

Volume 9: Crisis Edition

October 2025

One Million Experiments

For Season 3 of the One Million Experiments Podcast, we asked organizers from different crisis response projects what lessons they would share with themselves if they were just starting out today. This zine takes excerpts from those episodes and puts them “in conversation” with each other. You can listen to all three project episodes and download this zine at millionexperiments.com.

Interrupting Criminalization 2025

IC INTERRUPTING CRIMINALIZATION

What does community-based crisis response look like on the ground?

What is it like to set up a community-centered crisis response organization?

How have strategies and models evolved as the work takes flight?

Organizers that we spoke to in Season 3 of the One Million Experiments Podcast are five years in to running crisis response projects that emerged in 2020. They are exploring ways to skill up to emergency services, like responding to active violence, but their current work largely centers on what we think of as non-emergency response and accompaniment around mental health needs.

Across the board, many of the projects that we spoke to are building the personal, pod, and community muscle to meet “non-emergency” needs like ongoing personal and neighborhood conflicts, and the many crises of capitalism, like lack of resources, shelter, and food.

Listening to their thoughtful reflections on decades of this work, it’s striking how we come back again and again to a vision of safety as a vision for well-resourced, interdependent communities.

Nowhere do we find the hope or promise of a large scale solution to impose security on a population. Instead, we hear story after story about people

finding creative ways to listen to each other's needs, and support one another's autonomy while taking care of each other.

The interviews with guests in Season 3 are rich with details of the embodied experience of organizing crisis response.

What does it feel like to do this sort of organizing?

What does it take from you and what does it make possible for you?

When work is done in and with community at every step, what does that look like?

Where does it get messy?

What are the pitfalls and possibilities that have opened up over the last five years?

We asked five different organizers from three different projects what lessons they would share with themselves if they were starting out today. While so many of the things that they've learned are particular to their hyper-local contexts, I've pulled out a few threads that resonated with me and echoed across the board.

While the larger goal for many projects remains the goal of being able to respond to live crises (like shootings, accidents, natural disasters), it's revealing to see the threads these experimenters are weaving tie together similar pieces of wisdom as they work

first to address the many constant crises that life and the reality of racial capitalism throw our way.

This zine takes a small number of those threads and puts them “in conversation” with each other. You can listen to all three project episodes and download this zine at millionexperiments.com.

- *Eva Nagao*

Featuring

ROX Anderson and **JASON** Sole from the CORE team of Relationships Evolving Possibilities (Twin Cities, MN) With REP, community members show up for each other in moments of urgency and organize into radical ecosystem pods. repformn.org

DARA Brayer, Cambridge HEART alum (Cambridge, MA) At HEART, community members are rigorously trained for mobile crisis response. cambridge-heart.org

LIZ Kennedy, Culture and Operations Director, and Community Care Co-Lead, **SHERI** Wander with Care-Based Safety (Ypsilanti, MI) In 2025, CBS focused on a place-based pilot offering support and community-building by showing up where neighbors gather. carebasedsafety.org

“Community building is as important as response.”

SHERI

I think it's really worth reflecting on. When we talk about [crisis response], we're talking so often about the one individual, the small group of individuals who are having some sort of crisis: mental health crisis, substance use crisis, you know, lack of shelter. And every time we respond to that, we come up against this larger crisis of capitalism, of empire, of fascism, right?

Like when people don't have the resources to care for themselves, to shelter themselves, to feed themselves, to get medical care for themselves or their community, then all the crisis response in the world isn't going to solve it. It's just going to give it a band aid.

So I think when we talk about it, what comes to mind for most people is that individual crisis. It's the, like, who do I call if I'm not going to call 911 type of thing.

But really, our work is deeper than that, and as we were designing Care-Based Safety, we did this community co-creation process where we went out into the community and asked people, what do you want? What should this look like?

Uniformly, what we were told is that community building is as important as response because they're not actually separate, and that people who are responding need to come from within the communities that they're responding to,

and that that's how you build trust.

You know, on the surface, our work might look like responding to, you know somebody who is freezing to death because it's cold and they don't have shelter. But if our work doesn't also include advocating for shelter across the board, then it's like an inch deep, right? We always have to be willing to go deeper.

Which, you know, honestly breaks your heart every day, but that's what this work is about, right?

**BEING WILLING TO
SIT IN THAT FIRE &
GET YOUR HEART
BROKEN OPEN AND
SAY, OKAY,
TOMORROW, WE'RE
GONNA KEEP AT
THIS, RIGHT?**

"It felt more like warm calls."

JASON

We just felt like we weren't getting any hot calls. So it felt more so like warm calls — like [callers] know they talking to somebody who they really gonna rock with anyway. Our carers are pretty dope. Our responders are amazing. So a lot of the calls were more so, man, I don't want to go do this thing,

man, can I talk to somebody? So it became therapeutic for a while.

The hotline coordinators were saying to us, should we call it a hotline?

ROX

...Underneath [it all] is always the need, right? People always have a need for housing. They always have a need to connect with medicine. They always have a need to connect with one another, and we have barriers to that in all kinds of ways.

And so I think those things in crisis are, like, blown up. They're, like, larger than life. But it doesn't erase those underlying things that we have as humans, be human-ing, you know.

JASON

Because this is a new model. We don't have any other thing to lean back on other than:

That's really, like, our chance to really look at it and say, this ain't got to be rushed. Let's just take a pause.

**SHOULD
WE SLOW
THIS DOWN
BEFORE
WE MAKE
THIS
DECISION?**

So really, people call us because they know we gonna slow things down enough for them.

DARA

We started doing what we call non-emergency crisis response, which it sounds contradictory, but a moment of acute crisis is really one moment, and people are dealing with deep emergencies and different iterations constantly. And so we weren't ready. We didn't have the infrastructure to do in-the-moment, show up to a crisis like that. But we were responding to people's acute needs.

...People don't have folks to accompany them in-

side of those institutions — through child custody, stuff in DCF, or through navigating housing court — the ongoing emergencies of situations they're facing, and the huge gaps that, you know, our typical service agencies don't provide.

And that also with our guarantee around self-determination and confidentiality and that we're not mandated reporters, people are really needing that kind of support.

“...we still thinking, dang, how can we love them to they next step?”

ROX

We're going to be in it in whatever form it looks like for ten years, right?

[Ten years is REP's project lifespan, set at the outset.] And so that creates that kind of constant flow that the ocean has, and the turnover is the individuals, right?

The little rocks and the sand and all the things that turn up when the ocean turns over, and that's community, and it's ever changing, and it's always evolving.

And the back and forth looks like weekly meetings...There's, like, constant movement, but there's a steadiness, and I think that steadiness comes through the Core [team].

**YOU KNOW, WE'RE
THE CONSTANT.
WE'RE NOT GOING
ANYWHERE.**

JASON

...I was, like, dang, I'mma graduate two babies in that time. I had to really think, you know what I mean?

So we realized a lot of times it's more getting people to come up with a decision for themselves.

**WE NOT THE HEROES.
WE NOT THE
SAVIORS.**

Let's try to slow this down to where you could think through a solution that you're comfortable with.

ROX

I think, just that wisdom, that knowledge that we have amongst ourselves, knowing that, you know, well, it takes a year to shut something down, and it takes a year to really start something.

So we know those two years down right there, and we know as organizers and activists that it takes a couple years to really kind of flush out an idea and see who's going to be there and who's going to be in the struggle with you.

It's, like, that wisdom, that ancestral knowledge. I don't know who put the number of ten. I think it was you [Jason], but I think that when that number came up, we were like, yes, that's a good commitment window to see if this dream, if this experiment, if this idea can manifest into something.

JASON

..that first call five years ago, we were just really happy to have our bags together — to have, like, granola bars and cigarettes, etc. — because our main motto is we just want to love you to your next step. So if we stay

thinking like that, it ain't about a quick move. It's like even when people off-board and leave REP and it's not working out, we still thinking, dang, how can we love them to they next step?

“Having lived experience by itself is not enough.”

DARA

A big learning is that when you want to invite folks in — building an organization where people with lived experience and who are deeply rooted in the community are the peer responders, which is what we absolutely wanted and wanted to center — also making sure that people are in the place in their lives to fully take that kind of work on and have done their own internal healing, as well as creating the kinds of infrastructures we need to support people managing and responding to crises so that they don’t burn out.

So I just want to really uplift that piece about how important it is to really assess if people are in the right time in their life to be doing crisis response. Having lived

experience by itself is not enough. You need to have done some of your internal work, apart from training, like your own healing journey.

**WHERE ARE
YOU IN YOUR
HEALING
JOURNEY TO
REALLY
SHOW UP
FOR PEOPLE
IN THE
MOMENT OF
CRISIS?**

“How do you get knowledgeable enough & equipped enough to where you don’t even need a call, right?”

JASON

We’ve had so many reasons to respond quickly here, unfortunately, but it’s always that, okay, what are you gonna do when you’re in crisis?

...And it’s, like, we know if something kicks off right now and it’s a tornado outside or whatever, we’re a pod now. We’re gonna all figure out how to get out this building, downstairs. We’re gonna make sure you get out the lot. We gonna figure out how to pod up real quick...

Because it’s, like, responding is great. For sure, we doing that. We answering calls. But then it’s, like, how do you get knowledgeable enough and equipped enough to where you don’t even need a call, right?

**HOW DO YOU
MAINTAIN THAT POD?
WHO YOUR PEEPS
WHEN IT REALLY GO
DOWN?**



“Do you have the systems in your life to be consistent?”

DARA

A lot of stuff was uncovered through the training, through the practice of beginning to meet people in the community, trying to hold our values to support people.

Do you have the systems in your life to be consistent? To show up to work and be consistent?

How to balance support and accountability in building a workplace is, I think, a big question...

**WE'RE TRYING TO
LIVE THE VALUES
WE'RE BUILDING IN
OUR COMMUNITY.
WE GOT TO LIVE
THOSE INTERNALLY,
FIRST & FOREMOST,
WITH EACH OTHER.**

How do we build those systems? ...[There] are some big pieces too around, just, like, the mechanics of building a workplace that can hold crisis work in a sustainable way that is both supporting people whose lives are really complicated — people have gone through a lot, their lives are complicated — coming in to do this really important work inside of their own communities. How do we do that in a way that's sustainable and centers the mission of the organization?

I think a lot of struggle was wanting to take care of our people inside our organization, and also we have a collective mission and commitment to the work we're trying to do.

So part of my work was to build systems of collective care for ourselves.

And a very concrete example is we have wellness days, right? We got some funding to actually implement a concrete day where we actually just, like, spend time together. And people take turns planning those days that are rooted in tending to ourselves col-

lectively as a community, and that looks like cooking together, that looks like going out into a park and enjoying nature, that looks like going and solving puzzles together (like a escape kind of room thing, you know). Those are all kinds of examples of things we would do together to bring joy and tend to our relationships in a positive way.

“There was so much grief involved.”

LIZ

Another piece of it was just, it was so emotional. I mean, we talked about grief. I remember...helping a youth set up a tent and the sun was going down, and it's just, like, damn, this is really the best we can do.

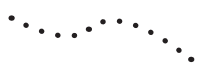
There was so much grief involved. And so I found I had to really take good care of myself to respond. And so within our job descriptions, we actually provide all responders 10% of their time that just goes to self

care. For those of us who are on the operation side of things, you know, some advice is really take creating a care-based internal culture as seriously as you're taking the direct service, crisis response work that you're doing. I think that's so, so, so important.

I love that line from a poem that adrienne maree brown wrote where she says that "the broken heart can cover more territory." And I feel like last summer was heartbreaking in a way that, like, expanded my heart to hold this work in new ways. And I'm really grateful for that.



"...very rarely, can a full crisis be managed alone."



DARA

Along with the daily practices of having meaningful places to debrief and check in, systems of accountability, and accountability partners so that people can be supporting each other's accountability one-to-one, practicing feedback is

an essential piece of crisis response work. You have to be able to give feedback to each other. And if you can't receive feedback, it's not safe to do crisis response work because you have to be able to, in the moment, name something like, I

gotta tap you out. And if someone can't hear that or gets defensive, that's not safe, actually. That could compromise responding in a good way. Having practices around all of those things and to continually show up to hold that is not easy collectively, you know.

...It's being in practice in a lot of different ways in daily life. So being in the practice of tending to self, the foundational things, which I don't take for granted right now, because I have a small toddler — sleeping enough, right? Like, are you getting rest? Are you taking care of your health, like physical health, in ways that your body needs to be taken care of? Are you tending to your relationships so that when you show up, and hopefully never alone...you have the resources to ask for help and knowing, like, very rarely, can a full crisis be managed alone. Who are you calling on?

And knowing that you can call on people, and ideally having someone by your side to be there with you and accompany the journey of supporting someone in the hardest or most vulnerable time.

I can't stress enough, the capacity to give and receive feedback being so needed and really working through our own like triggers, and shame responses, defense mechanisms, like being aware of those so that when hard feedback comes, it can be received. And also that you feel like you can give hard feedback if it needs to be shared, along with loving feedback. That should also be part of the practice of responding.

We also need to give each other a lot of grace. A deep gratitude I've learned from practicing transformative justice is, you know, non-binary thinking. We have to be able to live in the gray

at times and like, there is nuance to pretty much every situation. It's having clear compass, but also really seeing the complexity and not shutting down or dismissing a situation.

And I'm thinking this more, like, interpersonally — with the people that we're working with

— to show up into crisis, to hold complexity, and hold nuance while maintaining a compass, while being clear about your non-negotiables and the practices and the values that are needed to be holding it in a good way.

"We have to be joy activists."

SHERI

I want to also acknowledge joy, and that we have to be joy activists. We have to find joy. We have to create space for joy.

Our place-based response, yes, every night you're there, your heart is going to get broken. But also, every night

you're there, you're going to laugh. The number of people who come up and just, like, appreciate our being there, not in a like, oh, here you are to save the day kind of way, but hey, my friends are here.

...THE WORLD IS IN SOME WAYS, A DUMPSTER FIRE, RIGHT? BUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT DUMPSTER FIRE, I SEE PEOPLE DOING SUCH AMAZING THINGS, AND A FRIEND OF MINE ALWAYS JOKES, YOU WANTED A QUIET, CALM REVOLUTION.

WE'RE FRESH OUT OF THOSE.

I feel like that's the moment we're in, right? Empires aren't sustainable, and that doesn't mean we don't want to help it along. Help it, you know, help it end sooner. But death throws are angry and violent, so therefore our job is to care for each other. So that's how I'm treating the world, doing what I can to care for people and accept care when it's offered.

...My hypothesis is that our job on this planet is to love each other. Peter Maurin, who's one of the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement, said that our job is to "make a world where it's easier for people to be good." And I think that that's what CBS is doing, right? That when people have their needs met — when people have not just their basic, you know, food, water, shelter, 100% those — but also the need for connection and community then it's easier for people to be good and for us to just be able to create the space for joy. Like, how do we put our life's work to the test?

...We get to know each other, we build trust together, so that in the future we do know how to respond to that [for example] shooting. Because right now I don't know — and to just be honest about that. I think that's part of the trust building. Because, frankly, like,

the cops don't know either, right? Like none of us know, and so when we pretend that we do, that's a violation of trust because it's a lie.

LIZ

You know, we know that prisons and the prison industrial complex is really only a what 200, 250 year-old experiment?

But our ability to respond to harm, to move through conflict transformation, to keep each other safe, to hold one another accountable, these are ancestral practices that we literally have thousands of years of practice.

And so a big part of our hypothesis is, what are those practices, and how can we restore and reclaim every community's ability and capacity to care for one another? How can we skill up together so police and prisons can be obsolete?

“What is safety and how do we base it in care?”

SHERI

I would also say that there's definitely people who are like, yes, this is what I want, and also I'm concerned. What happens when they're shooting in the neighborhood? I want to call the police then. How do we engage people's radical imagination, if that's what they have been taught?

We know that's not what has always existed, but people have been taught that's what's always existed. So like, how do we get past that to tap into that radical imagination? And sometimes that was sort of a little piece of challenge, right.

For me, that's where the care-based safety comes in. Well, what is safety and how do we base it in care?

LIZ

**SAFETY IS TRULY
HAPPENING ON OUR
PORCHES. IT'S
HAPPENING IN OUR
BACKYARDS.**

It's happening in hard conversations and sharing harvest from our gardens.

That's safety.

