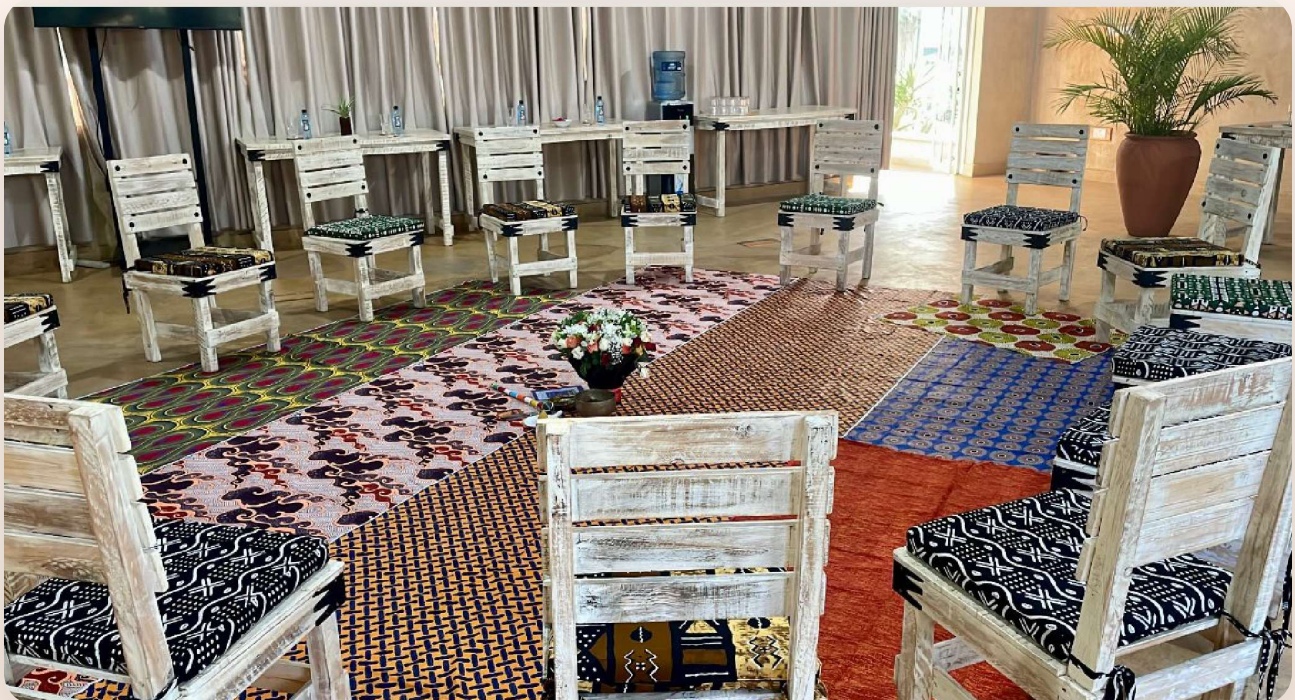




COLLECTIVE THREADS INITIATIVE

Frameworks for Collective Care

*Healing justice, capacity, and the shared work of
keeping one another whole*



BACKGROUND

The Care Fellowship is the result of a collective co-creation process with young activists, reflecting on a single question: what do we need, at this moment in our journeys as survivor leaders, activists, and movement organisers?

THE INVITATION

Beloved daughters of the struggle

We call you into a sacred community — not as broken beings seeking repair, but as powerful ancestors-in-training, carrying the revolutionary medicine our grandmothers embedded in our DNA.

You arrive at this threshold moment when the world aches for the healing wisdom that has always lived within African women, within our communities, within the very marrow of our resistance. For too long, systems of domination have tried to convince us that care is weakness, that healing is luxury, that our ancestral technologies are primitive. *They lied.*

Our foremothers knew what we are remembering: that care is the most revolutionary act, that healing is how we dismantle oppression from the inside out, and that our survival has always depended on the sacred art of tending to each other while fighting for our freedom.

Over these six transformative days, we will not simply learn techniques — we will remember who we have always been. We will weave personal healing with collective liberation, trauma-informed organising with ancestral wisdom, community care with revolutionary action. This is not retreat from the world; this is preparation to transform it.

We gather on East African soil, where our ancestors first understood that individual wellness and collective justice are inseparable, where healing circles birthed liberation movements, where women's wisdom sustained entire civilizations through colonization, displacement, and attempted cultural genocide. We honor every grandmother who kept our medicine alive, every mother who passed down our power, every sister who chose love over despair in the face of systems designed to break us.

The time for choosing between healing and fighting is over. We are the generation that does both — simultaneously, strategically, sacredly.

Together, we will birth sustainable movements that refuse the false choice between caring for ourselves and caring for our communities. We will create organizations rooted in abundance rather than scarcity, in rest rather than burnout, in the deep knowing that our liberation requires both transformed systems and transformed souls.

This is your invitation into the revolution our ancestors dreamed of: where healing justice meets organizing power, where care becomes our weapon against oppression, where we become the world we are fighting for.

Come as you are. Leave as who you were always meant to become.

In revolutionary love and ancestral power,

Prof. Nyamal Tutdeal

Liberation Architect & Healing Justice Practitioner,
Matkel

Nzilani Simu

Visual Storyteller & Creative Healer

Sophie Otiende

Founder & Co-Weaver, CTI

Elizabeth Maina

Cultural Practitioner & Co-Weaver, CTI

We hold space for your whole self — your wounds and your wisdom, your rage and your dreams, your exhaustion and your power. All of you are welcome here.

DEFINITION

What is collective care?

Collective care refers to the practice of distributing the labour and responsibility of wellbeing across a community, rather than treating care as a private, individual, or familial burden. It reframes survival and flourishing as shared, interdependent projects — and treats care itself as political work that sustains people, especially marginalized people, against systems that neglect or harm them.

The concept is rooted deeply in Black feminist thought. Audre Lorde offered one of its most cited foundations in *A Burst of Light* (1988):

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

AUDRE LORDE

Though often quoted to justify individual self-care, Lorde's point was relational: the preservation of Black women's lives is a collective political stake, not a personal indulgence.

Collective Threads' approach to care

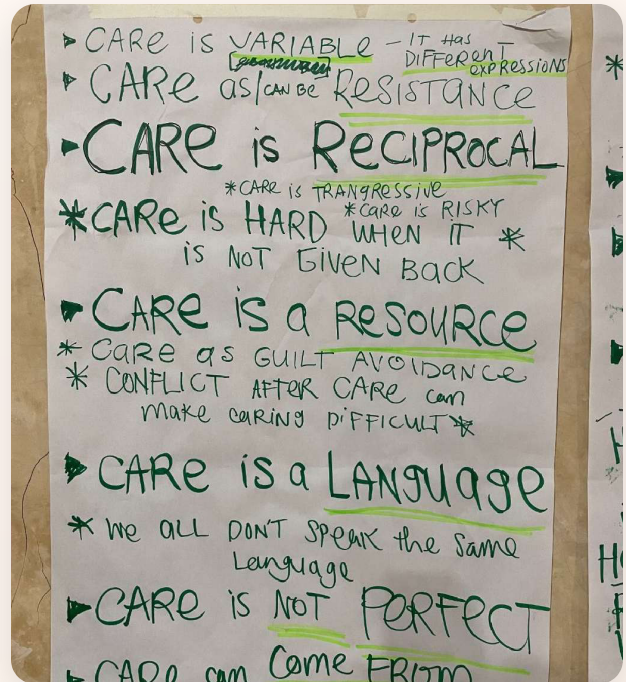
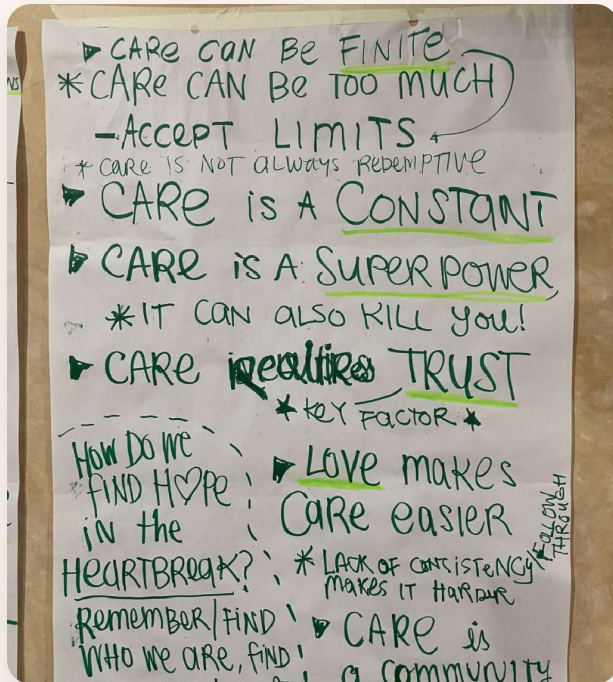
- 01 Care is inherently **collective** — an understanding that we are interdependent, not independent.
 - 02 Care is inherently about **sharing resources**.
 - 03 We are building an **infrastructure** where we care for each other.
 - 04 We work to **prevent burnout**, rather than accepting it as a rite of passage for every activist.
 - 05 Care is the work of **keeping each other alive** where dominant systems have failed us.
-

Our fellows this year were asked to define care, and they built their own philosophy of care from their experiences. What follows is the philosophy they co-created.

IN THEIR OWN HANDS

The fellows' philosophy of care

Drawn directly from the wall of the gathering — a living philosophy, written in the fellows' own hands.



Care is a constant

Care is a superpower

Care is reciprocal

Care requires trust

Care is a resource

Care is a language

Care is a community project

Love makes care easier



PART TWO

Frameworks for Collective Care

*Three tools for locating the self, tending our capacity, and
weaving care we can offer one another.*

01 Identity — *Who am I?*

02 Capacity — *What can I carry?*

03 The Basket of Care — *What do we bring?*

Who am I?

A framework for defining the self — from name to world.

In *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* (2018), Charlene Carruthers treats the question “Who am I?” as the essential starting point of political education and collective organising. Its purpose is not individual self-discovery, but an act of social and historical self-location.

We believe that defining the self is important in defining where we exist in the collective — and that it supports us in defining care for ourselves and others. What follows moves from naming the self toward naming the world we want: a progression of questions in Carruthers' tradition, extended to begin with the story of our names and end with collective vision.

FROM NAME TO WORLD

01 Where do I come from?

The story of our names



02 What do I believe?

Values — the principles I live by



03 What do I do?

Practice — how belief becomes action



04 What world do I want?

Vision — the self in service of the collective

■ The self ■ The collective

01 Where do I come from?

THE STORY OF OUR NAMES

We begin with the name, because a name is the first thing given to us by others, and it carries history we did not choose. This question asks:

- Who named me, and why?
- What does my name mean — in what language, from what lineage?
- Was it chosen with hope, with memory, in honor of someone?

- Has it been mispronounced, anglicized, shortened, or refused — and what does that tell me about the history my name had to pass through?
- Have I renamed myself, or chosen what I am called — and what did that act claim?

The name story surfaces ancestry, migration, language, and the marks of power before we ever speak. It grounds identity in something concrete and felt, rather than in categories alone.

02 What do I believe?

VALUES

From where we come, we move to what we hold — the principles we actually live by, not the ones we are supposed to profess.

- What is the source of my values?
- Where did they come from — family, faith, struggle, loss, community?
- Which were inherited, and which were forged from embodied experience?
- Where do my stated values and my lived choices diverge?

Naming values turns identity from a description into a stance, and it makes the next question possible — because what we do is the test of what we believe.

03 What do I do?

PRACTICE

Values remain abstract until they are practiced. How do I spend my time, my labour, my care, my attention? Who benefits from what I do, and who bears its costs? What am I building — and what am I, knowingly or not, sustaining? This is where Carruthers' insistence on accountability lives: the self is revealed in action, in relationship, in the daily distribution of one's energy. It also asks who my people are, since practice is rarely solitary.

04 What world do I want to see?

VISION

Finally, the self opens outward into the collective. Toward what future is all of this pointing? What would justice, freedom, or care look like for my people — and beyond them? What am I willing to struggle for, and alongside whom? Here the personal becomes political: defining the self is ultimately in service of imagining and building a different world.

Read together, the four answers form an arc — **Name** → **Values** → **Practice** → **Vision** — that refuses to treat identity as private or static. The self is located in a lineage, clarified by values, proven in practice, and finally accountable to a collective vision.

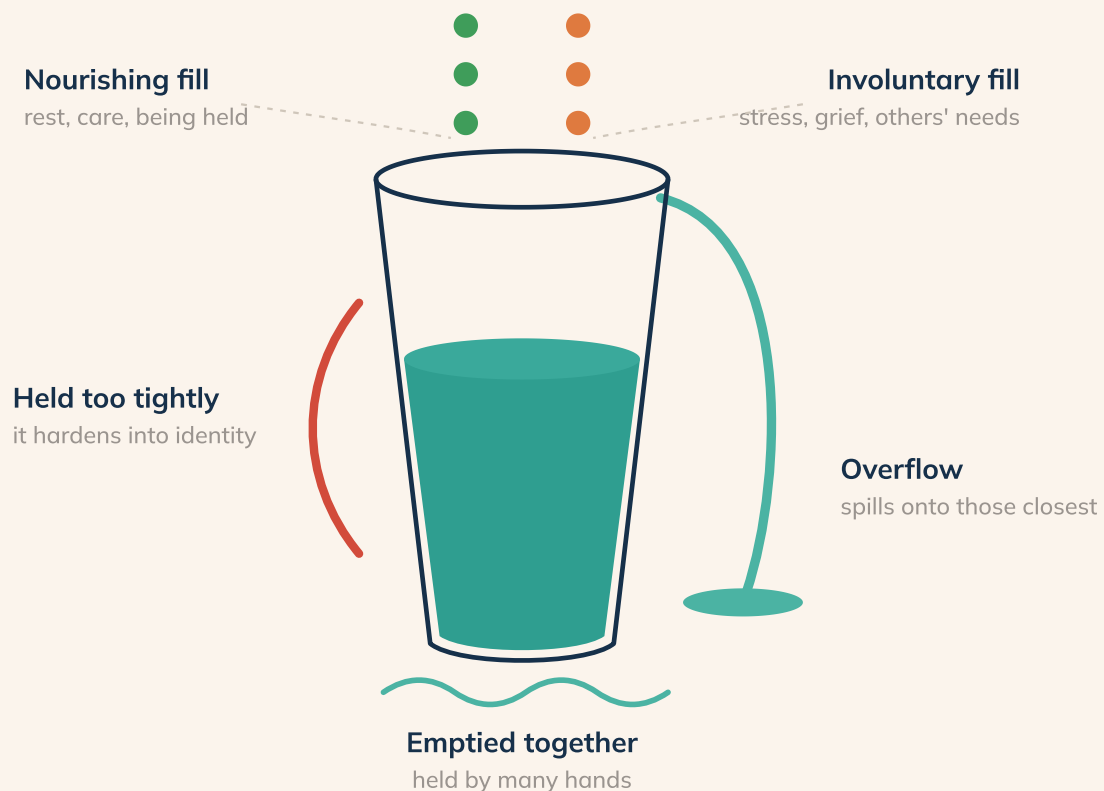
What can I carry?

Two companion tools — the Emotional Cup, and the Circumference of Care.

The Emotional Cup

On what we carry, why we grip it, and how we learn to set it down — together.

Each of us carries a cup. Not the kind you drink from, though the image leans on that familiarity, but an inner vessel that holds everything we feel and everything we are asked to bear: joy and grief, fear and tenderness, love, rage, exhaustion, hope. The emotional cup is the measure of our capacity at any given moment — how much we can hold, how much we give, how much is already brimming before the day has even started.



How the cup fills

There are two ways a cup fills, and we tend to notice only one of them. The first is **nourishing**. Rest fills it. So does laughter, being known by someone, a good cry, meaningful work, time with people who don't need anything from us, the simple experience of being cared for. This kind of filling restores capacity.

The second is **involuntary**. The day's stress fills the cup. So do other people's needs poured into us, grief that arrives unasked, the slow drip of labour and worry that never quite stops. This kind fills the cup toward the rim, toward overflow. Most of us are fluent in the second and have half-forgotten the first is even available to us.

How it affects us, and the people around us

A cup is meant to be poured from and refilled — a vessel in motion, not a sealed container. Trouble comes at the two extremes. When the cup is too full and we don't empty it, it spills. And it rarely spills onto the people who filled it; it spills onto the ones closest to us, the least deserving. When the cup is empty and we keep pouring anyway, we give from a place that costs us something we don't actually have — and we call that virtue. Either way, the people around us feel the level of our cup long before we tell them what it holds.

When the cup becomes the self

We don't merely carry our cups. Over time, we begin to grip them. And a cup held tightly enough, for long enough, stops feeling like something we carry and starts feeling like who we are. The grief becomes “I am someone who grieves.” The roles harden — the strong one, the caretaker, the wounded one, the one who holds everyone else together — until the handle has worn a groove into the palm.

Then something strange happens. We begin to defend the contents. We resist emptying the cup, because setting it down would feel like losing ourselves. We stay loyal to the very thing depleting us, because we genuinely no longer know who we would be without it. This is why “just let it go” is useless advice. You cannot ask a person to pour out what they have come to believe is their own substance.

How we empty it — collectively, and sustainably

Not alone. That is the first and most important thing. The privatized version of self-care — the bath, the candle, the early night — quietly tells us the cup is ours to manage by ourselves. But a cup held alone is, by definition, held tightly: there is no other hand on it. The tight grip and the solitary grip are the same grip.

We empty our cups in the company of people who will hold them while we rest, who say “here, give me some of that,” who notice the cup is full before it spills. This is what collective care actually means: not the lonely labour of keeping ourselves together, but the shared, ongoing work of keeping one another whole — care that moves in more than one direction.

And we empty them **sustainably**, which means it cannot be a single dramatic unburdening. The cup fills again tomorrow; that is not failure, that is the nature of a cup. What matters is whether there is a rhythm — a regular, reciprocal practice of pouring out and being refilled, rather than waiting for the overflow to force the matter.

You were always the hand around the cup, never the water inside it. You can hold it more loosely now.

The Circumference of Care

A framework by Alice Wawengwe — known to many of us as Mama Sophie.

The Circumference of Care helps you decide where to put your energy. It draws a line around the part of the world where your worry can become work, and your work can become change. Everything inside the circumference is what should keep you up at night. Everything outside it is still real, often tragic — but it belongs to someone else's circumference, or to all of us together. The circumference is not where you stop caring. It is where your care can actually *land*.

You draw that line using two measurements: what you carry inside you, and what you can reach outside you.

CAPACITY

What you carry within

Your energy, expertise, experience, skill, judgement and craft — and underneath it all, the real, finite fuel you have to spend. It asks: **which part of this am I actually equipped to move?** Capacity can be built over time, but in any given moment it has an edge. Knowing where that edge is, is half of wisdom.

INFLUENCE

What you can reach beyond yourself

Not what you can do alone, but what you can move through others — who picks up when you call, whose decisions you can shape, the rooms you are allowed into, the trust you have banked. It asks: **which part of this can I actually reach?** Pretending you don't have it is just another way of refusing to use it.

The key tension

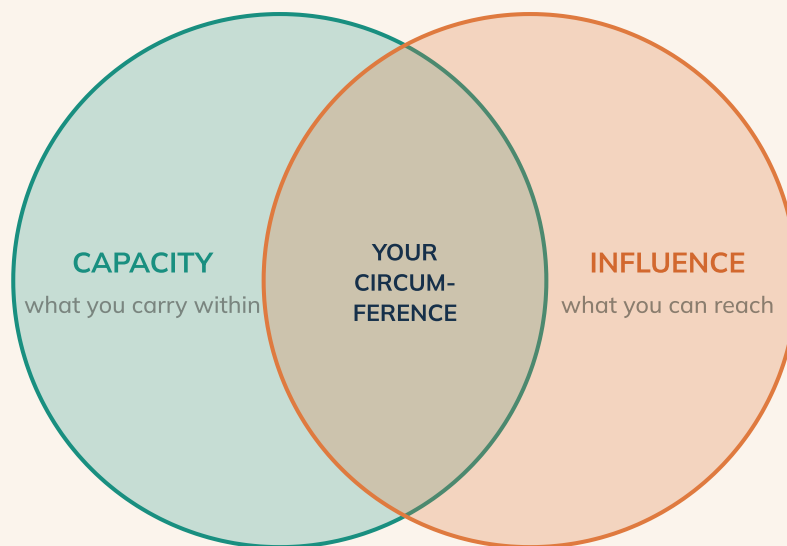
Here is where most of our wasted energy lives. There are things you have **capacity** for but no **influence** over, and things you have influence over but no capacity for yet. These two mismatches are the traps.

Capacity without influence is the person who knows exactly how to fix the system but is never in the room where it's decided — right, and capable, and completely unheard. This is the soil that grows resentment and burnout. The work here is not to try harder; it is to build influence.

Influence without capacity is the opposite danger: the access and the platform, but not yet the skill, knowledge, or energy to act well. The trap is taking on what you cannot yet deliver. The work is to build capacity — or, just as honestly, to bring in the people who have it and use your influence to make room for them.

Where the two meet — your circumference

The line you are looking for is the overlap: where you can both do the work *and* reach the people who matter. That is what is genuinely yours to keep up at night.



And this is what keeps it from becoming a recipe for selfishness: no single person's circumference covers the whole field. It was never supposed to. We cover the field together — each tending the patch where our capacity and influence overlap, and trusting others to tend theirs. **The circumference is personal. The field is collective.**

How to use it — three zones

Take your list of brutal facts. For each one, ask two questions — *do I have the capacity?* and *do I have the influence?* The answers sort each fact into one of three zones.

The Zone of Action

CAPACITY & INFLUENCE

You can do the work *and* reach the people who matter. This is inside your circumference — **act**. Don't spread yourself thin across the whole list; these are the facts that have earned your full weight.

The Zone of Growth

ONLY ONE

You hold part of what is needed, but not all of it yet. The honest move is not to force action before you're ready — it's to grow toward it.

Capacity, no influence → build influence, or partner with someone who has the reach you lack.

Influence, no capacity → build capacity, or bring in someone who has it and make room for them.

The Zone of Solidarity

NEITHER

Release it — not because it doesn't matter, but because it is not yours. Clutching it only drains the cup you need for the work that is. But releasing is not abandoning: you hand the fact to the collective, trust it sits inside someone else's circumference, and then you **stand with them** — lending your voice, your witness, your encouragement.

The goal was never to care about less. It was to care *somewhere fully, and well* — instead of everywhere, and not at all — and to trust that what falls outside your circumference still falls inside someone's, so that together we cover the whole field.

What do we bring?

A framework for collective offering.

In the sacred tradition of bringing gifts to the gathering, every person arrives with something to offer and something to receive. The Basket of Care is communal — woven from what each of us carries. Nothing is too small; everything is essential thread. Organising the offerings into four movements gives facilitators and participants a way to hold them, return to them, and know which they most need on a given day.

Weave 01

Returning to the Elements

Reverence for the oceans that carried our ancestors. Grounding work, roots deep in African soil. Water, essential oils, the elements blessing our bodies — to swim, to breathe, to be held by the natural world. This weave reconnects the body to land and lineage.

Weave 02

Reclaiming Rest

Decolonizing productivity and urgency. Resting without guilt — to sleep, to read, to disconnect from technology, to find the silence our ancestors knew. Being *self-full* rather than selfish. This weave names rest as resistance and restoration.

Weave 03

The Medicine of Touch & Presence

Healing through connection. Somatic bodywork, the medicine of touch reclaimed. Hugs that heal generational touch hunger. Love and support woven like kente cloth, each thread essential. This weave restores what isolation and trauma have severed.

Weave 04

Becoming Our Own Storytellers

Authorship and authenticity. Journaling, becoming griots of our own stories. Being authentically ourselves; masks only for ceremony, not for hiding. To pray, to meditate, to reclaim home as a place of joy. This weave returns each person to authorship of their own life.

A basket in the room

Alongside the offerings we carry within, there is a real Basket of Care held in the space — a tangible expression of the same principle. It holds what the community might need to feel cared for and at ease: feminine hygiene supplies, medicine, tissues, a first-aid kit, and other small necessities of care. Take freely and without asking. The basket is replenished throughout our time together, so that no one has to go without — and so that care is something we can reach for as easily as we reach for one another.



The Basket of Care, held in the gathering space — take freely, and without asking.

How to hold it. Invite participants at the opening to name what they bring to the basket and what they hope to draw from it, then return to the basket at closing to witness what shifted. The four weaves can also structure a multi-day rhythm, with one as the anchor of each day.



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LAND & ANCESTRAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge that this healing work takes place on the traditional lands of the diverse indigenous peoples of Kenya — including the Maasai, Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, Kamba, Kisii, Meru, Turkana, Samburu, and over forty ethnic communities who have stewarded these lands for generations. From the coastal regions to the Great Rift Valley, from the highlands to the arid plains, we honor the communities who have carried forward indigenous knowledge systems of healing, community care, and collective wellbeing.

We recognize the healing wisdom of all our ancestors across the African continent and diaspora — the pastoralists who understood the interconnection between land and healing, the grandmothers who preserved traditional medicine through colonization, and all indigenous peoples whose knowledge systems have sustained communities through centuries of resistance and survival.

We acknowledge that individual healing and collective liberation are inseparable, and we commit to practices that honor both personal transformation and systemic change. As we gather on this sacred land, we carry forward the responsibility to decolonize healing practices, center indigenous wisdom, and build movements rooted in the understanding that our wellness is tied to the wellness of the land and all its peoples.