Nov 17th Community Climate Wellbeing Workshop Summary

Workshop and resources developed and shared by Meghan Wise
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IMPORTANCE OF ACKNOWLEDGING OUR CLIMATE EMOTIONS

Acknowledging the mental health and wellbeing impacts of magnifying climate change is critical for helping people move through climate trauma. You are not alone in these feelings and emotions. But it's important we don't get stuck in anxiety, fear or climate dread. Making room to include hope, joy, optimism and collective sense of possibility can offer a more sustainable pathway forward.

WHAT ARE SOME KEY WAYS CLIMATE CHANGE IS IMPACTING OUR COMMUNITIES?

This workshop touched on the mental health and wellbeing of some key climate impacts: heatwaves, forest fires, flooding.

HEATWAVES

Heatwaves continue to generate more experiences of stress, waves of depression, anxiety, exhaustion, dehydration, heat stroke, heat fainting, and loss of life. Research has linked heatwaves to higher rates of anger, irritability, violence, community crime, and domestic violence. Hot temperatures also "bake" vehicle exhaust, turning it into harmful surface-level ozone and smog which also impact health and wellbeing.

How might we reframe thinking about and navigating heatwave impacts?

- Mobilize care-mongering: Care-mongering was quickly mobilized in the heat dome with people sharing fans, air conditioners, doing care check-ins, and circulating cooling coping strategies
- Address equitable public infrastructure. Green space and tree canopy can drastically reduce the heat island effect in a community.
- Prioritize cooling infrastructure investment in communities systematically made most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to systemic underfunding, racist policy, and land dispossession.

FOREST FIRES

There are well-known links between forest fire events and increased rates of anxiety, depression, PTSD, distress, bereavement, domestic violence, and community-wide trauma. At the community level, we often see evacuations, physical injury, loss of life, disruption or destruction of roads, railway lines, electricity and energy systems, destruction of homes and businesses, and a general rupture to community life and wellbeing.

How might we reframe thinking about and navigating forest fire impacts?

- Divesting and moving away from the driving factors of climate change like fossil fuel use and exploitative forest management practices.
- Maintaining old growth forests.
- Protecting forest biodiversity
- Working in partnership with Indigenous Knowledge holders for more sustainable and balanced forest management approaches.
- Equitable and just transitions to renewable energy infrastructures
- Working to promote wealth redistribution to alleviate ecological strain which in turn supports community wellbeing in the short and long term.

FLOODING

Flooding events are found to correlate with higher levels of anxiety, excessive worrying, irritability, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances. Looming threats of seasonal flooding can generate seasonal stresses and anxieties about potential flooding or trigger past traumatic experiences of flooding events. Flooding also causes serious economic hardship for families which could also trigger anxiety, depression, or increased experiences of domestic violence.

How might we reframe thinking about and navigating flooding impacts?
- Protecting and rethinking engagement with wetlands
- Reducing urban sprawl
- Working with Indigenous partners, leadership, and knowledge holders to navigate flood mitigation and adaptation.
- Stop clear cutting practices that can lead to increased flash flooding, landslides and soil erosion.
- Prioritize flood secure infrastructure and buildings to increase flood resilience.
- Managed or planed retreat from flood prone zones
- Mobilizing community mutual aid networks that can spring into action in times of tragedy.

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND EQUITY

Though climate change impacts everyone, NOT everyone is equally impacted by climate change. Disproportionate climate harm and impacts connect to historical and ongoing systems of oppression and inequity (e.g., colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, neoliberalism etc.). Unjust and inequitable systems create barriers to safely, justly navigating climate impacts and to securing climate wellbeing. Particularly for Indigenous women and girls, Black women and girls, and Women and girls of Colour, as well as LGBTQ2S+ individuals, those living with disabilities, the elderly, and other marginalized members of our communities like the unhoused.

How might we reframe thinking about and uplifting climate justice and equity?
- Root our work and actions in partnership and service of racial justice, gender justice, UNDRIP, and equitable community building.
- Advocate for community policy and decision making that prioritizes an equity and climate justice lens.
- Make space for leadership opportunities and shifting power to equity seeking communities systemically marginalized by systems of oppression.
- Prioritize equitable wealth redistribution practices and policies.

MAKE ROOM FOR MESSY HOPE

Build awareness for the role of hope, joy and optimism in climate work research, community organizing, and building climate solutions. Reframe climate narratives from doom, gloom and defeatism to ones of collaboration and collective hope and optimism for effective action. Hope and collaborative solution building are found to be more effective at mobilizing individual and collective climate interest and action. Making room for collective hope and joy in our climate work is a more sustainable emotional pathway through collective and daunting climate challenges. Mariame Kaba quotes, "Hope is a discipline," which frames hope as not just a feeling, but a verb and a practice. Hope in itself is a form of climate action. Hope is a defiance of defeatism.

SYSTEMS LEVEL
- Call on businesses institutions, municipalities etc., to prioritize climate justice and climate mental health and wellbeing issues in policy and decision making.
- Build systems and networks rooted in community care to decrease community vulnerabilities
- Prioritize reducing community inequity (poverty, racism, houselessness) that lead to disproportionate climate burdens
- VOTE to empower community leaders committed to addressing mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change.
- Call for rapid transitions to RENEWABLE energy systems at all levels and community spaces to help reduce the role of fossil fuels in magnifying climate change harms.

ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY LEVEL
- Be a leader in educating about the mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change and coping strategies in your networks. For example, sharing knowledge or insights from this workshop in your circles of influence.
- Join email campaigns or lobby political, business, and industry leaders to implement policies that align with climate science and climate justice
- Support, amplify, and help build capacity for Indigenous leadership on climate and environmental action.
- Join local or global climate movements or groups working towards climate justice, sustainability, divestment, or community resilience

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
- Nourish your mind, body, and wellness to build more sustainable capacity for long-term climate advocacy and activism
- Connect with culture and community to help nurture a shared sense of meaning and purpose
- Step back from doom scrolling
- Prioritize stories highlighting climate hope and community momentum!
- Reach out to talk through climate feelings with folks you trust.
- REST. Rest is necessary for sustainability and resilience.
- You can't be all things all the time. Give yourself permission to embrace guilt-free breaks and recharge when you need to replenish yourself.
- Make room in your body to embrace hope and joy in building climate momentum with your friends, family, and community.

CLIMATE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESOURCES
- Climate Wellbeing Resource Kit