

Peace and Quiet

New fund helps charity workers avoid burnout as they campaign for social change

By Cassie J. Moore

Seasons have joined to create a fund that will teach workers to engage in "contemplative practices," in an effort to encourage collaboration and prevent burnout among employees of charities that promote social change.

Last November, the newly formed Seasons Fund for Social Transformation awarded \$449,000 in grants to 15 organizations to support education retreats, meditation, yoga, and other relaxation and communication techniques. And Seasons is poised to grow this year with the addition of five to 10 more foundations and grants totaling up to \$1.5-million, according to Simon Greer, president of the Jewish Funds for Justice, which manages the Seasons Fund.

The ultimate goal is to raise \$5-million over the next 18 months, according to Michael Edwards, director of the governance and civil-society program at the Ford Foundation, and one of the founding members of Seasons. To that end, Seasons will make a presentation in New York at the Ford Foundation next month, at which grantee organizations will speak about their work and programs before an audience of prospective supporters.

The other groups that have supported Seasons so far are the Fetzer Institute, in Kalamazoo, Mich.; the Hidden Leaf Foundation, in Concord, Calif.; the Seeds of Justice Fund, in Santa Cruz, Calif.; and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, in Battle Creek, Mich.

Inside and Out

"Contemplative practices" describes exercises and techniques designed to heighten and improve self-awareness, focus, interconnectedness, compassion, and communication, according to the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, in Northampton, Mass. The center received \$20,000 from the Seasons Fund to offer retreats to social-justice workers.

"One of the most potent approaches is guiding people and getting them in touch with their own personal purpose and vision, and then helping them create an alignment between what they really value and what they're trying to manifest in the world," says Tara Brown, director of the Hidden Leaf Foundation and co-chair of the Seasons Fund.

In addition to such inward-looking activities as meditation and yoga, other contemplative practices supported by the Seasons Fund include some that focus especially on communication. Staff retreats in which employees can discuss their work and forge alliances with individuals at other nonprofit groups are another important component. Employees of social-change

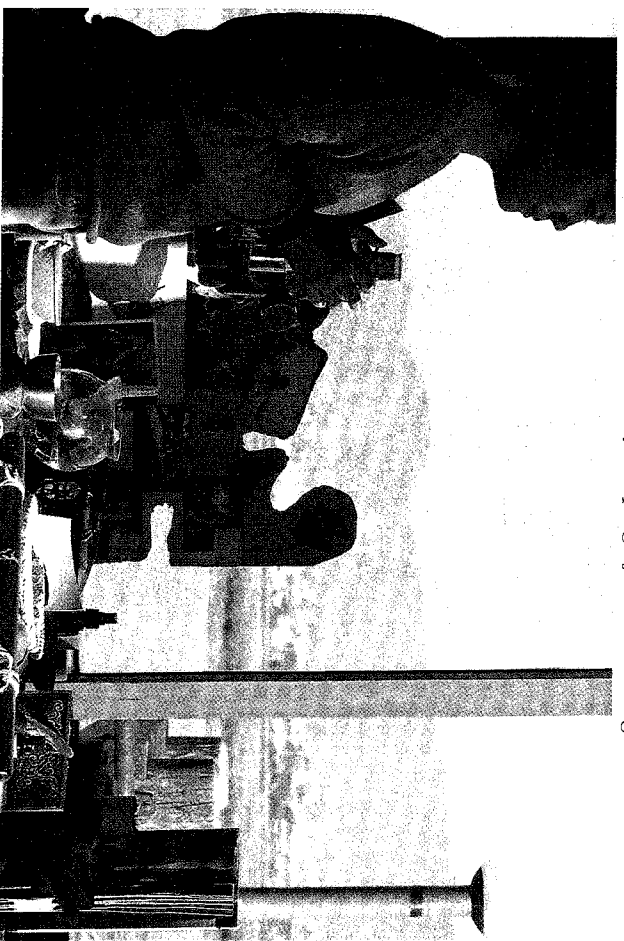


PHOTO: JAMESHARRINGTON/STREETLEVEL CENTER

Dana Ginn Paredes, of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, attends a workshop on spirituality given by the Movement Strategy Center, a grantee of the Seasons Fund for Social Transformation.

groups especially need these exercises, says David A. Brown, Tara Brown's father and founder of Hidden Leaf, because the traditional approaches to social change have been adversarial.

"It is set up as we versus they, these little grass-roots nonprofit organizations vying with the whole structure of our system," he says.

With the competition comes anger and frustration, and burnout soon follows. When staff members learn to communicate collaboratively, Mr. Brown says, they can cooperate instead of fighting or competing.

Mr. Edwards says incorporating contemplative practices can greatly increase the impact of social-change organizations.

"It increases their effectiveness, their ability to build alliances. It reduces burnout, it helps teams come together, and it helps individuals confront some of the barriers that get in the way of working together more effectively," he says.

Building Alliances

One group confronting such barriers and building alliances is ForestEthics, with headquarters in San Francisco, which has received \$30,000 from Seasons.

ForestEthics aggressively campaigns against polluters and companies that endanger the environment. However, its director, Todd Paglia, says the group first attempts to build relationships

with executives at those corporations to help them change their policies in a collaborative way.

"Our job from the get-go is not to challenge them or try and threaten them, but it's to get to know them and to educate them and hopefully change them in some of the places they're having an impact," he says. "Our approach is to be hard on the issues and soft on the people."

One of the group's recent successes was persuading Limited Brands, parent company of Victoria's Secret, to cancel a major paper contract with the West Fraser Timber Company, headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, which uses timber from forests where endangered caribou live, according to ForestEthics.

Limited Brands also started using recycled paper in its catalogs and became a partner with ForestEthics in lobbying the Canadian government to adopt more environmentally friendly policies. Mr. Paglia plans to use the Seasons grant to send staff members to the

Rockwood Leadership Institute, in Berkeley, Calif., another Seasons Fund grantee, as well as to develop other training programs. He is emphatic that these practices make a difference, saying that detractors may see these efforts as "hippie-dippy sort of stuff, but it's actually one the keys to, for example, ForestEthics protecting 12 million acres over the last several years. It's bottom-line effectiveness, to say nothing of people leading a better life."

As for that better life, Akaya Windwood, president of Rockwood, says that nonprofit employees tend to put their groups' missions ahead of caring for themselves, which can end up hurting their ability to carry out their missions.

"We've seen burnout, bitterness, leaders who would be better leaders if they actually did only work 40 hours a week instead of 60 hours," she says. Contemplative practice, she says, is about "taking care of yourself in service of the work. It's not a self-indulgent thing."

Personal Connections

Most foundations became involved in the Seasons Fund through a personal connection: Guilhermina Hernandez-Gallegos, formerly at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and now a senior program officer at the Fetzer Institute, and Mr. Edwards of Ford both had interest in contemplative practices and social transformation, which prompted their involvement.

Mr. Edwards says he began meditating in 1982. "The fact that we try to live out the philosophy that we're also encouraging in others gives us more strength and legitimacy, and makes us more attractive as a group," he says.

The Ford Foundation has thus far contributed \$500,000 to Seasons, and Mr. Edwards says he is recommending a \$1-million matching grant from Ford for the next round.