

ALTERNATIVES TO PSYCHIATRIC INCARCERATION

BUILD YOUR OWN
MAKE-SHIFT RESPITE



@embracing.ambiguity

honoring Mad lineages

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*Black psychiatric survivor and organizer,
pioneered what may have been the
first 'peer respite'*



In 1978 Jennie and another ex-patient worked to create a peer-based retreat center in Zuni, Virginia ('the Zuni Federation for Mental Health'). The center, which was free and open to anyone who had been a patient in the psychiatric system, was created with intention to

push back against the system's focus on "mental illness". Her work had never been reported on, and was only uncovered in Vanessa Jackson's collection of oral histories from Black psych survivor movement leaders ('In Our Own Voice').

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WHAT IS A MAKE-SHIFT RESPITE?

an
alternative
to
psychiatric
hospitalization

a
temporary
shared
'home hospital'
created
and maintained by
comrades
in community

an effort
built upon
principles of
mutual aid

assembled
in rapid
response
to a comrade
in distress

an alternative
to pre-existing
respite which
may not exist in your
area or have long
waitlists

to search for a pre-existing
respite in your area...

[https://power2u.org
/directory-of-peer-respites/](https://power2u.org/directory-of-peer-respites/)



GUIDING VALUES

Self-Determination

When supporting a comrade in distress, it is critical to preserve and respect their self-determination. As supporters we are not there to 'save' or 'heal'. We are not there to restrict, coerce, police, surveil, or confine. We are not there to tell them what we imagine is 'best for them'. Instead, we are there to ask the question: "what would feel supportive right now?". We are there to meet these needs/asks in the ways that we can!



Non-Pathologization

Avoid trying to 'diagnose'/pathologize your comrade. Often when we get into a 'helping' mindset instead of a 'supporting' mindset, we can start to analyze what might be causing distress. We can develop theories of 'what's wrong' with our comrade.

for example:

"he is going through psychosis and is super paranoid" --> Is this your analysis? Have you asked your comrade what his understanding/perception of the situation is? Instead of trying to convince your comrade of your reality, try listening to theirs. Try addressing what they are naming as distressing to them.





Consent

Always aim to receive consent. Are you wanting to bring a new person in to support the effort? Ask first. Do you want to share 'advice'? Ask if they are open to receiving advice in that moment! Before sharing information about your comrade with anyone else, receive explicit consent.

Non-Hierarchical

Be careful of asserting a hierarchy of 'helper' and 'helped'. There is a difference between 'supporting' and 'helping'. When we are 'helping', we are assuming we have knowledge of what is best. When we are 'supporting', we are meeting the needs that our comrade has communicated to us.



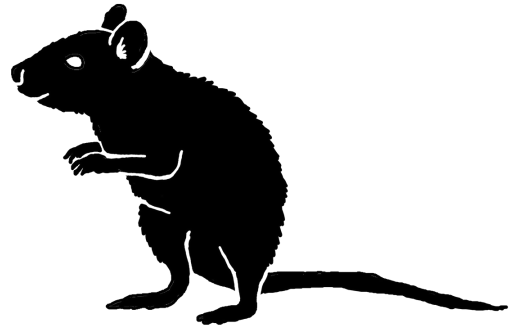
Communication

Aim to maintain an open line of communication with your comrade. Sometimes when we develop a team of supporters, the team can start functioning independent of the comrade in distress. Minimize the number of conversations that happen without the comrade. Otherwise it can contribute to a 'ganging up' dynamic where the support team decides 'what is best' without even consulting the comrade in distress!



Start with a conversation.

The first step in setting up a make-shift respite is to have a conversation(s) with the person you're supporting. Here are some questions that may be important to have answers to!



- **What is the objective of this respite? What are you seeking most? What is the need that the respite is meeting?** (for example, not feeling able to be alone and needing company? the need to escape an environment or situation causing distress? feeling unable to trust oneself and needing to lean on others? seeking safety?)
- **How long can the make-shift respite last? What is the capacity of the community to maintain the make-shift respite?** This is important to communicate together so that nobody is caught by surprise.
- **What is 'plan B'? What happens if the make-shift respite doesn't work as originally planned?** For example, what if the location doesn't feel as safe as was imagined? Do you have a back-up location? What if there is more support needed after capacity runs out? You can't plan for everything, but it's important to be nimble!
- **What would you like me to do in _____ situation?** For example, what would you like me to do if you are distressed when hearing voices? What is most supportive to you? What would you like me to do if you're feeling super suicidal? What is most supportive?
- **What would you NOT like me to do in _____ situation?** What feels unsupportive in specific situations of distress?
- **Who are 'your people' and when/how should they be contacted?** Who are some people you are comfortable with supporting in-person? Who are some people who you are comfortable with supporting from afar? Are there any people who you would like me to contact if XYZ happens? Are there any people who you would never like to be contacted?

Crafting the space!

Would the comrade feel safer in their own home? Then have people come over to their house. Does the comrade need a change of environment? A fresh start or escape from an environment that holds a lot of distress? Then pick a homebase that is a friend's house.

Does the space need to be cleaned? Is it cluttered and overwhelming? Would a deep cleaning make the comrade feel more comfortable and at peace? What about taking time to have a fresh change of bedsheets?

Pay attention to the lighting. Is it harsh? Does sunlight feel good or too overwhelming? What about the sound? Is background noise something that can contribute to overload? Is silence really hard? Would it be helpful to have something playing in the background?

Sometimes big spaces can be overwhelming. Consider creating a sensory cave in a closet to hunker down in! The hanging clothes tend to insulate sounds, and the dim lights can be helpful. Make a little closet oasis!



EVERYONE HAS A ROLE.

When creating a make-shift respite, it is best to assemble a team of multiple supporters. People can support in-person, from afar, through time and peer support, or through financial and/or material means.

Shift-based peer support

If the comrade you're supporting is requesting that there is someone there to talk to or be around 24/7, it is important to set up a shift schedule. Those doing peer support don't have to be 'experts' and don't have to 'know how to provide peer support'. The most important thing is that they share the values described a few pages ago, and that the comrade you're supporting feels comfortable/safe around them. Oftentimes, this role is pretty passive and may be spent just sharing space casually, going about your lives in the same space. Sometimes it can be more active and involve listening/talking/supporting.

Food/Provisions

Is there anyone in your circles that can bake a lasagna and stock the fridge? Anyone who can bring over fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies?

Rides

Sometimes the comrade you're supporting might want a change in environment: a trip to the beach, a walk through the store, or a picnic at the park. Who can offer a ride? Who has access to a car?

Financial Support

Are there people willing to doordash some food to the address? What about folks who can come together to pay for a refreshing and grounding haircut? A healing massage? Who can help to cover rent if your comrade is missing work?

Leading an activity

Are there folks who can drop by and lead an activity such as painting together (kinda like some art therapy of sorts!)? Does the comrade you're supporting want to learn to crochet/knit? Do they play an instrument and want to jam together?

Coordination

If you're assembling a shift schedule or starting a meal train, having someone to put together an excel sheet and organize group chats is helpful!

creating structure

one element of 'traditional' treatment environments that can (sometimes!) feel helpful is a sense of structure. But we don't have to be locked up in a ward or inside residential to add structure to our days. We can attempt to incorporate elements of structured support in our make-shift respites. Even better, these structures can remain in place after the respite has concluded!

FREE PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

for a calendar of free online peer support groups, visit the following link. try piecing a few (or many!) into a schedule.

<https://sarahbroas.wordpress.com/peer-support-group-calendar/>

DAILY CHECK-INS

sometimes a daily check-in at a specific time can be helpful! it doesn't have to be a long, extended conversation. this can be a place to take time to reflect and draft a text to friend about your day.

BODY-DOUBLING

if your comrade is having trouble getting some tasks done, making calls, etc. offer to spend some time body-doubling. this just means independently working on tasks, side-by-side/over a call.



What is Mad Love?

Mad love knows no bounds. It cannot be defined. That is to say, it cannot be confined. It cannot be confined to a single sentence in a dictionary. It cannot be confined to a feeling on a wheel...

And yet:

you'll know it when you feel it.

... the feeling of a comrade's hand rubbing salve and bandaging your wounds.

...the squeeze of your hand around mine to bring me back when I start to drift away.

...the calm of your voice saying "I get it" when I say "I want to die".

you'll know it when you hear it.

...the sound of my breath on those three-hour phone calls when you just can't be alone anymore.

...the sound of our laughs when I needed to dance in the rain, and you never doubted me a second.

...the sound of my cry when you said you couldn't cry alone.

you'll know it when you see it.

... the text on your phone from a comrade checking in on a rough day.

...the first-aid kit in the respite bathroom because they know it's not simple to "just stop".

...the package of paper plates a friend dropped off because they know you're too depressed to wash the dishes.

you'll know it when you taste it.

...the week of meals a comrade dropped off because they know it's hard for you to cook when the voices are loud.

...the salt of your tears when you finally feel held and safe enough to cry.

...the taste of your safe food that your friend always keeps stocked at their place to make sure you have something to eat when you come over.

Mad love is all of that and more.

Mad love is a feeling, a sound, a vision, a taste.

Mad love persists when we reject notions of what "love" and "care" are supposed to look like.

Mad love flourishes when we embrace the Madness in ourselves and others.





MAD
LOVE TO
YOU, ALWAYS

