

**Session Two (Jan 27, 2020) Debrief**

9 people, 3 presenters. 2 connected to SPEC Elders, 3 to XR one new Canadian. Due to the size we did not break into smaller discussion circles. One participant played an active role in negotiating how our time would be spent, and is a good candidate for future facilitation. This person is a counsellor and active on the XR Regen Committee.

There were some interesting developments in this session which may affect how this group is delivered in the future, and offer insight into what participants are hoping for when they sign up for the group.

This debrief will continue the tradition of the previous debrief of being subjective in nature. Questions of interest include: Did the group increase their ability to cope? To what degree has/does/will taking action help? What brings people to the group, and what are they hoping for when they choose to attend? What have we learned about how we conduct the group and utilize the group's time, and how will we apply what we've learned to future sessions?

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 glad to be there, and they were invested in the group. They are a bit shy when it comes to participating in chants or songs, although the chants and songs are generally well received. One participant asked to do a check in and for participants to say their name when they speak, so as to know who they are in the circle with. We may have made a false assumption after the first session that doing a circle check in wouldn't be needed for sessions.

The issue being if we are breaking into small groups is it better to do the check in then? This maybe a greater time management issue in large groups? Further, introductions often lead to the same place as stories that might be told in the smaller groups? Given that the composition of group members is different session to session, and people may not remember each other's names, I feel that having a circle check in at the beginning of every session would be a good use of our time, in small groups.

With larger numbers, the group should be number off into groups of six+, immediately after a very brief welcome and land recognition. Smaller groups may help people feel more connected to each other, which will lead to more group experiential diversity.

Much of our agenda at the beginning of the session was set aside in favor of what appeared to be the group's desire for circle discussion. It is difficult to set aside an agenda after spending a lot of time and consideration preparing for it. Tom's experience and intuition as a facilitator was

evident when he was able to sense the emerging needs of the group and adjust the session in response. The middle section of our agenda stayed very much the same, though we remained as one large group instead of breaking into smaller ones. The last section of the session went as planned, and was received very well.

**Learnings, questions, & reflections:**

Michelle continues to be a vital part of the preparation for each session, and was also a valuable participant in the group as well. It is a great help and comfort to have her continued support, and I am very thankful that she will be present at Collingwood when those sessions start on Feb 13. Both Tom and Taylor will also attend the Town Hall in early February. This type of support will continue to be needed and appreciated as this program continues to expand.

A lot of time was filled in this session with group discussion and support. I did not get the sense at any point that the group discussion stopped being helpful for people. However, given some of the topics of discussion in the group, I began to wonder where best to locate the focus of this group; outside the individual in terms of what to do in response to the climate crisis, or within the individual in terms of how the climate crisis affects each participant. In the context of this session, it appeared to me that locating our discussions within each participant and exploring how the climate crisis affects them personally was the prevailing preference; one participant even explicitly indicated this preference.

Although I would hesitate to use a single session to determine how every session should go, when asking myself what brings participants to our group to begin with, my mind goes to the fact that this group is advertised as the “Kitsilano Town Hall Support Group”. Therefore, a major component in what brings participants to our group likely has to do with their perception of what a support group does.

In my mind, support groups generally locate their focus on how a certain issue or illness affects individuals, and provide opportunities for participants to share these feelings and receive support, while also offering support and empathy to other participants when they talk about how they’ve been personally affected by the same issue. While discussions can explore and honor actions taken by (or intended to be taken by) the participants, and place some of the focus outside of the individual, this is all still grounded within the personal internal experiences of each participant.

By prioritizing each participant’s internal experience and offering the chance to share and receive support, I believe we will find the heartfelt inter connectivity we were hoping for when we began this group. This will also likely adhere to what participants were hoping to receive when they initially registered for the group.

Regarding the exploration of taking action, it occurs to me that it may be unclear to participants what that action will look like, that participants may have differing preferences on what type of

action to take, and that some participants may need to process what they're experiencing as a result of the climate disaster before they can take action. Further, some participants are already taking action but are in need of support. With this in mind, I believe that the best way to move "from climate grief to action" is through a dedicated focus on the grief, or whichever climate-induced distress participants are struggling with. By helping to process climate-induced distress and offering our love, support, and confidence, we can enable participants to determine what action looks like for them and commit to that action in a way that is also health affirming, should they choose to do so.

It appears that there may be two themes emerging, the need to express feelings and the need to support actions. This may indicate the need for two types of groups, one that focuses on emotional expression and acceptance and another on supporting personal and collective action.

One participant spoke about sharing love with all movements instead of only one's own movement, and this seems like a fruitful philosophy for our group to internalize. We may be best served by loving, supporting, and honoring the actions that others are already taking and allow our participants to network with each other and find a movement that fits for them. This will allow us to maintain our focus of providing space for participants to receive support for their climate-induced distress, while also serving as a vehicle for a broader social movement. In the work that reconnects, our contribution to reconnecting people to themselves and others may provide a vital and unquantifiable role in the overall climate movement.

Regarding questionnaires, I have come to believe that connecting with researchers who are conducting studies on climate distress is a better source of data for us than trying to conduct our own research on the support group. There was no enthusiasm for answering questionnaires in the previous session, and this may have even been alienating for some participants to the point where it may account for some of the participant drop-off. I feel that networking is among GTEC's greatest strengths, and we will come into contact with more meaningful quantitative data through our connections than we can get from the groups we run.

On a final note, I would like to express our continued appreciation for Maggie's involvement in our group, and thank her for the expertly delivered mindfulness exercise she led in this session. Allies such as Maggie (and SPEC Elders) are a great gift for our group, and I hope to have continued contact in one form or another going forward.

Additionally, I'd like to express my appreciation for the participants themselves, who have proven to be insightful, supportive, generous, and caring, among other admirable qualities. Much wisdom was shared by our participants, and their contributions to the development and implementation of this group cannot be understated. It is a great honor to learn from our participants, and look forward to continuing to do so in future sessions.

### **Post Discussion**

Tom and Taylor met and discussed some of the aspects of session two, and our group in general. One of the points of conversation regards the name of the group. Currently, this group is advertised on the GTEC website as “Kitsilano Town Hall Support Group”. While there is nothing bad about this name, it is somewhat unclear from the name what our support group is about. We talked about advertising the group instead as “Climate Support Group – Kitsilano” or “Climate Crisis Support Group – Kitsilano”. Given that people looking for this type of support are likely typing “climate crisis support group” into their search engine to find a group, keeping the name of this group simple and descriptive of what we’re doing may make our group easier to find, and more appealing for people looking for support with climate induced distress.

We have also talked a fair bit about figuring out what the structure of our group should be, for the purpose of creating the “manual” for how future facilitators will deliver this group. We haven’t decided for certain whether a 5<sup>th</sup> session will be standard, or whether we will only be doing that this time. However, the 4 sessions we do guarantee will each have a theme inspired by the work of Joanna Macy. These themes are; gratitude, honoring our pain, connection, and a fourth as yet to be determined theme, but it will probably be in the vein of “going forth” or “what’s next”.

Regarding within session structure, the general guideline will be to have a beginning of session check in (where participants say their name, even if everyone knows their name), reflections about the content of each other’s check in, group or small group (depending on attendance) discussion and support, a guided meditation, a group activity, and then closing out with a one word or phrase check out for how participants are feeling at the end of the session.

Some of the prompts offered to participants will relate to the theme of that session, for example, we may ask participants to tell us where their greatest sense of connection (or one of the greatest) comes from at the beginning of session three, where the theme is connection. The goal is to offer a 4 session repeating plan that is structured enough to encourage participants to attend all 4 sessions, but not so structured that they can’t just attend a few of the sessions if they can’t or don’t want to attend all of them.

The structure: 4 session, 2 part model ☐ each session has a theme, and each session is divided into circles and Joanna Macy exercises (or other appropriate ones, but we use Macy)

We decided to separate the resources from the sessions themselves, due to the difficulty involved with adhering to a strict schedule when the needs of the group differ from what we had planned. We will, however, offer the resources as supplemental material that participants or anyone else is free to check out if they’re looking for some readings, videos, or stories that relate to the climate crisis. This fits well with the educational component of GTEC’s overall goals.

Informed consent continues to be a problem. At this point, informed consent has started to fall off the agenda, and we will need consultation if we are to make it a priority. We currently have

had many attendees from each of the two sessions who haven't done informed consent, but then we also don't go as deep as a counselling session would, so it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which we need it. I believe that the informed consent I drafted is far too thorough and long, and if we are to make it a priority, someone with more experience will need to determine what is required from our informed consent. In terms of liability, we have no reason to believe so far that the content of our support group is sufficiently intense to elicit the type of distress that may come from formal counselling. We also note that there is "no fee" so there is no professional contract and that the group is a self help group. This does not mean that boundaries etc. are not necessary, only that consent issues need not meet a the higher standard expected with the exchange of money for service.

We discussed how best to bring our sessions back on track when we feel that discussions are moving towards areas which don't appear to be beneficial to the group. There are many ways of doing this, but some important considerations are to not shame any particular individual, to keep a good sense of humor when steering away from unhelpful topics of discussion, and to take charge of the situation when this need arises.

Likely, we will just gently remind participants what the focus of our group is and encourage us to speak within those parameters, but each situation is different, and each facilitator is different. As long as love, support, and positive regard aren't lost when addressing these moments, then the facilitator has likely done well. However, the facilitator must do something in these moments, or else discomfort may take over the group's atmosphere, and it is the facilitator's responsibility to maintain a supportive and positive group energy.