

The "Short Update"

The exchanges below are extracted (and edited) parts of letters exchanged with friends of our project.

Subject: the "Short Update"
From: Petros <petros@cyprus-org.net>
Date: 28 Feb 2004
To: Z.

Hello Z,
and other friends/ colleagues,

My apologies, for the delay in getting back to you with an update.

So, here's a short update, with the hope it can be a meaningful part of things. I don't know where or how exactly it may be relevant to the process of your organization or work- group, so please feel free to ask questions and to make suggestions, either through email, or even better, when we get a chance to meet in person.

You may know that there have been some meetings among some of us for exploring the desire, feasibility, and viability of a group of healthcare workers which would function as a team or collective (we haven't worked out those terms yet), aimed at providing healthcare primarily to the politically active community in Portland (and extended families and loved ones).

This means that we view this work as building and nurturing one more of the institutions (or counter-institutions) of the Movement. Just as we have our Movement radio programs, print and electronic media projects, legal teams, spaces to assemble, food production and distribution, all being carried out by groups of colleagues and co-workers who see it as part of Movement work, we would also like to do our healthcare work in that way.

So we would be addressing primarily the healthcare needs of people who are active (or have a presense in) the radical and progressive community, meaning individual activists or members, supporters, or benefactors of organizations, collectives, co-ops, unions, bands, affinity groups, communes, work- groups, volunteers, staff, etc, and their loved ones and families. We see this work as being oriented toward both the needs of individuals as well as of groups.

For example:

"the dialogue process in our co-op has collapsed, can you help us?", or

"the vibes in our vegan house are poisoned", or

"I just got a diagnosis that I'm diabetic, would exercise help me?", or

"I have this pain here",

all these might be in the range of our work.

Our orientation toward the work is coming from the realm which is vaguely known as alternative/ complementary/ natural/ therapy, with an emphasis on the radical political values embedded within these healing arts and sciences. We want to actualise those values, and employ them in the service our communities.

Most of our colleagues who practice similar "modalities" of healthcare, even if they have the best intentions, are usually unable to really actualise the radical values which are the foundations of natural therapy. They usually practice under the model of "small capitalist business / individual entrepreneur / health- professional", and so

become stuck in situations where most of the value of these healing arts is neutralized by the surrounding political system of profits, and authoritarian state power.

All this is a complicated way to say that our group of healthcare workers is looking at practicing in ways which negate the power of the profit system and the domination of the state as much as possible - this necessarily brings us to seeing our work as a non-profit service being offered on a volunteer basis, as a part of the emerging alternative economy (based on co-operation, exchange, green values, collectivism, direct democracy). How exactly this might be set up (will we look at seeking grants, setting up fundraisers, set up bartering arrangements, sliding fee scales and donations, a combination of it all?), we have not yet had a chance to explore it yet.

The particular individuals who have been involved in this exploration, are Sue Scandale, Kristin, Glenn, and myself. We are all at various stages of transition in our paths in healthcare work, so this is good time for all of us to be exploring all this for working together in the near future. We all bring different sets of knowledge and experience to the group, and also different personalities and life- stories, which makes us pretty diverse and "complex". Altogether, we have between us several decades of combined presence in the world of health and healthcare, with overlapping strengths and weaknesses, which makes us a pretty solid group.

We have been meeting and exploring various dimensions of the work, especially in the areas of philosophy of (approach to) health and therapy, the politics of healthcare work, the possible forms and ways of co-operation among us, and we are slowly going deeper and deeper. This exploration is important, because if people in our community will be placing a trust in our group for issues of life and death, health or illness, we need to become as thoroughly functional as a team as possible, beforehand.

We are all in various phases of transition right now, so we are not ready to begin very soon. But the process so far has been very meaningful for all of us, enriching, productive, and addressing a lot of "the good and juicy stuff", so it looks very desirable so far for all of us to keep working on this.

Things we need to look at outside of our internal process, are items like our relationship to the Movement community around us, as a whole, and also our relationship to the particular groups, organizations and individuals who are our comrades, friends and colleagues in the Movement, such as yourselves. Perhaps the meetings you propose, or other meetings in the future, can help us to figure that out?

By "relationship" we mean the whole thing: personal stuff, finances, arrangements, legalities, times and spaces, issues of health and medicine, political principles and personal/ group dynamics, all of it.

I'd be happy to participate in any of the meetings you propose to explore all this in person.

Looking forward to finding good ways to work with you,
and many thanks,

Petros

<http://petros-evdokas.cyprus-org.net>

Subject: Thanks for talking to me

From: Z

Date: Fri, 12 Mar 2004

To: Petros Evdokas

Hi Petros,

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed our discussion today. Everyone that I have talked to tonight in my own collective and in the Alliance has seemed excited about what you all are doing. I sent out a summary of our meeting to the general listserv since I will be out of town for the Alliance meeting. I'm reproducing the message for you below. Let me know if there are any mistakes or if I didn't explain things the right way and I will clarify for the group in a subsequent email.

Hey folks,

.....just a general update:

I've been talking to a man named Petros who is involved with a burgeoning health care collective which has yet to be named. Their ideas are revolutionary and if nothing else they should be a part of our Alliance, if not our primary health providers.

Here are some highlights from our meeting:

-They will be a volunteer-based, non-profit health care facility concerned with eliminating the exchange of funds for healing. They want to involve the patient in their own healing rather than letting it be a "commodity" that one can pay for.

-They will work collectively to heal each patient. There is an herbalist, a naturopathic doctor, a mental health practitioner, and a Chinese medical doctor involved in the collective so far. They would all be involved in the treatment of each patient.

-The collective will encourage political activism as treatment for sickness, i.e. if someone has cancer they would encourage environmental activism as an active part of cancer treatment

-They are interested in treating "disease" within collectives as well, for example, helping disfunctional collective resolve issues such as patriarchy, egalitarianism, lack of group sense, communication etc.

All of these things seem extremely valuable to me, let

me know what y'all think. In addition, they need some help to get off the ground, I encouraged Petros to discuss becoming part of the Alliance with his group, since I have the feeling they need help with things like articles of incorporation, by-laws, finding a space, etc. I think the Red and Black would be willing to sponsor them. They are open to mutual aid as payment for their services.

That's all for now, the Alliance Health care committee will hopefully be meeting next week to discuss ...this new group, ...and some other health care options that have been researched.

Z.

Subject: Re: Thanks for talking to me
From: "Glenn Goldman" <gdgoldman@msn.com>
Date: Sun, 14 Mar 2004
To: Z.

Hi,

First, I wanted to let you know how happy I am that you and Petros both expressed enthusiasm about the direction of your meeting. It sounds as if we're making some positive strides toward building a functional radical health care collective.

I wanted to offer some feedback regarding the summary of the meeting that you provided to your friends and comrades at the Alliance. I know that Petros made a point of emphasizing our concerns around creating false expectations in the community and how lack of clarity about what we do and what we offer is likely to emerge as an ongoing issue. I offer some clarifications in that spirit. I have not passed this by all the other members in our nascent health care collective, but I will forward this to them.

It's very difficult to attempt to present what we are attempting in a small amount of words. In that regard, I think you did a great job. But I would want to tweak two specific points:

<<-The collective will encourage political activism as treatment for sickness, i.e. if someone has cancer they would encourage environmental activism as an active part of cancer treatment>>

What we are attempting is a non-authoritarian model of health care. We want to help people understand the conditions (physiological, social, environmental, emotional, spiritual, etc.) which lead to dis-ease so that they learn how to develop creative and effective approaches toward their own healing. I don't think that we're into prescribing political activism for anyone, however, if in the course of a therapeutic relationship, a person in our care was moved to take political action as a way of taking back some power for themselves, we would fully encourage that. In fact, we would want to help them find healthy ways of relating to the movement that would be empowering and to avoid the elements of the the movement which are pathological.

<<-They will work collectively to heal each patient.....
They would all be involved in the treatment of each patient.>>

I had the image of someone walking in with a splinter and then having a shrink, an herbalist and a guy with needles descending on her! It would probably be more accurate to say that we will approach all of our work in a spirit of consultation. Some individuals might benefit from having some or all of us directly involved in treatment. Others may only need to work with one of us. But we intend to consult closely with each other to make certain that each individual is getting the treatment best suited for her needs.

I want to thank you for taking the initiative to take on this project. If you can think of any way that any of us can help you, please feel free to approach us.

Regards,
Glenn

From: Petros
To: Z.

Z wrote:
> Hi Petros,
> I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed our
discussion today.

"Thanks for talking to me"
"No, thank **you** for talking to me"

Me too, I had a wonderful time.
I want to thank you again for putting aside quality time for exploring all these concerns.
Personal contact with you is very enjoyable, and I hope we have more chances again to spend time together.

Thanks for the note to the Alliance and to other colleagues (I'll share it with our group, too). Here's a helpful item to remember:

Since class war has made the field of healthcare into a battlefield, words and images are weapons in that war for profits. So we use the word "doctor" only for certain individuals who have a certain role in the establishment system of medicine. That word conjures certain privileges, methods, and obligations for the practitioner, and a particular relationship to healthcare.
Neither myself, nor anyone else in our work group is a medical doctor. We need to clarify this in order to avoid creating wrong expectations in our community.

{And of course we're very happy (and we have a need) to co-operate with any medical doctor who is positive - or even neutral - to natural therapy and healthcare. Even better, if they are politically active or supportive of the liberation process in some way.

A sane integration of nature's ways, consciousness **and** appropriate use of medical technology, is a formula for good healthcare.}

Please feel free to share any of the above with anyone you think is appropriate.

Many thanks,
Petros
