Organizational Policy and Practice Changes for Equity and Prevention

Total time: 1 hour, 7 min, 8 sec

This episode features Darin J. Dorsey, Principal/Founder at [Rooting Movements](#) and ARPA Coordinator at SATF, and Megan Foster, Prevention Program Coordinator at SATF.

Meg: Thank you for listening to this short recording. I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Task Force. In this series of SATF's Exploring Prevention Audio Library, we connect with people across Oregon and beyond, to learn more about creative violence and abuse prevention ideas. Today, I am here with Darin J. Dorsey, who is not only my co-worker at SATF, but also leads, facilitates and implements work across the country. Darin, could you tell us of them a little bit more about yourself, your organization and what you do?

Darin: Yeah. So my name is Darin James Dorsey, and as of about a year ago, I am an independent consultant with my company that I started with my wife, Cecily, which is called Rooting Movements, and Rooting Movements, is a consulting firm that works with social and political movement organizations, and it was formed after both of us having the experience in working in specifically the movement to end gender based violence, and finding that a lot of the barriers to our work existed within the organizations that we worked for, and also, in noticing how a lot of the movement organizations that we were in did not necessarily act as movement organizations, weren't connected with other organizations, weren't connected with their communities, and weren't addressing sort of current sociopolitical events that impacted the work, that that they were doing. So what we do is all kinds of work that helps the organizations sort of root themselves and ground themselves in the movement that they are in. That varies from trainings to, we do equity assessments or audits. We do retreat facilitation, with kind of like a movement grounding that's involved to there. And various other strategic planning is another one, anything that will sort of help an organization become a bit more grounded is what we do. And then, of course, I also am working at the Sexual Assault Task Force here, supporting the ARPA prevention program that's intended to build capacity to do prevention, for programs to do prevention, across the State of Oregon.

Meg: That's amazing. I I really love what you just said there to about movement organizations. I think for a lot of us that probably got a little bit lost at times, feeling like, maybe we're just a social services organization. But that's not, right, the the crux of the movement to end gender-based violence and to do this work. I I was thinking about it, not as a a reframe, because I don't think it's a reframe, because that's that's so much of where this work came from, but more so a reminder. I'm so grateful for starting off with that today. I think you alluded to this little bit. But could you tell us a little bit more about why this work matters.

Darin: The the fact is that we are all impacted by oppression in various ways, and that means that sometimes we we push oppression forward, whether that be racism, misogyny, various systems of oppression. We're all susceptible to participating in it. And so this happens in our movement organizations. And I think sometimes we may or may not realize that within our organizations they are structured in a way that often pushes us in that direction. And so it's really important, like you said, that we have these constant reminders that we are in a movement and we do have a greater purpose so that we don't get sort of pushed in that direction of of being co-opted. One example that I often provide around is around sort of the traditional approach to nonprofit board of directors. You know the idea that we wanna get people in here who can raise money. We want to get people in here who are well connected, who can donate money themselves. Often we want backgrounds or experiences where people might be attorneys. They might be bankers, real estate agents, and I absolutely am not saying that if you're an attorney and banker, etc., that you shouldn't be on a board. But that we have created the structure where folks who are positioned in these places have a huge of influence over our organizations and the directions they they can or or cannot go, and so that then impacts the work, and so as movement organizations, we need to be really intentional about how we structure our organizations and be very thoughtful about hey? Maybe we shouldn't just replicate the structure at the local museum nonprofit has, or the local foundation has. But how can we utilize this required structure of a board of directors in a way that connects us with the community in a way that drives work forward instead of holding it back

Meg: I love that so much, especially thinking one of the conversations I feel like I have with so many people, including myself on a regular basis, is like, whenever I'm doing anything 'what is my goal?' and I think that sometimes that's a really hard question for folks to answer. If at the end of the day our goal is ending gender-based violence, ending multiple forms of violence and abuse, making our community healthier and safer, how is every single thing we do serving that purpose? And when we don't ask that question of like, 'what is our goal' right, like what are we trying to accomplish? It's so much easier to then just say, I'm gonna go with the system structures that are there to help this this survivor, or whatever crisis is appearing in front of me and miss that piece of intention that goes towards working towards that end goal. And so I I appreciate again that reminder, because it's so easy to get lost in the day to day work sometimes.

Darin: We're incentivized to get lost in the day to day work, you know. It reminds me of a situation probably about 5 or so years ago, where I was working in the state of Washington, supporting sexual violence prevention, statewide, and we got word that I think there was some additional funds that were left over, and they would be distributed to the States and it was like 'hey, we have (I want to say it was maybe around $100,000) that we can sort of add to our efforts around prevention. And so we all were really excited about this. We met. We're like, Okay, this is great. How are we gonna use these funds? What are we gonna do? And at the time there was a lot of conversation about, hey, how do we address racism? And how do we support black, indigenous, and communities of color black communities/indigenous communities/communities of color with these funds? And so we immediately were like, okay, we need to do trainings because that's what we're used to. And trainings have a lot of benefits, and so we we, you know, wrote down a few organizations that did trainings and started to

reach out to them. And I reached out to a friend of mine. His name is Ramish, and he used to work at Race Forward. I'm not sure if he's still there or not, but he's also done some work in the movement against gender based violence as well. And so he was the first to kind of reach out to, to pursue training by Race Forward, and I talked to him about 'Hey, we got this funding. We want to help all of our preventionists across the State address racism and their sexual violence prevention work.' And he asked me some really critical questions. He was like 'how much power do these folks have, do these preventionists across the State have? How long do they tend to stay in their positions? Are they well paid? Are they well supported? Do they stick around for a decade at a time? And if we go in there we do this training, are they gonna be supported in implementing anti-racist practice in their prevention work?' And I could not confidently answer those questions. But I just remember when I called him I was so focused on, 'hey, let's get something scheduled, are you all available? Let's figure this out' because I wanted to check that box of like, okay, we got somebody to do this training. We're gonna do these trainings. We're gonna get them done. We're gonna report this deliverable to the State. We're, gonna you know, be able to talk about that. And we're gonna evaluate it and have these surveys that said people learned so much. And he just really reframed that for me to like 'well, what's the impact of this going to be on communities in the State? How is this training going to translate into people's lives and the prevention of violence in their lives?' And ever since that that reminder that's been something that I think about, so often is, you know, what is the outcome here? And am I just trying to do my job? Am I just trying to get the thing done so that I can say, 'Hey, deliverable, complete'? Or am I trying to accomplish something that is going to create real change.

Meg: Yeah, that's exactly where my brain went when you were like training and reaching out to these organizations, just because I think not only at the Task Force during the last 12 months have we experienced a lot of turnover, but across the State so many local programs, there's just so much turnover right now. And so that's exactly where my brain went of like, how is that sustained? And I think about when our colleague, Megan Shorr, at the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and I were facilitating the series of dismantling white supremacy culture in and as a part of prevention, long long name for a Workshop, but when we facilitated those workshops we had a lot of people, especially when we pivoted to virtual because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we had a lot of people that were signing up for this, but it was largely and almost exclusively people doing direct program work, whether that was advocates or preventionists, or or parent educators or other folks. And so we we really tried to intentionally hold one that was just for executive directors, and hold one that was for funders and State program leaders. And it was definitely interesting. And even there, like those, those people, have had turnover in the last year. So it's like, how does what is the sustainability in those pieces that that keep things a part and a core of an organization, and everything they do, which kind of leads me I think, to that next question, we're thinking about organizational policy shifts, especially those aligned with prevention. What does this work actually look like? You've given us some examples. But what does this actually look like for organizations? And for you as a facilitator of this?

Darin: It can look a number of different ways. I think, at the very beginning, sort of the first step is in trying to think differently about organizational policy. Because I think you know a lot of us, we've been at workplaces for a long time, and some of them not necessarily being nonprofits, or even organizations

and so we kind of take organizational policies given like, okay, of course, we structure it that way - when we should actually be aware of where those structures came from. I often, in a lot of my work I utilize various historians. One of them being Dr. Caitlin Rosenthal, who talks about the connections between the management of plantations and the management of current day, you know, employee management. And makes connections that basically said the way that we manage our organization is actually very much derived from how plantations were managed. And she often talks about the fact that people have this assumption that this is kind of archaic system when the reality is like as far as inventory tracking, inputs outputs, and gathering various data to assess how your business or plantation or enslaved people are performing was more sophisticated than most people think. And so that's where a lot of business management approaches came from.

And specifically in the nonprofit field. We've derived a lot of our organizational policy and management from for profit companies. I have to talk about where in an organization that's for profit business, and your job is to to sell something. One of your main priorities is to ensure that what you're putting in to your salespeople as far as resources is less than what you're getting out of them. You know, you're not gonna be a functional organization. That's that's not the case generally speaking as as far as making profit and making sales. And so when we adopt some of these organizational processes, policies, structures, and ways of moving in a field where our job is to go out the community and prevent violence, it has the outcome of limiting the effectiveness of the violence prevention that we're doing out in community, but also creating harm within our organizations. So the first step, I think, is, is being able to think critically about organizational policy and practice, and take a step back and ask the question of why are we doing things the way that we're doing things, are there other ways to do that? And once you think about that, then I think that is a lens that you could look at your organizational practice in your organizational policy with and depending on your organization and the work that you do in the context, can I identify where changes can be made.

And so that looks different for every organization. Some examples include, one that I often talk to people about is around reimbursements. So we've got people going out in the community doing community outreach, doing prevention, doing advocacy. When I was working in Texas there were some months that I I drove about, you know, between 600-900 miles, because we served 5 different counties that were huge. And so every month I'm putting that much mileage on my car, and you know, filling up the gas, all that. And I've also had situations where hey, I need to take a flight somewhere to go to a training, and I'm gonna be reimbursed for my meals, my expenses. Meanwhile you're in essentially Disneyland, or, you know, some really expensive downtown area, and your meals cost $30 each for one person. And so we have a practice in place in most organizations where staff are burdened with carrying those costs themselves, and then be reimbursed after the fact, when it's very possible for most organizations, and all organizations, to find ways to bring policies around travel advances so that Staff aren't taking on that burden. And oftentimes the kind of pushback is, 'hey, that's a little complicated for the accountant, and like what happens if the travel doesn't happen? What happens if that staff member leaves and we've advanced them this funding?' And those are certainly, you know, scenarios to to consider and to to think about, to plan around, but are not huge barriers in terms of implementing that. That's something that we we can plan around, and we can think critically about, 'hey, if this is happening

where we can't recover the money that we're advancing for travel, because people are quitting, or people, you know, something's happening there, then how can we improve that process? And how can we maybe think about what are the root causes of that? Are people being paid enough, you know, if they feel like, if if the organization feels like there's a risk that someone's gonna run away with a travel advance or something, then to me, that's a symptom of that, you know, that organization is not an economically empowering environment and so there are some other things that can be addressed as opposed to requiring staff to front this money that you don't know if they have. You know, people have all sorts of different expenses and obligations, and honestly, it's just none of the organizations business. And so that's one example that that I often work with organizations around. But there's plenty and all different types and areas of policy.

Meg: That makes me think about, to you earlier example about nonprofit board structure, and I think I've been in a lot of conversations where we look at some of those, I'm air quoting, like "specialized positions" so things like accounting or bookkeeping. And I think that there, there's some assumption out there that the like Venn Diagram of knowledge doesn't overlap between bookkeeping and accounting, and you know, skills and experience in the movement to end gender-based violence, right? And I've had this conversation a lot where it's like, well, we put a call out there, and we just we didn't find someone who had come from this work who also had this other experience. And it's Like well, so maybe we need to like, think about how we're hiring there, but going back to that comment I had earlier of like, what is our end goal and how does every single thing we do serve that end goal with intention. So if some of those economic or financial practices in your organization don't really help you move towards the end goal when they absolutely could, right, what I'm hearing they say is that these structures could be designed to also help you move towards your mission internally and externally, both In and outside of your organization. But so often we've like, we've decided that, no, this is one type of expertise, and that that circle never overlaps with the broader work we do. Social justice, anti-violence, anti-oppression, any of that.

Darin: I've I've seen that happen so often, and I would say that as far as, you know, my experience doing equity work and anti-racist work with organizations, there is often a point of tension around the bookkeeper who may not want to even be involved in that work and so what does it mean when you have somebody in your organization who has this organizational power, this organizational role, that isn't thinking critically about anti-racism, about equity? Will you? What you end up with is is very inequitable outcomes, whether that be interpersonal, whether that'd be organizationally. And so it's really important for well, the whole organization to be involved in this work, and again for us to think critically about our structures. I know a number of nonprofits that actually outsourced a lot of that work and said, 'Hey, yes, you know, it's it's challenging to find people that have this movement background, or have this understanding of what it means to be an equitable organization, and then do this work. And so we are actually gonna sort of outsource or find somebody outside the organization to contract with or to, you know, set up an agreement with, where they'll be doing some of our bookkeeping' because the risk of bringing in somebody who is not practicing anti-racism, who's not practicing equity is is very tha, that's very high. It's a very high risk that will impact your employees and impact your organization. And so again, that's a place where I think, because we see organizations operate in a certain way, there's

often an assumption that 'oh, no, no, that all has to be in house that all has to be done a certain way. This particular position needs to be carrying it out.' And for many organizations that is a good setup. But it's not the only setup, and it's just important to be open to various approaches to that.

Meg: I'm curious, having had a few of these type of conversations, I feel like I hear a lot of people kind of, I don't know if it's it's getting overwhelmed at the idea of doing this work or not knowing where to start, or what that looks like, but I hear a lot of times folks saying well, this is coming from our funders or this is coming from you know the restrictions, or the guidelines, or the things we have to do to meet someone else's requirements. And I think that's oversimplifying some of those internal pieces and I'm curious what you you might say, having, doing this work with organizations?

Darin: I mean, I think the first thing I would say is that it is complicated. And it is, it does vary what you know, the agencies that we do have in our work, it does vary between organizations and the funders that we have. One of my favorite approaches, when it is feasible, is to be very clear about what your job is, and what the funder's job is. So one example of this, I actually just encountered this about a week ago, where I was working with an organization that's doing RPE [Rape Prevention and Education] work in a conservative state, and they need to work with their state public health agency to implement a state plan around prevention, or for the RPE program. And they were told by the State Agency, which was also the pass-through for their funds, that you know they they assembled a an advisory committee to sort of put together the State plan, and to inform it with preventionists and organizers from across the State. And the State Agency went to this person that I was working with, and said, essentially, 'Hey, I can't have anything end up in this plan that talks about LGBTQ and related issues, or that talks about sexual health or that talks about reproductive justice or access to to reproductive Care, that that won't fly here. That won't end up in the plan. I'll get a lot of pushback, so as you're facilitating these meetings just like make sure that that you know that doesn't end up in the plan.'

And I was talking to this person. I was like, your job is to work with communities in your State to be up to date on best practice and research around prevention and to advocate for the most effective approaches to prevention possible. Her job is at that state agency, and you know I haven't worked in the State Agency or a public health agency, so I don't wanna go out of my role and describe it, but it's very different. And it is serving different goals, serving different people. And so what I encourage them to do was to go back to that person and say, 'hey, this is my job, so you're going to get information that reflects best practice, up to date research, and input from communities across the State. And you can do with that what you will.' And so I think that's often an approach that we're free to taking. And you know it's not, I'm not saying that it's always a safe or the best approach, but I think it's one that we should consider more often to say, 'hey, actually funder, this is your job, to advocate for this. I'm doing my job. And and I'm handing this off to you at this stage.
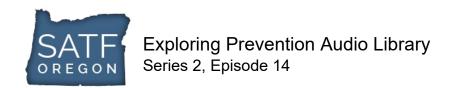
Meg: Yeah, I think that's such an important point. I think that so often, the perceptions around the the power dynamics of funder and fundee, or that the funder has all this power, and I think I you know, I think we've been in that position as well at the Task force where it's like, well, why are you suggesting we do this program in this way, and my response was because you contract with us to do this program, and we're telling you that that this is the way to do it. You don't have to contract with us anymore, and

we're in the position of saying if we don't have your funding, yes, our work would shift, but we're not gonna do work that is, is not aligned with our values as an organization, and so that that that little pushback and I'm not saying like, go in and be like, 'you're terrible.' But maybe maybe go in and say 'you're terrible.' But saying 'No, we know what we're talking about. We know our community's best, maybe. And so we wanna lead with that.' That that opportunity to question or approach funders with curiosity, or just say no, is something that can be actually really meaningful. And how do we expect funders to change if we don't ever ask them questions? If we don't ever question how things are? If we don't talk with them about what the work actually looks like?

Darin: Right, and I think I identifying those areas where they they could do more is important. I had a somewhat related experience when I was doing some statewide work in Washington where we did this amazing prevention event. It was 3 days. We brought in great experts. People really connected, built connection between preventionists across the state. Honestly one of the most effective events I've ever seen. And it was called Prevention Retreat. And that's because we had an agenda that had a lot of spaciousness. We had it in a place that had some outdoor spaces, had a lot of various things to do. Had amazing food. Because we recognize that these folks that are doing prevention and often advocacy, and often, you know, management, and other aspects of their jobs, don't get a lot of time to to rest, to recuperate, and to connect with people who are doing similar roles. Oftentimes they're, they can be kind of isolated at their own organizations. So that's what we identified as, 'Hey, this is what folks need to be able to do to do their work effectively.' And again, amazing evaluations, amazing feedback that we received.

We felt really, really good about this event, and after the event my funder came to me, and the first thing they said was, 'Oh, yeah, it sounded amazing, heard really great things, but you can't use the word retreat anymore.' And I'm like, 'wait! What? Well, why?' And they? So they're they're like, 'we we, you know, we, we, we have to get these approved and everything and the people hire up, they just didn't really understand why this would be a retreat, and if this will be effective, and they just kind of imagine that you all were just kind of like sitting around in your hotel rooms for a few days. And I'm like, 'okay, like, so so now, you're coming to me telling me that we can't use 'retreat' anymore, instead of making the case of why it was important that we use that framework for this event,.' Because I I could have, I mean, I think, one, this funder kind of understood some of these concepts and understood why we use the term retreat, why we structures the agenda the way we did, but they also could have reached out to me and said, 'Hey, I need to make the case that, you know, that this retreat was functional ,that was effective and productive, for prevention in the State. I would have been happy to to support that. But that sort of the initial reaction of 'oh, we can't use this word anymore,' to me, I'm like, 'well, that's that's a little lazy,' you know? Like, 'do your job like, you understand why we use that that term, so why are you not advocating for that in your organization? Why are you just coming to us as grantees whose job it is to do the most effective work and to, to do a retreat and telling us not to use this word.' And so I think again, that's just an example of how we can kind of take a step back and question what we're being told, and put some of the onus back on funders like, 'Hey, if you want to fund this work, if you want to support this work, then you'd have to fund and support the work. You can't just sort of dictate what it looks like.' And that's part of your job, too.
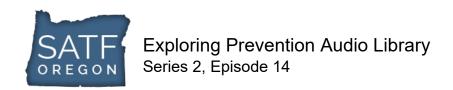
Meg: Yeah, that is, that is amazing; such an amazing example. And there's, I think there's sometimes some unintentional, maybe intentional, I don't know, but some some gatekeeping that happens, right, like in your example, like, well, why couldn't you talk to the other people in the funding agency, right like, why is it like you only have contact with that one person. Why can't there be more relationships built? Why can't there be more connections built? Like, why can't you go and talk directly to them about like 'here's what really happened?' And I, you know, I I always advocate as a Funder, using the the Rpe, which is the Rape Prevention and Education Grant. I always advocate for people to hear directly from the grantees, because I can talk about their work. I can celebrate their work all day, but like hearing directly from them about what it looked like, what the impacts were, what stood out to them is way more meaningful than me ever just saying it on their behalf, or writing it into a report. And so like why not facilitate those connections when we can? Why not let people hear from you directly?

Darin: Right. And I think that's another place where we see this impact of organizational practice and culture just kind of be picked up from for-profits and from other organizations. Something I often work with organizations around is transitioning from a need-to-know information sharing approach to a share-first information sharing approach. And so that need-to-know information sharing approach is this idea that we share information with people who absolutely need to know it. Someone who wants information has the burden of proving that they need that information. Otherwise we withold it. And this is really really common in sort of business environments. It's not really helpful for the work that we do, and I often work with organizations around transitioning to a share-first approach, where information is shared, unless you can convince, you can make the case that there is a reason that people can't know that information. So private personnel issues, for example, there are, there are certainly, you know, we work with survivors, and we have confidentiality policies, there are certainly situations where you withhold information, but anytime that happens, the burden should be on the person withholding the information to explain why that's the case, instead of being on the person who wants to know information. And so I I see this as an example where it, when it comes to transparency from funders transparency with within our our own organizations, where again, we're sort of taking the just generic or traditional approach to this when we need to think critically about 'hey, why are we doing the things in this way? And how can we shift and not replicate harmful processes?

Meg: Again, another great example, and I think that it's so, not doing that intentional thinking of like the why are we doing this? And like, what purpose does it it serve, is such a like that critical thinking you named, just the first step is so so important, and a step that I think a lot of times we often skip, like why are we doing this?

Darin: Right, and I I see it happen I think, in particular one place I see that happen is around budgets. People not sharing information about around budgets, and it's like, why, you know, why are we not sharing this information? Why are we not providing people with budgets, and the agency to make the decisions based on those budgets? And again, I think it's just a practice that we've sort of adopted and not thought critically about.

Meg: Yeah, absolutely. Especially when people are like the ones implementing the programs, and have no idea, like what they can even do, right, or what that even looks like, or how programs can support each other. And you know they're so so much there.

Darin: It's not uncommon for people to be running a program, and then, you know, within these organizations that have these, these practices it's not uncommon for someone to be running a program, and then so be told all of a sudden, out of blue. 'Hey, your programs over-budget.' And they have no agency in preventing that. They're on the ground. They know what's happening. They might know where we can cut, where we can make changes, where we could be more efficient. But they had no idea, you know, they had no involvement in that budgeting process. And so now they're in a position where they have to deal with it after the fact. They have to take on that work because of this process that's not transparent. It's not collaborative. And I've seen that happen in prevention and advocacy, throughout our organizations

Meg: Thinking again about the organizational policy shifts, especially as they're, right, aligned with preventing violence and abuse, that that movement to end gender-based violence. What does success look like in this work?

Darin: I think success is ongoing. So I think success is in building, or I, I would say at first even deconstructing and thinking critically about current organizational practices, forms and culture, and then building alternatives to those. And that's an ongoing process. You know. We're we're in a movement. And so we need to think about our work, not just in the right now, what's right in front of us, but also what's coming up ahead, what's coming up behind us, and given our analysis of power and society and violence, what obstacles are gonna show up in our way to prevent us from doing effective work because we know that they exist. And many of those are internal. Many of those are individual practices that we bring into our organizations. So I think success is building a long term culture of thinking critically about how we're doing things. Success is an ongoing practice of reminding ourselves and and building connection with the movement that we're in, so that we don't lose sight of the context of our work.

So it it can look a number of different ways, and indicators of success are not always positive. I've worked with a number of organizations around organizational equity where a number of staff left afterwards, and that included staff who had been involved in a lot of harm within that organization, with doing harm in that organization, and that also involves staff who had experienced a lot of harm saying, 'hey, actually, my experiences have been validated. I am recognizing that you know that I've been held back here, or that I could do more, or, could, you know, have a better experience in the workplace, so I'm gonna go off and do that.' So it can look a number of different ways in an organization. But I think the number one thing is that it is long term and sustainable change, that hopefully, we can sort of ground within an organization, and its practices. And there are a number of ways to do that, whether it's thinking critically about your organizational values, revisiting those and thinking about how those are implemented in your programs; whether it's a strategic planning, whether it's doing an equity assessment where somebody comes in, and sort of assesses where equity is at your, at your

organization, and where to, you know, what you can address to increase it. There are a number of ways to approach that, but I think ultimately the really really important piece is an ongoing commitment to that, and holding yourself, as an organization, to a high standard when it comes to organizational equity. That's something that I think we don't do enough of, and when it comes to these these topics of of doing harm, you know, whether that be, how to be anti-racist, whether that be how to not be ableist, how to not carry out these systems of oppression throughout our day to day lives. We need to have a really high standard for that.

I often use the example of the fact that if somebody came into an interview at a domestic violence shelter, and said, 'Hey,' you know, answered the question, and said, 'you know I I just don't understand why survivors don't just leave.' Then they might be, probably would not be hired. You know there would probably be a conversation where it's like, 'Hey, this person, you know, brought that into the interview, let's move in a different direction.' But when it comes to racism, ableism, transphobia, there's often this great amount of leeway that we give folks where we're like, 'oh, well, you know they they can learn, you know. We can bring them in. We could do some training.' And that's true, and we shouldn't expect everyone to be perfect on every issue. But we do need to have, we do need to have a bar. You know that that that is at a reasonable rate where it's like, okay, maybe if we bring this person in, who doesn't have this expertise, they're gonna harm people, and maybe we don't want them to learn at the expense of our staff. And so I think that's another piece. Just understanding that that we need to have a high standard for equity, at minimum as high of a standard for that, as we do for the services that we provide and the other aspects of our organization.

Meg: I'm really sticking on that word you you said too around like long term like sustainable organizational change, right? And I think one of the things I'm hearing you really emphasize is that one, it's not doing one thing right. It's not just doing an equity assessment, and you're done. It's not just changing a policy, and you're done. It's not just one thing right, that this is a lot of things, and it it is ongoing. One of the things I often say about prevention is that, and it's one of our our core shared values around prevention that our Prevention and Education Committee, highlighted is that prevention takes time. Like this change takes time. But like once you've gotten to a place that that feels reflective of where you're trying to go, it also still takes work to sustain that right?

Darin: Exactly

Meg: It's not just like you've done the ten-point checklist and now you're done. This takes a real commitment that is ongoing. And just thinking about how much our world and how much prevention as as a a sector has shifted just in the last decade, right. Things are changing so much. The the context within which we are doing our movement work has shifted and is continuing to shift so much so the assumption that if you start things now and you get wherever you think you need to be, how how whatever that long term is, that the context, for within which we're existing isn't also going to shift while you're doing that work, that this work is ongoing. And I think that's a really meaningful part of doing that in organizational work.

Darin: Yeah, I think so. You know. One thing that I do is, occasionally I will do a workshop that is recorded, that an organization will have to use for a longer period of time. You know whether it's in their onboarding or continuing education. They wanna make sure that all sorts of new employees get this information, which is really great. And, I am hesitant to, I usually place kind of boundaries on that, and say, 'hey, you can use this for maybe 2 years, something like that - at which point I want to take another look at it. Maybe you keep using it after that, but I want to take another look at it, because there might be some things that I learn. There might be some things that that I even learn about what I am presenting today. Where I'm like. Oh, that was that was harmful, you know.' I got into this work around sexual violence prevention, doing a lot of Paul Kivel and Allan Creighton's exercises that say, 'hey, stand up if you've been oppressed in this way, stand up if you've been oppressed in that way.' And so I know now that that's not necessarily the best approach in all environments to talk about oppression and to teach people about oppression. And so these, the way that we do our work can shift, can shift quite a bit. It's important for us to hold that space and know that that we're gonna learn more, that we're gonna learn that even what we're doing today in the name of organizational equity, we might find out that there are better ways to do it, or that you know that we could be doing something a little bit harmful, and it's really important to just again just keep up the work to sustain the work, and not see it as okay, we did this, you know, we did this this year. Now we're moving on, because then you'll just end up right back where you were.

Meg: Yeah, so often I I will say, right, like our goal in in prevention, our goal in these these shifts that we're really trying to make, is not perfection. Our goal is to learn from the harm we've caused and actively work to not cause that same harm again. Right? And that's a very individual level piece. But I think I think that one of the most meaningful prevention strategies we can do is is model humanity, model that we are not perfect, model that we, model what learning looks like right, model growth so that other people can also do that that as well. And so often, especially because those, the ways in which we've taken that that corporate world and those other pieces, there's this feeling that we have to be a certain way. We have to be, I'm air quoting 'professional.' We have to show up in certain ways. We have to know all the things and the ways in which I think so often, that actually makes it harder for us to be successful at things like organizational equity, at prevention, at the ultimate goals of the movement to end gender-based violence right, is is how are, we recognizing and modeling and being transparent? That information sharing piece that you named before, right like, how are we showing when we did something that caused harm and how to move forward, and not at the expense of you know our teams or other people, but like really centering, that humanity is a core piece of movement making.

Darin: Yeah, I think that's a a key component, especially when it comes to organizational leadership. It's so important that we're able to own our mistakes, to be transparent, and to be accountable, you know. That's I think that's the big, big piece - we can't have organizational equity without accountability. And so that's, I think, another answer to to that question, of what does success look like? A big piece of it is accountability throughout the organization, because we already, we already know which way it it tends to work, which is the people who make less money, who, you know, have less management or supervisory responsibilities are held accountable to their work, by default. But how our organizational

leaders are accountable to the rest of the organization, to the rest of the staff in every single direction, is a key component of implementing organization equity.

Meg: Yeah, I also think about, just like thinking about the Task Force, you know, we've been around for about 22 years now, and I know that as an organization we have caused harm at times in the State. And so I I think so much of what we try to do, at least my experience at the task force has been like learning from that history and not trying to redo that harm, not trying to recreate that harm, not trying to add to the harm right; to shift how we are doing our work in the State as well. So I think it's important right and like, we're never, we're never gonna get it perfect, but how are we as an organization as well, not just as leadership or individuals, but how are those institutions that exist actively working not to reinforce that harm? And I think you gave so many examples today as well just about different ways that people could address harm, that they've caused right and and kind of leads us to that that piece right of all of this work, we are gonna navigate challenges and barriers. I think you you you named that the the things that are going to pop up in our way when doing this work? What are some of those common ones that you've observed in organizations, and how can organizations try and set themselves up for success thinking about those?

Darin: Of course, it's different for for each and every organization. I think the number one thing is sort of moving in the direction of equity, because it, you know, because we're supposed to, because it sounds nice for some superficial reason, and then when we run into an obstacle sort of just tossing it aside or just defaulting to traditional approaches, is definitely one thing that I've seen that organizations really need to avoid. They need to expect that it's going to be hard. Like I said you might lose some staff, you might need to have some sort of change in in your programming or your your resources for your programming. You know, I know of an organization in Seattle that did some internal organizational change work, and they were somewhat of a grant-making organization. And so they pulled back the amount of grants that they could do for the an entire year, where they put more resources towards organizational change. That's not the approach for everyone, and not everyone can even do that, depending on what they're sort of mandated to to their funding or other requirements. But, I think that example just goes to show that it's really really important to know that this is going to be, this is going to be a long term effort, and it's not something that we could just say that we're gonna do. But we have to really commit to it long term.

I think one of the challenges that I see, I see a number of different challenges, but I think one thing that I would refer folks to is an article that recently came out, and and it was through Forge Organizing. And it's called [Building Resilient Organizations, by Maurice Mitchell](#), and I think there's Youtube video where they did an interview about this article as well. But he talks about a number of different dynamics to show up in organizations, and these will often be exacerbated when you're doing organizational equity work. And so it's really important to be aware of sort of some of these dynamics that Maurice Mitchell talks about. We don't have time to go through them all. We could do another podcast to talk about this article, which is why I really want folks to to go look at it, to go read it. But he talks in this article about just various structures, various approaches that can cause division in our organizations. So one example is, he talks about maximalism, which is this idea that the most that if any, if we have any position, that's

less than the most idealistic position in our work, then that's harmful or that's bad. You know that in itself can can cost division in an organization. So folks are are saying, hey, we need to have unlimited vacation time. We need to have yearly Sabbaticals of 3 months for each employee. You know, and that is what that is what rest looks like. That's what self-care and community care looks like, and anything less is harmful like that is going to get in the way of us having a realistic conversation within the sort of the scope of the organization about how do we care for our employees.

So that's one example that Maurice Mitchell talks about, but there's a number in that article, and I think in general, it's just important to recognize that within movement organizations we are very much navigating a tightrope of being in community with each other in a way that requires vulnerability that requires connection while also recognizing limitations of of who we are in community with when we do this work. And knowing that, hey, we also need to rely on, you know, our own networks of care outside of our workplace, outside of our movements. We also need to do things like, an organization could set you up some really good health insurance, and medical care, and that's their obligation. But it's also that employee's individual responsibility to the extent that they have the the ability to access it, to go get that care and ensure that some of their needs are taken care of. So I think that being aware of that tightrope that we're kind of walking on and and recognizing that we all have limitations of what we're asking for from each other, and that we need to be connected, we need to be in a relationship with each other and just being co-workers in a traditional sense as you would at a real estate and investment firm, or something like that, may not work. Like we've been talking about here, things are not gonna be perfect. We're gonna make some mistakes, but understanding that we're navigating that is a really important piece

Meg: I I know this is not the crux of what you're saying today, but I'm really cluing into some of those pieces, not just about the the sustainability of this work, but also individuals, and and teams within organizations and institutions, sustainability in the organization and in this work, and probably because I'm a deeply exhausted human being right now, but that sustainability piece right? And I think that's one of my favorite things that I I feel like I did learning around starting in the the pandemic was just how being sustained as a human being in the work in the movement in the organizations is really a cool and critical part of prevention. I remember talking to an organization who was taking some of their their participants on a field trip, and they asked their participants 'where do you want to go?' And they said, 'we want to go to the coast.' And this organization was like, great, okay. And then they wrote up this whole description about how, in this case, self care and community care was prevention, and how that got us closer to ending gender-based violence, and just like the learning that I've gotten to do around that and that sustainability piece, and I love that tie-in of like, how are we building not just equitable organizations, but the a foundation or a part of that, is ones that that are sustainable, but also help people thrive, not just like survive.

Darin: Exactly

Meg: So I again, I don't think that's the correct of what you're saying. But I'm really, I'm really clinging, like glomming onto that at the moment, wanting a lot of rest in my life.

Darin: It definitely ties in, for sure.

Meg: So what what other lessons have you learned? Where have you struggled along the way in this work? What has made you think differently?

Darin: I I think one thing that I learned was that a lot of our issues are not exclusive to the movement against gender-based violence, or movement to end gender based violence. A lot of the dynamics that we face in our movement organizations are also faced in other movement organizations. And so these dynamics that impact our work, that cause us to sort of go down these roads that are not the most movement oriented, or not the most community oriented, impact a lot of organizations. And one of the best protective measures to going in one of those those directions that's that's not community centered, that's not movement centered, is to be in in community with other organizations and other individuals in these movements. And so a lot of my work involves connecting organizations with organizations that they may not have thought there was necessarily a connection, and saying, like, hey, this work is is connected, and you will both be stronger together. One example is, you know, I think we saw in the past week or so that in Florida, the Governor and some other folks raised issue with an AP African American studies course, and then the the college board went in and made changes, and removed a lot of the content that the Government raised issue about. And this is, of course, connected to the ongoing attacks on critical race theory. Which I'm not the best person to describe, but I'll just briefly say is sort of the lens and analysis of how race impacts our society and structures in our our day-to-day life and and institutions in in our country. And so people in our movement may not see the connection between our work and what's happening with critical race theory, what's happening with these attacks on AP African American History, but there's also the fact that most people may not see this history, may not see this movement's history as being based in how gender-based violence was happening to enslaved people, to indigenous people at the founding of this country, and how that's actually the resistance to that violence is actually very much at the foundation of the work that we're doing today. And so when a school, a school board, a community, a governor, is attacking these things and saying, 'hey, we shouldn't learn about enslavement. This is making white people feel bad.' They're also attacking the history of gender-based violence, and our understanding of how that can happen, in an intersectional way that involves more than just gender. That involves other types of oppression. So this work is, is very much connected. But it it's that's something that I think we lose sight of, and that's been a huge lesson that that I've learned in sort of, you know, in my my own sort of journey is being in the movement to end gender based violence for over a decade, experiencing immense organizational harm, and also witnessing other black people experiencing immense organizational harm as saying, 'hey, maybe this isn't for me. Maybe I'll go try to change, change the world somewhere else,' and finding very, very similar dynamics, particularly in the progressive political movement. And so I think that's something that a lot of movement organizations could stand to learn and implement in their work, just those connections and awareness of, 'hey, how can we make our work stronger by collaborating across movements and across issues?'

Meg: I love that, and also I'm so grateful for you highlighting that example, and naming the right, not only do we need to work across these these sectors and movements, but that our work depends on it right?

Darin: Exactly

Meg: Like we can't be successful in ending gender-based violence without all those other pieces, and I think that's what you were saying, I just wanted to like very explicitly say, right, that that we cannot be successful without these other movements.

Darin: Right, and I will also add that these counter movements, the resistance, and the the obstacles in front of us, require us, or are trying to push us in this direction, of not seeing these connections. It, you know, when it comes to that School board it's trying to say, 'hey, we shouldn't have these books because they talk about the time of enslavement and that's critical race theory, etc.' It's it's an immense risk for black and brown organizations to go to that school board and fight that battle. It may be less of a risk, for the local sexual assault advocacy center to do that. The problem is oftentimes that, Diane or Susan, or whatever executive director might be connected to the people who are pushing this critical race theory thing. And so that's part of this part of this process is understanding that we cannot be in a political movement. You know that that doesn't mean that we can't navigate those circumstances with the, you know, with grace, with thoughtfulness, with critical thinking, and potentially being careful around it at times. But we cannot divorce ourselves from the political realities that we find ourselves in. and so when it comes to being an organization, that's part of the foundation, that's part of, you know, when we're saying, 'hey, this is ongoing work.' It's also in this, this understanding of our work and how it situates in our society and our community, and how that is connected to other work, to other things that are going on, and how we should interact with that as well. So needless to say, it's complicated. But but I think you know, as we've talked about it, really, what really matters is being intentional, being thoughtful and being dedicated and long term in our efforts to become equitable movement organizations.

Meg: Thank you so much for your time today, Darin, this was incredible. If folks want to learn more from you, or or connect to you, what are some of the the places they can go?

Darin: Well, they can definitely go to RootingMovements.org. They can find Rooting Movements on Instagram. I'm on Twitter, but I don't tend not to say too many intelligent things on there. I try to keep it light over there. And then, for folks who are in Oregon, doing prevention in Oregon, they can connect with me through the task force as well.