



Session One (20.1) debrief and learnings

21 people 3 presenters. 3 connected to SPEC Elders 5 to XR. One XR person taking model back to Ottawa mid-February. Circles/sessions lead by: Tom, Maggy and Taylor.

It is important to note that this is a psycho-experiential group that does not target intellectual learning. It is difficult therefore to describe and measure results in an objective manner. We are dealing with the heart and not the head and therefore measurement and resulting data will be subjective. How I feel rather than what did I learned. The central questions being: did the group increase the ability to cope? To what degree did taking action help? Debrief notes will report group attendance, the processes used, the questions raised, what we did to address those questions and provide direct reporting on the apparent usefulness of the various exercises.

Process Highlights:

People seemed engaged. One person had significant emotional event during circles. It was well managed by circle leader. The Joanna Macy Gratitude exercise was well received and it was obvious that most people had experience with mediation techniques. Chanting was well received and inspirational. The individual "Courage" call response was particularly powerful for the person (people) named. A one word "how are you feeling" ending seemed to work. The clean up period was well used by people to have connections and ask questions etc.

Learnings, questions & reflections:

Michelle did an excellent job of site set up etc. This is an important role as it permits facilitators (and others) to have conversations before the meeting. Should this informal contact time be built into the agenda? This half hour set up time (6:30 to 7:00) has the potential for informal meetings. Paperwork and informed consent was a barrier. Streamlining and including it as part of online registration is a must do! Most people seem to understand the seriousness of the climate crisis but were able to discuss their feelings without expressing strong emotion.

Also, one person who left at the beginning mentioned needing anger management. Climate rage and anger were noted as significant emotional themes by several participants. Several people had strong grief responses during check-in. Perhaps a system is needed to accompany the person out of group and to a private space when necessary? Facilitators assessed power point project hook up for future video clip screenings. More chairs where needed. One person asked about tea and coffee etc. Due to reasons of cost and clean up etc. people should be asked to bring their own refreshments. There was no scheduled break and that seemed to work. Joanna Macy and chanting seemed to work.

The participants appeared to be especially engaged when Tom was speaking during the first section of the meeting. Tom's experience as a speaker really showed during this segment of the group. While the other sessions will likely have more time for group activities, the front-end speaking segment is very important, as it sets the tone for the rest of this group's engagement. I would recommend that future facilitators of this group be prepared to speak for 10 minutes at the beginning of the first session to



clarify the guiding philosophy, intent, theory, and personal reflections as to why we're running this group and how we think it will be beneficial. This transparency into our thinking process allows participants into our inner circle and enables them to buy into what we're doing here. In this spirit, this document will be made available for participants/collaborators to see.

Maggy was a tremendous asset to have with us in the group, and had a lot to offer in terms of facilitation and knowledge of the Joanna Macy materials (though she is very modest about it). Her participation and our connection to SPEC Elders helps to fill a vital need for cross-generational connection. Given the value and insight that elder members of our group had to offer, I wonder about the potential participation of adolescents in our group. However, it isn't clear to me yet what barriers might arise from the participation of individuals who are still under the protection of a legal guardian.

If we are professionals addressing a health issue and we seek "informed consent" then adolescents who can understand the risks and benefits do not need parental permission. Defining the group as a health program creates other problems however, in that we have to adhere to a range of standards. True self-help groups such as those in the 12 Step model are not professional health programs and therefore do not need to meet "informed consent standards." Answering this question is key in determining what the lower age-range for participation in our group should be.

One thing that seemed clear to me, based on the response of the group members there, is that a group such as this one is sorely needed. A wide range of struggles are represented in this group, including but not limited to complete hopelessness and a deep, pervasive, debilitating eco-grief and eco-rage. It appears to me that this group will (and perhaps already has) attracted group members suffering with what might be considered climate induced DSM diagnoses.

As already noted, several members also reported anger management concerns. I expect that we will have a number of participants struggling in this way who either can't afford or are otherwise unwilling to seek traditional therapy. One participant reported that their therapist was uncertain how to help their climate induced struggles, and that they were accessing individual counselling as well as our group. Maggie has suggested that there is great power and healing when these experiences are shared with a group.

It is possible that our group support model for dealing with climate induced struggles offers something that our participants need which they can't or won't get from individual counselling. Regardless, we may want to develop a questionnaire to help determine whether people are struggling with climate induced DSM diagnoses. This will help with our future program development in various ways.

One last note, our group is called "From Climate Grief to Action", yet many of our participants were already committed activists. This, of course, is a great gift for our group, but it makes me wonder what brought these members to our group if they've already gone from climate grief to climate action on



their own. I wonder if, even for activists, grief remains an issue. I suspect that this group is looking for relational connection and support.

Obviously, it is not surprising that people who have already taken climate-action would be the most ready to expand this action into the inter personal world. Confirming why activists participate in our group will give us important insight into what brings all participants to us in the first place. One theme I picked up on is the internal dissonance and shame that people feel from contributing to the degradation of our environment (via driving, eating meat, producing waste, etc...) while also suffering immensely from the climate disaster.

Self-forgiveness, acceptance, and self-esteem may be an important step towards taking action, and I wouldn't be surprised if these themes became foundational to our delivery of the group. Additionally, we would like to find a way to address climate nihilism, but by virtue of experiencing climate nihilism, it seems likely that individuals struggling with this will see no point in accessing our group. Perhaps, if a participant reveals that they are feeling nihilistic about the climate crisis, we can engage them directly and learn more about how they were able to overcome that barrier to attend our group, or if it was even a barrier to begin with.

“The Paper Trial”

Paper failed miserably in this session, as mentioned earlier. If we want participants to sign an informed consent, they are more likely to do so if it is integrated into our registration. We don't have enough time to read it in full, so participants are stuck looking at a piece of paper while also trying to pay attention to what's happening in the group. The end result is that people likely didn't read the whole document, and just signed it because they wanted to be there.

This is worse than a digitized consent would be; while they are also likely to not read it there, they are free to read it at their own leisure, and we'll know for sure that they've offered consent before they show up to the first meeting. Taking ten minutes of the beginning of the group to deal with informed consent would add a level of formality to the group that I don't think participants would respond well to (this is what my read of the room tells me). We can keep printed copies on hand for drop-ins, but relying on paper for this is costly, wasteful, counter-productive, and such an ironic contradiction to our overall goals that I felt compelled to acknowledge the irony and promise to do better. It is important that we “walk the talk” and base our practices on the kind of systematic changes we advocate for.

Additionally, handing out informed consent when participants are already there diminishes the “consent” part of the agreement, since a sunk-cost fallacy is likely to keep participants present even if they would prefer not to be after reading the consent. Fortunately, the one participant who was turned off the group after reading the informed consent showed the courage to clearly state their desire to opt-out, and promptly left before we began.



Additionally, I (Taylor) am still in possession of the vast majority of the feedback forms and questionnaires that I printed out. If we want to collect feedback and other helpful information from clients, we should adopt a system where digitized versions of our feedback forms and questionnaires are scheduled to be emailed to participants who registered online the morning after each group meeting via automated email. I am also recommending using a service such as Survey Monkey to collect information, instead of trying to organize it ourselves.

It would cost GTEC less money yearly to use Survey Monkey than the printing cost of making paper copies for every group, every time. The other option is to abandon the questionnaire and only ask for feedback. This will make our findings qualitative and anecdotal, but since our primary goal is helping people, I wouldn't be too concerned about abandoning the questionnaire. Perhaps GTEC could consider offering an informal questionnaire outside of our group support to collect information about how people are coping with the climate crisis.