



Slate Ballard

Capacity Building Training Partner

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I started to dream again of more equitable ways of building community and creating opportunities for folx to share their creative energy in new ways.

What was your journey to this work?

My journey has two phases. If I was to name these two phases one would be called the learning phase and one would be called the opening phase. The learning phase started when I was attending Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). I, for many years in my life within the charismatic evangelical church, had been a cultivator of group dynamics. I was interested in creating spaces where people felt welcome, could be vulnerable and could experience something both individually and collectively that created a feeling of connection. While taking a course in Organizational Behavior at SCSU I was introduced to the work of Edgar Schein on organizational culture. I became fascinated by the cultivation of culture within groups. I was particularly interested in how one might cultivate cultures that allowed creativity to thrive. I was also interested in how to encourage collaboration and co-creation, although I didn't know that word at the time. I began to ask myself the question - if I could cultivate a culture that modeled collaboration, creativity and co-creation in the city could it help transform the culture of the city? My co-founding of The Grove, a new kind of social space and coworking community was born out of this idea. I was cultivating a culture while experimenting with its potential impact on the larger culture of New Haven.

For phase 2 - the opening we need to fast forward about 6 years. My partner and I had recently adopted a black boy and my partner was going through a deep awakening around the impacts of structural racism and white supremacy culture and privilege.



For me, I did not experience a sudden light bulb moment but a slower opening and realization of the impact of structural racism and white supremacy culture on my own person. I began to notice how I had shifted my practice of community building towards capitalistic goals and had cut off my spirituality. These noticings helped draw me back to a truer sense of self. I attended CLP and BD101. I was a Creative Community Fellow with National Arts Strategy. These experiences challenged me, pushed me to be vulnerageous, helped me to heal and to access my whole self. I started to dream again of more equitable ways of building community and creating opportunities for folx to share their creative energy in new ways. I began to explore connections with my ancestors and to find a spiritual practice again. I am healing and finding my wholeness. This arc speaks to just some of my journey to this work.

What fuels your work as a facilitator?

The knowing that my liberation and my children's liberation is wrapped up in the liberation of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ folx. I increasingly realize this to be true in every aspect of life from organizational work settings to family life.

Who is a role model you look to in your work?

Currently, I am inspired by the work of Mia Birdsong and her exploration around rethinking community, family and social connectedness.

Training History

B.S. in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Organizational Communication, Management and Organizational Psychology from Southern Connecticut State University. National Arts Strategy Creative Community Fellow 2019



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