

TUJALI

**PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR CULTURAL WORKERS TO
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR
COMMUNITY.**

**CULTURAL WORKER
RESOURCES**

**MADE FOR
CREATIVES
BY CREATIVES.**

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INTRODUCTION

Nairobi's creative community thrives thanks to people like you.

Maybe you're a producer, curator, DJ, MC, fixer, booker, promoter, community organiser, manager, someone who keeps the lights on and the studio open. The person who makes sure the artist gets paid, the venue is booked, and the audience feels welcome. The one holding everything together, from the spreadsheet to the stage to the person having a hard night.

Making things work can be messy and often invisible. It doesn't appear in your contracts. It lives in the WhatsApp messages at midnight, the conversations that happen in the corner of the room, the relationships you build so that everything else can function. The work that makes the art possible. You may have struggled with how rarely this work is acknowledged, financially or otherwise. And yet you become the person everyone leans on. The one they come to for advice, to process a difficult situation, to offload. Sometimes, without even realising it, you become the automatic therapist, even when you are running on empty.

This resource is for you. To equip you with practical tools and ideas to build your own resilience, better support the people around you, and navigate tricky work situations.

It's important to remember that sometimes situations are bigger than us, and it is okay to ask for help. This is a starting point.

WELCOME TO TUJALI.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CARE?

Care is not just about what happens when something goes wrong. It is a culture you create every day. It is how you greet someone. Care is making people feel seen in your space, noticing when someone is struggling even before they notice it themselves.

In Nairobi's creative community, people look out for each other. You share resources, contacts, and knowledge. You show up. And yet, when it comes to mental health and wellbeing, stigma can get in the way. Seeking support can feel like an admission of failure or something that invites judgement from family, community or peers. Sometimes when you are asked to support you just don't know how.

Taking care, of yourself and others, can mean navigating difficult territory. As cultural workers, you are often expected to show up without the tools, training or support. This resource is about making care more intentional. Helping you identify your support network and the resources you can turn to when you're not sure what to do.

"Pia wewe unahitaji usaidizi."

CIRCLES OF CARE

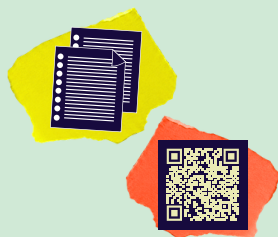
Before you can take care of yourself, your communities and your spaces better, it's worth asking: what does care actually mean to you? Unajijali vipi?

Who is caring for the carers?

'Circles of Care' by Gravitropia, is an exercise to help you think through exactly that.

Work through it here:

WORKSHEET #1:
"CIRCLES OF CARE"



A FEW DEFINITIONS:

MENTAL HEALTH

"Afya Ya Akili"

We all have mental health, and it shifts. It is not a fixed state and it is not something that only affects some people. Stress, anxiety, burnout, grief: these are all part of life. Talking about mental health and asking for help is actually an act of courage.

WELLBEING

"Ustawi"

Wellbeing is about overall health and happiness: how you are doing physically, mentally and emotionally. The habits, practices and connections that keep you grounded and contribute to your nutrition, housing, work and income, culture, safety, access to health services, leisure and community.

SAFETY

"Usalama"

Being physically and emotionally safe in the spaces you share is important. As cultural workers, this can include how you handle difficult situations, how you respond when something goes wrong, and the structures you put in place before anything happens. This resource aims to help you build some of these structures.



CULTURAL WORKERS ARE CARE WORKERS

When we think of carers, we often picture medical professionals: nurses, doctors, counsellors. But care work happens everywhere. And in Nairobi's creative community, it happens informally, invisibly, and often without any of the support that those professionals have access to.

Beyond the logistics, the bookings and the budgets, cultural workers are holding space for people. You are the person someone calls when they are having a crisis at 2am. The one who notices when an artist is not okay. The one who stays with someone until help arrives, even when you are exhausted.

We heard this again and again from cultural workers in Nairobi. None of it was in the job description. The question is not whether you are doing it. You are. The question is whether you are resourced, supported and equipped to do it well.

Research shows that psychological distress among music and arts workers is higher than the general population. Here are some contributing factors:

THE CRASH.

You pour everything into a project and then it's over. Irregular schedules and the intense highs and lows can take a toll on your health.

THE FINANCIAL REALITY.

Irregular income, unpaid work and financial precarity are well documented drivers of poor mental health in creative industries.

THE PERSONA GAP.

Deep identity investment in creative work and the need to keep up a strong public persona can make it harder to admit when you are struggling.

GRIEF AND LOSS.

Creative communities have lost people. Unprocessed grief is a significant risk factor for poor mental health.

SUBSTANCES.

Alcohol and drugs are part of many creative spaces. Research consistently shows elevated rates of substance abuse in this sector also as a significant risk factor.

INDUSTRY MALPRACTICE.

Undercutting, non-payment, pay disparities, cliques and a culture of competition over collaboration all take their toll on creatives and cultural workers.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

"Jijali"

You cannot support others well if you are running on empty. How is your mental health? Do you feel well enough to help others?

"Jitunze kwanza ili usaidie wengine"

We have put together a separate resource for creatives in Nairobi: practical tools for taking care of your body, mind and heart. We would encourage you to explore it alongside this one. Also know when to ask for help. Sometimes you are the one who needs to be taken care of. Do not hesitate to seek help from your support network and, if necessary, professional mental health assistance.

"Ni sawa kuomba usaidizi."

This is a quick and simple way to check in with yourself before engaging with a difficult situation:

CAPACITY

How am I doing right now? What state am I in?

URGENCY

How serious is this? Does it need to be addressed immediately or can it wait?

SKILLS

Do I have the knowledge or experience to help, or do I need to bring someone else in?

SUPPORT

Who in my network can I call on if I need backup?



WHO IS YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK?

"Undugu ni kufaana"

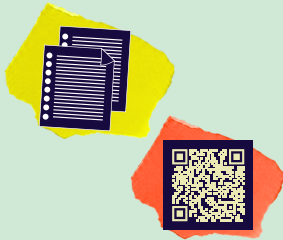
When you are the person everyone else turns to or when you find yourself in a situation you don't know how to handle, who is your support network?

This is a simple exercise that will help you map this out!

- Who do you call when something happens?
- Who in your life understands the reality of this work?
- Do you know someone with more experience that you could ask for advice?

WORKSHEET #2:

"MY SUPPORT NETWORKS"



SUPPORTING SOMEONE ELSE

You don't need to be a mental health professional to support someone who is struggling. This section is about that moment when someone in your community is not okay and you are the person who is there.

PREPARE

Before you can support someone else, check in with yourself. Do you have capacity for this conversation right now? It is okay to say: "I want to be here for you, can we find a moment and a space where I can give you my full attention?"

LOOK

Pay attention to the signs. Is someone becoming withdrawn? Are there extreme changes in their behaviour or mood? Notice someone who is withdrawing. An extreme change in behaviour or mood (e.g. outward appearance, hygiene, habits or energy levels). Are they showing signs of increased substance use? Trust your instincts.

LISTEN

When someone opens up about their problems, your job is not necessarily to fix them. Show that you're listening. Be patient. Don't rush, interrupt or take over. Don't judge or tell your own story. Respect their privacy and don't be intrusive, but be honest that if the situation requires it, you will seek appropriate professional help. Here are some questions that can help open things up:

- Have you been through something like this before? What helped?
- Do you have other people around you who can support you?
- What do you need most right now?

LINK

Help them find the next step. This might be pointing them towards professional support, sharing a resource, or simply checking in tomorrow. A simple "I thought of you, how are you?" can change how someone feels during a difficult time. You don't have to take responsibility for their journey, just show that you care.

Real situations rarely arrive neatly. These scenarios give you a chance to think through the Prepare, Look, Listen, Link framework, so it feels familiar before you need it for real.

WORKSHEET #3:

"SUPPORTING SOMEONE ELSE"



WHEN THINGS ESCALATE

"Tahadhari"

Sometimes a situation is serious and you need professional help. Here are things to note.

IMMEDIATE RED FLAGS – GET HELP NOW IF SOMEONE:

- Has been hurt or violated
- Is in an unsafe situation or in physical danger
- Talks about wanting to hurt themselves or others
- Has attempted or is planning suicide
- Is at risk of harming themselves or someone else
- Has taken an excessive amount of substances

If any of these are present, do not try to manage it alone. Stay calm. Stay with the person if it is safe to do so. Contact emergency services or get them to a place of safety. You do not need to have all the answers, your job is to make sure they are not alone and that help is on the way.

WARNING SIGNS TO TAKE SERIOUSLY

- these need attention and follow-up, even if they're not emergencies:

- Withdrawing completely from people and their support network
- Extreme or sudden changes in mood, behaviour or personality
- Inability to carry out basic daily activities
- Talking or writing about hopelessness
- Significant increase in substance use
- Expressing feelings of guilt, worthlessness or being a burden to others

If you notice these signs, encourage the person to seek professional support.

If someone does not want help or is not ready to seek support, you can't force it. Share what information and resources you can.

REMEMBER:

You are not responsible for someone else's decisions, but you can remain a consistent and caring presence. A simple "I'm here if you need me" can really make a difference.

For professional support resources in Nairobi, see our [resources](#) page.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF CARE

"Tujaliane"

Individual care matters. But it is not enough on its own. A culture of care is built collectively, through the decisions we make about how we run our spaces, our events, and our organisations. If you are in a position to shape how an organisation, space or event operates, you have an opportunity to make care structural, owned by the community rather than an individual. And beyond the ethical case, care makes your organisation stronger. People work better, stay longer, and show up more fully when they feel supported. Some starting points:

TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SAFETY.

Create space for the people you work with to talk honestly about how and what they are experiencing that may be affecting them and what they are doing to take care of themselves and others. Make it part of your team briefings, not as an afterthought or only when something goes wrong. Normalise these conversations so that when someone is struggling, asking for help feels possible.

HAVE A PLAN.

Think through the scenarios before they happen. What do you do if someone is in distress? What if there is a medical emergency? What if someone discloses something serious? A simple protocol, even a one-pager, makes a real difference.

BUILD IT IN.

Care should be part of how you brief your team. Have a code of conduct. Clear channels for reporting and support. Think also about visibility - posters and visual materials in your space are a simple, low-cost way of making care tangible.

SHARE THE LOAD.

Care work should not fall on one person. Think about how it is distributed across your team, and whether the people doing the most of it are supported. Where possible, have at least two people in your organisation who share this knowledge and responsibility, so it doesn't rest with one person and it remains even when they leave.

BUDGET FOR IT.

A wellness day, a group activity, or bringing in professional support doesn't have to be expensive, but it does need a line in the budget. Treat it the same way you'd treat any other essential cost of running your event or organisation.

For practical tools and resources for organisations, venues and festivals on building a culture of care in your spaces, see our [resources](#).



PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

This resource can support you, but isn't a substitute for professional help. If you need more support, please reach out to a qualified professional. We've put together a list of affordable and free options:

Access a list of [professional resources](#) here:



COLLABORATORS



LaMusicJunkie



people's
palace
projects

Queen Mary University of London



MESHWORKS

ZAHABU

