

What Makes a (Chosen) Family?: Reflections from MEV's Cross Cohort Convening

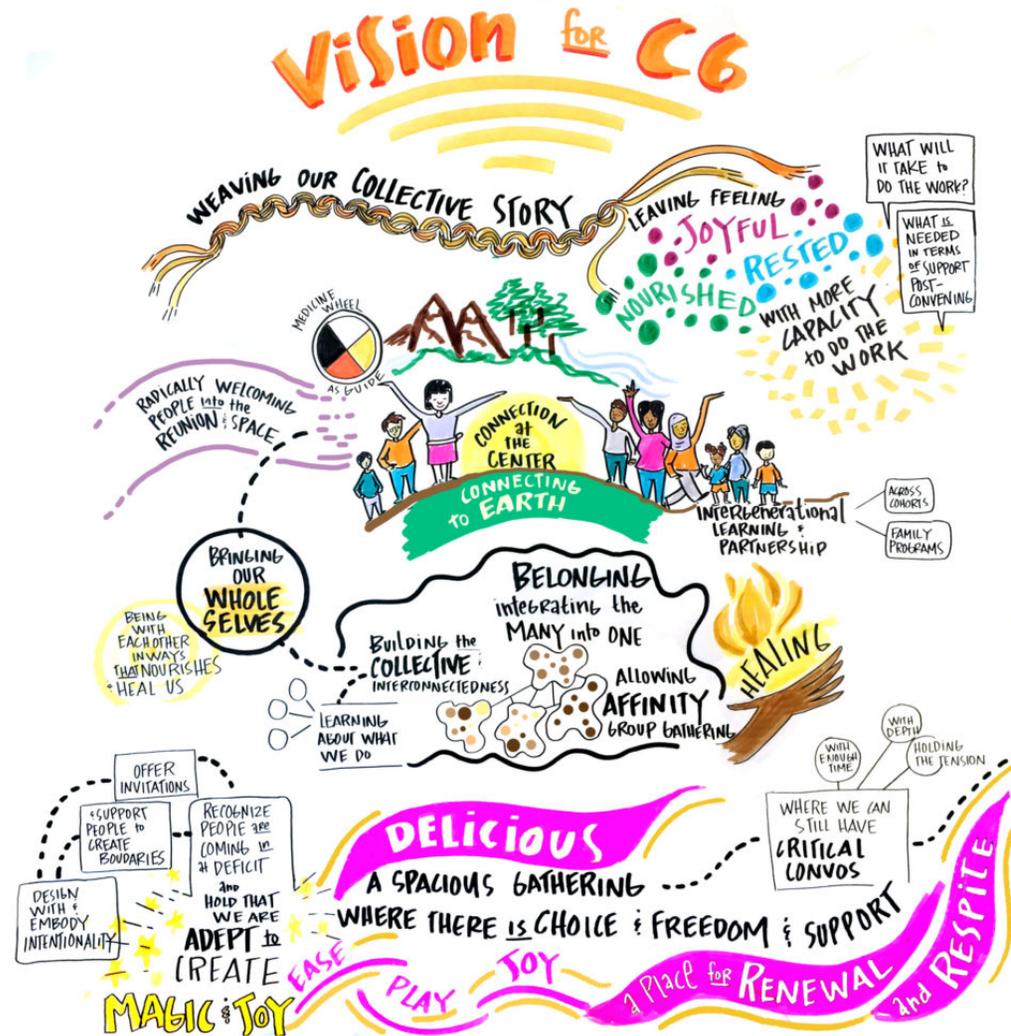
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Originally Posted December 4, 2019 Share:

What makes a (chosen) family? Over the last decade, MEV has had the privilege of grappling with and ideating around this question through our past four cohorts of Movement Makers, faculty, staff, and allies. The work of ending violence against girls and women – cis, trans, and gender-non conforming folks – is necessary, fulfilling, and can be deeply heartbreaking. We know that it cannot be done alone. That we need beloved community who see us, who will hold us accountable, and who will encourage us when the arc towards justice seems so very long.

This past October, the MEV community came together for our largest gathering thus far – a chosen family reunion. Reuniting in Aptos, California, land of the Ohlone peoples, past, present, and future. While the location was familiar to some, this was an altogether different gathering, reflective of the work we have done as a program and a community over the years. It was important that we be able to hold all the parts that make this community what it is, from the multitude of origin stories, to the ways the program has been transformed through centering healing and language justice, to the blossoming of convening spaces into intergenerational gatherings, and more.



Collective Vision for the Cross-Cohort Convening, envisioned by the co-design team and captured by [Claudia Lopez of On The Right Mind](#).

The Co-Design Team

To lay the groundwork for our time together a stellar co-design team composed of Movement Makers from each cohort worked diligently to ensure that the needs and desires of their community were reflected throughout the agenda.



The Co-Design Team for Convening 6

There were calls for spaciousness, joy, time to connect and share stories, resources for healing and spiritual renewal, an opportunity to practice languages most resonant with people's spirits, and an overall desire to feel seen and heard. These calls were answered in the form of access to spiritually grounding activities such as a community altar, pouring of libation, yoga, tai chi, sunrise meditation, a curated Spirit Space that housed a healing justice practice space and more.

Joy and connection were in full bloom during the revival of Club MEV, whose theme this year was Freedom Futures! Through dance, karaoke, adornment, beloved community, and joy we embodied what liberation and a world without violence looks, feels, smells, and tastes like. We even had a special futurist performance from the originators of Club MEV, Trina Greene Brown and Scheherazade Tillet.



Club MEV Originators [Trina Greene Brown](#) and [Scheherazade Tillet](#)

Storytelling

Stories were a highlight of our time together. From stories about the land we were privileged to be on and the people who are the stewards of it; to stories of ancestors that have stewarded us through life; to stories about MEV and who has stewarded what it has become and will be. Movement Makers called attention to what is needed from the movement, funders, supporters, and others in this current political moment. We explored the underpinnings of gender-based violence and the ways that settler colonialism, capitalism, enslavement, and heteropatriarchy has led to dehumanization, criminalization, erasure, forced assimilation, and trauma. We shared the many ways we stand in resistance to this through recognizing that our liberations are connected, decolonizing from the inside out, being ourselves, reclaiming our histories, imagining and creating something new, practicing joy, and building community power.

We dove deeper into the theme of building power and resilience in a community-led feminist response to fascism, exploring many questions. How do we recognize that there are many different kinds of feminisms? What does it mean for survivors to lead? How do we organize multi-racially and multi-lingually? How are we rigorous in our analysis of systemic oppression? How do we center Black and Indigenous women and girls? How do we use strategies that are accountable to our communities?



Cross cohort Movement Maker conversation featuring: [Joanne Smith](#), [Nicole Matthews](#), [Isa Noyola](#), [Ana Orozco](#)

As MEV begins sunseting, we are using these same questions to guide us in how to share the stories, lessons, and experiences that have emerged throughout the program. Through a 'Storytelling Arc,' we aim to share the insights of MEV's work and the deep expertise of Movement Makers, and to ensure that these important resources remain accessible to our community and future generations beyond the life of this program.

Resistance Communications (RC) has been partnering with us and sharing their gifts of narrative by helping to roll out the first phase of the Listening & Gathering Process that we are undergoing as we look to sunset. During this phase the MEV community is invited to shape the Storytelling Arc through questions such as: 1) What topics and themes of stories would you like to hear or share? 2) How should the learnings be shaped into offerings that are most useful in your work and for your communities, now and into the future? 3) What are the traditional and non-traditional storytelling methods and mediums that are most meaningful to your communities? We hope that many of you will be involved with us in this process.

Supporting Each Other's Needs

No family reunion would be true to its purpose if it did not allow for intergenerational connection, space for healing, and attempts to support the needs of each family member. At this convening, community members were able to see how their requests over the years have come to life through the centering of families with Pachamama Camp, and the intention of Healing Justice, Spirit Space, and Language Justice programming.



Pachamama Kids Camp – Pachamama means Mother Earth in the Quechua language spoken by the Quechua people, including several indigenous ethnic groups in South America, especially in Peru. Pachamama is considered to be present in all living things, in human beings, along with all animals and plants, to be part of the Earth itself.

The Pachamama Kids Camp was a delicious opportunity to practice how we build intergenerational movements. Families and caregivers were invited to ground in the natural and cultural history of Monterey Bay, and to link with movement conversations around the connection between violence to the earth and violence against girls and women, Indigenous communities, and climate justice. Drawing inspiration from the Environmental Justice Movement and Indigenous philosophy and knowledge, the camp supported young people in connecting, caring, and getting activated to protect the environment. With 35 dependents and caregivers joining us, we visited the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the educational Farm Discovery at Live Earth, and the Mystery Spot.

The Pachamama Kids Camp was hosted by [Lorena Estrella](#), Cohort 3 member and consultant with the Sadie Nash Leadership Project, and Oakland-based radical educator Marylin Zúñiga, in partnership with cohort 2 member, cohort 4 faculty, and founder of Parenting for Liberation, [Trina Greene Brown](#). We know it takes our whole community to co-create conditions where families of all

kinds feel welcome in movement spaces. We also know that our movement spaces are nourished – and full of giggles and naptimes – when kids, elders, dependents and kin are present.



Ana Romero giving an introduction to the ancestor altar and history of dia de Los muertos.

We were nourished by ritual as well. Movement Makers [Ana Romero](#) and [Vivian Jojola](#) helped to coordinate the creation of a community ancestor altar in honor of *dia de los muertos*. The altar served as an anchor during our time together and was a reminder that even though this work may sometimes feel isolating, we are never truly alone, we are pushed forward by our ancestors and pulled forward by future generations.

Language Justice is one of several areas of praxis we committed to in Cycle 4. At the convening, we continued this practice by having Language Justice Interpreters present to support us in our English/Spanish programming, inviting all of our languages into the space (both ones we have access to and ones stolen by colonialism and chattel slavery), and celebrating different forms of knowing and knowledge-making. This included movement, dance, visual art, music, song, and powerful ritual. We thank the Movement Makers from across cohorts and the MEV community who have asked MEV to take up this work and make Language Justice a reality for our movement spaces.

Looking Ahead

We are turning to each other for support and affirmation that, despite the current climate, we will win. The Cross-Cohort convening felt like an embodiment of this belief. That if we continue to hold each other with grace, care and rigor, liberation will not just be something hoped for, it will be made real.