexico. Autonomous Body Shop in Pennsylvania. Self-injection workshops. Yeah. Exactly. So much, and I think so much harm reduction work. We could see so many different kinds of harm reduction work.

Transcamp World. 313 Care Collective, Street Medics in Detroit. Love it. Thank you all.. Feel free to keep putting them in. That's really fun to see what people come up with.

Couple of things I want to say about-

-Just one more piece around mutual aid that's a kind of bigger theoretical piece for people who are interested in that. So like we're told that the government does or will do poor relief and disaster relief. And a lot of times there's a fantasy. I think I would consider it a liberal fantasy. I think a lot of people hold this fantasy, whether they identify as liberals or not, that we will someday, or somehow get a caregiving state that will do these things that will provide for poor people that will provide for disaster. And the reality is that we have a state here in the US that is

aimed at cultivating white settler life that has always given any shred of care through a very racialized, gendered colonial lens. You know, when we think about the New Deal [where] there's care that was provided that the Social Security administration emerged in the New Deal. And you know, many others [like] the GI bill and many other programs. And they've always given out care in ways that like give more money to men than women, and exclude Black people and undocumented people. And like, I mean, it's just like...it's like they give the smallest amount they can give to stabilize after a like uprising of some kind like, in this case, the uprisings of the early 1900s against capitalism, and then they give it in a really conditional way that leaves out people in our communities and cultivates like the white settler family, and so letting go-

And also, like in our lifetimes, they've just totally moved away from it. Like all of them Democrats and Republicans are just like absolutely no to the Welfare State. Let's put all that money towards border enforcement, military prisons and police. So, just letting go of the idea that this the State, that the United States that it's a job-

-or Washington State, or Seattle, or the city of Portland, or whatever are that they're designed for care. They're not designed for care. I think it's really really useful when we let that go, and we can turn towards caring for each other. Whatever relief they give is always conditional, exclusive, and they revoke it when the crisis of their legitimacy is over. Right? There's lots of beautiful writing about how they expand welfare programs briefly after uprisings, and then they shut them down as quickly as possible. You could look at the Covid checks that came out during 2021, and then oh, they're gone, even though the economy is still terrible, and more people are unhoused than ever.

People often ask, you know, if I'm pushing for mutual aid like, how will we ever have that at scale? Like that's like a question people often ask. And I just want to say, like, in terms of this theoretical piece, we're often asked to imagine that things are only at scale if they're at the national scale so we're told something like the ACLU is a more important, you know, organization than your local anarchist info shop, or your local doula project, or whatever, because things matter if they like if they have a DC office, and they happen, like, you know, centralized. And I think that's really not true, like things are actually far less responsive when they operate at that level of centralization and everything we know about the history of disasters and disaster responsiveness, which is the way to understand the crises we live in, is that it's best done at the most local level. So the kind of scale we want is not the scale of top down centralization that looks like the state, and like some nonprofits. We want the scale of lots of autonomous local projects that are networked, sharing information and resources and responding to the conditions in their communities, so that our doula project is happening in Spanish, and this doula project is influenced by serving a Muslim community, and this one is really working towards supporting trans people giving birth, and this one is really focused on the west side of the city, and whatever. you know. And they all know each other, and they're all sharing their best resources and care, but they don't like having one boss or one way. They're not trying to standardize like we don't have a single standard right? We might share useful criteria. But we don't decide that there's like one way to do this, one language to do it in, one pace, like that actually, that undermines responsiveness to specific community conditions. So I

really want to help people imagine that there's kind of a thing people say, like mutual aid work. It's also small and like that could never be anything. And it's like, actually, that's the scale of resistance. We believe in bottom up resistance that's networked. It can be immensely strong and powerful, but actually it's stronger. And the other thing is a big lesson from the 60s and 70s movements is that when you centralize, it's easier for law enforcement to infiltrate. It's easier for there to be like fucked up like sexist power dynamics that like come from on high, you know, like hierarchical, centralized decision making is very vulnerable for things that undermine our movements.

So when I think about the state in this way that I'm describing, it includes acknowledging that sometimes they give us concessions like when we organize really well, sometimes like, Oh, shit! Now they're they're they're copying us. They're creating a program that provides some of what we were providing. Or they're, you know...and that we can acknowledge concessions really as like a sign of the strength of our organizing, and still never believe that they are going to give us what we need, or that we have to stop fighting, right, because as soon as you stop fighting, they take away the concession right? So it's a way of being able to be like, yes, it's great when sometimes they give something out that people need, but we shouldn't count on it, and we shouldn't see it as the place that will someday like meet our needs.

We're living in a moment where stakes are really, really, really, really high, like things are extremely dire, you know, like we're living in the midst of an ecological crisis that's threatening all life on Earth, and that's disrupting our access to the basic necessities. We're living in a moment of fascism and colonial control that is targeting women and queer people and trans people in like really intense ways. So many people we love are being targeted in the intensity of Zionism in the United States, and like criminalized and deported in just like profound and terrifying ways.

So we have to really meet each other's needs. There's no chance that this administration is about to meet our needs. You know what I mean like they're literally trying to kill us all and deport us all so like, how do we turn away from our false hopes in state solutions, and instead turn towards each other and build faith in one another?

Okay, just checking my time. Okay.

So some common problems that face mutual aid groups that maybe some of you have already seen in the work you're doing, or that may come up in work that you're scheming. A lot of groups struggle whether or not to seek out money, especially grant money, and a lot of times there's strings attached to money like if you seek out grant money, then you have to say that you're not...I mean the worst ones are like you're not allowed to serve undocumented people, or you're not allowed to serve people with criminal records like some of the worst stuff. But it also can just mean, like you have to do certain kinds of grant reporting, and you have to track your money in certain ways. Things that like, for some groups can feel...can kind of push people towards like very technocratic systems in their group that might like lift up the leadership of people with certain kinds of education or class or race privilege, or might like create business-y professional

dynamics that are really bad for community organizing. That can be hard. Strings attached to the money just can be hard. I mean, a really common thing that's just really true for us is that there's not enough money to meet everyone's needs like lots and lots of groups want to, you know, fund everyone's bail or fund, everyone's abortion, or everyone's transportation or pay everyone's rent. And they're like...there's so much crisis in our communities, and that can be really stressful. And that's like, not our fault. That's the conditions we're living under.

A lot of groups struggle when there aren't enough resources to decide who gets the help, you know, or even just like all these different orgs want us to come table at their events, but we can only do three. We only have enough people to do that three times a week. How do we decide? Or all these groups want us to get them masks, or all these people need a ride or whatever. And so sometimes people in groups get into fights about [things] like, *I think we should prioritize this. I think we should prioritize that.* And in my experience, most times both are good arguments like both...yes, I wish we could prioritize everyone. Sometimes I see a lot of groups blaming themselves and each other for things that are actually the conditions of crisis that we're in.

A lot of times I see groups that want to help people and then be overwhelmed by the fact that, like, *if I need help with my rent this month, I'm probably gonna need help with my rent next month and the next month and the next month*, like people don't have like small easy to solve problems. A lot of groups that started in 2020 that were like raising money for people in their communities, and they were like, yeah, we'll help people with groceries here and there, and rent here and there, and then they soon met many people who have like intractable, difficult problems like they have disabilities, but the government won't give them disability benefits, or that it's not enough to cover rent, or they need a major fix on their trailer, or they need a new wheelchair that costs thousands of dollars that the government won't pay for like people have, like deep, intractable crises. And also a lot of people who are in crisis, have a lot of chaos in their lives, like people are dealing with active addiction or really serious mental health issues, and a lot of groups like become really... it's a real struggle like these are real conditions.

I think a lot of groups and individuals struggle with how to have boundaries, but also be loving and generous like we don't want to throw anyone away. Of course, we don't want to decide people are too difficult or complicated. Of course we want to go to the people who are in the most crisis, and then how to be like, and *I can't have you live in my house forever, or I can't take calls after midnight*, or whatever you know.

These pressures just create a lot of conflict in groups. So I just want to name them, because I find that a lot of people who are doing mutual aid, especially if they're new to it, when these things come up, they're like mad at each other or blaming themselves instead of being like *oh, this is what it's like to do this work now.*

Some things that can help with these pressures. One is remembering that we can't do it perfectly. It's not possible. I really like, rely on [that] we are imperfect people doing imperfect work. We make mistakes. We learn on the job we learn in front of each other. We actually can't like a lot of people's mutual aid includes things that involve raising money. We cannot raise

enough money to undo the boot of the state on our necks that is taking everything out of our communities like we don't have enough here to meet everyone's cash needs. We might we-

-I think, between us, we have like... if we added our time, we have a lot of time to do each other's childcare, to accompany each other to appointments, to listen to each other when we're in crisis, to hold each other when we're having a mental health breakdown, like we have a lot of stuff when people...but like, yeah, we don't always have enough people or money to do the things we want. The conditions are the problem, not us.

It really helps for us to not be attached to getting our way like in a group for me to be like, *I want us to prioritize like immigrant moms on the south side*, and some other people in the group are like *we need to prioritize wheelchair users and people in, you know, who are coming out of this hospital*, you know. And it's like can I just try to like, see all the sides and be like, I don't need to get my own way? And can I be open to finding a way for the group to move forward, even if it's not exactly what I wanted?

Trusting the wisdom of the group. This is hard. We're living in a society where we were told not to trust each other. We were told other people are a threat. Other people are against you. They're going to take something from you. So how do I learn to trust the wisdom of the group, even if it's not my number one?

And it really helps if we directly communicate with each other. I have other workshops which I recommend about direct feedback, instead of gossiping, or ghosting, or blowing up at people, because I never told them that what they were doing was upsetting me. These things really break up our groups. So how do I learn how to directly say, *hey, when you missed the meeting, it left me feeling like I had to hold the bag, and I wonder if you could tell me ahead of time?*, or *hey, when you don't do your task, it feels like this*, or *when you do my task for me without checking in it, feels like you don't think I'm competent* or *when you guys all went out for drinks after the meeting, I felt left out* or like, How do we? And then if I need to talk to a friend, how do I ask for a confidential conversation about what's bothering me coming from a place of love for whoever it is I'm talking about, and an assumption that I'm going to go back and directly communicate? We are not good at this.

Okay, and I just want to say, and maybe, Erin, you can put this in the chat for me. I have a whole broader set of workshops about some of these specific skills. And it's called...they're through BCRW, and it's called Building Capacity for Mutual Aid Groups. There's like five online workshops. And they're all on a page on my website that Erin can post from that page I gave you. That would be super helpful in case people want to go deeper, and you can watch these by yourself, or with a group. All the slides are there. You can do the workshops for each other.

Okay, so mutual aid principle. I think I've already been through some of this. The system of the people suffering under it, or what creates poverty, and we do mutual aid work with a commitment to dignity and self-determination for people in need or crisis. We don't believe we know what they need. We actually listen to them, right, which is different from how charity and

social services work. We do this work with a long term commitment. So yeah, we live in a society that's like, yeah, go volunteer at a soup kitchen on Thanksgiving and take a selfie. And then you've contributed. You know what I mean. This is not what we're doing. We're not doing this like we're not dipping a toe in. We've started a project to give people rides to abortion clinics, and we're doing it [for the] long term. And as we do it, we're learning, *oh, we really want to have people who speak Spanish with us. Oh, we really need, you know, to have space in our car for kids and have car seats, and then take care of those kids while their parent is inside.* As you go, you keep figuring out how to do it better.

Mutual aid is the way that most people enter social movements. So we really want to have-

-And there's a lot of people who are like in agony about what's going on in the world and do not know how to get involved, and they're being constantly told by the liberal establishment to just like go to a useless march that will supposedly convince the elected to do something different, or wait to vote or donate money to a nonprofit, you know, like that's all they're ever being told to do. So we want to find ways to welcome people in. We want to have a lot of groups that have open meetings and pathways for new people to join and make it fun and really draw people in and build more mobilized, skillful people in our communities who can lead this work in lots of different ways.

If we're doing secure work, if we're doing something together that breaks the law, we might not start with the open meeting for that part of the work. In order even to get more people into that kind of work, we need to have some part of it that's above ground that welcomes new people. [It's] really, really vital that a lot of groups start...they don't ever open room for new people, and then the people who started it, you know, get sick or have a kid or move away, and like, it becomes really small and really burn out and unfocused. So we got to figure out how to create groups that can let in new people and make them fully skilled to co-run the group.

We do political education in our groups. We are like, like, you know, people get interested. People come into our movements with some particular interest, like they really care about getting access to people for abortions. They care about immigrant kids, or they care about one thing, and our job is to try to grow each other's solidarities. So we do that in lots of ways. We do political education in our groups like we're going to have a disability justice workshop. Or we're gonna do a... we're gonna all watch Jex's presentation and learn more of the history of what we're doing and how it relates to racism and capitalism, and you know these broader forces. You know, we're all trying to expand each other's and our own solidarities. And also it might just be like, Oh, we're sitting at this table together at the Mutual Aid fair, and we start talking. And I'm like, what do you mean you're a prison abolitionist? How does that work? And you're like, what do you mean you're an anarchist. What does that mean? You know, and we just are getting to learn about each other's politics and perspectives and growing our solidarities.

As I mentioned, [a] vital skill in all mutual aid work is willingness to accept and give each other feedback right? Just letting...like being willing and interested in learning. This is way harder than

it sounds. Resolving conflicts instead of kicking each other out or leaving, [and] moving towards each other in conflict instead of away.

Mutual aid groups are really committed to transparency, unlike, you know, all the institutions we live under, the big nonprofits, the universities, the businesses, the government. We actually are like, where did the money come from? How'd the decision get made? Like we want to share that with each other. It builds stronger groups.

Most mutual aid groups operate through consensus decision making. You know, people don't want a boss, especially for unpaid work. Almost all the mutual aid work we do will be unpaid. Our movements, you know, if we're getting paid, we're probably getting paid by our opponents, the government or philanthropists. So most of our work will be unpaid, especially if it's really bold and important work, and people don't like to stick around to be bossed around. They want to participate. They want to have a say in how the work goes. I have some workshops on consensus decision making that might be helpful if it's a new idea for you. It's not hard to do, but it's a new skill for most of us, because most of us live like we work at jobs where there's a boss, we go to school, and there's people bossing us around. Our families have bosses.

Okay, so I wanted to spend a little time....there is a chart about mutual aid tenancies versus charity tenancies. Erin, will you post a link to that in the chat? And I wanted us to all look at it together, and just see what we notice, what stands out, and talk about it together in the chat. Thank you so much.

So let's take a moment to look at the chart and feel free to just write in the chat what is standing out to you. [I] wonder if any of you have seen any of these tendencies in your own mutual aid organizing?-

-Oh, not seeing the chart. Do you see this? It's just...It was just put in the chat by SYAWebinars. It's a link. Thanks.

Is there anything you recognize in groups that you've been part of, like maybe jobs you've had at nonprofits, or in schools or hospitals or things you've seen in community groups.

Oh, the link to consent. Oh, yeah, the link to the consent decision making stuff is that prior link that Erin dropped that workshop series, Building Capacity for Mutual Aid Groups. There is a whole thing on how to do consensual decision making in there.

Eligibility criteria, Brinkley says, yeah, a lot of our groups tell certain people they can't get help. They need to follow government regulations and report those according to those regulations. Yeah, thanks, Deborah. Yeah, it's a common charity model framework.

You know, and I have to say, a lot of mutual aid groups start and charity stuff creeps in, right? Like, I've seen groups that were like, *yeah, we don't want to work with drug users*. That's a really common stigma in our society that carries over that people will carry it over into their mutual aid

groups [and it's] horrible, you know, like...yeah, depoliticizing of things like menstrual product access. That's another thing about mutual aid. We can and should say, this is political. We're not giving this out in a depoliticized way. We're giving this out in a political way. We're like, you know, free access to everything, for everyone, total bodily autonomy, and, you know, pro-sex. All of our messages, we get to have them in there and keep them in there.

Amelia talks about resonating with the siloing caused by being chained to capitalism and philanthropy. Everyone's fighting to fund their project instead of the overall ecosystem of care. Yeah, great. Thank you.

Single issue work. Yep, that's very common in the nonprofit world where like people are not at all connecting the dots like they're not showing up for the fight against the jail in their town while they do their work to support youth or whatever, even though youth are going to be funneled to that jail.

Yeah, thank you. Yeah. Yeah. Morgan asks about consensus decision making sometimes leading to a bland, final result in creative fields. Yeah, if you, if you look deeper into the materials, the consensus model I use is about being able to do things in teams. It's just about having people in a group not have one boss, but instead come together about what the big principles are, and then be free to do things in teams or spoke. So you could have a team that's doing the art build or a team that's doing the meals or whatever, but knowing what decisions have to go back to the whole group, and what decisions really don't and can be implemented in smaller groups so that you don't lose that creative spark or have to have everything go through everyone, but also so that one little group doesn't start [to] go off and do something really like counter to what the whole group would want, or promise something for the whole group. So it's a lot about having that discernment so that people can do that autonomous work.

Yeah. Great people are talking about secrecy, things that are behind closed doors that happen a lot in the charity model. Great. Thank you.

Okay, so group culture is the second thing I want to talk about. When we're starting groups or when we're joining groups, or when we're reviving groups that need to be revived, or when we're just in groups, it's useful to know. They have cultures which include many things like the signals people get when they first come in. I mean, this is pretty huge like were you welcomed? Like so many people try to join stuff and are like everyone seemed unfriendly. This is like a huge problem in our movements. We're so snobby. We're so like you didn't know the right word. You weren't the same age as me. You weren't wearing a cute outfit like we've got to get over that shit, or we're never going to get anywhere. We need huge movements, right? How does the group feel? Or what kind of norms do we have? Are we late? Are we, you know, punctual? Do we celebrate? Do we sing? How do we give feedback to each other? All groups have these cultural norms. Family groups have them, social groups have them, schools, every kind of group. We're part of friend groups. What are the dominant feelings, warmth or coolness, urgency or spaciousness, scarcity or faith in abundance?

And these norms are created by the people who start the group, and they also change as people come in, and we can change them on purpose. We can change the culture of a group on purpose. And it's just important to recognize that, of course, the conditions we live under are really impacting the groups like we all have a lot of internalized white supremacy and patriarchy and capitalism. And there's actual scarcity. And people we love are actually dying of the things that we're working on. And, you know, it's important to recognize that. And then we can still decide to try to work on our group culture.

So, Erin, if you could drop in the chat, the group culture chart, let's look at this together. What stands out in the chart? What tendencies do you witness in groups you are part of or work with? And also, what helps us change group culture. What have you seen help move towards the aspirational qualities on the chart?

Dysfunctional communication avoidance of conflict. Yeah. I mean, this is so huge like I haven't been having this real... I don't know if anyone else has this thought. But I have had this realization that in our culture, in the dominant US culture [that] saying no at all is like something people are terrified of and think is conflict, which, of course, is horrible in our sexual relationships, horrible in our friendships and family relationships, terrible at work like we are not allowed to say no. A lot of us don't let ourselves say no. It's a very big deal, like that kind of avoidance of conflict to the level of not even being allowed to have a preference, or know our boundaries, or doing everything sideways, like disappearing, avoiding, but never actually think, *no, thank you*, or *I don't want that*, or *that's not for me*, leads to so much conflict.

Overworking in martyrdom. Yeah, thank you. Few people [are] doing most of the work. Yeah.

Yeah, Jay says, 'I think it helps when we let people select into roles and trust them. It feels small. But letting an extrovert be part of the work of welcoming folks and introverts work on data files instead of expecting everyone to do everything'. Yeah, I think that's true. And I also think there's a little bit in our subcultures, and that maybe, I think some of us share, of people realizing that they have a quality, and then overly limiting themselves. So I think there's a combination of being like, *yeah, that's not your number one, but do you want to try it? What if I accompany you? I know you don't want to facilitate, because you prefer to be in the background, but we think it's really good for the group if everyone tries facilitating sometimes, would you facilitate with me?* Like a certain amount of offering people chances to do things outside their comfort zone without any force, you know, without any coercion, I think, is a bit useful in our groups, because I think a lot of people are like reading an Instagram personality quiz, and then deciding they can't do a lot of things, you know what I mean? But I also think, Jay, you're right, like, just being like, yeah, we don't all have to be the same like some people don't like to cook, or whatever. Some people are really good at, you know...like, really love to drive. And others are like, that's actually really hard on me, you know, just like really being open to who people are, and all of us also being willing to chat that out with each other.

Okay, I just want to say another thing about these charts. The point of these charts is that you could use them in your own group. So instead of us being in a group and like accusing each

other of making the culture bad, which is a lot of what we do. We're like you rush us, or you, whatever we could just be like *hey, let's all have a 20 minute conversation about this chart. What do you guys see on this chart? What's missing? What do you think is good [or] working really well in our group? Is there anything on this chart anybody wishes we had in this group culture?* It can be a neutral way to talk about what's going on in here. And I didn't say this, but a lot of groups get really focused on what's going on out there. How many meals did we provide? How many rides did we provide? How much money did we raise? It's very capitalist to be focused on the external and the deliverables, and it's very feminist and anti-racist to be like what's going on in our group? How are we doing? Can we build a really like affirming space to stay in it together? And so being able to talk about that space is what these tools are about.

Okay, [a] couple more things before I bring us...

Okay. You all know this, but I have to say this. Mutual aid includes rule breaking and law breaking, and this is something that I think we heard in the introduction really beautifully. An example that I had to put in this, of course, is like, you know, something we all look to in all of our movements is the work of people who have broken the law to provide abortions when that has been illegal. That is so inspiring to us right now. It's inspiring the DIY Hormones movement. [It's] people taking risks to make sure each other has what they need.

Other examples. I love these images. They're from 2020 in Echo Park, in Los Angeles. There were a number of homeless people living in tents in the park, and the city was planning to raid and send these sanitation trucks to, like, you know, destroy people's encampments. And all these people put their bodies between the sanitation trucks and the unhoused people in the park and stopped the sanitation trucks. It was really-

-To me this, like these are very beautiful images, and it worked, and actually, for many months, the city stopped trying to raid the encampment and a really beautiful sort of mutual aid material culture emerged in Echo Park, and people had like solar showers, and all these food projects there was like a lot going on there to support the unhoused people living there, And it was like during the beginning of Covid.

And then in March 2021, the cops spent millions of dollars. Los Angeles spent millions of dollars to raid the encampment in this highly militarized raid, and thousands of people showed up to try to stop it. And I think it's just a really significant moment, like, what does it look like when we have the deep politicization of mutual aid? How many of us would have had to show up to stop the raid? That's the deep question. Because there are raids like that happening every single day in our cities. What would it look like if we had enough people every time to stop the sweeps of encampments? That is a deep question for me, and I'm very moved, I think, probably I've mentioned. Maybe if any of you I've mentioned this book constantly, but I love this book by Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting*. Maybe someone could put it in the chat. There's actually a free PDF of it online. *In Defense Of Looting* by Vicky Osterweil, [a] brilliant trans writer and journalist. And in this book, she talks about a lot of really incredible mass action that's really helpful right now for how terrifying the conditions are. And she talks about in the early 1930s, the depression

is on. There's tons of people being evicted. There's a lot of poverty. There were these eviction riots that would happen where like hundreds or thousands of people would like go through the streets like, hey, someone's being evicted down the street and gather people and stop the evictions with their bodies like sit down on all the furniture, push all the cops out of the house, not let them move any of the stuff. And this happened in many cities, but the research Vicki did shows that in the early 1930s in New York City, 77,000 households, evictions were prevented by this method. A third of all evictions in New York City in the early 30s were stopped by people in big groups physically stopping them. That costs no money, and just thinking about that like, what would it look like to have a culture where people were just like ready to go outside like, oh, they're walking by. I'll go and join them, and also how much safer it is to do that if we're all doing it together? If there's hundreds or thousands of us doing it? Like, to me, that's the kind of inspiration I need right now, when I see this terrifying coup happening really far away where I can't. You know what I mean? Just feel like in DC... like it just feels like... I feel so powerless in this moment, and that makes me feel a different kind of people power like I love reading that Meg was there at Echo Park. Thank you for sharing that, Meg.

Okay, another example. Maybe you all have seen these images. This was in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2017 or 2019, when this guy came home, and he was in his van, and ICE was there to arrest him, and his neighbors just like made a loop around the van, and stayed until ICE left. Like just thinking about, you know, what does it take for us to just protect each other with our bodies? These kind of material actions that are not solely symbolic? You know, they're like actually putting ourselves between people in our community and the state.

One more example, maybe you know about this, moms for housing. These black moms in Oakland who took over this empty, foreclosed housing. These are some of their allies, standing outside at night to protect their space. They had these families living in this foreclosed housing that was empty. And I just want to show you [that] these are the cops that came to move them out like just how high stakes this is, how our opponents are willing to unlock the most militarized policing against these families, like how badly we need to organize like this massive people power against this level of violence.

Okay, just looking at the time. Okay, I've got a few more minutes to give you a little bit more. So a couple of things, these are just like tools, you know. I do see perfectionism and procrastination as some of the biggest obstacles to the day-to-day work in mutual aid. Most people live with one or both of these. For years and years, I thought I wasn't a perfectionist, because I'm like, oh, my shit's a mess like look at my slides. They're all different fonts, like, I'm like, you know, I feel like I'm this person who like just slap, dashing everything together and moving too fast. And then someone was like, that's because you're a perfectionist, Dean, like your belief that you're imperfect, you know you get it? So I think a lot of us could look at this. And also even people who overwork a lot still procrastinate. So even if you're the bottom liner at your, you know, in all the projects, and you're like, you know, you're a worker. Most of us still are working very chaotically like, *oh, now I'm working on this thing. But it's not the thing I really need to work on that's due later today. Instead, I'm working on this*, you know? And now, I'm lost in these other emails, like, even over workers, have problems with actually working in a flow of priority.

One of the most useful tools I ever learned about this is to create a prioritized list because then every time you sit down, you don't have the chaos of decision-making fatigue. Instead, you're like my adult self told me three days ago, Dean, work on the thing that's due soon, even if you feel avoidant of it, rather than turning towards these other emails or this other project. [I] really recommend going through having a prioritized list. And, like, you know, updating it once a week, but just using that as your guide, you'll feel more satisfaction, I think,

Perfectionism and rich judgment in our movements is a lot of what leads us to like being afraid of being canceled if we say the wrong thing or canceling each other for saying the wrong thing. What if we were like, yeah, we're all super imperfect. Yeah, like, you know, you could be like, Dean, I really like some of the stuff he does, and also like Oh, my God! He makes so many mistakes, and he's just done something in his thing that I feel like wasn't good with my access need and was ableist. And I'm going to tell him and give him the feedback. And you know, like, could we all just be like, yeah. And then I could be like, Oh, my God, this person's giving me this feedback. That must mean because it's because they care about me and my work and be like, not defensive and be like, thank you. I really want this work to be better and be more accessible to more people, you know, like, could we just all... the the perfectionism really gets in the way of that kind of exchange.

Perfectionism can also impede our boldness. I've seen groups be like if we can't do this perfectly right, maybe we shouldn't do it. And it was something they actually really should do like we really needed them to do that bold action. People are so like, what if I'm doing it wrong, and then they sometimes don't do the riskier thing. So you know what? If the right people aren't here? What if, you know, what if it wasn't perfect? It's like, just do the risky thing and receive feedback about it. But I just think sometimes we're so afraid of looking bad in public that we don't do the thing that's useful to our communities.

For some people this kind of perfectionism and procrastination is related to imposter syndrome like, if I actually do this work, people will see that I'm not smart enough. I'm not radical enough. Or suddenly everyone's looking to me, and what if I don't do it right, you know. And so, really, looking at like, what are those messages inside ourselves? Everybody thinks they're a fraud. It's not just you. Could you talk to a friend about it, you know?

Yeah. And it can really lead to this difficulty prioritizing tasks and feeling really chaotic or spread thin, and a lot of us also are like...it really helped me a lot to track my time and be like, what do I...when I think I worked for that six hours, what else did I do, you know, like what am I? Most of us are pretty distracted like, what would it mean to like come into greater concentration around what I care about, and not not from a place of shame, but just from a place of like, oh, I really... I really want that intentionally.

Something that I found helpful is actually understanding the difference between feeling avoidance and feeling on purpose. So in the chat if you're willing to, would you think about a task or type of work that you avoid or procrastinate? And how does the avoidance feel in your body?

For me, I feel this kind of like I want to like, move my head away, and maybe even put my arms in between. I feel not very upright in my body. I feel like tired and like meh like.... What? What does it feel like when you're just like I don't want to do the spreadsheet for the mutual aid group. I don't want to call the new members. I don't feel like calling my grandmother. I don't want to talk to my partner. Tummy ache. Yeah, sorry. That is really understandable. A lot of people, it goes to the tummy. Yeah, what else? What feel...? What is it like when you're just like I couldn't even? Clenching all the muscles. Yeah, tightness...[a] creature is pacing around in my chest. Yeah, that makes so much sense. Makes you go to the fingernails. Yes, yes. A lot of people get very tired and sleepy, dull in the head, heaviness in the chest, attention everywhere [and] can't focus. Yeah, exactly. Looking all around. This is so helpful.

And now I want us to like keep putting the avoidance, [but] think about what it feels like when you're on purpose. When you're like...here we go. For me, there's like an uprightness. There's a forwardness. *There's a focus of the eyes straight spine* from Amelia like...what's it like when I'm like, I'm here. Some people feel that folks are behind them like I am with my people. Someone says, there's a flame in my throat. I feel lighter, more playful, like a sense that my comrades are here, or my ancestors, or everyone who's ever needed this, or I'm moving towards the people who I love in my community, who need us to do this or the way I want things to be like an arrow. Yeah. I think that in general, in our society, most of us are having avoidance. There's like a societal avoidance and a lack of forward motion. More forward motion is taboo scary off the table. I think our technologies are causing a lot of this. Natural adderall, love that.

So like one of my questions is, can we do this on purpose before you start a task? Can you cultivate this feeling? Sometimes I light a candle, sometimes when I have to write, I love to procrastinate writing, I'll like...I have written myself a little note about why it's okay [and] why I'm allowed to write this because I think, like I'm bad, I shouldn't do this. I'm not smart enough, whatever you know, so like thinking of. What are my reasons? Why do I choose this? Writing those down, and like saying them to yourself beforehand [that] you can do this before meetings like before I go into a meeting, if I'm feeling like thinking negative thoughts about other people in my group, fear around what's going to be said or done, can I like, get on purpose, fill myself with love for this work? Remember compassion for others and myself. We can even like do this on purpose in our meetings. Doing jumping jacks. Nice, right? Like what's it take to get your body to feel the energy of on purpose?

Okay, one last tool I want to share with you all before we go into the Q. And a portion is this tool, this chart? Will you share this working compulsively versus working joyfully chart in the chat Erin? This chart actually comes from workaholics anonymous. I didn't write this. Workaholics Anonymous is a 12 step program for people who either avoid work or overwork. I think most of us could get something out of it, to be honest with you. If you can deal with 12 step environments which are imperfect, even just reading the Workaholics Anonymous literature can be kind of helpful. I find this chart helps people and identify what's hard about work, including work on our favorite things that matter to us [like] our creative projects, our housework, our childcare work, our care for the elderly, our mutual aid projects, and also what we want to feel like. And I find this chart helpful. I'm curious. Is there anything that anyone can relate to on this

chart that you want to share in the chat, or anything that helps you move toward working more joyfully?

Oh, yeah, ADHD... ADHD symptoms and that working compulsively seem overlapping. That makes a lot of sense. Yeah.

And it's like, if you recognize yourself here, you're just like everyone else, like I think that's so helpful like we are all like this. There's nothing shameful here. I find so much relief in that. It's our shared problem that we can work on together. It's capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy that have created these patterns. It's not our personal personalities or something wrong with us.

Yeah, this is just a tool. I mean, it's really fun to talk...bring this tool to your friends, and people you're working on things with, and see if it's helpful. You know I do a lot of like, hey, I'm going to start working on the thing I feel most avoidant of at 2pm, and have my best friends start at the same time. We text each other, or sit together in the same place and do it, or someone else from my mutual aid project. Let's both do the thing we are avoiding together Friday at 5, you know. Whatever the thing is that works for us.

Also, if you have trouble saying, *no*, I have done this thing where I'm like I'm not allowed to say yes to-

-For a while, it was like speaking engagements or travel things, things that I knew were hard because I'm like, oh, I want to say yes, I love that person, or whatever I always see the best in that I would. I can't say yes without a 48 hour hold, or without asking my friend Angelica. She's my buddy for a lot of this. Angelica has to talk this through with me because she helps me see-

-Yeah, Dean, that would be really fun. And also you'd be tired because you have to teach the next day, and, you know, she helped me see the other side of the other column related to my care and well-being. I recommend, like if you have trouble saying no, getting using some tools like a 24 hour, 48 hour hold and having to run it by someone else.

All right. Before we go, I just want to show you this image that helps me a lot, set it to Bachman, very old image from him: *The government does not care. We, the people, must help each other.* I love this. I really rely on it.

Okay, Jex, let's talk about whatever you want to talk about. Whatever anybody wants to talk about.

JEX BLACKMORE:

Thank you. Thank you so much, Dean, for sharing your analysis and thoughts on that work. Yeah, Amelia says air horn, and this is just...like made me feel so excited, and I'm sure everybody agrees, or at least I hope they do. For folks who are wondering how long this is going to go, we're just going to talk for 15 more minutes, and then that will be the presentation. But I

wanted to... before we getting into the few Q's, and if anybody does have questions or thoughts, if you can add it, we'll do our best to get to it.

But a couple of things came up for me, and one is especially in the second half of your presentation, that mutually can feel really different and sometimes harder than what people are used to, especially if they come from nonprofit or professional settings or professionalized settings. And I just wonder how we hold space for that discomfort while still moving forward together. I wonder if you have thoughts on that? And you know from my perspective, figuring that out together is doing the work, is part of it. It's not necessarily something that stands in the way. But I definitely see that there's some discomfort around that.

DS:

Yeah, I think there's so many different pieces to it, like one is like, we want to take our lives back right. Everything we need right now we have to get through capitalism. We have to have these terrible wage jobs where we exploit others and get exploited and exploit the earth like everything we need comes through like shitty earth and people destroying systems. And we want to build a world where we get everything we need through consensual connection and collaboration. And so we have to completely change what skills we have. So, a lot of people enter mutual aid groups, and they're like, I just want someone to tell me what to do, and it's like, sorry, that's not a good approach. Right? So one of the things that's hard about mutual aid is co-stewarding, being willing to say what I really think. If I'm somebody who's used to kind of following instructions or being willing to hear others, if I'm somebody who likes to get my way in a group and bring my idea and have it done, these are huge new skills. Self-management of my time, being able to be with others and be like, wow! We didn't get the thing done. What's that like? What do we think without being like judgy about it to each other? Being willing to admit I took on more than I wanted to take on, or then I really could do, because I wanted you guys to think I was important or I wanted...or I thought I was the one who could do it best. But actually, oops turns out I can't do it, and being willing to say that instead of disappearing like all these skills that are kind of also come up in jobs because a lot of us do the same stuff in jobs-we're flaky, or we don't give real feedback. A lot of people have huge conflicts at their jobs with their coworkers. But there's something that's about like self-empowerment, and like also trusting others in mutual aid groups. And there's also a way that that can make mutual aid groups like a lot more fun like I've worked at a lot of nonprofits where the group had decided this was the agenda, like the ED or the board or whatever, and a lot of us were like we should be focusing on this, but we weren't allowed to. And in a mutual aid group, you can be actually responsive to the conditions. So we can all be like, you know what we're doing this wrong. Fuck it. Let's do it the other way, because no one's getting paid to do it wrong. You know what I mean. So like, there's also all this creativity and all this renewal of our faith in each other. And so it's like, yeah, like, I mean, interestingly, a lot of the tools I've created around this-

-Some people are using them in nonprofits that are trying to run like mutual aid groups. Right? They're trying to run their nonprofit that does work for prisoners or does work for people in crisis in according to mutual aid principles which is like something we can all try to do. It can be hard, because there's certain things about money that can make it hard. But it's totally like absolutely

like something to pursue, and I've done that in nonprofits. And I've also worked with lots of groups where nobody's getting paid. Some of the problems in us just kind of come up in both situations. But a lot of it is about being like, we're just going to take responsibility for each other. Also, we've all been told our job is more important than whatever community work we do, and that's just not fucking true, like the community work we do is the work that is going to make or break the next storm. The next, you know, crackdown, the next budget cuts so like we have to kind of totally reorient like to what we've been told is important. We've been told it's important to like be skinny, get married, buy certain shit, like all that's a lie. And what's actually important is like whether we can share stuff and work with others in our communities under like the worst possible conditions.

So there's a lot of just like, how do we become those other people? And a lot of my recent book is more about that stuff like, what are the internal skills and emotional awarenesses that I need to be with you while we do like hard stuff together, and that's because that's like the rest of our lives, you know?

JB:

Yeah, absolutely. I'm so excited that-

-When I saw that you wrote a book that is a lot about relationships and the tensions, it made so much sense to me in terms of just like the logical next step kind of is like, all right, this context of how change happens, and how we can help and help each other. But then, kind of hitting some roadblocks or challenges, or just being like, oh, we don't know how to be in community and relationship with one another. And that's super hard and you know, we can spend a lot of time just working on that in groups, and that being a lot of the work, and I think that's one thing you talked about is kind of the pace at which we do and move in as a group, and that the pace of revolution is sometimes small and slow. And I think that that's a really wonderful concept, because there is this notion that we deprioritize our relationships in groups because the work is more important, you know, and what you were saying, too, about how do we grow groups and bring new people in when we're trying to balance the work itself?

I think those are all really, really critical points. Yeah, Amelia was saying: Is there moments of accountability that we can get to instead of deflecting? And it is really hard. It's personal. It's vulnerable, it's vulnerable work.

DS:

Can I answer that one? I love Amelia's question.

JB:

Yes, of course.

DS:

Yeah. So all of our groups are just made of our relationships. And if we don't do the relational work, all the other work will come to a screeching halt. You know? We also don't want to bring

the work to a screeching halt to do relational work like some groups have been like we need to stop and focus onward. I actually think we learn by doing. And so there can be kind of, I think, a misunderstanding of like... I don't think groups should stop working on their projects. Sometimes they should do a moratorium on new projects while they make more space for building some skills or conflict, but my ideal is that people build the skills into every meeting like we do, why we give direct feedback and don't gossip in our orientation for new members. And then we do it regularly. And we also do like a facilitation training. And we like...we constantly do the skills building throughout. Or we...I've really been encouraging groups to like at the beginning. You know how like, if you go to like church or a 12 step meeting, they say the same things over again at the beginning and ends of the meetings, and you kind of learn them. So could we do that in our in our mutual aid groups like we do a thing at the beginning about how we know we're imperfect people doing imperfect work, and we give direct feedback, and we also strive for forgiveness, you know, like, could we not gossip and keep each other's confidentiality? Could we just say that at the beginning of end of meetings like in ways that make sense for whatever our work is like, because because we love trans people, we do this or because...whatever you know, whatever our purpose is not that that'll just do it, but that it'll remind us to try it and give us a shared language, because part of what Amelia is talking about, which is so real is that not everybody has these skills and not everybody even wants to do emotional work. Right? People may even think like, I don't want to, or you know, a lot of people are like super deluded about ourselves, like all of us, right? And so, if our groups are kind of training centers for the emotional skills of being together in the new world we're trying to build, it's a bumpy training. And it means like sometimes giving people direct feedback. It means also, like...Amelia says it feels so personal. My personal mantra is this Buddhist thing: Nothing is personal, nothing is permanent, nothing is perfect. So whenever I feel like so wounded by the other people in the group, or someone doing something, I try to be like, I have an opportunity to give direct feedback. I have an opportunity to care for myself and love myself and the wound I'm feeling especially, you know, is it related to other things that have happened in my life? Is it related to childhood like really being open to my broader emotional awareness about myself. Getting support if there's a boundary like oh, maybe I need to say to that person like, maybe I maybe there's some kind of boundary that's useful. Also, just some kind of like, like, just cultivating compassion like, okay, this is where this person's at on their journey. What's working well? Where do I have safety in this group? So maybe you know, Jex is giving me the side eye in our meetings, or we're having some-

-But also I want to remember, like Amelia and Diana are here, and Erin, and they have consistently shown me care. Instead of getting hyperfocused on the one person I'm having like some kind of tension with, you know, like... just what are like, how can I resource myself? A lot of us go into like deeper and deeper, like dig in to either a victim feeling or like Jex is my enemy, or I'm looking for all the ways that Jex is bad, and I'm telling other people about that and building a campaign against someone actually, who's in my group and who I love, even if right now we don't like each other. So how do I like hold the inevitable humanness of this relationship, and figure out what's the most workable ways to be in it rather than being like how dare Jex and I for not being perfect, that's just not an option, right?

So like, and also the other piece of this, I really wrote the new book based on the feeling I've had that like, right now, it feels like our groups can be destroyed by one emotionally activated person. I've seen that over and over again. This book is for all of us to be like, what's it like when I'm emotionally activated. When I'm activated, and I think everyone's against me here, and I think everyone's on Jex's side, or whatever is happening, or I think this group has stopped caring about trans people, or whatever my stories are, what do I do this? That the new book is full of those tools like, how do I be like, oh, Dean, you're emotionally activated. That's okay. Let's not press send on that message to everyone about how terrible everyone is, or let's not post this thing on social media right away. Let's see who does care about me? Where is the support? What else do I have in my life? Can I put this in context? I might be having tunnel vision about this one thing happening with Jex, like all of that. Whenever I have a story that someone else is at fault, I'm probably emotionally activated. They also may be doing things that aren't great, but I might not be parsing those carefully. I might be creating like a very, you know, painting with one broad brush about them and myself.

So this is, anyway, I just give all of this to Amelia's question, because absolutely we are all fucking so annoying and hard and do weird shit. And like, I have a friend, Morgan Basticus, who I love so much, a brilliant comedian and artist and anti-zionist activist, and she said, she's been reading parenting books because everyone in our movements, we're all a bunch of toddlers, and all the wisdom from the parenting books is useful for all of us because we are being reparented by ourselves and each other in these groups, because we've grown up in spaces that did not prepare us to be kind and loving and generous and collaborative. So it's like, if I treated everyone like a little tantruming toddler, and it was like God, I love you and I'm so excited for you to learn these skills with me that we're all trying to learn, and if I treat myself that way.

JB:

I love that. I often talk about how bartenders are great people in the movement, because they know how to deal with really difficult and challenging people. You know, I think of those skill transfers in a lot of these cases.

With the limited time we have left, I want to get to just two of these questions, and one is from Lindsey. And it's an important question. They're an RN, doing street medicine independently for unhoused in their community, and they have an opportunity to meet with the directing MD of Local Public Health Department to discuss partnership, and they feel torn because it could be opportunity to provide more resources, like supplies and funding, but also would require accountability and possible red tape, and are seeking guidance on what to do.

DS:

That is so juicy. My general thinking about this is, I'm always curious what can we do above ground, and what can we do underground? So one: are there ways to see the red tape and see the strings as clearly as possible at the outset, and be like these are the pieces that we could move into being more resourceful through this, and these are the pieces we have to keep doing on our own? Like not losing like, basically because what I've seen happen with the cities and

counties I've been in, they'll co-opt a street medicine project or transformative justice project or a youth support project or diversion program, and then they put in the eligibility criteria, and they put in, but not that and not you can't give out this medicine. You can't give out this supply, or you can't, or people have to be tracked in this way, or there's some kind of weird... If there's any working with the police, obviously fuck, no, but like, you know, so figuring out...really assessing the cost, and then being like, How do we protect the part that's good?

The other thing is like a lot of times when a project is totally unpaid and really grassroots-y, and then any part of it becomes paid, a lot of people kind of go to sleep. They're like, I no longer participate because there's now a staffer, even though that one person can't do what the 20 of us were doing, or whatever. But how to make sure that we keep alive this... because the most important part is the mobilization of our communities towards what we really want. And so we don't want to lose that. Then they're winning if they kind of co-opt us and put most people to sleep, and it's only the professionals who get to do stuff. There's a whole amazing history of like gay health in this wonderful book called *Before Aids*. Highly recommend this book to you, Lindsay, because it's the history of the three big gay clinics in the country, and how they all started out as grassroots, unpaid mutual aid projects, and became these like behemoths that, like, you know, don't serve certain parts of our community. So just looking out for those things, and then, being like, [what] can we get away with? Can we get anything for free out of this like, are we...? You know what I mean, like, what can we actually, how can we? How can we take the money and run on the right parts? Or is it actually so compromised? And then also negotiating with the institution with a like, we don't have to fucking do this. Yeah, you can actually make that not tracked. Yeah, you can actually-

-You know what I mean, like making them get creative about not forcing their methods, you know, like figuring out how much more negotiating power we have when we're like we don't need you to do this, you know, even though, of course, I know that probably you're doing this work under extreme scarcity and difficult conditions, but trying to come in with that level of bravado. And then, also knowing we're going to keep the most, you know, stigmatized work going, no matter what they do.

JB:

Thank you. And I think that kind of speaks a little bit to this final question about how do you see the tensions between mutual aid and nonprofits evolving over the next couple of decades? And I feel like that is a really good way to follow what you were just talking about.

DS:

I think that there's been this brief period in USHistory of this explosion of nonprofits as a way of trying to manage all the undesirable people and situations, and trying to keep people asleep, and that is going away. So I think that, like there's gonna be more direct attacks on our nonprofits who provide anything that we all care about to any of the most stigmatized populations, and we're gonna have to just do more of it on our own. And so it's just really good to be like, how do we build projects even if we temporarily have staffing or grants that could survive without them? How do we build broad collectives where most people are unpaid and the

work would go, even if what we've built over time has been all these really tiny staff centered projects that can't serve that many people and that are like easily killable by the philanthropist or whatever, as soon as they take the grant away? So I think that's the real move is. And that's what these workshop series building capacity for mutual aid groups [is about]. It literally is like a map of how to build a project that a lot of people could enter that has collective governance, that if the money came or went, you could still have the group.

JB:

Oh, I love that, especially given the funding cuts and kind of manipulation that's happening on the Federal level. I see nonprofits really in crisis and people very uncertain, and I'm starting to realize how vulnerable that system really is. So I love this concept.

Well, Dean, thank you so much, not just for your brilliance, but for your generosity. And you've really given us, like so many of us, a political home in your work. I know several mutual aid groups that have started in part because of your book. And you've really shown us that it's not just a buzzword, that it's a practice of collective survival, and I love being reminded that we don't have to wait for permission to build the world that we need, that we can do it together. So thank you so much for being enlightening and showing us that. I really appreciate your time today.

DS:

Thank you for all of your generosity, Jex, and everyone at Abortion Academy for organizing this, and I'm so glad that I was with you all.

JB:

Great. Well, thanks everyone, and this will be a recording [that] will be online in the next couple of days, and with links and all of that. So if you want to share it, which I hope you do share with folks, all that will be online soon.

Great. Thank you.