



Photo by Reuben Bloom / Basic Cable

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For Immediate Release: Choreographing Care sparks long-term change at area homeless shelters.

Carving out a space for catharsis, lightness, and laughter can be nearly impossible in the urgent day of social workers. Supported by McColl Center for Art + Innovation as part of their Tale of Two Cities initiative, NYC-based artist Jody Wood worked with Men's Shelter of Charlotte and Urban Ministry Center to launch *Choreographing Care*, a workshop series for staff to process stress and secondary trauma through an artistic outlet. The project is different from other training staff receive in that it prioritizes experimental theater, somatic therapies, and nonverbal expression. Staff who participated in workshops were asked to sculpt their bodies into an image, create a self-amplifying microphone, and perform mental disarmament exercises. According to Wood, the project aims to provide more than a self-care opportunity for staff. The project also functions as an artistic intervention into overtaxed poverty support agencies. "It's really about changing the perspective that a care worker is supposed to give tirelessly without having needs of their own. They need care and support too and these activities can have profound transformative effects in increasingly bureaucratic institutions that typically overlook sensory and corporeal experiences" says Wood.

The project concluded in May 2018 however both agencies will be working with Wood to adopt the workshop series into their organization long-term. Men's Shelter plans to roll out a 6-9 month continuation of the project, which will be shaped by their own staff leadership. Workshop leaders including Queens College Music Therapy Clinic will be partnering with Men's Shelter to co-facilitate workshops, and Urban Ministry Center will adopt the monthly workshop series starting November 2018. Future plans include creating a toolkit to extend the project to additional homeless shelters.