The Activist Survival Handbook

Stories, guides, advice and useful information about activist survival, safety and sustainability

For activists, community workers, and anyone working for change

pt’chang nonviolent community safety group inc.

The Activist Survival Handbook

Other pt'chang publication available at : www.vicnet.net.au/~pt-chang

other publications by pt'chang:
the peacekeeping handbook, november 1996
pt'chang protocol and procedures handbook, september 2000
pt'chang volunteers manual july 2002
nonviolent community safety and peacebuilding manual april 2003

Trauma and debriefing

The importance of early and effective intervention into the negative effects of trauma, on both a personal and community scale, cannot be underestimated.

Pt'chang recognises that the types of traumatic incidents that can occur at protests, blockades, community events and festivals can have a lasting impact on a community's sense of safety and upon the individual's capacity to recover and continue working in a particular role. Effective and appropriate intervention after a traumatic incident is crucial.

It is not enough, according to Pt'chang, to put in place preventative measures or to just have the ability to respond to unsafe situations as they occur. It is important and integral to a community safety strategy to also have in place processes to deal effectively with the aftermath of a traumatic incident should it occur.

Responses to trauma can vary from individual-to-individual and group-to-group and is also affecting very much by culture. The Western model of healing through counselling emphasizes a kind of individual psychology. By focusing exclusively on the individual it undermines family and community efforts to provide support and care. As activist movements are cultural diverse, it is important both recognise different approaches and offer a range of models and support systems to deal with traumatic events. This will mean paying attention to individual's healing as well as the group level -- paying attention to a persons home support structure and the entire group.

Although Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CICD) and its variations are still a relatively new procedure in fields such as emergency and police services, it remains a virtually unknown practise in grassroots social change networks. Often social change workers and activists will face a range of highly traumatic incidents and situations with little or no structured support or intervention. These incidents could include assault or threat of assault, fatal or near fatal drug overdoses, suicides or attempted suicides, fatal or near fatal accidents, arrest and imprisonment and high-levels of personalised abuse and victimisation.

The process of debriefing is to assist in the normal recovery processes and to intervene early in the negative or damaging impacts. Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) can be identified and further support for people arranged.

Other forms of support include offering rituals of healing to help mark and bring completion to a traumatic event. From activist in the Global South and indigenous peoples we learn about he importance of rituals. Community psychologist Felipe Sartí, who works in Guatemala, explains, *"Rituals are crucial for people to come together and maintain [relationships]... The spirituality of the Achi people, as with other indigenous communities, was crucial as a psychological support mechanism."* Bringing people's spirituality as they may experience it into ritual or other modes of healing can be very important in healing from a traumatic event.

In many ways, Pt'chang is attempting to encourage a culture of increased personal support and culturally appropriate debriefing specifically for volunteer social change workers amongst community and activist networks.

We continually highlight and promote the importance of adequate support structures within campaigns and organisations and encourage the adoption of debriefing as a routine process after events and protests and other political or community action.

Supporting each other as activists

By Starhawk (United Sates)

Genoa was an atrocity. Our friends and comrades have been brutally beaten, tortured, and wrongfully imprisoned. Some of them are so badly injured they will never be quite the same again. None of us will ever be the same emotionally or politically.

We need to support the people who went through the worst. And even those of us who escaped the worst need to know how to deal with trauma and how to recognize Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD).

Some of the symptoms follow. All of these are part of our normal human response to trauma; it's their duration and intensity that can turn them into the life-threatening condition of PTSD. If you are still having strong symptoms three months after the action, you may need experienced help.

Our level of trauma will vary according to our personal histories and the level of violence we were exposed to: watching the stretchers being carried out is traumatic in a different way than being in one. People who come from violent homes in childhood, who are already survivors of rape, assault or abuse may be especially vulnerable.

Some symptoms:

- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns. Some people may be unable to eat or sleep. Others may not be able to stop.
- Not being able to put aside the terrible images and memories.
- Not being able to feel.
- Depression, inability to take joy in life.
- Rage (well, rage is the sane response to what happened, but crippling or self destructive rage, or anger directed at the wrong targets, can be a symptom.)
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol for self-medication.
- Fear, anxiety, panic attacks and phobias.
- Guilt, regret, and self-blame. Witnesses who escaped suffering the worst may be especially prone to 'survivor's guilt'.
- Overwhelming grief.
- Inability to function normally, to plan or make decisions, or to carry out normal life activities.
- Shame.
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings.

What you can do for yourself:

- Reach out to your friends and allies for help and contact. Don't isolate yourself.
- Remember-what happened is not your fault. You don't need to feel ashamed or guilty, although you may find yourself having these normal responses to trauma. The guilt belongs to the men who beat, tortured and murdered people, and to those who gave the orders, not to you. You coped the best you could with an utterly brutal situation.
- Being there in Genoa is a mark of your courage, commitment and integrity. Never let anyone tell you otherwise. Be proud.
- Friends and family members, in their own distress, may behave in ways that make it worse. You have the absolute right to stop them, to leave a destructive situation, and to find real help.

- Remember that people do survive even these terrible things, and can come back stronger. But you may need time to focus on your own healing. Don't worry right now about whether or not you will go back to an action again. Know that healing yourself from this one is a political act.

What you can do to support your friends:

- Find them. Contact them. Don't let them disappear into isolation. I'm especially worried about those who might have come to the action alone, or without friends in their own home city. They need to have contact with people who have been there, who understand at least something of what they went through.
- Keep in contact. Call them, ask them how they're doing, if they're sleeping. Remember that people may think they're fine at first, but later begin to suffer the effects of the trauma. Commit to remain in contact over a period of months, not just the first few days.
- Help them to talk. We need to tell our stories, sometimes over and over and over again: ideally to someone who has been through it and understands, but if that's not possible, to someone who can simply listen, accept the full range of our feelings, without trying to make us feel better.
- Feed them, shop, cook and clean for them, take care of some of their creature comforts.
- Accompany them. Help them get where they need to go.
- Be an advocate for them in medical, legal or mental health measures. Help them make and get to appointments. Go with them. Help them fill out forms, write statements. Find appropriate help and resources for them.
- Be an advocate for them with their school or job.
- Help support their family and friends who may also be in grief, shock and rage.
- Be a advocate, or a buffer, between them and family members, lovers or friends whose own level of stress and fear may cause them to react in ways that are not helpful. Be willing to let them get mad at you. Try to gently explain the reality of what has happened.
- Help them bear witness, but take their lead. Some people may find their greatest relief comes from speaking out and telling their story publicly. You can help interest the media, or set up venues for them to talk to groups. For others, however, this might be too overwhelming or restimulating. Help them find other ways to witness: writing their story, writing statements that can be read by others for them, making tapes or videos at home.
- Carry on the struggle. Find ways that they can stay connected and be a part of it even if they are not able to go to actions.
- In all these things, remember that your friend is in charge of her or his own healing. Don't patronize or infantilise them, but support them to make their own choices.

Resources:

If you know care providers with an understanding of activism, and experience in dealing with trauma who might be willing to be listed, please have them contact Pt'chang. If they need more information, ask them to email Pt'chang at: ptchang@office.minihub.org

Another good resource on trauma, with links to other sites and book recommendations, can be found at: healingtrauma.protest.net

We need to take care of each other. If we do, we can strengthen our movement, and grow stronger. Love and solidarity, -- *Starhawk*

Nonviolent direct action trauma casualties and how to avoid them

By Rowan Tilly (United Kingdom)

Some Genetix actions have been traumatic and dis-empowering for a few of those arrested, as demonstrated in the diary of an activist below. Public Genetix rallies are most likely to produce these situations. Much of this can be avoided through careful preparation and good support.

Typically, at open / public Genetix rallies people surge on to the gm crop, apparently "spontaneously", but in reality many have inwardly planned it. The tidal wave sweeps some inexperienced and unprepared people in. Some of these unprepared people get arrested and charged and have to endure various degrees of trauma afterwards. This can include anger, stress, anxiety, fear, paralysis, isolation, confusion, humiliation, defeat, and indecision, feeling like a victim, powerlessness. It often seems to be the most vulnerable people (e.g. with a disability, with a child, inexperienced) that get arrested and experience trauma. Often this person's difficulties will get transferred to the rest of the group of defendants and this may result in serious conflicts emerging within the group, dragging everyone down.

Edited extracts from a diary:

This diary was generously offered by somebody inexperienced who spontaneously joined in crop pulling at an open public Genetix action.

"I'm wandering up the path with my placard watching it all. someone says "I do encourage you to pull some up - look - they come up really easily!" well, maybe if i just push [some] over like this, without even looking down at them - nobody will even see. ... there. subtle ! ... cops everywhere now - my [friends] have got nervous and headed back up the field. think i'll go back to the gate - cops heading up from the gate. that's ok, they don't want me, i haven't been trashing. they're heading my way though, maybe i'll go up the field. shit where does this path lead to - no i'll go back down to the gate. cops heading straight for me. no escape - hand on the shoulder. arrested ! no way ! how did that happen? .... wish i'd read one of those bits of paper people had [legal briefing].

"police station. in a cell on my own. ... determined not to cry. taken to interview room. try and stay centred. officer is very kind and gentle... so tell him i pushed over [some] plants. could've had a solicitor but i just wanted to get out of here quickly as possible. ... car outside waiting for me. feeling sheepish now - what a prat for getting into such a stupid situation.

"day after the action: ... panic setting in. bit tearful. ...

"a month later at the police station: ... i'm first to arrive. always too early. should i wait for [the others] or just go in? don't want to be in trouble for being late. go in alone. they charge me with criminal damage. can't believe it - start shaking and crying. tell them i was supposed to have a solicitor - they chase it up for me and lock me in a cell 'till she arrives. crying hard. ... solicitor arrives. tells me what happens next, forms, fingerprints, bail. go home dazed and depressed.

"first hearing (six weeks after action): ... i'm anxious about (a) my mum seeing me on the news - she's just had surgery, she really doesn't need the worry - and she does worry; (b) what i'm going to get fined - potentially much more. worried about the money granny left me last year - the only legacy i'm likely to get. they might take the lot. meet barrister. ... wants to know everyone's pleas. they all want ... to go "not guilty" - he wants to know my plea - court ushers saying we've got to go into court now, they're all filing out - i don't know, i don't know ! i thought i wasn't going to have to decide this today - oh no! tears coming, i hate this. "w" realised, says something to barrister - but we're all trooping in to court now - me all wet and dripping tears."

Experiences like this understandably lead people to assume:

(a) all direct action is terrifying and they are never going to do anything so silly again - which means our movement is unsustainable;

(b) it makes more sense to do actions covertly so you don't get the legal consequences - there are some good arguments for acting covertly but this one is a misconception.

Why is it that some individuals experience extreme trauma following arrests while others come through it empowered?

How can four women take the risk of destroying £13 million worth of warplane, go through 6 months of remand in prison and come out strong? How come they survived that and were empowered by the experience (even before they were acquitted). How come two of them went on to do further high-risk actions and go to prison again and again? They claim there is nothing unusual or heroic in their characters.

How trauma can be avoided: The case for careful preparation before an action and support afterwards

Most experienced activists confirm repeatedly that the most important step to avoiding trauma is to be well prepared, especially emotionally and psychologically - and spiritually if so inclined. This simply means to reflect on what is ahead, imagine how it will feel, think about what you can do about it. Emotions like fear are usually about the unknown and will dissolve if you think about the things that could happen and plan what to do. There are lots of practical solutions to the negative stuff, most are common sense and easy to find before the action, but not so when you are locked in a cell. for example, if you think you might get bored or frustrated in the cell take a book to read, if you are afraid of being isolated stay together with a buddy.

The best kind of preparation for open public rallies is an open public preparation session, including a legal briefing, encouraging everyone to attend. This will reduce the likelihood of "action casualties" occurring.

Of course preparation means that some people will decide not to go ahead, or to do something less risky like support someone else. Better that they avoid the trauma and hopefully decide to go ahead when they feel more prepared. However "brave" we are, there will always be a limit to what we can cope with, something worse they can do to us. The trick is to get familiar with our personal limits and go up to those limits but avoid going over them. Some of us live in a secure setting that means we can stick our necks out further. Nobody is invincible and we don't need to be. Perhaps the greater effort needed to prepare for actions will mean that initially the actions are less frequent with fewer people - but perhaps they will be so improved that eventually the net result is better.

if the preparation as above doesn't happen then the very least we can do is provide good post-action support. be on the look out for anyone experiencing trauma (they may try to hide their feelings) and be sensitive about offering support to everyone (including the ones who might be irritated by the person who is traumatised).

Often organisers don't want to provide public preparation because this might alert the police or the company. A solution to this would be for all organisers to make it standard practice to provide a verbal and written legal briefing prior to rallies or actions at gm crop sites, whatever the intentions of the organisers - we don't necessarily know the intentions of others.

The experience of going through the court / punishment process when well prepared and supported mean that you are likely to experience some of the emotions already mentioned - anger, stress, anxiety, fear - but less intensely. and you are also likely to experience clarity, feeling alive, inspired, a sense of achievement, centred, in control, vulnerable yet powerful - and sometimes very intensely. some people say prepared actions seem to have more depth and meaning which goes beyond their own experience - touching others more deeply too. these positive experiences make it possible to walk through the negative ones: "feeling the fear but doing it anyway". they also inspire other people to take action. so it's understandable that people who have had a few of these experiences carry on, become more effective and many also become organisers.

Many thanks to the person who offered the diary. If you think you know who that is please respectfully keep it to yourself.

Rowan Tilly

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Psychological and psychiatric effects of organized resistance and civil disobedience

By Michelle Arsenault (Canada)

Sure, we knew how to tie ropes, climb, encase ourselves in cement, lock ourselves into roads, tree-sit, construct tripods, how to speak to media, deal with police and legal processes, etc., etc., etc.— but we did not know how to handle the physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological duress of the organized resistance and civil disobedience actions and related situations we would suddenly be in.

We certainly didn't anticipate that pre-existing mental illness would be triggered. Now I know that of course a high-stress situation can create, expose or trigger psychological and psychiatric vulnerabilities. And that these symptoms may or may not have already been surfaced in that person before - they could be diagnosed or undiagnosed, and some of the activists were still young. Specifically I saw symptoms of mood disorders (mania, depression, and bi-polar depression), as well as alcoholism and addiction.

I also saw what I now recognize as acute stress disorder appear, not be recognized and thus fumble undealt with among camp participants.

We didn't even think to recognize that we were unprepared in these terms, that our actions were potential critical incidents. We naively and nakedly exposed ourselves to a terrible psychological crisis situations. Despite are openness, there is so much that we did not know and we did not discuss and we did not debrief. We felt the effects though. And as surely as the potential for incidence of post traumatic stress disorder was alive, it occurred among us."

Case study -- Forest Defence Camp at Owain Lake, Ontario Canada -- 1996

In the Autumn of 1996, I spent 6 weeks as an activist and activist support person at the pre-dominantly Earthroots-sponsored forest defence camp at Owain Lake - Temagami region of Ontario Canada.

The land we were defending was Teme-Augama Anishnabi native land. The native people of the region had been government-forced off the land earlier this century and relegated to living to Bear Island (also in the Temagami region). The government then determined the Owain Lake area to be crown land. For several decades the bear island Teme-Augama Anishnabi fought through legal channels to reclaim this land - land they had never legally signed away.

Despite the critical nature of the ecology and unresolved land claim issues, as well as many years of public information, media and legal campaigns aimed and defending this area, the Ontario government's ministry natural resources gave Goulard lumber of north bay Ontario permission to execute an ecologically damaging shelter-wood cut, to commence in Sept 1996.

From the beginning to the end, the injustice and corruption were stupefying.

Our situation was a crisis.

We've been front-line eye-witnesses to an on-going man made disaster daily for 3 months. It has destroyed 1000's of acres of habitat, old growth forest, unceeded Teme-Augama Anishnabi land. This disaster is the result of an illegal act. It could have been prevented, we have been trying to prevent it. But now all of the damage is nearly done. We are mortified by the devastation of the land around us; by the 10's of thousands of what were old-growth trees we now watch being incessantly wheeled down the road on their backs; by the injustice that this illegal disaster has been permitted, and that this act is being protected by law enforcement despite the fact that it is illegal.

We feel alienated, isolated: while, people we speak with outside of the direct situation actually agree that it may be unethical, they think us as deluded lunatics for stating that it is illegal: because if it were illegal, why is law enforcement spending a half of a million dollars to prevent anyone from stopping the act?

Beyond repeatedly arresting and incarcerating us, they wasted money on surveillance: night vision goggles; infiltrating the camp, sound bugs. Helicopters and at one point, we had to travel through seven checkpoints to get to the campsite. On crown land.

It has become a war for us. One front in a global war. A war of supreme overriding importance. Either we sustain ecology on this planet or we will die. These values are not significantly recognized by most people we meet in our everyday lives.

Our names and faces make the news back home, where we're definitely a topic of discussion. Our identifiable body-marks and fingerprints make it into police and likely files. We're cautious in our e-mail and phone calls. Sometimes, I don't know if I'm being neurotic and paranoid or simply safe and realistic. We believe the camp is bugged.

The issues and our actions and campaigns, and monitoring during all of this time are complex, demanding, and for the most part, well organized. We have funding. We are environmental resource grads, biologists, ecologists, journalists, teachers; Greenpeace, Earthroots. We are determined empathic activists from all walks: Earth First!ers. Former Clayquot Sound arrestees, treeplanters and yes, more than just a few hippies' kids. We are people whose spiritual values and ways of life are, in are sight, being unapologetically devastated, stolen and disrespected: local traditional trappers, native Mohawk spiritual leaders from Kanasataghe (Oka) and Teme-Augama Anishnabi from Bear Island.

I am suddenly a warrior. I am not alone at being at a point where if laying down my own life would actually protect that land, I would do so. Grateful to ended the destruction.

I never knew I could feel this frustrated. Sometimes it is so hard not to resort to violence or certain property destruction. What was I taught about war in school? - to take out transportation, means of destruction and communication. Occasionally clandestine groups quickly form and do.

But I have come to realize that even though I am willing to give my own life, to do so is impotent here. I never knew I could be this powerless.

Some of the activists have families who aren't particularly supportive - my common-law partner of 5 years has left me as a result of my stance, others have been thrown out of their parents' homes for their involvement. Other activists have spent too long up here, without an income to pay rent and have thus become homeless. Some people we know are even angry with us. Or think of us as "unstable" or deluded.

Every now and then, mostly individually, we go back to "civilization." surprisingly to me, urbanization already feels like a culture-shock. While visiting Toronto, one of us hid under a restaurant table, unable to cope. And, although, at camp, we can't even pickup radio signals, we find that there is, in civilization, a concurrent alternate (and occasionally grossly distorted) reality narrated by the great deal of media-attention about our actions. As a result, on these occasions when we do get out of the bush, we are each suddenly treated very differently by people (be it new acquaintances, community groups, friends or family) and we suddenly see that we are suddenly perceived and characterized as many things: heroic in stature by some, ridiculous and unstable by others. Irregardless, we are now 'different': distinguished, freaks, radicals, courageous, selfless, selfish, set apart, exemplified, objectified, and / or examined.

The devastation is and eye-level, morning noon and night, continuously. There's not much left. It is imperative that it stop now.

In the wilderness, people can and do become lost. The threat of serious injury (particularly due to exposure, frostbite and hypothermia) is very real. In running reconnaissance or getting to an action site we have navigated miles in dark, cold and wet night wilderness — although it's been rare, people have become injured and lost here. Informally, we learn, out of necessity, fear or interest, how to provide for ourselves in the wilderness - how to build shelters, mark safe drinking water sources, navigate by the sky, emergency first aid.

Our bodies are changing noticeably, from the cold, in terms of where the fat goes on them. We crave fat. Most of us are vegans tho. We now try to fry a lot of food.

We have grieved. We have mourned.

This is now our warzone. This is now our home. We are now our family. We are changed people. - our roles, our interdependence, the way we live our days, our common values, community, our very necessary purpose here, the length of time that we've been separated from so-called civilization.

To this day, most folks I talk to still find this story to be what crisis interventionists would call "a unique experience beyond the realm of normal activity". It was by definition, a crisis.

Organised resistance and /or CD actions as a critical incident

The actions were hard. I cannot emphasize enough how, in my opinion, how many organized resistance and /or CD actions are in themselves critical incidents, meeting the defining criteria.

The potential for resulting psychological injury is increased by the fact that in actions, despite the best planning, experience and best people who are participating, things can quickly go wrong and do.

Four of us, in two pairs, locked down to a bridge; laying flat on the top of the bridge, we reached down between beams to handcuff are arms together in lock-boxes around bridge support beams. Since our hands/ lock-boxes were under the bridge, they were too high above the water for the police to reach from below — they would have to use chainsaws to saw beside us into the bridge support beams (rather than into the lock boxes as is the usual case) to release us.

Things that didn't go according to plan that day included (but were by no means limited to): myriad effects of hypothermia (hallucinations, psychosis, inability to reason), frostbite, unanticipated brands of police compliance techniques, unexpectedly prolonged duration of the action (the police stated and enforced compliance technique for that particular day was to leave us locked own for hours, it was the standard —22c cold windy weather), neglectful (distressed) support workers, reaction to the physical stress of being locked down, the stress of being locked down to someone who is in distress, unexpectedly tightening cuffs that reduce blood circulation, suddenly realizing that we couldn't even temporarily release ourselves to get a medical assessment of injuries.

Despite my exposure and experience as a support worker in prior actions, and the fact that I had thoughtfully chose to express myself in this exact form of action I was involved with, I didn't choose many of the unanticipated events that subsequently unfolded:

In my case, to have most all of my freedom of movement restricted for 9 and a half painfully contorted hours eventually became a quiet psychological torture. The 1st 6 hours were fine enough, but level of stress I would feel in that last 3 and a half hours I simply had not anticipated. Later, I read somewhere like in an amnesty international piece, that "restricting freedom of movement" is in itself, not surprisingly to me anymore, a very effective means of torture.

We had locked down without gloves (I don't know what happened with communications that night, but at 5am we suddenly believed that the constant police presence on the road was near and was about to interrupt our action before we had even started it — we had suddenly rushed, in a sleep-deprived yet action-buzzed state of mind, without any hand or wrist protection to lock down). We thought that our hands would be safe anyway: we knew that someone had brought packs of those chemical hand-warmers — but, one after another, they didn't work. Hence, the girl I locked-down with began to get frostbite on the hand I was also cuffed to. Remember: our bare hands are in a steel lock box under a windswept bridge. Also, the cuff was tightening with her movements and restricting blood flow to her hand. After awhile our hands were so cold and disabled we couldn't get ourselves out of the situation if we wanted to. How did we know this? As a result of her frostbite, she tried, then I tried, discreetly, to simply manipulate either the handcuff key, or the karabiner that the chains of our cuffs were fastened by, to temporarily unlock and readjust ourselves — but we couldn't. We were locked down for as long as the police decided we would be. We discussed all this quietly between us, and we decided that we were both ready and willing to suffer it out. Most people didn't even know that this private situation was occurring. Among those who did, no one questioned or interfered with our decision.

Unable to unlock ourselves, our health was then de facto in the hands of the police. The police pointedly stated that they had no intention of "getting us down / unlocking / removing us" too soon.

Our conditions became physically painful. It was a greater test of stamina and endurance than we had anticipated.

The six of us who locked down that day began to get hypothermia and accordingly exhibited appropriate symptoms of mental impairment, hallucinations and distress. None of knew at the time that this was characteristic of hypothermia. None of us knew what acute or critical incident stress, crisis etc, were by definition. We were simply inexplicably and somewhat unknowingly-to-

ourselves losing our minds. And in ignorance, and in the circus of events, no one there seemed to even accurately notice that.

Circus? — While 5 out of the 6 of us were locked into positions where are bodies were flush against ground level, in contrast, 20 members of a school field trip, half-dozen or more members of the media, 20 police, a dozen or more loggers, and other camp participants were mostly standing.

We became in a sense invisible as people. We were objects. They couldn't even hear us over some of the noise when we spoke: who ever speaks to you from ankle level? And all the while, we were under more physical and emotional distress than, I believe anyone there, including ourselves, realized. This aspect of the action was very isolating and alienating and difficult to endure. I felt very separated from the situation.

After a while the police turned the action into a crime scene wherein it would be illegal for our support workers to go into the area to give of food or water or adjust our clothing/covering from the cold. Inexplicably, loggers and press were however still allowed on the site.

I wasn't prepared. I never in my life planned on hearing the deafening noise, smelling the hot sawdust, and actually feeling the friction's heat of a chainsaw less than an inch from my head as it cut into the beam of a bridge. (Stoned on hypothermia as I was, that really got my attention.) Remarkably surreal, one hell of a rush, unforgettable. And paradoxically, I laughed!

They had given us a protective visor, placed a thin but apparently safe plastic divider between our head and the chainsaw, but still, not much can immediately prepare you for that. One activist, who I could only hear (I was in a contorted position unable to view much at all) was being cut away before me. He began screaming, in uncontrollable horror!

They immediately stopped cutting (and apparently checked him out, he wasn't being physically hurt, rather, psychologically, the stress of the situation had just become that overwhelming for him.) Then, without telling us what just happened, they started up the chainsaw again. The girl I was locked to met my eyes. Each of us had tears welling, understanding that this had been a very long hard day, and a very different day than we had bargained for.

Prison (maximum security for the men, medium security for the women), in my experience, was a vacation. A respite of warmth, and cozy, clean and light weight clothes and bedding, with hot running water, non-life threatening climatological and environmental elements, and meals and drinking water you didn't have to unthaw or even work to prepare.

However, I shared my cells with an activist who could no longer cope with being confined. She was agitated, irritable, fearful anxious and angry. She began to lose her wits, yelling and desperately pacing. She was distressed that we had gone beyond 24 hours in jail without having 'juris prudence.' She was stressed for a cigarette and a tampon and even at least one damn piece of toilet paper.

Neither one of us had ever been in jail. In my case, I submitted very well to confinement. It represented the safe end of a successful yet very strenuous difficult action. In her case, it prompted acute stress (and / or exacerbated the undiffused stress of the action we coming from).

That action met the criteria of a Critical Incident.

Organised resistance and/or CD actions and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

I believe that I personally developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD) and subsequently became suicidal for months.

The urban world, the world at large no longer made sense to me and seemed to violate my beliefs. Instead, however, when I returned my urban apartment from that trip, I was unable to even make it back to that cabin: I had immediately withdrawn almost entirely from human contact. I couldn't answer the phone or even open mail for months. I put masking tape over the peephole on my door. I couldn't work. I was soon broke. I couldn't even make a welfare appointment. A friend started leaving food at my door. After awhile, my door was posted with an eviction notice (non-payment of rent).

Homelessness was imminent. I ultimately became suicidal, and required medical intervention. The treatment given to me was exclusively for manic-depression, specifically the depressive aspects

the time, not any treatment or recognition PTSD (by myself or others). The activist experience I had went through was very foreign to the physicians treating me, and was regarded as a symptom (a manifestation of the kind of trouble one can get into during an 'episode') and not at all as a potential cause of my illness.

It took about 8 hard months, but I eventually recovered to the point of being able to work and to begin to rebuild my health and my life.

Positive psychological effects of organized resistance and/or CD actions

I feel it essential to qualify that, despite the trauma around and inside of us, we also grew as people and as a community in many positive aspects.

We learned new skills and developed existing and new-found interests. The skills, personal qualities and life experiences of the participants were fascinating, and impressively accomplished. It is very empowering to take a very public stand for something that you believe in to your deepest core; to tangibly directly assist in a critically important movement.

To forever become a part of the long proud diverse global history of civil disobedience, direct action, and conscientious objection: justice and positive change. I am privileged to have acquired the gifts of such strength, courage, dignity, integrity and awareness from this experience. My participation there as both an arrested-activist and general camp participant expanded my social-political and ecological conscious, gave me greater self-awareness and assisted me in making changes to live in a more positive, gentle and **authentic** manner. In these respects it has positively marked the course of my life and my daily living to this day.

How it worked out – today

One year later: significant success: of the seven Ontario old growth white and red pine stands that had been slated for cut in 1997, none were. We believe that our campaign in 1996 had direct bearing on their preservation.

Two years later: all charges against all of us were dismissed: it had played itself out in the courts. In deed we had won on our defence, that indeed the cut was illegal.

Three years later. I have never returned that region, and have become, for the most part, inactive in related environmental CD movements. Many things associated with that trauma fills me with much anxiety. I really didn't think that I could psychologically cope with being in such a similar landscape again. Despite my distance from the area, I imagine that Owain Lake is likely coming closer to looking the goddamned moon, and I know that the land claim still unresolved.

And I know that I'm both enriched, wiser and still scarred up by all that I witnessed and learned there. I might have remained active in CD had I known all that I am telling you now. And I might yet become active again, because I am finally learning just what it was that went so wrong.

Four years later — today. I wrote all of the above one year ago. It was necessary and good to process it. I remember crying as I wrote. I learned a lot more about crisis intervention etc. - that definitely helped. I've recognized the positive application of this whole experience and spoke about in Washington. That in itself helped — seeing and hearing the immediate understanding, recognition and common shared experience of what I described. I've finally recovered. I feel good.

I know that others can benefit from this education and insight. These educations, these skills, are the best of what I can offer to activism, sustainable life, justice, and positive change. As a facilitator of these skills, I'm ready to be involved in activism again. Although I haven't been back to Owain Lake yet, I spent a peaceful vacation in an area near the Temagami region last summer — without bail restrictions, and without any incident.

Further background about this campaign and relevant history can be found at:

Earthroots website: http://www.earthroots.org/ - campaign history link

Bray, Matt and Thomson, Ashley (eds.). Temagami: a debate on wilderness Toronto: Dundurn press, 1990.

Written by Michelle Arsenault

Source:, Crisis intervention and prevention for civil disobedience activists and action support. Arsenault, Michelle. National Conference on Civil Disobedience. American university, Washington dc, January 22, 2000

Emotional preparedness

By Katrina Shields (Australia)

Your emotions can contribute to a situation's effect on you and to your response to it, because our responses are not only based on what we know, but on how we feel. Our experiences reinforce our emotional habits, often causing us to react inappropriately to situations requiring a particular, unique response.

By focusing attention on our feelings, we can become more consciously aware of how our emotions and life experiences affect our judgement and can contribute to serious errors.

Begin with thinking about how you feel about the situation you are in now, and be as honest as possible about your concerns, fears and anxieties related to peace work. Try to find out what triggers an emotional response. Answering the following questions may help. These are some of the "big questions" that people face when they are going into a conflict situation, and may make you stop and think quite deeply about the work you are about to do. Try not to be overwhelmed by these thoughts, but factor your responses into your preparation.

- What emotional life experiences have affected your decision to volunteer for peacekeeping or peacework? In what ways have these experiences affected your ideals, beliefs and responses?
- What emotional benefit do you hope to gain from your peace work?
- Are you a perfectionist, always trying to get everything right? What do you do with your frustration if you are not permitted to "get it right"?
- How do you react under pressure? How do you react when you are angry? Afraid? Confused? Tired?
- How do you respond to other people's anger or confrontational styles?
- Have you ever had violence directed at you? Or witnessed violence being directed at someone else? What emotions did it bring up in you?
- List two or three things that make you feel uneasy. Why do they make you feel this way?
- What frightens you about the situation you will be going into? What do you NOT want to see happen? What is the worst scenario you can imagine taking place there?
- How do you react to the possibility of your own death? To other people's deaths?

Stress and burnout

Stress is response to strain. It is an inevitable part of life - we need a certain amount of stress to enhance performance, but too much stress debilitates performance. Many people effectively manage continuing stressful events whilst others 'cave in' under the strain. What makes the difference is the effectiveness of the individual's response to strain and coping mechanisms. Excessive stress is known as 'burnout'.

Burnout

Burnout is defined as physical and emotional exhaustion involving the development of negative self-concept, negative job attitudes and a loss of feeling for others.

Symptoms: Tension, fatigue, inability to relax, easily startled, moved to tears easily, trembling, paranoia, feelings of omnipotence, overconfidence, stubbornness and inflexibility.

Importance to activists

It is crucial that you learn to look after yourself, and be able to *meet your needs.* Remember, extended periods of stress will burn out your body and mind.

It is crucial to make sure that we know *how to* and *actually do* look after ourselves - if we are under too much stress we won't be capable of 'being there' for others or meeting people's needs.

Looking after ourselves ranges from keeping healthy lifestyle habits - eating, resting, having fun and relaxing and exercising adequately, to having a break, or refusing to continue interacting with someone abusive.

Preventing stress and burnout as part of group culture

Some recommendations

- Create a group culture / ethos that supports self-care, balance and sustainable work loads and patterns.
- Take a long-term perspective of planning and working for the long haul, to keep experienced / skilled group members for as long as possible
- Balance task focus with process and relationship / maintenance focus - in meetings, in daily work, in planning, and in evaluation
- Provide workshops / training in stress management and burnout prevention - can be as part of conferences, gatherings or ongoing training / orientation.
- Use regular planning and evaluation as a tool to reduce stress
- Build stress level checks into reviews and evaluations - how stressed do people feel? What is contributing? What do we need to do about these?
- Put stress prevention strategies on the agenda for meetings.
- Allow people to express feelings of distress, grief and loss and frustration - regard them as normal and healthy responses to unhealthy situations and state of the world.
- Provide individual or group debriefing after critical incidents or high stress campaigns. Keep an eye open for vulnerable individuals and see intervention as valid.
- Create support structures, eg support / affinity groups, routine debriefing, supervision, mentoring for new people, group workshops and training.
- Put value on socialising, fun, humour, relaxation time as a group.

Motivation and despair

why support and debriefing is important

- Feelings of discouragement, exhaustion and even bitterness are not uncommon among activists who have worked for more than a few years.
- Turnover is extremely high, with subsequent loss of skilled people.
- Many groups do not attract enough new members or work as effectively as they could, and the causes can be linked with not dealing effectively with these issues.
- Research by Mary Gnomes on peace activists in the USA. found the major cause of dropping out and discouragement was not campaign losses or lack of results, but unresolved and unsatisfactory relationships with other activists.
- Bill Moyer highlights that many people adhere to a belief that they are powerless and that what they are doing is failing. They are often hostile to the notion that the movement is progressing along the normal road of movement success and that they could afford to celebrate their successes.
- Groups are often led by highly task/action-oriented personalities who may remain highly motivated, but who do not acknowledge the needs of others for training and support, or for validation, and who do not give attention to individual needs and group process until it is too late.

As activists and community workers we need to individually and collectively deal with feelings such as loss, grief, frustration, anger and despair

We are continually bombarded by signs and information telling us that the world is not safe, and that horrific violence is random and everywhere. Feelings of pain or distress caused by this are natural and healthy, if acknowledged, expressed and used as a motivating force for acting positively for change.

What is not healthy is the denial, the psychic numbing that prevents many people from really taking in what is happening around us, and which also saps energy and blocks the ability to take action for change, sending people scurrying into escapist activities.

Or, unacknowledged, unexpressed feelings of pain for the world can cause people to take action in an unhealthy way - acting for change from a sense of desperation and/or driven-ness, so that their actions are more frantic than effective. This is a sure recipe for eventual burn-out. Cynicism, can be seen as a form of congealed disappointment, feelings that have not had an opportunity to be expressed and to shift.

Actions which rely on anger as their only fuel can result in behaviour which is counter-productive, lacking well-thought-out long term strategies and appropriate responses.

When we can express our feelings of pain for the world - whether they manifest as anger, fear, sadness, hopelessness, frustration, numbness, etc. - in a safe way and in the company of others, it helps to release the mind, to clear the energy, and to overcome the fear that these feelings will destroy us. It helps us to re-connect with others, with the vast web of life, and with the resources we have for creating change. It reassures us that we are not in this alone - we have support for the journey.

This support can be done at a very simple level by being willing to listen to and support colleagues feelings, or to allow time in meetings and workshops to acknowledge this dimension, through to specially designed workshops and training

supporting each other

It is never an easy road for people committed to fundamental change. For many of us this work represents a lifelong commitment. How do we sustain ourselves through the inevitable hard times? How can we hold on to our faith and resolution?

Where do we recharge and renew our commitment? How do we find resources?

Who can help us to stay on track? Few people who devote their lives to such work do it without some regular source of reflection, challenge, and affirmation - necessary for sustained and effective efforts for change. Too often we are confronted with feelings of isolation - even from those with whom we work closely.

Support from our community and from the groups we work in are one way to give regular attention to each person's social change work - to reflect on directions, goals, effectiveness, rough places and growing points, to challenge each other - taking into account all dimensions of our lives.

by supporting each other we can:

- Hear each others' stories of despair and of hope and to gain support
- Allow full expression of the feelings of despair and other feelings
- Reclaim our sense of power
- Create visions of positive futures
- Develop more skills and strategies for action
- Enhance our sense of community - with each other and with the web of life

supporting others

There are three basic elements to the support: emotional support, support for action, and educational support.

Emotional support can be: giving encouragement, affirming and validating thinking and achievements, allowing space for expressions of feelings, checking on physical health and discouraging over-work. Support can be loving challenges based on seeing a person and their life clearly and then thinking carefully about that person.

Support for action can be: helping to clarify goals, set directions and take actions. It can also help solve problems in specific difficult situations, to look at longer-range strategy questions. It can focus on areas of skill and leadership development for each individual.

Educational support can encourage learning as a primary focus by attending workshops or seminars together, or reading and discussing books or journal articles, or asking members of the group to share special knowledge or expertise.

if you are supporting another worker

- Have clear agreements around boundaries - what you want to do together, how often, how long, to meet, being respectful of each other etc.
- Confidentiality is very necessary for building trust. Make a clear commitment that sensitive personal matters raised between you will not get discussed with anybody else.
- Practice good listening - this is the key element. Allow enough time for the person to speak and have the focus of attention.
- Keep to the stated purpose - keep the focus on the person - resist getting sidetracked.
- Ask pertinent, strategic questions to encourage clarity on each person's objectives and how to reach them.
- Encourage and affirm self-care - physical and emotional.
- Allow silence - encourage the focus person to pause occasionally, to go within, to reflect without interruption.
- Provide challenge and feedback - gently, skilfully and honestly. And practice receiving feedback. Encourage boldness.
- Draw out deeper feelings - this takes time and skills.
- Deal with conflicts as they arise.
- No recruiting - support time is about support for you, not for recruiting the other members for your cause, unless they offer.

maintaining group morale and motivation

developing a good task / maintenance balance

Groups can become overly focused on the task at hand - especially when the task is preventing environmental destruction - at the expense of the maintenance of individual and group well-being. This means paying attention to how things are done not only what gets done particularly in terms of attending to group process that maintains interpersonal relationships and work satisfaction. Attention to group maintenance whether it be in meetings or daily activities can help to sustain your group for effective work in the long haul.

building team relationships

Good teamwork can be one of your most effective tools for making a difference. Understanding and valuing the individual needs, skills, talents, resources and styles of working and communicating which each person brings to your team can help each person to do their best work. Your team can then synergise these energies for maximum effectiveness. There are many options for training and support for team building.

resolving conflicts and improving communication

Nothing saps the energy like unresolved conflict, or confuses an issue like misunderstanding and mis-communication. Good techniques for communication - both oral and written - and for resolving inevitable conflicts, will help your group to function effectively. Groups that see conflict as an opportunity for development rather than as something to be avoided, are more likely to flourish. Basic training in conflict resolution skills can be a good in investment maintaining the group. Taking time to resolve conflict, if necessary with a neutral third party mediator or facilitator can prevent serous damage to group morale.

celebrating successes & achievements

Too often our successes and achievements are overlooked in the rush on to the next thing. In the world of social change activism, where there are many setbacks, it is vital that the group does take time to celebrate, to validate achievements and provide impetus to carry on.

Dealing with fear

- Fear is a natural and very important human survival response;
- Fear is part of our human 'flight, fight, connect' response – our bodies can feel like running, hiding, fighting, or being close with others or sometimes all at once;
- Fear can be managed in the same we 'manage' stress;
- There is a huge range of useful and effective fear management techniques we can use at any time.

Breathing: focus on breathing, slowing down breathing, counting breaths, count slowly to 10 with each breath.

Communication: eye contact with others, talking about feelings with partner, sharing the fact you're scared with others, reassuring others, self-talk, telling yourself you'll be okay, laughter, humour.

Touch: clasping your partner's hands, clasping your own hands, holding an object, a crucifix, prayer beads, a small stone or precious object in your pocket.

Grounding: touching the ground or earth, holding onto a tree, a leaf, something alive or natural.

Body: washing your face, quick body shake, vigorous exercise, a quick run, jumping up and down, stretching, touching toes.

Visualisation: Closing eyes and visualizing an image of a 'safe place',

Voice: humming or singing a song softly.

Meditation: meditation, calming and centring techniques. Many spiritual, martial arts and meditation practises have techniques for managing fears.

Activist Debriefing

By Anthony Kelly (Australia)

After many years of providing debriefing to activists, Pt'chang has spent considerable time exploring and developing particularly activist- orientated processes for debriefing.

For many years we kept hearing of activists coming away dissatisfied with 'mainstream' counsellors or psychologists when they sought professional help from trauma. Many counsellors might enquire about "why you put yourself in that position in the first place", and seek to uncover a pathology or problematize your activism or motivations. Debriefing after a violent or traumatic action is not the time to do that.

Likewise, some of the western models of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CICD) are individualistic, even through they can be done in a group. CICD processes often fail to recognise and can sometimes even undermine collective and community healing and recovery processes. Each movement and activist group has a particular culture. Debriefing needs to be sensitive to this culture. Rather than impose inappropriate support processes we try to identify and reinforce its existing support structures.

Furthermore, activists have often reported debriefing sessions that focus purely on personal support and recovery fail to acknowledge, record or build upon valuable lessons for the next action. Support and recovery is primary but learning from the action is important and as activists, we can draw lessons from these debriefings for future actions.

What is Activist debriefing: Activist debriefing is a collective process designed to assist in the recovery after an action or event and build upon our own internal resilience and community support structures. Debriefing is a safe and confidential space to explore the emotional and psychological impacts that may have involved violence, incarceration, injury, abuse or victimisation. Activist debriefing recognizes the political nature of the work and emphasizes recovery to a place of renewed strength.

Who should attend: Anyone connected to the action. Even if you weren't in the thick of it, you can fill in valuable details and support others stories. Experienced activists and activists who were not 'hurt' can demonstrate their solidarity for others by coming along. Come along if you have a connection and feel that you should be there.

What happens: It can be facilitated group process, with an experienced facilitator, about two hours and confidential. It's generally based on Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CICD) but modified for activists and can be changed to suit the group needs and culture. We have learnt heaps from Latin American and other movements that have survived intense repression.

Generally, we go through the action step by step, discussing what happened, what you experienced and how you have felt since. Everyone gets listened to and heard. It finishes with sharing ways of supporting each other and lots of ideas and plans can come out of it.

Responding to a critical incident?

A Critical Incident is "any situation faced by any person that causes them to experience unusually strong reactions which have the potential to affect the person immediately or some time later."

Critical Incident scan include serious accidents, injury or life threatening situations, witnessing or assisting with serious accidents or injury, attempted suicides or suicides, acts of violence, sexual abuse or assault, personal, racial or homophobic abuse, threats or death threats.

Critical Incident Stress refers to stress which is causes emotional and/or physiological reactions to demands or pressures which are *sudden, unexpected* and due to a *specific incident* or *set of incidents*. It is a normal reaction to an abnormal event.

People may go through certain stages during and immediately after a critical incident:

- Shock – it couldn't have happened;
- Disbelief or denial – this is not real – it's a joke;
- Realisation – it has happened, this is real;
- Survival state – 'on automatic pilot', allows people to survive event without 'thinking'.

People respond differently top incidents due to the person's life experience, belief systems, coping mechanisms, age, role in the incident, state of mind at the time, current health and social support systems.

A **Critical Incident Debriefing** session should ideally be held as soon as possible after any potentially traumatic or 'critical incident' and involve all people involved in the event. An outside professional de-briefer may also be brought in for this de-briefing.

A de-briefing can be a standard and routine practice at the end of every peacekeeping shift and as soon as possible at the end of every peacekeeping project – whether or not there was a critical incident.

A standard Critical Incident Debriefing procedure includes the following stages:

1) Immediate Personal Support: (after the Incident.) The aim of this stage is to meet the persons' immediate physical and emotional needs, re-establish a sense of safety and security as much as possible and to assist people make the transition from a state of high arousal associated with the incident to a more normal state. This is also called 'diffusing'.

2) Debriefing: (12 to 72 hours after incident.) An organised, preventative intervention designed to reduce the likelihood and impact of critical incident stress symptoms and encourage a self-managed recovery to take place. An individual or group de-briefing session could be needed to help people involved to form clear idea of events, identify assess personal stress symptoms, normalise the stress responses, promote self-care and support strategies, enable people to integrate experiences.

3) Follow –Up: Where ever possible, maintain contact with and check up on people involved in a critical incident. Individuals may find that other aspects of the situation come into prominence after the de-briefing. Signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) should be looked for. Follow-up de-briefing sessions may be required. If stress responses continue referral to a clinical PTSD counsellor.

Conducting a mini-debriefing

If you find yourself in situation where you feel a mini-debriefing is necessary, here are some guidelines to consider.

1. Not everyone can conduct mini-debriefings. Those best suited have good interpersonal skills, know from experience that critical incident stress is real and a normal reaction to acute trauma, are comfortable with the expression of emotion in themselves and others and are trusted by those they plan to assist. Knowledge of crisis intervention, grief and loss is a definite plus.

2. You must be seen as an ally to the people you plan to debrief. Sometimes even the warmest supervisor cannot lead a debriefing due to the attitude some may have towards management or an existing climate between groups and management. It is recommended that debriefers be at the peer level. If there is no one else, simply put your cards on the table right away. Inform the group (or individual, if that is the case) that your role here is as a supportive friend. If you feel your position would get in the way of a debriefing, get someone else to lead the process.

3. Make the rules clear. This is to be a debriefing, not a critique or evaluation. The purpose of the session is to share your feelings about a difficult incident, not to criticize others. Also make sure participants agree that the proceedings will be confidential.

4. Pick a time and a place that is comfortable and where there will be no interruptions. The debriefing should be a continuous process with no one else wandering in and out.

5. Do not assume how participants are feeling. Explain why you have initiated the debriefing and your knowledge about critical incident stress. Then simply invite participants to individually respond to how the incident has affected them. Listen and watch for signs of emotional vulnerability. If there is none, fine, you have done your job. If there is, let it flow and the group will establish its own emotional level. Remember, the expression of extreme emotion is a healthy, normal process that so many people have learned to suppress.

6. Don't force the group process, but try to get each individual to contribute at least once. One suggestion is to follow the traditional debriefing steps and have participants discuss what they actually said and heard at the scene. If individuals have been traumatized, it normally shows through their tone of voice. When this happens, let them express themselves. Affirm that what they are experiencing is normal given the circumstances.

7. Stop criticism of others. A critique can come later, but if individuals start complaining about others behaviour, stop it by saying something like: "Bob, we will be doing a critique later this week. The purpose of this session is to share our feelings about the call. Tell us how you felt during the incident when things started going wrong." Being criticized by others before you are debriefed can be more traumatic than the incident itself.

8. Do not permit tough, insensitive comments or any gallows humour. This will quickly put an end to the expression of personal feelings.

9. Watch for the non-participant especially the one who is visibly shaken. Touch base with him/her later in private to make sure he/she is not simply reluctant to talk in a group setting.

10. If the mini-debriefing becomes emotional, do not stop until all the grief and pain is out. You may go through the entire group without any expression of feelings and finally the last person

shares some emotional pain. Make sure you allow time to go around the group again allowing others to do the same.

11. End the session with "What do we need to do now?" question. After an emotional session there is a need for a transition. Talking about action plans and support structures gives time for individuals to internalise what has happened and get ready to return home or to work. Never underestimate people's own individual stress management strategies – even though they may not be yours.

12. Finally, after the session is over, you should contact a trained debriefer and debrief yourself. Doing this will release any pent-up stress and build your confidence about further debriefings.

Remember, the worst thing you can do when others have experienced critical incident stress is to criticise them before they are emotionally debriefed.

references and resources

Activist Trauma Support database

http://www.activist-trauma.net/

Activist Trauma Support (ATS) is an organisation which exists to help people who have experienced trauma through their participation in social justice movements. As governments, the police and corporations increasingly turn to violence and brutality to suppress or silence resistance, more and more people are experiencing the after-effects of trauma in their every day lives. The trauma of police brutality can lead people to experience anxiety, panic attacks, depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Activist Trauma Support exists to raise awareness of the after effects of trauma amongst activists and to facilitate contact between activists and sympathetic professionals.

We have set up a database and are looking for sympathetic professionals such as psychotherapists, psychologists, counsellors, Cognitive Behavioural Therapists, homeopaths, acupuncturists or other healers who could help activists overcome the after effects of traumatic experiences. If you are interested in doing this, then please consider joining the database.

If you are happy to add your details into the database on our website then that is great (instructions below). However, if you would like us to be an intermediary between you and the person we can do that too. We could contact you beforehand and see if it is ok to put the person directly in contact with you. Joining the database does not require you to work for free. It will be up to you to negotiate a fair fee for your work but please do bear in mind that most activists will have very limited financial resources.

If you'd rather email us, you can contact us via :activist_trauma@riseup.net

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