

# FLOCKING TOWARDS JUSTICE: MUTUAL AID & CRISIS SUPPORT PODS IN ACTION

Kai Cheng Thom, SSE, Qualified Mediator, Master  
Jungian Life Coach

With gratitude to the work of Mia Mingus & the Bay Area  
Transformative Justice Collective

Transformative Justice Practitioner & Loving Justice  
Dreamer



# LEARNING OBJECTIVES



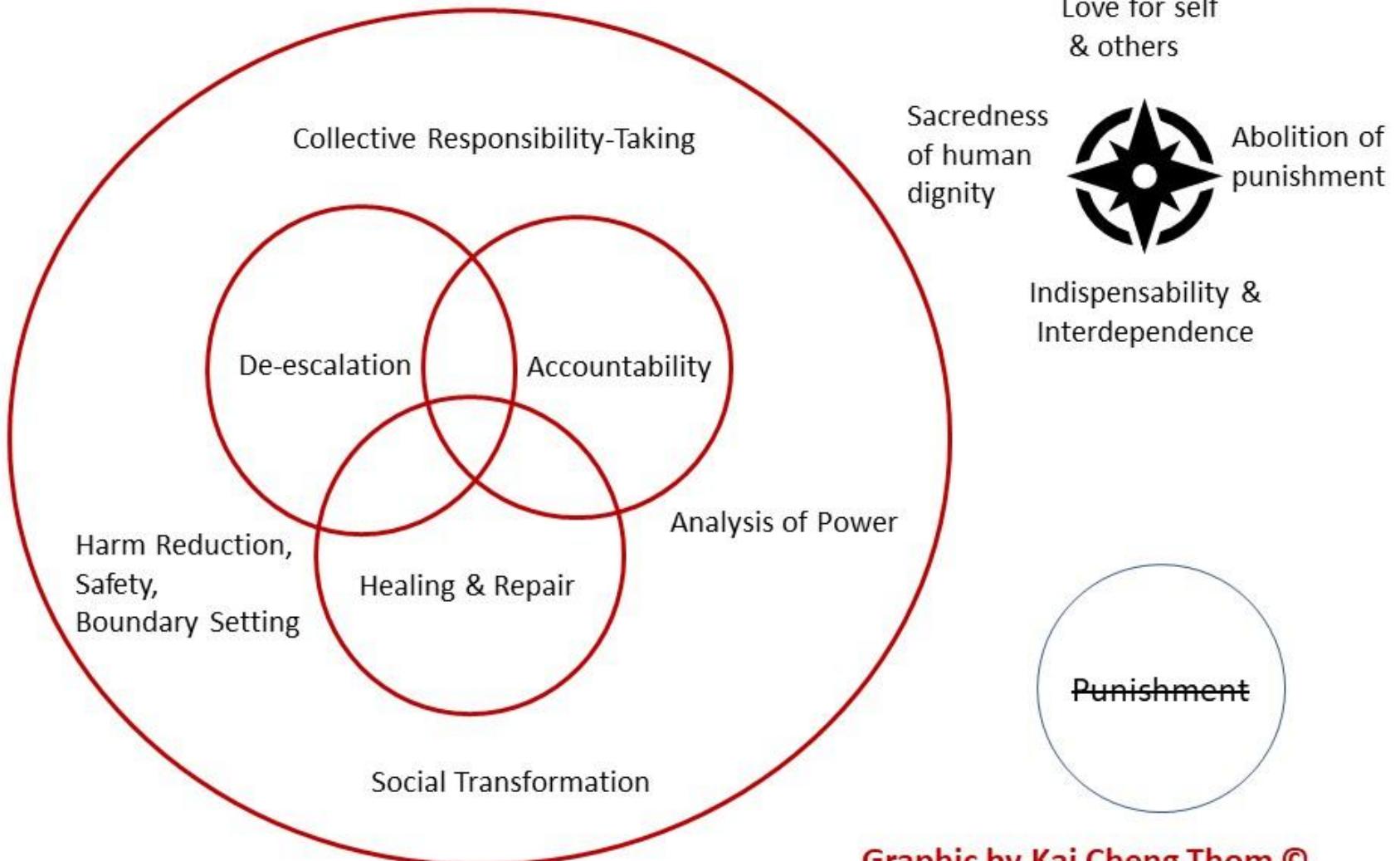
- 1) Define and discuss Transformative Justice in the context of counter-normative community building and practicing embodied ethics
- 2) Understand the “pod mapping” strategy developed by Mia Mingus and the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective and creative adaptations used by many others to create non-punitive community-based responses to intimate harm, violence, conflict, abuse, and other crises
- 3) Consider the strengths and limitations of community-based, counter-normative responses to risk and harm
- 4) Practice applying one version of a support pod structure in the context of your own life and practice based on Kai Cheng Thom’s experimentation with this method in queer, trans activist, and somatic sex education communities

# WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE?

- Transformative Justice (TJ) is rooted/inspired by diverse and ancient forms of Indigenous governance from around the world, but particularly methods practiced by the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island/North America
- TJ today is a decentralized approach to responding to harm that is led primarily by queer Black and Brown women and femme practitioners and theorists such as Mariame Kaba, Mia Mingus, Ejeris Dixon, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha, etc
- TJ has many definitions and forms today, but shares a central ethos of focusing on **transforming the conditions that perpetuate harm rather than on rule-breaking and punishment, as well as abolition of prisons and the police system given their role in upholding anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, and otherwise oppressive systemic violence**
- **What does your body-mind-spirit tell you when you dream into practicing a response to harm that decenters punishment and centers transformation?**

## Transformative Justice Praxis Map

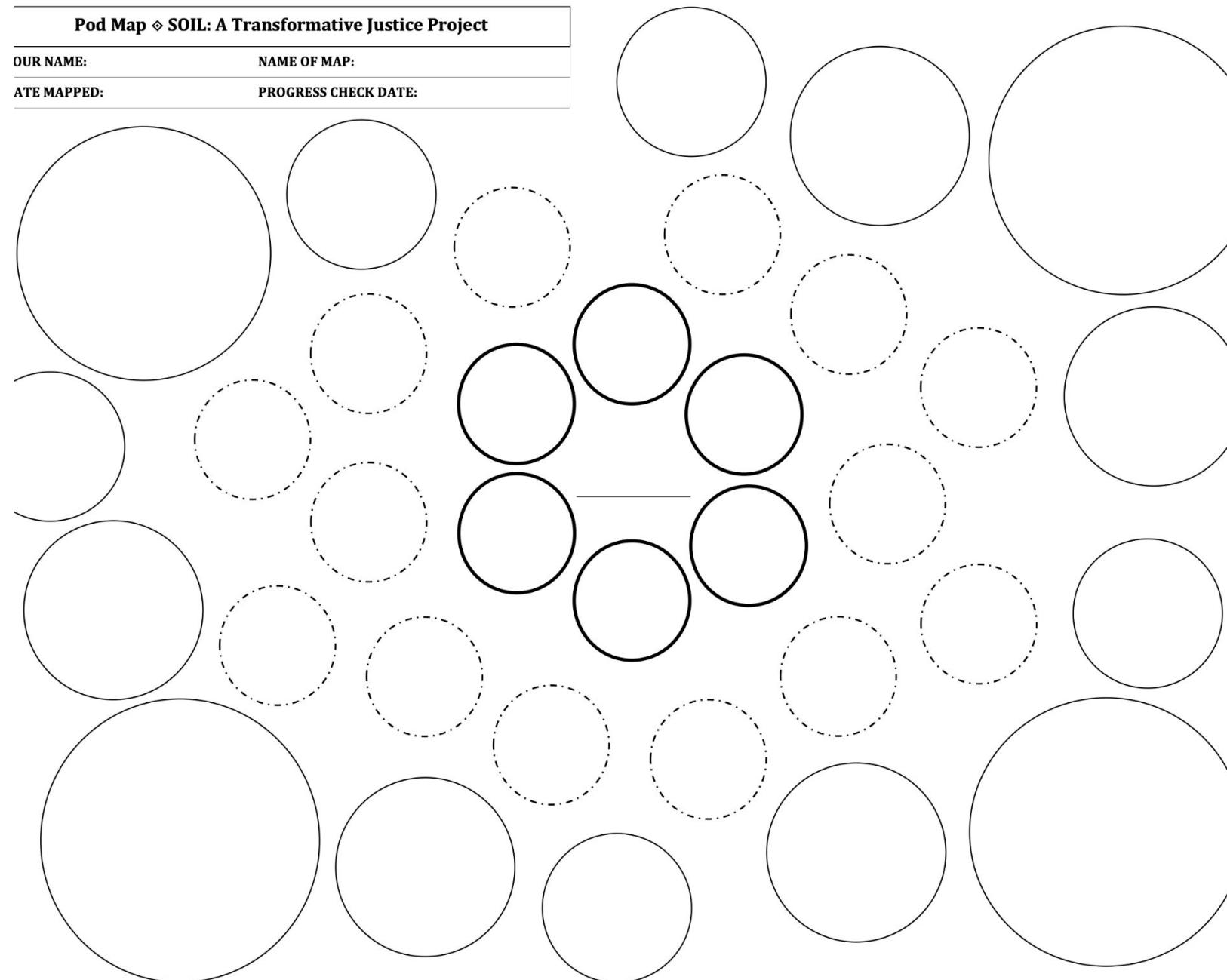
- Only some elements may be possible at any given time
- We do not need to address every element at once
- It may be necessary to address one element in order to make another available (ie de-escalation may make accountability possible, accountability may make healing & repair possible)



Graphic by Kai Cheng Thom ©

Pod Map ◇ SOIL: A Transformative Justice Project

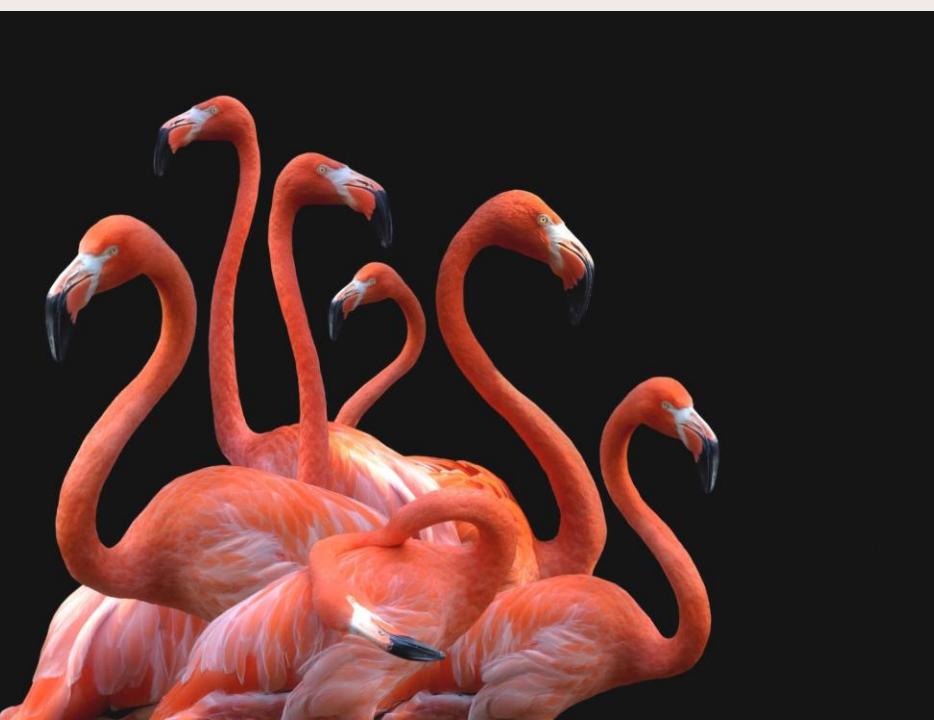
OUR NAME:	NAME OF MAP:
ATE MAPPED:	PROGRESS CHECK DATE:



# MIA MINGUS' POD MAPPING MODEL

<https://www.soiltjp.org/our-work/resources/pods/podmapworksheets>

# WHAT DO YOU CALL A GROUP OF...



1. Dolphins?
2. Geese?
3. Flamingos?  
Crows?
4. Bees?
5. Humans?  
Healers?
6. Activists?  
Visionaries?  
Erotic adventurers?
7. Intricate exquisite biological organisms, each one a living ecosystem dreaming its way towards the unfolding of the emergent mystery of the collective Soul?

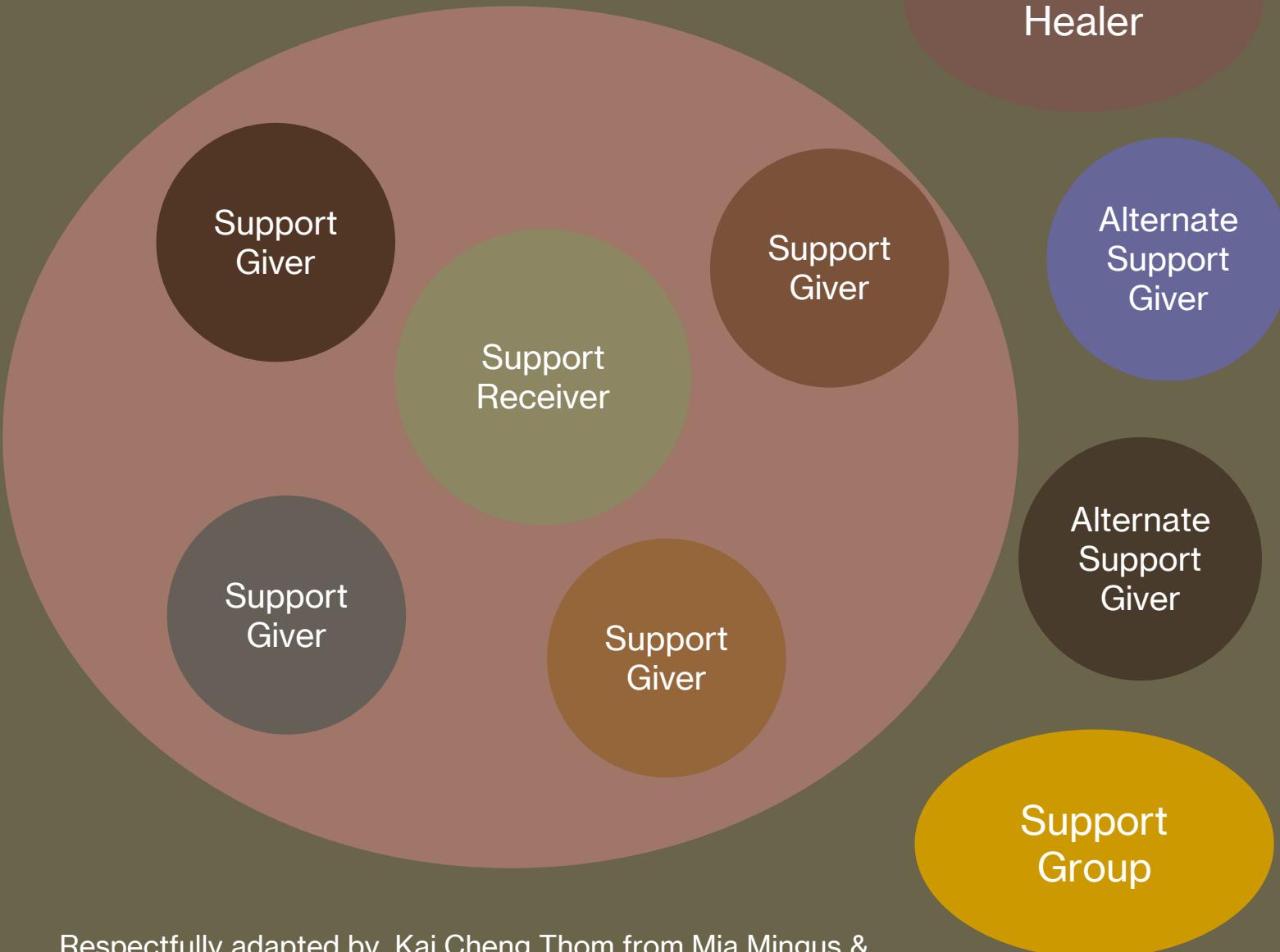


# SOMATIC INQUIRY: IF YOU WERE HAVING A TOUGH TIME, WHAT FORMATIONS WOULD YOU WANT AT YOUR BACK? AT YOUR SIDE?

a gaggle, a flock, a flamboyance, a hive, a swarm, a reef, a raft, a pack, a herd, a pod, a lineage, a troupe, a  
outpouring, a circle, a coven, a grove, a mix, a parliament, a pile, a neural network, a coalition, a cloud, a  
murmuration...

- 1) The support pod is a unit of mutual aid & care. It does not replace other supports, such as healers or support groups.
- 2) Ideally, the Support Receiver convenes the pod and selects 2- 4 Support Givers based on relationships of trust. However, another person can help set up a support pod, and the Support Givers can be volunteers from shared community too.
- 3) Alternate Support Givers may also be identified to step in as Support Givers step out of the Pod
- 4) The Support Receiver and Support Givers negotiate the baseline of communication norms – is there a weekly or monthly meeting/call? What are the emergency or crisis communication plans?
- 5) Once the Pod is “activated,” the Support Receiver has a group of people who have agreed to be reachable within a 12-24 hour period (adjust time frame as needed). This means that if there is an urgent need, at least one Support Giver will respond to a request for help. Use a safe word or emergency code to signal the level of urgency.
- 6) The Support Givers can also support each other and, with the consent of Support Receiver, independently debrief and plan with one another if the Support Giver is unexpectedly unresponsive
- 7) The Support Receiver can disband the Pod at any time for any reason. The Support Givers can also step in or out of the Pod for any reason.

# Support Pods In Action



Respectfully adapted by Kai Cheng Thom from Mia Mingus & The Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective's Pod Mapping model

# WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW ANYONE TO START A POD WITH?



- In the dominant culture, many of us are so fragmented by the demands of capitalism and colonization that it's hard to imagine knowing people who would want to be in a pod with/for us
- It's important to acknowledge the grief of this without bypassing it
- However, it's often helpful to start by just starting conversations about this concept in our communities and friend groups – familiarity starts to build trust, and our own contexts can inform us about what might work
- It can also be easier to start with one person – remember that they might know other people who share values that we don't know about yet
- Practicing asking for and receiving help is an important skill to grow in our communities – often, we imagine that people don't want to help, but the history of mutual aid shows us that in fact many people are longing for ways to build community and make a contribution!

# TIMES I (KAI CHENG) HAVE USED THE SUPPORT POD STRATEGY



- As a Support Receiver, to navigate situations in my community where I felt unsafe and in danger of being attacked, “cancelled,” stalked or physically intimidated/attacked by people, but did not want to escalate the situation or engage with police/criminal justice
- As a Support Receiver and politicized public figure, to prepare for backlash and harassment from strangers and/or hostile media
- As a Transformative Justice facilitator, to generate material and emotional support for individuals who had recently experienced assault, harm, harassment, intimidation, abuse within their communities but did not want to engage with police/criminal justice
- As a Transformative Justice facilitator, to generate material and emotional support for individuals who had recently been accused of assault, harm, harassment, intimidation, abuse within their communities but did not want to engage with police/criminal justice
- As a coach and somatic healer, to create a circle for individuals recovering from the trauma of ostracization and public humiliation, and to create a context in which collective healing rituals could occur
- As an activist/organizer, to prepare individuals in high-risk situations for critical incidents such as being doxed or harassed by mobs, police raids, legal investigations, etc
- As a friend and community member, to support stabilization for individuals going through mental health crises
- As a trainer of Somatic Sex Educators, to help trainees create a support structure for experiencing conflict or complaints in the context of their professional practice

# TIMES THAT SUPPORT PODS HAVE NOT WORKED WELL IN MY EXPERIENCE (KAI CHENG)

- When the Support Receiver is feeling so distressed that they end up feeling very suspicious or paranoid about the Support Givers, or simply not able to receive the support in a way that feels good
- When members of the Pod have not been able to respect the agreements and boundaries laid out when the Pod was formed, or to renegotiate them successfully
- When two members of a shared community are in conflict and both have convened Pods that essentially end up becoming hostile cliques towards one another. In my experience, when there are two Pods supporting a pair of individuals in conflict, it is best for the Pods to try and coordinate de-escalation and often **extremely damaging if the Pods get swept up and absorbed into the conflict**
- When the Support Givers start to act as vigilantes carrying out punishment or consequences on behalf of the Support Receiver
- When the key agreements that Support Receivers can dissolve the Pod at any time and that Support Givers can step out of the Pod at any time are not respected

# PRACTICE POD CREATION



- 1) Identify a situation or context in your life where accessing support from peers would be helpful
- 2) Make a list of 2-4 people you could invite to be in your support pod – these should be people you trust and who have some perspective or skills that could be useful to the issue you are seeking support with. Note: This can be hard. Sometimes we can't think of folks, or this activity can remind of us of people or relationships we've lost. Be gentle with yourself here.
- 3) In your ideal world, what would an initial meeting look, sound, and feel like? How would you ask for what you want?
- 4) Reflect: A support pod is primarily for the Support Receiver, but many Support Givers often also benefit from the experience of practicing mutual aid in this way – I (Kai Cheng) once organized a Support Pod for myself and two of my Support Receivers actually ended up becoming close friends and very generative co-organizers/political collaborators. Being a Support Giver can be a beautiful experience. What are some ways you imagine your Support Givers could benefit from supporting you?
- 5) In your ideal world, what would the norms and practices of the Support Pod be? How would you communicate, and about what? What would the support look and feel like?