

Wellbeing as resistance: exploring culturally appropriate wellbeing support for Black workers in Black-led charities

Black communities in the UK face deep, built-in inequalities in most aspects of everyday life. This is emotionally demanding however access to wellbeing support is often out of reach. These realities are magnified for Black workers in Black-led grassroots organisations whose roles see them providing wellbeing support for their communities. For these workers, emotional labour is high, resources are low, and standard wellbeing support systems do not meet their needs. Emotional burnout is common. The risk is that this further worsens the health and wellbeing of Black people and communities for whom Black-led grassroots organisations are a key support mechanism.

Adira, a Black-led mental health organisation in Sheffield, knows from experience that talking therapy, the standard wellbeing 'solution', does not fit with the realities or cultures of many Black workers. Most workers already engage in therapeutic talking practices outside work through community circles, faith groups, and family networks. Workers find standard talking therapy offers to be culturally unsafe, and time and cost make them inaccessible.

Adira led a 6-month study to explore what culturally appropriate wellbeing support looks like for Black workers from Adira and several partner organisations. 10 workers took part, receiving £30 every month to spend on their wellbeing as they liked. They reflected on their experiences individually and with other participants. This is a summary of what they learnt.

Key findings

Good wellbeing support is flexible, relational, and community-based

Focusing on their own wellbeing was a new and radical experience

- Workers had emotional permission to rest, play, and receive care
- Some reconnected with parts of themselves they had forgotten existed

Simple activities are good for wellbeing

- Examples include uninterrupted time alone, haircare, eating out
- These activities enabled workers to shift care onto themselves
- These are not 'everyday' activities to grassroots Black workers

Every participant reported work-based improvements

- This included greater focus, healthier boundaries, and increased emotional capacity
- Modelling new ways of caring for themselves and others also positively impacted their teams and communities

Focusing on wellbeing had a positive knock-on effect on workers' lives

- Reported improvements included diets, sleep patterns, exercise routines, and community engagement

Recommendations

For everyone

- **Re-define wellbeing support to account for cultural relevance and autonomy.**

For city decision makers and funders

- Recognise the critical role Black-led organisations play as a health and wellbeing support mechanism and invest in them as such.
- Account for workforce wellbeing in planning process and investment approach.

For health and care institutions

- Partner with Black-led wellbeing organisations to re-imagine what culturally competent support for workforce wellbeing looks like and how it is delivered.
- Use these findings to inform the delivery of support in organisations more broadly so workers from all communities benefit.

For Black-led organisations

- Recognise that caring for self and community is a way of changing the system.
- Model culturally-relevant care for workers: set boundaries; take time to rest and reflect; and, recognise informal spaces as integral to wellbeing support.
- Continue to develop peer- and inter-organisational support for mutual care and exchange of culturally-safe knowledge and experiences.

For all VCFSE organisations

- Normalise joy and rest: frame wellbeing not as indulgence but as critical to sustainability and impact.

Further information and resources

Read or download a copy of this briefing on our websites:

Adira: <https://www.adira.org.uk/>

VAS: <https://www.vas.org.uk/>

For more details or enquiries, contact:

Adira: info@adira.org.uk or
zaramakinta34@gmail.com

VAS: VCFSE Partnerships & Development Team through info@vas.org.uk