English Transcript

Mic Check! Podcast
Episode 07: Transforming Our Relationships with Conflict & Accountability
Guest: Stas of Spring Up and Valleria Miranda-Ferrick of Unity Circles
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Intro music plays.

Priya Dadlani
You're listening to Mic Check!, a podcast by Third Wave Fund. For over 25 years, Third Wave has resourced youth-led, gender justice organizations that philanthropy has consistently left behind. We do this work because we know when directly-impacted communities have the resources they need to come together and dream up our shared liberation, they have the capacity to build stronger organizations and movements for social change. Whatever your relationship is to philanthropy, we’re glad you’re tuning in to hear directly from queer, trans, intersex, and sex working organizers and activists on their movement origin stories, what their day-to-day work is like, and how we - and especially those in the funder sphere - can best support them not just in moments of crisis, but for the long haul.

Intro music fades out.

Priya Dadlani
And I’m your host, Priya Dadlani! Today’s conversation is an important and always timely one. We’ll be hearing from Valleria Miranda-Ferrick, a transformative and restorative justice practitioner and educator who is also the Executive Director of Unity Circles, an organization dedicated to building networks of intergenerational leadership that are rooted in the values and practices of transformative and restorative justice. Unity Circles is also a 2022 grantee of Third Wave’s Accountable Futures Fund. Valleria will be in conversation with Stas, a nonbinary BlaQ-Italian storyteller, transformative justice practitioner, abolitionist, organizer, healer, and survivor who is also the co-founder of Spring Up and bluelight academy of the liberatory arts.

They’ll be discussing how and why social justice organizations need to reimagine how we approach conflict in our work, and what facilitators need most at this time to grow the practice of transformative justice, restorative justice, and community accountability.
But before we dive in, we’re excited to hear from Third Wave’s very own mai doan about our Accountable Futures Fund, and have a quick introduction to how the fund supports Black people, trans people, sex workers, and youth who are navigating conflict and harm in ways that decrease the power of carceral and state systems.

Welcome mai! So for folks that may not be familiar with the Accountable Futures Fund here at Third Wave, can you tell us a little bit about what it is and how it got started?

**mai doan**

Sure! So, the Accountable Futures Fund is a five year, multi-year grantmaking program that resources groups and organizations led by queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, People Of Color who are developing the fields of transformative justice, restorative justice, and community accountability. This means, we fund groups that are building up the skills and capacity of their communities and the movements they are a part of to respond to harm and violence in ways that decrease the power of prisons, police, and other carceral systems.

The Accountable Futures Fund began as a pilot fund in 2019, in response to Third Wave Fund witnessing conflict and harm within QTPBIPOC-led movements for gender justice, and really wanting to think through what our role was as a gender justice funder when conflict happens within the movements and organizations that we resource.

We really wanted to make sure that if we were to create a fund to resource conflict resolution, that it would be aligned with the needs of those on the ground and at the forefront of this work. And so we developed this fund through a series of interviews we did with QTBIPOC organizers and practitioners in these fields, and continue this commitment through our ongoing learning and relationship building with our Advisory Council members and grantees.

**Priya Dadlani**

So we know Third Wave resources youth-led gender justice movements across the U.S. and we know that gender justice is a part of every movement for justice. Can you talk a little bit about how transformative justice intersects with gender justice?

**mai doan**

So from what I’ve learned, so much of transformative justice is about recognizing and addressing the conditions that contribute to harm and violence happening. And when we think about these conditions, I think it’s really important and necessary to include an analysis around how things like patriarchy, misogyny, transphobia are contributing, in implicit and explicit ways, to harm and violence happening in the first place. Otherwise, we risk replicating rather than disrupting the conditions we are trying to shift, change, or transform.
I also think of organizations and current and former grantees like Survived and Punished and the devi co-op who are actively supporting survivors of violence who are criminalized for self-defense. Their work really shows how the criminal legal system and other carceral institutions are particularly dangerous for cis and trans women of color, and femme, non-binary, gender non-conforming, and trans people of color, and why gender justice is critical to developing alternatives to the police and other carceral systems and practices.

**Priya Dadlani**
Thanks mai, that's really helpful! I’m wondering if there is one important thing you’ve learned in your time creating AFF that you’d like to share with folks?

**mai doan**
Something I find really exciting about this fund is that funding transformative justice, restorative justice, and community accountability with care and responsibility requires that we really look at and challenge how we think about and practice philanthropy at every level. For example, we’ve learned how strict timelines and funder-driven outcomes aren’t inline with the values or needs of the organizations we fund through the Accountable Futures Fund, and in fact, create real barriers and limitations to their work. Because of this, we’ve developed the fund to offer five year, multi-year general operating support grants - as a way to meet the need for sustainability through long-term funding without strings attached to outcome, and to offer funding that allows more room for the creative, adaptive, and often non-linear nature of this work.

It’s been really powerful to learn from the visions and expertise of our grantees and Advisory Council members, and apply that to how we resource this work. And we’re always learning and trying new things with as much intention as possible.

**Priya Dadlani**
Appreciate this quick 101 from you mai about the Accountable Futures Fund and transformative justice. And before we get into our conversation with Valleria and Stas, we’re wondering if you want to give any shout outs?

**mai doan**
I’d love to shout out our grantees and Advisory Council members - they make up so much of the brains, heart, and muscle behind this grantmaking program and I am so inspired by and appreciative of the work that they do.

*Music fades in.*
Maryse Mitchell-Brody
Hi friends. This is Maryse.

Sylvia Jung
Sylvia.

Jillian Jacobs
And Jillian!

Maryse Mitchell-Brody
The Development team at Third Wave Fund.

Jillian Jacobs
We’re not here to tell you to buy new sheets, or improve your internet security, although you should definitely do that, we’re here to ask you to fuel gender justice movements by giving a monthly donation to Third Wave.

Sylvia Jung
Whether you give $5 a month or $500, we need you. Find a donation link and other ways to support our work in the show notes. No coupon code required.

Music fades in.

Music fades out.

Priya Dadlani
Welcome Stas and Valleria, we’re so excited to have you on this podcast. I’ll let you both introduce yourselves.

Stas
Hey, y'all, my name is Stas. I go by they/them pronouns. I am a light-skinned Black Italian. I was born in Italy, but raised in Miami, so I definitely still identify with the south. But I currently live in Denver, Colorado on Ute, Arapaho, and Cheyenne Lands. I'm one of the co-founders, vision keepers, and imaginatrix at Spring Up and bluelight academy of the liberatory arts.

Valleria Miranda-Ferrick
Greetings, my name is Valleria. I use she/her pronouns. I am a first generation Brazilian Afro-Latina residing in Boston, MA land of the Pawtucket people. I am a restorative justice coach for Boston Public Schools in addition to being the Executive Director and founder of a restorative justice and transformative justice organization called Unity Circles. Thank you for having me!

Priya Dadlani
To kick us off into this conversation about transformative justice, I want to ask, you know, every strong organization will inevitably have conflict, and we've seen that. Breakups, disagreements, interpersonal conflicts come to the fore, especially in social justice spaces. So how can we best prepare for those moments utilizing a transformative justice framework and approach?

Stas
Yeah. I think this is a really good question because it is so real. And I think that sometimes our organizations will judge ourselves when we deal with conflict. But the reality is that this is present in every organization I've been a part of, every community, and I think when we try to avoid conflict and have this kind of perfectionistic approach, we're living into white supremacy culture. And conflict isn't necessarily about harm. It can be about strategic disagreements. Just because we're trying to move towards another reality doesn't mean that we all agree on the pathway to get there on the best strategy to prioritize. And the reality is that conflict can be really generative and supportive in us figuring out what is realistic within our capacity, within our timeframe, within our skill sets. We are not doing this work on our own. We're always part of ecosystems of change. And when we try to do everything, we end up not doing anything that well. So prioritizing being able to say no, being able to know what's right for us is actually a really important part of creating an effective organization and community.

And so I think that we often see conflict showing up in feedback and evaluation, in collaborative decision making. And if you're not noticing conflict coming up in those spaces, it probably means that there's a really strong power dynamic, and that power is determining what's seen as legitimate rather than a space where different opinions can be held at the same time across power dynamics. So I think that conflict is actually an indicator of a healthy community rather than a very hierarchical community that's focused on efficiency and on doing what you're told. I think understanding and respecting our differences and where we diverge and being able to discern between what conflict is interpersonal tensions and what is strategic conflict, is very important in being able to make space for the right conversations and the right disagreements.

I think that some of the ways that we do this effectively using a transformative justice framework is in really having the conversations, even if they take time to have clear values that have
definitions and that are paired with practices that you can actually do. The challenge is that values are often very abstract, and it can be hard to know what they look like to live into. And we can have really intense disagreements about, for example, what the value of respect looks like. A clear example would be, if you have the value of freedom or liberation of all, a tactic or a practice would be accountability. And when we're thinking about accountability, we're thinking about relational accountability. So how are we living into our relationships with one another? How are we thinking about care and support? We're also thinking about task accountability and what does it look like for us to follow through on our commitments. And have open conversations about capacity, about disability justice, about urgency, about what of our tasks are realistic, who are we accountable to, and why are we doing those tasks.

So I know for me, I tend to break any rule that someone gives me. So if someone says, "Oh, you need to complete this task by Friday," I'm going to push it because I don't like being told what to do. Whereas if someone tells me, "I need this information from you in order for me to do my next step because this project needs to be available to the community by the winter when they're dealing with this issue," I'm going to feel a different level of commitment to that task than if I think about it as a rule. So thinking about who are you accountable to, what are you accountable to them for, and building norms of accountability from the bottom up, thinking about accountability as a personal commitment and then as a relational commitment to your colleagues, to your community, and then accountability to leadership and leadership's accountability to the rest of the community rather than focusing on accountability as a top-down kind of management strategy, I think is a really important lesson that we can learn from transformative justice.

**Priya Dadlani**

Ooh, thank you, Stas. I really appreciate that. And I'm going to pass to you, Valleria, if you want to add to that or speak to your own experience navigating conflict through transformative justice work.

**Valleria Miranda-Ferrick**

Absolutely. Thank you, Stas, for sharing. There's so much there. I think something that has come up for me that feels really important is, I'm not sure I'm sure you've read the essay Dreaming Accountability by Mia Mingus. I love this essay, this blog. For me, that has really shaped the way that I think of accountability and conflicts. Growing up, accountability and conflict has been very scary. I've really been conflict avoidant, and I didn't know that until I met my partner and he showed that to me or he told me and he reminded me. And that was kind of my first experience, was consistent accountability. It really taught me how to be in a better relationship with conflict. And when I first read Dreaming Accountability, it brought so many questions up for me. It's actually like an essay that has a lot of questions actually and helps guide the reader to think about
their relationship with accountability. And for me, my interpretation of it is that it talks about accountability. It can be scary, daunting, it can be intimidating. And also, it's beautiful. It can be enlightening. It can be transformative. Both/and. It can be uncomfortable and it can bring so much beauty. So I always go back to this. I always go back to the essay because it's just a reminder to me that I may be in conflict, I'm in extreme discomfort, but there's so much possibility ahead.

This is actually an essay that I bring a lot into the work that I do as a restorative justice coach in schools. We've spent two years really reading this essay and sitting with it and building a culture around it. And we always talk about accountability as a gift, feedback is a gift. For people, that's been really hard to sit with. But when we have created this culture of feedback is a gift, that we become less defensive, or the hope is that we become less defensive. So I've really tried to bring that into my organization as well. And talking about this idea of generative conflict, that conflict can be generative, it can be paired with possibilities, transformation, and so many opportunities. So this idea that conflict, it can be scary and it can also be beautiful. So those are the two things that I'm holding as we're having this conversation.

And I think another point, Stas, you were talking about was values. Two values that I really hold in this work dearly is curiosity and humility. And I say it all the time, curiosity and humility. Because I've led and held, I've had the privilege of holding hundreds, if not thousands of processes over the past decade, both with young people as young as five years old to I think probably the eldest is 60 years old. And I say privileges because I've been in spaces of vulnerability, of people opening up their heart. So I just found that people, there's so much that we don't know in conflict, and it's just about holding people in that uncertainty. Curiosity allows us to just be more open to the possibilities. It allows us to be wrong and not come from a place of like, "I am right." And humility does as well. So those are the two values I really hold in this work. And I really try to uplift in my work in the community doing transformative justice and also in my work in institutions, right? Because there's so much we know, but there's so much that we don't know and there's so much beauty in that.

Stas
Oh! Valleria, there is so much there. I feel like you got my brain sparkling, my body feeling. I'm with you. I think that that last piece you were talking about so much that you don't know, that feels really critical for me because I feel like that connects to the importance of relationship building. I think that relationship building with other people as well as with an organization, Spring Up this year is our 10-year anniversary as an organization, and it's really interesting to think about how much history we carry and how that shapes the way we move as an organization. I co-founded the organization with my partner, my spouse, so I really resonated
with what you were talking about, of navigating accountability in your relationship as a real indicator of what this looks like. And our third co-founder, Shaïna, has been one of my closest friends since we went to Montessori school together and we were toddlers. And so the three co-founders, we've really known each other a really long time, and so much of what we do comes out of our relationships with one another. It's been really important for us to think, as we bring other people into the organization, there's a gap there in how much we know about each other and how much we don't know about this new person, how much we know about the history of this organization and how much this person doesn't know about the history of the organization. We've been developing this document that's called The Conflict Misalignments and Endings document. Right now it's about 30 pages, and it goes through the history of our organization based on the patterns of lessons we've found in the conflict and endings we've had. So it doesn't have any specific examples that are naming people, but instead saying, one of the core lessons for us is on abolition and what it means for us to be an abolitionist organization, and some of the fallouts we've had with partners around our abolitionist stance and how that's kind of strengthened our commitment and our understanding of what we may gain and what we may lose from that stance. And it's opened up some really incredible conversations for our team to get on the same page as well as to have conversations about what brought you here, what were you doing before?

And I think that that idea of feedback as a gift is really critical. For me, that came a lot from learning about design thinking, human-centered design, participatory research, and the value of humility as a researcher, as a designer in centering those that you're designing for and how you design a product, a service, an organization. And I think that human-centered design and tech can be kind of icky in my opinion. I think sometimes the way that it's framed can feel very white. And yet I've learned some really incredible tools that we incorporate in our trainings at bluelight academy to support people in centering feedback, seeing feedback as a gift, and having effective containers. How you design a survey, how you ask for feedback really shapes the kind of feedback that you receive. So getting feedback early and often can catch conflicts and disagreements before they escalate into harm or someone feeling really unheard and silenced. And that's one of the biggest issues that I see in organizations, because we do a lot of consulting with organizations, especially in response to harm and conflict that they've had.

So much of what we see is that people were trying to give this feedback, and it was not being heard or there weren't containers to have real conversations about it. While it still felt like something that was maybe a curiosity or something that was a little bit off, but because you didn't talk about it at that point, it escalated and it escalated. And now people are furious and they're writing open letters on Instagram, and the Slack channel is super passive-aggressive and
all of that. And if you have those containers for feedback early and often, you can prevent things from escalating to that point.

**Valleria Miranda-Ferrick**

Absolutely. I really appreciate your framework and how as we've been working together this past year around building a framework for my organization, Unity Circles. Unity Circles, we were founded in 2012 as a grassroots organization, but really haven't been established until 2018 more formally. And as we're rapidly growing, we're realizing that we have to make the, I think I got this from you, make the implicit explicit and thinking about in regards to our relationship with conflict, accountability. How do we navigate those things? How do we explicitly create a culture of feedback? How do we, during the retreat and orientation, we're having one this Saturday, talk about this idea of generative conflict and have people sit with the idea of like, "Okay, what is the relationship with conflict in my life? And how have I navigated in the past? And this organization is asking me to lean into it, what's coming up for me"? Having all these questions and sitting with it, because this is what we do in order to be doing transformative justice, transformative work, we need to transform.

And going back to Mia Mingus, transformation is not easy. I think about the butterfly metaphor, that caterpillar has to go through a lot of distress. Not distress, but pain and discomfort, in order to evolve into a butterfly and to gain wings in order to fly. We've been really thinking about that with your support around how do we make this work a little bit more explicit and think about the institutional knowledge we have in our heads, these values we have in our heads that we truly believe in, that we live and put it into paper, I guess, or put it into writing so that when people are joining us in community, they understand the beauty and also the challenges of doing this work, right? Because it's not simple. Transformation can look very pretty butterflies look beautiful, but the process to become a butterfly may not be so beautiful or it may not feel so beautiful. So creating a culture of feedback is important. Also creating a culture of calling in and calling out.

**Stas**

Yeah, man. At Spring Up, one of our core values is non-binary thinking. And I think this binary between calling in and calling out is one that makes it seem like they're opposites. And I really appreciate, Sonya Renee Taylor did a TED Talk. I think it's something about cancel culture, I think that's the title. But what she's generally speaking to is this framework of calling on, and that calling in often is tied to this idea of offering an immense amount of emotional labor, of like, "I'm telling you this is wrong and I'm going to facilitate this whole empathetic learning journey for you that gives the impression that in order to tell someone that something hurt, you then have to also offer a lot of yourself." And I think that calling out tends to be perceived as a very public thing. And I find that often a private conversation, if that doesn't work, then calling out can work.
But having a public statement be the first thing can be challenging if you already have a relationship. If you don't, sometimes that's the only avenue you have, right?

But I really appreciate this framework of calling on that she speaks about because it's the idea of telling someone, "Hey, that's not cool. And Google it, I don't have to do all the work to teach you. Maybe hire a coach." We at Spring Up, there's a collective of 11 of us and we offer coaching. A lot of the coaching we do is with folks who have committed harm or with folks who are facilitating processes just to get someone else whose emotional labor is being recognized and valued to support you in going through that transformation journey. Asking someone to commit to that transformation does not necessarily mean that you personally need to be responsible for facilitating it because there are so many resources out there, that once someone decides, "I want to commit to this transformation," there are books, there are podcasts like this one, there's coaching, there are webinars, there are retreats, there are spiritual communities, there are peer groups, there are all kinds of things that folks can access if they choose to go through that transformation that doesn't require the person who experienced that harm to facilitate that process for them.

I love that you mirrored back to me “making the implicit explicit” because that is something I say on a loop, because I feel like one of the things that it's often implicit in our organizations and communities is emotional labor and is the invisibilized labor of care and emotional support. And that is critical to sustaining our movements, and yet often it does not get recognized. It does not get valued. It's not part of someone's job description. Or if it does get added to a job description, maybe you're the HR person, that's actually about state liability. That's not about care and support. I think that when we make the implicit explicit, we start to notice the ways that white supremacy culture becomes ingrained in us through school, through these expectations of how power operates, through these expectations of "professionalism" that often get weaponized against people of color, against disabled people, especially neurodivergent people. And that when those aren't made explicit, we end up falling into patterns that are expected of us outside of our general community. And those tend to be dominated by white supremacy, ableism, and capitalism, right? And I think that we have this assumption that when we step into social justice spaces, we are somehow outside of all of that, we are somehow in this sort of utopia where nothing like that happens. And that's why people get so upset when those things become present.

And that's why, like you were talking about, Valleria, the way that we do onboarding, the way that we set up the container for a training space is so critical because we have to be explicit about the fact that none of us are perfect, that conflict and harm will show up in these spaces, and that we'd rather have them show up in these spaces because we then get to practice how we will respond with folks who are values aligned with us. And we start all of our trainings with this
quote that was adapted from bell hooks. It's in the book Feminist Accountability by Ann Russo. And the quote says, "Rather than trying to control whether oppression will manifest, the focus is more on how we will respond when it manifests. We should think of it as inevitable rather than surprising because a commitment to anti-racism or anti-violence does not mean that you will never buy into privilege. What it does mean is that when you make a mistake, you are able to face it and make needed repair.”

I don't have a completely naive understanding that if we're all free, we'll all be perfect and we'll never harm one another. That's not realistic. But I want to have it so that our communities have the skills and the commitments to address when something goes wrong without needing to call on someone else. That's I think a core framework of transformative justice, is deprofessionalization. And when I see this focus on we should have more social workers, we should have more mental health professionals, sure, that's great, but also, getting a license in mental health is only an indicator of a skillset that we hope that everyone can learn whether they get that credential or not. I also have worked a lot with young people, and I think that what I hope, what I think the point of transformative justice is, is that no matter who is in a situation when something has gone wrong, justice is already there.

**Priya Dadlani**

Yeah. Wow. There's so many questions I have, and you all have shared so much, my brain is bubbling over. But you already kind of started speaking to this, Stas, and so I want to ask the question and then, Valleria, invite you to respond. So thinking about deep professionalizing this work and allowing it to be something that everyone in communities can access justice on their own, how do we do that? How do we build that?

**Valleria Miranda-Ferrick**

Yeah. I feel like Stas has spoken to this, but at its most basic is transforming our relationship with conflict and accountability and seeing it as the human experience. We're not above it, we're beside it. We're not above it, not below it, we're beside it. And just changing our relationship to see that, "Okay, this is part of the experience. How do I work through it? Who are the people that are going to support me in my accountability?" I don't believe that you can hold someone accountable, but people can support you in your accountability. So who are your people? Thinking about pod mapping, I think that's a huge resource, where you're thinking about the people in your life that who you're accountable to, who are the people that can support you in accountability, are the things that are coming up for me. And just values, I think, what values guide you. As I said before, the two values that I feel are the most important in my work, and just not my work, professional work, but my personal life, is curiosity and humility, and holding those two values at the center of this work.
Stas
Yeah, I really resonate with that so much. And I think in my experience, people often have a hard time identifying who is there for them. And an important thing is not to have also a perfectionistic ideal of what support looks like. We designed safety and care plans that can support people in mapping out their support system, the warning signs that they're feeling overwhelmed, their care plans, their boundaries. One core point of that at the beginning is that in conjunction with the pod mapping tool, we make it so that it's not just general support people because you might turn to different people for different things. So who's my support person when I'm working on taking accountability? That may be a different person from who's my support person that I like to get into my body and work out with, which is another form of care that may be different from the person who brings me a lot of joy and laughter, which can often be even a young person in your life, which you might be uncomfortable putting that child on your pod map. But if that's the person who brings levity and joy to your life, then you can have different facets of who you turn to for support without having this perfectionistic ideal of the most well-rounded best friend who knows everything about you and who can support you in anything that you go through, right?

And I think this question of how do we get these skills to everyone is really why we founded bluelight academy of the liberatory arts. I've been passionate about learning about this for many years. And I remember there was a point where there were only a couple books that talked about transformative justice. Some of them were out of print and you would have to buy it for like $85 on eBay or something to get it. It was tough. I think as transformative justice has been getting more airtime and more folks know about it, it can also create this kind of idolization of people and putting people on a pedestal as that's the person who really knows how to do this, right? The challenge is that that's so contradictory to transformative justice. The point is that you're doing it with people in your community, in your life, and they will be imperfect. And the number of requests we get, "Can you facilitate a process for us?" I don't know you, I can coach you so that y'all can facilitate a process for yourselves. I've been working with Valleria to support her and her community in incorporating this, and I know Valleria. But the point is that you are always going to be better poised within your own community than someone who's outside of your community that you idolize as knowing all the answers. So that's why we founded bluelight academy, is to make this information more accessible to people and to provide easy access to support. You can join our subscription community for $5 per month and get quarterly coaching with our team to support you in your process without necessarily paying the coaching fee because we want it to be accessible to people. So I think that's super critical.

Valleria Miranda-Ferrick
One of the ways in which Unity Circles gets to lean into TJ is through our Transformative Justice Practitioner Program, which we refer to as TJPP, and its a 5 month educational practicum program for young adults ages 18-25 in the Boston Area. And it’s an opportunity for participants and young adults to build community with each other as they learn how to embody TJ values and practices, and I think one of the great things about our program is the accessibility component. I found that in the past decade doing restorative justice work and recently starting to engage and lean into TJ, a lot of people who aren’t able to access it because of financial needs. People are eager to learn about these movements and practices but they may not have the time and space and the resources to access it so what we have done is we’ve raised money to be able to stipend people and pay them as if its a job to come in and do this labor, to learn about your lineage and unpack the harm that maybe systems have caused in addition to learning there’s so much unlearning we do. We talk about white supremacy and how internalized that is in everyone regardless of who you are as an individual. We talk about community accountability, harm reduction, safety planning, crisis response and that’s all labor. And the wonderful thing is we’re able to compensate them with the hopes that they can take this learning and use it in their lives right? Bring it back into their local communities so that TJ can be a reality and something we can strive to in Boston.

**Stas**

I love that. And I've been following your work for a while and I've met some of the young people who have gone through the program, and I think it's very much living into what we've been talking about, of identifying that young people are already doing this in their life and just providing more access to skills and support and community to recognize that as a valuable contribution to their lives, to the people around them.

**Priya Dadlani**

I appreciate you both for sharing about the impactful work your organizations are doing, and I’m wondering how does philanthropy fit into all of this? And specifically how can philanthropy deepen into solidarity with the work your organizations are doing and the movement at large?

**Stas**

So yeah, I think that how can funding and philanthropy fit into this, we've been having some conversations as the advisory board about what the right design for this program is. And I think that I've seen the way that funding can create a sense of urgency in the work can really be forcing the organizations to really focus on their deliverables to funders over their accountability to their community. They're often focusing on how they report to their funders over how they share back with the community what they're doing. And in order to stay on the timeline and stay within the budget, they can sometimes prioritize following through on what they said to their funders over...
implementing feedback from their community, over moving at the speed of trust. And I think that what's really critical for funders is to de-center themselves in the evaluation of a program. I think if you can focus on the way that the community is responding, valuing the way that a program adapts based on what's actually necessary for their sustainability over making sure that they completed all the deliverables, I think that Third Wave Fund does a really good job of being flexible and responsive to what the organization says they actually need. I think that we at Spring Up have been funded by Third Wave Fund in multiple different grant programs. And I think one of the things that I've really appreciated, which is also true of the Accountable Futures Fund, is the multi-year funding. I think that especially when we're talking about trend funding, there may be organizations that get a huge influx of funds and they grow to meet that size. They hire team members, they commit to programs that meet that size, and the next year or two years later, that funding disappears and it's not sustainable to stay at that scale.

And that is something that really concerns me because I've seen now, at this point, I've been doing this for over a decade, I've seen a lot of really incredible organizations close after they seemed like they were the darlings of funders. They seemed like, "Oh wow, everyone's so excited what they're doing and they're growing at this rapid pace," and then all of a sudden they can't maintain it and they close. So thinking about multi-year funding, thinking about sustainable funding, thinking about funding for general operating rather than for a specific program, I think especially when we're talking about incorporating this sort of conflict strategies, how are you strengthening your relationships. So often, the funding that you receive is for a specific program and it's difficult to allocate that funding towards your internal strategic planning and your relationship building and mutual aid for your team members and giving people paid time off because those things don't fit neatly into the line items for your program. So thinking about general operating funding for multiple years is something that I think would be critical in order for organizations to be implementing the ideas that we're talking about.

I also think that when we're talking about the next generation of leaders of transformative justice and deprofessionalization, a lot of folks are not going through the hassle of becoming a 501(c)(3). And I've seen a lot of groups also have really tricky relationships with their fiscal sponsors who are taking credit for their work, who are policing how they implement things. So a lot of TJ groups that I know are unincorporated or are an LLC rather than a 501(c)(3) and cannot receive funding from the vast majority of funding that's out there. We at Spring Up, we're a co-op, worker co-op, so we're co-owned by the team members. And you can't be a worker-owned co-op. I mean, there's strategies for co-ops within 501(c)(3)s, and there's some really interesting organizations supporting in the implementation of that. But being a worker-owned co-op means that we are focused on the feedback that we receive from our clients and students and community members over the guidance that we get from funders. And there are a couple funds that have still
been able to support us maybe with a fiscal sponsor for a specific program. We receive funds from Life Comes From it, which I think is an incredible model of funding in this ecosystem that goes through a fiscal sponsor specifically for scholarships to our programs. That means that we don't have to have our general operating budget be fiscally sponsored, but instead we can have a scholarship fund be fiscally sponsored. And I think creative strategies to direct funds towards more informal grassroots formations that are not 501(c)(3)s is something that I would love to see more programs doing and prioritizing and figuring out how to do that effectively.

I think that's also really critical for some of the funding that Third Wave Fund does with sex workers and with groups that are maybe going to have issues if they become more formally incorporated, which is really critical and transformative justice when you're talking about communities that can't turn to the state as a resource. They're also less likely to be formally incorporated as a 501(c)(3), and I think that's connected to this strategy of depersonalization. We had a partnership with NYSCASA, which is the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault, where they paid for 80 community members around the country to participate in our transformative justice program for free, all in domestic violence and sexual violence advocacy organizations. So many groups participated that told us it was incredibly supportive for them, but that they would not have been able to find the funding in their budget to be able to commit to that kind of thing. It was already a lot to find the time to be able to commit to it. And that was what was an appropriate request of them to be able to show up. So we want to be doing more partnerships with funders, with foundations to be able to sponsor folks in their community to get access to this coaching, to get access to retreats that train them in these skills, to get access to these courses because it's not just the content, it's also the peer-based relationship building. And that feels really connected to depersonalization as well, because so often we feel isolated in what we're doing and we have to create all of the things to fix what we're dealing with, when in fact, there may be other organizations that are already doing what you are trying to figure out how to do and you can learn from them, like Unity Circles.

I was just speaking to a program in New Hampshire that's trying to do a similar thing, and I was like, "Y'all got to connect with Unity Circles because people are already doing this."

**Valleria Miranda-Ferrick**

Yeah, absolutely. No, as a recipient of the Third Wave, I just want to talk about how that is given access to some of the people that we're working with. So just to give you kind of context, when the organization, Unity Circles, was founded in 2012 up until 2020, for eight years, we were all volunteer-led, every single person. And what I found was that the people who stay longer within the organizations volunteering, after they got their internship credit, were economically advantaged. They were able to do an internship for two or three years. And the folks who wanted to stay, but they couldn't because they had a livelihood who were economically disadvantaged,
could not stay. And those were the people that represented the communities we were working with. We were holding spaces, we were holding circles within public schools, and we found that the people from the community actually couldn't do that without pay. So from the very beginning, I saw that. As a value-based organization, we were like, "The first time we get money, we're going to pay young people. We're going to pay people to do the work." 10 years into the work, last year was the first year that I'm getting paid. So prior to doing that, we were paying young people first. So because we're paying young people to be able to access these learnings, access these teachings, have a space to build community, have a space to build on their skills, they're able to do that with a stipend. So we pay them $18 an hour, so that's above the minimum wage, and we're able to offer them, it's a job, but really it's a learning experience, but it's an opportunity for them to gain a livelihood, but also learn these skills so they can implement in their lives.

So, just wanted to speak to the gratitude for having this. And also, the multi-year approach gives us a little bit more stability because we found that constantly applying for grants and some grants that have all these metrics and quantitative data, and it's like, as an org, we talked about this as a board like, "How do we quantify this?" We can't be like, "You have to do 10 conflict processes and let us know the outcome." That's not okay. How do you quantify quality of life and community and care? So the fact that Third Wave is unrestricted, is a multi-year, is really allowing us to continue to do this work in an unrestricted way. So I just want to, speaking from as a recipient, just wanted to share that this has made our work a lot more accessible.

**Priya Dadlani**

Thank you both for sharing that. Before we close, does anyone want to share anything else? I don't want anyone to leave with any lingering feelings or things you wish you would've said, but yeah, anything coming to mind that you all want to lift up before we close this episode?

**Stas**

I would just like to add that we host our courses and retreats three times a year. If you're listening to it when this comes out, we are accepting registrations for fall courses and retreats. If you're listening to it afterwards, there's a good chance we're doing it sometime soon because we do it three times per year. And we also have a mutual aid network on Patreon where we can get subscribers. So even if you just want to support this work, if you want to subscribe to share funds that allow for access to this, we would really appreciate it. And if you are a funder and are interested in supporting and expanding scholarships or getting access, please do email me or contact us on our website because that's really what we're looking for right now to make this sustainable for us as a community and to make this more accessible moving forward.
Valleria Miranda-Ferrick

Thank you so much for this opportunity and as always wonderful connecting with you Stas. And for those listening if you're interested in learning how we are embodying transformative justice as an organization, as individuals check out our website check out our instagram handle. Our website is unitycircles.com and our Instagram is @UnityCirclesBoston and we’re continuing to learn, continuing to unlearn, and this work is very humbling. So we appreciate you all being on this journey with us and we hope to continue to learn with you as we navigate this world. Thank you.

Priya Dadlani

Thank you so much Stas & Valleria! We’re so grateful to you both, and all the gems you all dropped during this episode. If you’re listening and curious to find out more about the work Stas & Valleria do, or tap into the resources they shared, check out the show notes!

Outro music fades in.

And that wraps up Mic Check! Episode 7; stay tuned for the next one! This episode was produced and edited by Priya Dadlani and Monica Trinidad, with support from mai doan. Our intro music was created and produced by Jordan W. Carter.

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Outro music fades out.