

2021
A YEAR IN REVIEW

The DINNER PARTY *labs*



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TDP Community Collage: Curious about the cake, the mangoes, the phone in the image up top? While Dinner Partiers weren't able to gather in-person this year, our community nevertheless found ways to thrive. These are objects that Dinner Partiers have shared with one another across tables, in care packages, and other deliveries. Even if we can't break bread, we can still show up for one another.



Letter from the Executive Director

We are faced with no shortage of seemingly existential threats right now: rising deaths of despair and mental health concerns; the stoking of racial tensions, and with it, an embrace of racial revanchism; distorted views of one another, and rampant toxicity in our public square, with dire consequences on everything from public health to the functioning of our school boards; technologies ostensibly meant to connect, which fuel the opposite; fracturing workplaces that lose sight of the people behind the systems they operate and impact, and find themselves the objects of ire and growing disaffection.

But what might on the surface seem like disparate issues competing for fleeting attention or funding or both are bound by a common thread: At the root of each one, we'd argue, is a problem of isolation and fragmentation. And the closer we look, the more we find that the solutions to each are bound in our ability to build deeper social connection and cohesion.

As a society, we've tended to focus on the things that are easy to measure: on programs, products, and policies, and technocratic fixes to long-standing problems. We're mystified when well-honed theories and plans fail to translate into practice, and throw up our hands when there is no single policy or programmatic fix, and cultural forces imperil our best laid plans.

But there's a growing recognition that the primary ills of today are all bound together somehow. Talk of interconnectedness and wellbeing has entered the mainstream. Grief and isolation have become the stuff of headlines. We recognize that **building power and collective healing go hand in hand**. We're finally lifting up the **invisible labor performed by America's care workers, and the care economy** on which we all depend. Coalitions of unlikely bedfellows have emerged to say that justice and bridge-building are co-dependent. (Full disclosure: We're proud members of **one such coalition**.)

We tend to think of community as an afterthought: a nice-to-have, after we take care of the real work, whether that's in education, or healthcare, or the like. But what if it's the reverse? What if we focused instead on collective care as the end goal? What other positive behaviors and outcomes would follow? What if, to quote Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, "**we can be the medicine that each other needs**"?

Over the last year and the years that preceded it, we have seen again and again that systems-change and relational work go hand in hand; that our workplaces are only as healthy as our



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workers; that our individual wellbeing depends on our collective wellbeing, on our sense of belonging, and on our access to communities of care.

I was asked in a call recently what the world would look like when we’re done. I’ve learned enough to know we won’t be – that work worth doing is not the stuff of one lifetime, but of many. Still, it’s a useful question, and one we rarely pause long enough to answer.

We envision a day in which whoever you are and whatever you carry, you’re able to find and meaningfully connect with others who’ve been there, too. We’re working to prove that when we’re able to show up in our workplaces as our full selves, our work is better for it, and to create the conditions that make it so. Having witnessed the consequences of endemic isolation and a culture known for “*bowling alone*”, we wish to live in a world marked by high rates of trust among neighbors and a proliferation of welcoming communities, a world in which we can easily point to coalitions of people living and working alongside one another in ways we would have deemed impossible a generation ago.

In the pages that follow, you will see the early fruits of that labor, and the lessons we can draw from it, including principles that can be adapted and tailored to the unique needs of your particular community.

Together, we’ve got this.

See you at dinner,

Lennon Flowers

Co-founder and Executive Director, *The Dinner Party Labs*

About The Dinner Party Labs

The Dinner Party Labs designs approaches to community healing with those impacted by isolation and fragmentation. We develop **tools, resources, and storytelling content**, and serve as **an incubator**, helping other organizations and networks bring design healing to their own communities.

Projects of The Dinner Party Labs include...



Our flagship program, **The Dinner Party**, connects grieving 20-, 30-, and early 40-somethings to one another, whether one-to-one or in small peer-led groups.

We have three additional programmatic offerings for organizations and communities struggling with disaffection, disengagement, or mistrust:

Our **Workplace Resilience** program helps organizations get grief-ready, through trainings and workshops for staff, managers and leadership teams.

Our **Peer-to-Peer Care** consultancy brings the design healing practices we've developed through The Dinner Party to other communities and networks.

The People's Supper helps communities experiencing acute polarization and division by offering resources and support designed to deepen trust and understanding of one another across differences in order to work toward shared goals.

The Dinner Party Labs designs approaches to community healing with those impacted by isolation and fragmentation. We develop tools, resources, and storytelling content, and serve as an incubator, helping other organizations and networks bring design healing to their own communities.



History

In the Fall of **2010**, five 20-somethings who'd all lost parents sat down for dinner, and a chance to talk about loss and life after – a subject we otherwise scrupulously avoided. We talked until 2am, and kept getting together.

As we became more comfortable with our stories, we started telling people about what we were up to. In **2011** and **2012**, our friends started telling their friends, and we soon discovered we weren't as alone in our grief as we'd thought. Soon there were Dinner Parties in DC, NYC, and the Bay. It took over our nights and weekends, so in December **2013**, Lennon quit her job, and The Dinner Party opened its doors.

Between **2014–2019**, we hand-matched more than 10,000 20-, 30, and early-40-somethings to small, peer-led groups of people who've experienced a major death loss. Amidst the pandemic in **2020–2021**, we connected another 3,600 peers to one another virtually.

We realized early on that the problem we were trying to solve was not grief, because grief isn't a problem. The problem was the isolation that comes with grief.

But the problem of social isolation is also structural in nature, and fueled by today's political climate, which became unignorable in the 2015 election cycle. As a result of segregation and a media landscape that perpetuates existing echo chambers, we spend our time with people who look like us and think like us. Online settings encourage outrage and shaming behaviors, reducing people to two-dimensional avatars and objects of anger.



That means that building communities of belonging is not enough on its own: We have to intentionally cultivate connection and community across difference, and change the very definition of who belongs.

It was to that end that we launched The People's Supper, just after the **2016** election. Since then, we've brought together 10,000+ people across lines of racial, religious, generational, and political difference for a chance to talk about the experiences that have shaped who they are, out of a belief that trust can serve as a lubricant for social change.

The results have included everything from a newly launched workforce development initiative in Erie, PA, which will provide capital funding for minority-owned businesses, to a faith denomination's regional supper series on racial justice, led by lay members and clergy throughout rural, suburban, and urban Maryland.

2020 saw the birth of both Workplace Resilience and our Peer-to-Peer Care program, two fee-for-service models that were years in the making. The first brings peer-to-peer support practices into organizations to better support employees who are struggling with loss, and guides leadership and management teams through the training and workshops needed to develop cultures of proactive, respectful and clear Grief Readiness. The second partners with other organizations comprised of people with a shared experience of loss, to equip them with tools, resources, and a learning community to create holistic, peer-driven communities of care at scale.

We recognize we cannot serve every person who experiences loss, or address every isolating experience individually. That's why we're committed not only to delivering best-in-class services in the years to come, but to sharing what we know: synthesizing learnings and best practices and sharing them on a wider stage with any and all who find themselves sitting with similar questions to our own.

Impact: The Dinner Party



ABOUT

Connecting grieving 20-, 30-, and early 40- somethings to one another, whether one to one or in small peer-led groups.

“Losing someone is so isolating, especially when we have to go through it early in life. I felt so alone. And now I have 12 friends who are with me in this every step of the way. That lack of isolation means more to me than I can even begin to put into words. Thank you TDP.”

Dinner Partier, November 2021

Highlights:

We connected

1,052 Dinner Partiers to

76 Virtual Tables,
which continue to meet
on an ongoing basis

and **1,724** grief buddies to chat one-
one-one

(Still looking for a seat? We've got more tables on the way. [Take a look at our open seats](#). Can't find what you're looking for? [Sign up](#) to be the first informed of our next release.)



This Fall, we engaged social scientists Dr. Laura Brady and Dr. Tobin Belzer to conduct a survey about the experiences of Virtual Table participants.



222 Dinner Partiers from
82 of our **120** Virtual Tables completed
the survey. Here are some preliminary

97% of survey respondents would
recommend The Dinner Party to a
friend. (Indeed, 81% already had.)

When asked to describe the rapport at their table:

95% of respondents indicated that their table allowed them to form relationships with people with whom they would not normally connect.

92% of respondents indicated that their table played an important role in their journey with grief.

84% of respondents considered people at their table to be friends.



As a result of participating in TDP, the majority of respondents indicated they:



86% Experienced a sense of belonging

84% Expanded their support networks

70% Developed empathy for themselves

70% Developed empathy for others

We found positive relational dynamics at a table strongly predicted key outcomes on an individual level, including a person's ability to normalize their grief experience, and to honestly share their feelings and experiences, however difficult they may be. Strong rapport was likewise highly correlated with personal and social growth, including empathy for self and others, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, an expanded support network, improved communication skills, and relational and spiritual growth.

What that means: The quality of our relationships strongly impacts our ability to navigate adversity. In other words, if you design for community, healing will follow.

Recognizing that different people are looking for different things, we continued to grow and strengthen opportunities to connect in both small groups and one-to-one. And while the learnings of 2020 remained true – it is indeed possible to spark vulnerable, authentic conversation through a screen, and to cultivate real community with people who may never meet in-person – we can't wait to add in-person tables back into the list of offerings in 2022.

- **We hand-matched more than 1,724 peers to one another through our Buddy System**, pairing them with someone we think would make a pretty good grief pal: Two men in their thirties who both lost wives to cancer; two women, both moms, who lost their husbands to suicide; two women in their early 20s, who lost their dads to addiction, and now call each other every week.
- Our **BIPOC Well-being program** continued to host quarterly events, weekly gatherings, and ongoing host support specifically led by and for BIPOC members of our community. Events featured a variety of BIPOC healers and artists, each steeped in somatic and sensory practices, ranging from the founder of The Herbal Academy to renowned Indigenous vocalist Wade Fernandez, to one of Colombia's dancehall pioneers. Tasked with elevating visibility of BIPOC voices and cultural traditions in a white-dominated grief space, our Program Director spoke on more than two dozen podcasts and event panels, joining renowned grief advocates Hope Edelman, Rachel Ward, Dr. Carrie Kholi-Muchison, Alica Forneret, Allison Gilbert, and Ken Ross. We developed comprehensive new policies and processes to equip our community to better respond to incidents of racial harm, and continued to hold a weekly gathering space on Fridays open to any and all BIPOC members of our community.
- **As grief, isolation, and the loss of familiar rituals continued to dominate our headlines, we launched a pilot project called "Making It Through, Together,"** inviting a dozen Dinner Party tables to explore a series of collective grief rituals, drawn from a variety of time-honored spiritual and religious traditions. Since the pandemic began, we've witnessed a deep longing for new ways of gathering, memorializing, mourning, and celebrating. As more and more people move away from traditional religious institutions, we find ourselves nevertheless craving connection to wisdom and traditions of the past, and seeking rituals for the things that, in the words of Prentis Hemphill, "**are too big for one body to feel**". We've seen a need for practices that can be done alone or in a group, virtually or in-person, and that can speak directly to a diversity of identities and experiences. The two-year project, made possible by Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, will culminate with a public release of the ritual collection in 2022.
- **We launched a new online platform in partnership with our friends at OneTable, which will allow hosts and members to have autonomy over their user journey:** to list their table when ready and open it up when seats are available, and to freely switch tables when they wish to. The platform will also allow us to unlock scale: Users will now be able to filter for what they're looking for, which means that for the first time, we'll be able to list dozens of tables at once.

The only remaining bottleneck? Hosts! In 2022, we'll need lots more of them. (*Itching to connect with others like you, and consider yourself a damn good listener? Know someone who might be a fit? [Sign up for our host training here.](#)*)

Lessons learned

- **It's easier to find “your people” when geography isn't a factor.** Of our 140 virtual tables, nearly half are what we call “affinity tables” – tables built by and for people who share a particular loss type or identity, both of which are often compounding sources of isolation. Over the last year, we've started 12 tables for Both Parent Loss, 9 tables for Sibling Loss, 8 tables for Suicide Loss, 3 tables for Homicide Loss, 2 tables for COVID-19 loss, as well as 7 tables for BIPOC members, 5 tables for LGBTQ+ folks, and 3 tables strictly for male-identifying members of our community. We've also seen that our most salient identities and the sources of commonality we long to discuss are often ones that can't be summed up with a single word.
- **Trust that everyone is their own best expert. That means giving users autonomy over their experience.** For our first six years, we relied on match-making: connecting each prospective Dinner Partier who came through our doors to a nearby table, based on a variety of factors, ranging from geographic proximity, to loss experience, identity, and shared hobbies. Our “human algorithm” had a better hit rate than Tinder, but we were constantly behind: Our waitlists ballooned to six months or more. We made the switch from “match-making” to “signalling” – helping hosts and Dinner Partiers more easily find their people, by sharing their own story and describing the kind of community they wished to create. For the first time, we gave users the chance to sign-up for tables on a first-come, first-serve basis. We discovered things worked better when we relinquished control: By and large, the right people sign up for the right tables. We've learned that every person is unique in what they want to prioritize: Better to let them decide for themselves.
- **Want to turn acquaintances into friends? Seize the moments in-between.** One of the telltale signs of a table that's really gelled? An active WhatsApp thread. We're often asked if hosts and Dinner Partiers can share phone numbers, and whether they can hang out outside formal gatherings. Duh. "I think the balance of loss stuff and all the other stuff is so key to solidifying relationships," says Gabriela O'Leary, a NYC host, whose table has been meeting for five years. Before COVID, they would hang out in her living room while waiting for everyone to arrive, and “there was always a lot of catching up”. The group would eventually migrate to the table, and “move into something a little bit more serious or more structured, or more loss-based. That balance," she says, "was really nice and sustaining." The group has continued to gather online throughout the pandemic; several have since moved to other states, so the format works for them. They also began a WhatsApp group during COVID, where they recognize death-anniversaries and celebrate birthdays and chat in-between gatherings.

Impact: Workplace Resilience



ABOUT

Helping organizations get grief-ready, through trainings and workshops for staff, managers and leadership teams.

“As part of my DNA I believe that approaching others with empathy always wins. [...] to learn that my lack of preparation could have a deep, lasting impact on people going through the hardest moments in their lives lit a fire inside of me to do better. Several years later, it's absolutely the best learning opportunity I've had to date.”

Mallory M., VP of People, List Reports

We're applying everything we've learned from Dinner Partiers over the last decade to help workplaces develop the skills and tools needed to show up for grieving employees. We're working with organizations across sectors, across sizes, essential and nonessential alike, to become more grief sensitive in how they approach company policies, management skills, and team culture. Whether grief is the product of a death loss, or just loss of normalcy during this time, our focus is on creating workplaces and teams that are emotionally resilient through it all.

Highlights:

- **Hosted a six-week Grief-Readiness Lab for school mental health providers in the Pacific Southwest.** In partnership with the Pacific Southwest Mental Health Transfer Technology Center (PS MHTTC), we invited participants on a learning journey, providing each one a framework and focused time to begin developing their team's unique grief readiness plan. Our interest is in equipping organizations – and the people who run them – with the tools and skills to ensure their workplaces are ones that can rebuild a grieving employee's confidence, and even serve as an emotional anchor. In December, we're running a second Grief Readiness Lab with MHTTC, this time for several hundred mental health counselors and staff working in school settings from across the country.
- **We teamed up with the Aging Services department of Multnomah County, OR, to guide a cohort of social workers and supervisors through a five-month series of trainings and workshops on Grief Readiness.** What is "grief readiness," exactly? It means intentionally anticipating the needs or experience of grieving employees, and developing the policies and cultural norms to help them re-engage with their work, while also supporting the needs of colleagues and the organization at large. Together, we examined everything from the emotional, social, and physical effects of grief, to the unique impact of collective loss on employees of color, personal and collective care strategies, and the management and leadership strategies required to create a culture of support.

Lessons learned

- **Grief readiness isn't just about wellbeing, it's also about workflow.** For too long, grief wasn't a topic often discussed in the hallways of corporations, schools, universities, or other places of work, and the ability to sit with grief wasn't seen as an essential skill for managers and other team leads. While the **Grief Recovery Institute** named nearly two decades ago that 1 in 4 employees are grieving, and mismanagement of that grief costs organizations \$75 billion annually, it wasn't until the pandemic hit our workforce that organizations could no longer ignore its effects. As a recent article in The Atlantic named it: "**The American Workplace Isn't**

Prepared for This Much Grief. In our work with teams, we're helping to uncover the ways in which increasing grief sensitivity in workplaces isn't just kind, but mission critical, and how simple interventions can make a significant impact.

- **Even as we continue to beat the drum for nationwide bereavement leave, remember: There are steps each of us can take to create more supportive and sustaining workplaces.** Our friends at Evermore fought hard to get federal bereavement leave added to President Biden's Build Back Better plan. Sadly, it was cut, which means the onus remains on individual states and employers to sort out how to show up. Still, one day, three days, or even two weeks of bereavement leave was never going to satisfy the need, because grief is not something we resolve with a funeral. The good news? There are lots of small steps and soft skills we can work on that make a meaningful difference.
- **knowing less can be more.** Being a supportive manager or colleague to a grieving coworker is not about extracting personal information or becoming their therapist. You only need to know that something is going on and only to the degree it's relevant. If your colleague is experiencing "grief brain," you can offer to share a heads-up with their project leads, to know drafts may need a once-over to catch any stray errors. Ask specific questions about how you can help: "how much time do you think you might need?", and "how do you want me to let the team know?", and "what can I do to be most supportive right now?" Be mindful of how someone's identity or their proximity to power might impact their grief experience and ability to self-advocate, and give them the space to name what they need.

Partners include:

REDFIN



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR
OLDER ADULT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Impact: Peer-to-Peer Care

ABOUT

Bringing the design healing practices we've developed through The Dinner Party to other communities and networks.

“From Option B Gatherings, I have gotten to talk to people from all walks of life, across the globe, about what it means to live when you have a gaping hole in your heart and in your world. What transpires from these conversations is a realization that you are not alone. Gatherings leave me feeling heard, understood, and armed with refreshing perspectives about facing, and thriving, in this impossible reality. I hope as a host I facilitate those feelings too.”

Haley G., Host, Option B Gatherings

As early as 2014, in the infancy of The Dinner Party, we began hearing from people carrying myriad loss experiences – divorce, chronic illness, caregiving, and estrangement, to name a few – who wondered if they could find a Dinner Party for others navigating similar experiences. Even then, our interest lay in developing social technologies (emphasis on "social", de-emphasis on "technology") that would help anyone anywhere connect around shared sources of loss and find amidst their deepest pain the sources of their deepest power. We also knew we couldn't go there yet. We realized we would never be able to build peer-led communities for every imaginable loss type ourselves: Our success would instead depend on working alongside existing networks and communities of people united by a shared experience, to build community-led, "many-to-many" support structures. In the last two years, we've begun to turn that vision into a reality.

Highlights:

- **Equipped Option B with the knowledge and tools to launch Option B Gatherings, their equivalent of Virtual Tables.** As in-person support groups vanished and grieving people found themselves without the care communities they'd long depended on, our friends at Option B found themselves in need of something more than Facebook groups. We worked with them to design and implement a program that would connect members of their community to small, peer-led groups, resulting in 74 matched groups and 1,063 members in the span of a year. It was our first time applying our methodology to an outside network, by helping another organization adapt our principles and practices to their own needs.
- **Launched *Life After Loss: The Educators' Edition* to help educators who've lost a student forge deep connection out of an experience that, left unattended, leads to burnout, disaffection, and disconnection:** We've launched a new pilot with the School Crisis Recovery and Renewal (SCRR) project, bringing together educators who've lost a student or an alum for a chance to talk openly about the experience and how it continues to shape their lives and work. We've heard consistently from educators (by which we mean "anyone who tends to the wellbeing of students") who've shared that the death of a student is often met with perfunctory platitudes, and that the ensuing grief is tended badly, if at all. And as we see in society at large, both of those responses are reflections of racist and classist norms when it comes to whose lives matter and whose don't. Many educators struggle with the word "grief" itself, whether that's because they were never afforded permission and the space to grieve, or because the death happened years or even decades ago, and they've long since found ways to move forward, even as they continue to be colored by the experience in ways big and small. We're starting with just a couple of peer-led tables this Fall before we open up the opportunity to educators far and wide next year.

Lessons learned

- **Allow groups to grow and evolve according to the needs of your users.** (*Translation: Put the people you're serving in the driver's seat.*) As friends and friends-of-friends heard about the experience, hosts and members alike would regularly add new members to their Option B Gatherings, with the result that few groups remained static over time.
- **Meet the moment.** While “going back to normal” continues to elude us, we’ve also been attuned to the ways that things have changed. We’ve heard from members who showed up at each other’s weddings, as in-person gatherings slowly resumed, and of folks who drove three hours for an in-person meet-up, mystified that they could feel so close to someone they’d only experienced in two dimensions. More than a year later, many of the groups are still going strong, but demand for new seats began to fall. We’re not quite as lonely as we used to be, and many of us are a little too Zoomed out to leap at the opportunity to create new virtual communities. Instead, we’ve seen an uptick in demand for large-scale Option B events: for fleeting connection on a day when you need it, borne of a newfound comfort with break-out groups, and a recognition that virtual gatherings, especially those tied to a speaker or a theme, open up a sea of opportunities that wouldn’t be possible with in-person events alone. So the Option B team opted to close Gatherings in one form, in favor of gatherings in another. The moral of the story: As the needs of your users shift with time, be prepared to shift with them.
- **Mind the gaps.** While peer-to-peer care spaces are often built around shared experiences that are culturally visible (e.g. familial loss), their adaptability makes them especially well-suited to building community for experiences that are less visible or ignored. In partnering with SCRR, we quickly realized that the experience of losing a student is rarely, if ever, tended to. This type of loss is so often unacknowledged, the people who share this experience don’t always know how to identify what they need or how to name the connections they’re craving; with no existing care models, it’s easy to think these experiences don’t need or deserve care. In this instance, we learned from participating educators that they didn’t necessarily identify as “grieving”. Some associated the word strictly with the loss of a close family member or friend; others struggled to language how the loss of a student years or even decades before continued to impact them, or the ways in which a number of losses, compounded over time, took a toll. In turn, part of our initial work involved consciously widening our descriptions of grief and loss for this audience, so that those who didn’t immediately identify with our culture’s narrow use of the word “grief” would know that this was a space for them.

Partners include:



Option B

Impact: The People's Supper



ABOUT

Helping communities experiencing acute polarization and division by offering resources and support designed to deepen trust and understanding of one another across differences in order to work toward shared goals.

“Of all the conversation/study/social justice groups in which I participate, the People’s Supper has been the MOST well organized, best modeled, and deeply rewarding of all.”

Participant, Racial Justice Journey, Baltimore–Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church

In 2021, The People's Supper continued to “*live the questions*” of what it takes to build trust across differences, and how that trust translates into systems-change. We worked with select communities experiencing acute polarization and division, offering resources and support for those looking to deepen positive social connectivity across differences. Through our *Racial Justice Journeys*, we lead multiracial communities through a months-long story-sharing series designed to help community leaders break down barriers across lines of difference, and deepen trust and understanding of one another.

Highlights:

- **Invited local leaders and everyday citizens in Brooklyn to share stories about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and work, in order to forge deeper connection and understanding between policymakers and those they serve.** We wrapped up an 18-month partnership with Eric Adams, then Brooklyn Borough President (and newly elected Mayor of NYC), and his team, working to combat loneliness and create positive points of social connection among residents amidst both the pandemic and a surge of anti-Semitic hate crimes and anti-Asian harassment in the city. More than 230 select participants – ranging from members of the community who were formerly incarcerated, to the President of St. Francis College, to senior leaders from NY Presbyterian Hospital and representing dozens of organizations and networks – shared stories of their own struggles with isolation and racism, and their opposites.
- **Launched our first train-the-trainer model, inviting participants in our Racial Justice Journey to bring the process back to their home communities.** We conducted a year-long partnership with the Baltimore Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, working with 80 clergy and lay leaders on a five-part racial justice series. The racially mixed group of Black and white leaders represented 35 different congregations throughout all eight of the denomination's regional districts, from urban to suburban to rural. We are now working with participants to bring the same process back to their own local communities, through a combination of interfaith and interdenominational partnerships, and multiracial partnerships between majority-Black and majority-white congregations. Over the summer, participants entered a second phase of their work together: learning to bring a People's Supper series back to their home churches and local communities, creating places where they can practice what it means to live in right relationship to one another, and where they can examine their church history and community history through an equity lens. Most leaders have decided to make it broader than just their congregation by launching interfaith and interdenominational partnerships, or intentionally pairing majority-Black and majority-white congregations, built out of relationships initiated in the winter supper series.

- **Examined the impact of story-sharing and sports fandom on hyperpartisanship.** We teamed up with LUMA, an independent film and documentary company, and a team of researchers at UC-Berkeley on a two-part gathering in Phoenix, AZ, bringing together a group of Cardinals fans – a racially mixed group consisting of both Democrats and Republicans. Over dinner and a game-day, we wanted to explore how cheering for the same team, when combined with personal story-sharing, might challenge false assumptions and deepen empathy across difference. Recognizing that the effects of one-off events tend to evaporate quickly, we wondered whether the back-to-back events would make people more or less interested in engaging with someone different from them, and whether we could create a model that could be easily repeated and reproduced there and elsewhere. Leading up to the Midterms next year, LUMA is planning to launch the initiative in communities across the country – giving neighbors a chance to build relationships with one another in a moment when it can be all too easy to retreat into our own ideological silos. They'll pair it with a mini-documentary about the series in 2022.

Lessons learned

- **Stop looking for common ground. What we need is common humanity.** When it comes to sitting down across difference, brief encounters with one another are rarely enough to challenge our most entrenched beliefs, let alone the misinformation or partial truths that flood our news feeds, telling us what we want to hear. But that doesn't mean they aren't worth it. The point isn't some empty call for unity, or to summon a middle ground where none should exist. The point isn't even to correct misinformation or the false assumptions we carry of one another. The point is that gathering matters, for the simple reason that we need moments of positive social contact to combat the suck of our Facebook feeds. That we've arrived at a boiling point at precisely the moment we are most isolated from one another is no coincidence. Studies show that the more we consume the news, the *more inaccurate our views* become of those across the political aisle. In other words, the more “informed” we think we are, the more prone we are to believe the worst in one another. What we need are opportunities to experience community at its best rather than its worst, to recognize our common humanity in lieu of common ground, to create communities of care that actually work for everyone.

- **Bridging is not for bridging's sake.** While positive social contact is paramount, it is not the end goal. The work of building a bridge has to be in the broader service of getting to somewhere that is greater than where we are now. In the words of our co-founder and friend, Rev. Jen Bailey of the Faith Matters Network, “Social change moves at the speed of relationships, and relationships move at the speed of trust.” We cannot settle for empty calls for unity, or feel-good moments of bridge-building alone. We have to address the inequities that divide us in the first place. This means being even more thoughtful about who’s at the table, and how each person impacts the others. It means committing to building the trust necessary to overcome the inevitable challenges, large and small, that get in the way of the work we need to do together.
- **We can't just “agree to disagree.”** Neither does this mean we’re going to resolve to agreement in one gathering or one series. Disagreement and conflict are often connected to deep stories of hurt in our own lives and histories. We can begin by meeting conflict with curiosity. That starts with getting to know our own impulses, and using that to inform our sense of our own boundaries and others’, our own experiences of harm and others’. In gatherings, we invite participants to name their boundaries of what they will share and receive – knowing that conflict and tension may at times be inevitable – and to name if and when we’ve been harmed here.

Partners include:



The logo for Luma, consisting of the word "Luma" written in a stylized, cursive script.



Impact: Additional Partnerships

“In all the 32 years since I became an orphan, I didn’t think I could ever possibly find another only child who lost both her parents at the exact same age I did. It has been a cathartic, affirming, emotional and joyful experience! Alaina and I have been in weekly contact since we were matched. Each time we talk, we find another thing we have in common! We already have forged a bond for life.”

Patti, age 60, on connecting to Alaina, age 28, through the Care Squad

Over the course of the year, we also embarked on a number of projects that intentionally invoked themes and learnings from what had, until now, been siloed bodies of work. We wanted, for example, a way to combat the loneliness that comes of grief, while forging unexpected connections across difference, bringing together lessons learned from both The Dinner Party and The People's Supper. Across all of our programs, we've been witness to moments in which one person's presence threatens others' ability to take part – when for example, a white participant in a mixed race space refuses to believe that racism in America is real, or one grieving person tells another that they're doing it wrong, or that that they shouldn't feel so bad "because at least..." The situations may be unique, but the tools for relational repair, or for naming harm as it happens without shaming someone, are shared. We expect that more and more, our work will take on a "hybrid" quality, as we deploy learnings from across our programs to help communities tackle a myriad set of challenges.

- **Launched the Care Squad, connecting older and younger grievers to one another, in order to combat generational segregation and forge connection out of loss.** In a year of ongoing isolation and fractured social bonds, we connected more than 200 people, ranging in age from 22 to 93, for a series of conversations anchored in the theme of survival – sharing how loss has shaped them, and powered them, too. The stories have been deeply moving: a 19-year-old and a 57-year-old, who both lost their partners to suicide; a 72-year-old and a 46-year-old who both lost their partners in the last year; two people, ages 50 and 37, who were both learning to date again.
- **Launched Pathways to Repair, an 18-month partnership with our friends at Faith Matters Network and Center for Rural Strategies examining the conditions required for healing, trust, and relational repair.** Too often we and those in our communities have found ourselves ill-equipped to navigate the everyday bumps and bruises of relational work: The passing comment laced with an unintended barb, the casual dismissal of one's experience; an awkward silence followed by a subject-change. The result is that sometimes those harmed must either swallow their hurt to remain involved, or extricate themselves; in other cases, a minor incident that could have been handled in the moment escalates into something bigger, leading to a group's dissolution or to a person's banishment, absent a pathway to repair. Together, we're out to develop resources that can be adapted for different communities working to reduce harm and to normalize human messiness. Following a series of private and public-facing learning calls across our teams and with outside experts, we'll work to collate principles and practices that can be modified for our respective communities, and used to train staff, volunteers, and members at large to better tend to the person(s) harmed and to the person(s) who did harm, as well as the overall needs of the group

Lessons learned

- **Want to forge connection across difference? Start with our invisible identities.** We've found that when people arrive expecting sameness and find difference, they tend to get judgmental – engaging in grief wars or writing each other off. On the other hand, when they arrive expecting difference, they get curious, marveling at the differences in roads walked, and simultaneously seeing sources of commonality in the places they'd least expect it. You cannot know by looking at someone that they lost a parent young, or lost a child to addiction, or a partner to suicide. And yet it's these experiences – the stories that are so often the last we choose to share – that surface some of our deepest sources of connection. Whether you're seeking to bridge across generational, racial, or ideological differences, start by creating an environment that allows for expressions of real vulnerability, and invite people – by invitation, not demand – to share stories about those they've lost, and how that experience continues to shape them.



Partners include:



Center for
Rural Strategies

PRESS

We're committed to changing the cultural narratives and norms around grief, isolation, fragmentation and loss. Press mentions help spread the word about our work, along with lessons to help other communities build the kinds of connections they're craving.

Press mentions help spread the word about our work, and with it lessons learned to help other communities to build the kinds of connections they crave.



Throwing a dinner party for people coping with loss and grief



The Power of Breaking Bread



Mandy Patinkin Cries as He Tells a Fan the Emotional Story Behind His Iconic Princess Bride Line



Processing Podcast - Carla Fernandez, Arroz con Pollo



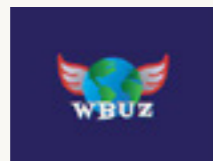
Design Physical and Digital Spaces to Foster Inclusion



America needs a Chief Friendship Officer

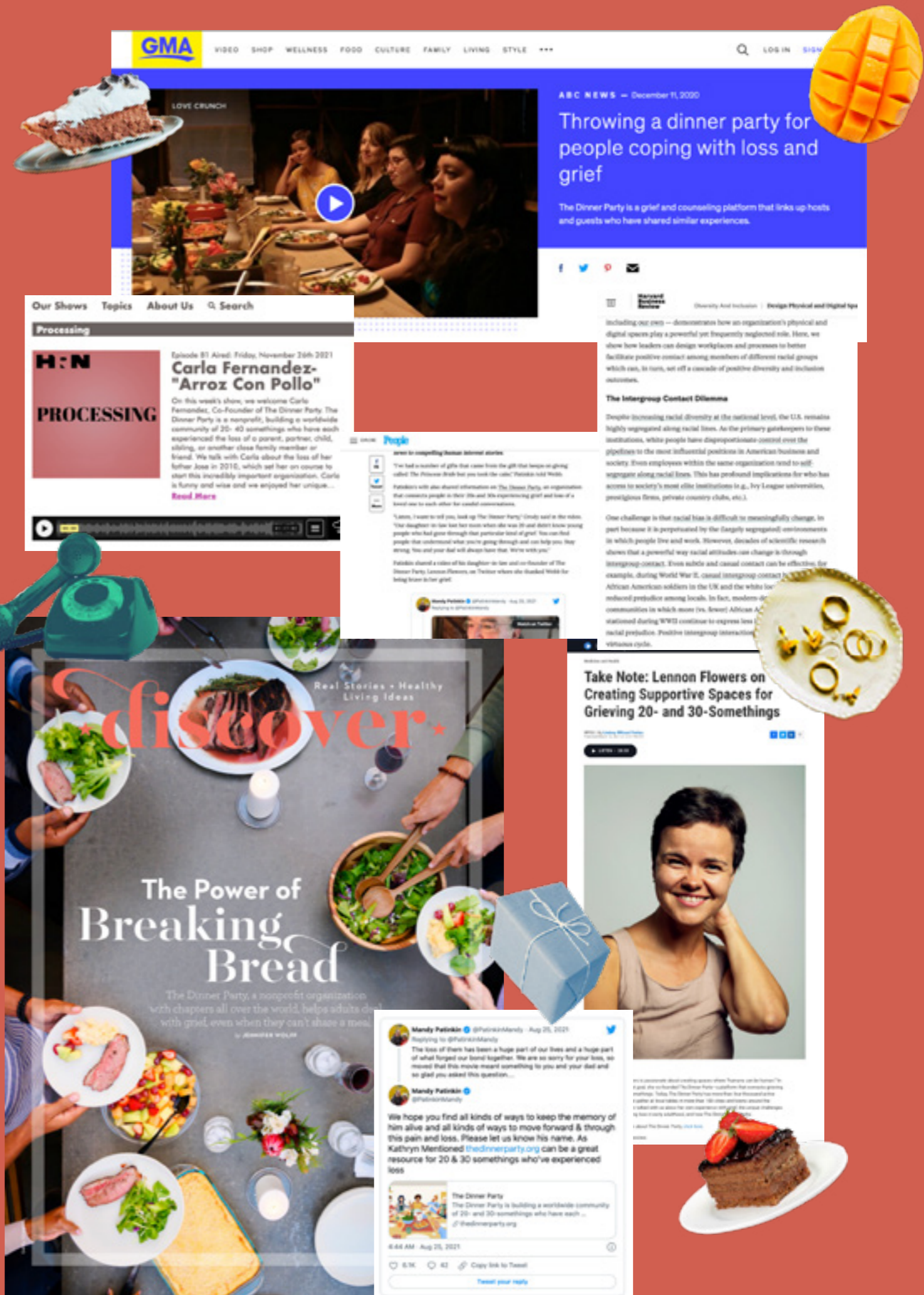


How the dinner party became a place to talk about death



Take Note: Lennon Flowers on creating supportive spaces for grieving 20- and 30-somethings

American Voices with Senator Bill Bradley: Coming Together to Grieve



FINANCIALS

Early on in the pandemic, we were prepared for the worst: Events were cancelled, and grants were frozen, as fear and uncertainty waylaid our best-made plans. We foresaw a budget shortfall of \$150,000-170,000, and a surge in demand for grief support without the capacity to meet it, and absent the form we relied on to deliver it – in-person gatherings. But we also understood the moment demanded we meet it: that we find a way to offer the same scalable peer-led support under a new, virtual format, and that we recognize once and for all that a problem of loneliness and isolation cannot be healed by self-care alone.

And so, we did.

With help from key funders, we were able to invest where we needed to: rather than merely tread water, we launched new programs, and rewired our organization to support virtual gatherings.

In 2021, we once again saw our budget grow, this time as a product of earned income streams and grant funding, as foundations began to recognize that social connection and social cohesion are integral to our individual and collective health and wellbeing.

Outside of The Dinner Party, all programs are funded by a combination of private grants and fee-for-service, which means that 100% of all public donations are able to directly support programming.



WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM:

2021 TOTAL INCOME BY SOURCE (PROJECTED THROUGH 12/31/21)	Amount	%
Individual Donors	\$242,483	35.52%
Memberships	\$34,783	5.10%
Earned Income	\$163,700	23.98%
Corporate Contributions	\$35,000	5.13%
Foundation Grants	\$206,670	30.28%
TOTAL	\$682,635.57	

2021 TOTAL INCOME BY PROGRAM (PROJECTED THROUGH 12/31/21)	Amount	%
The Dinner Party	\$371,600	54.44%
The People's Supper	\$74,916	10.97%
Workplace Resilience	\$56,500	8.28%
Peer-to-Peer Care	\$20,950	3.07%
Additional Partnerships	\$56,670	8.30%
The Dinner Party Labs Operations	\$102,000	14.94%
TOTAL	\$682,635.57	

2021 TOTAL INCOME BY SOURCE FOR EACH PROGRAM	% Earned Income	% Individual Donors	% Foundation Grants & Corporate Contributions
The Dinner Party	18.04%	37.56%	44.40%
The People's Supper	69.41%	3.89%	26.70%
Workplace Resilience	100.00%		
Peer-to-Peer Care	100.00%		
Additional Partnerships			100.00%
The Dinner Party Labs Operations	1.96%	98.04%	

WHERE THE MONEY GOES:

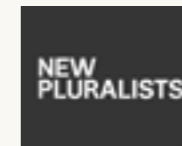
2021 Expenses	
Program Services:	Projected through 12/31
The Dinner Party	\$365,602.00
The People's Supper	\$50,941.38
Workplace Resilience	\$40,007.00
Peer-to-Peer Care	\$11,532.05
Additional Partnerships	\$15,938.51
Total Program Services	\$484,020.94
Supporting Services:	
Development	\$43,083.87
Operations	\$129,143.00
Total Development & Operations	\$172,226.87
Total Expenses	\$656,247.00

OUR SUPPORTERS

To everyone who's shared a currency that counts – whether money or time or wisdom or all three, and to everyone who's bravely shown up, and inspired others to do the same:

Thank you. We cannot do this alone.

Foundations and Corporations



2021 Donors & Fundraisers (As of November 30, 2021)

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Ahsaki Benion, <i>in memory of Clarence Eugene Benion Jr.</i>	Anne Carver	Christina Scalise	Elizabeth Nelson	Jackie Marks, <i>in memory of Efigenia Marks Mendoza</i>	Jolene Wagner
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Alison Slade, <i>in memory of Lorraine Stanfield</i>	Barbara Zietek	Cristina Catania	Emma Siegel	Jeanne & Geoffrey White	Julie Oshinsky, <i>in memory of my brother, Danny</i>
Allison Dixon	Bari Rogoff	Cyndi Chung	Emmy Komada	Jeannette Herrmann	Justin Baker
Amanda Ayers	Barry Siegel	Dana Fox	Eric Jin, <i>in memory of Liping Shi</i>	Jeannie Hall, <i>in memory of Lorraine</i>	Justin Thongsavanh
Amanda Burr	Becca Bernstein	Daniel Nisbet	Erika Nedderman	Jeff Park	Kahani Hissami
Amandi Clarke	Becky Rohtbart	Daniel Seth, <i>in memory of Lissa</i>	Erin Biebuyck, <i>in memory of Andrew Joseph Biebuyck</i>	Jen McCartney	Kaitlin Lang
Amir Nathoo, <i>in memory of Mansur & Nadia Nathoo</i>	Becky Spanagel	Danielle Weisberg	Erin Knowlton	Jennifer Azlant, <i>in honor of Edward & Joan Azlant, in memory of Jose Fernandez, & inspired by Mandy Owen</i>	Kaitlyn Cacciola, <i>in memory of all of the loved ones that can't be here, especially CJ</i>
Amir Ravandoust	Beth Morris	Danny Wilson	Eva Guarna, <i>in honor of my favorite</i>	Jennifer Coccia, <i>in memory of my mom, Nanette</i>	Karabi Acharya
Amy Manzo	Beth Parks	Darby Smith	Evan White	Jennifer Kurzweil	Karen Larochelle (Fig & Fire)
Amy Tran, <i>in memory of Cocola</i>	Betsy Regan	Daria Joseph	Ezra Nelson	Jennifer Lewis, <i>in memory of Barbara and Chuck Lewis</i>	Karina Carson
Amy Van Ermen	Bonnie Sheppard, <i>in memory of Douglas James Sheppard</i>	David Bulnes	Fabian Pfortmueller	Jennifer Mergott	Karl Snyder
Anabelle Robertson, <i>in memory of Bennett Joan Harmony Nieberg</i>	Brian Hill	David M. Ellmann, <i>in memory of Stephen Ellmann</i>	Gabrielle Diener	Jennifer Otremba	Karla Sanchez
Anand Arivukkarasu	Brittony Gill	David Szymaszek	Gaetano Moscatiello	Jennifer Thoman	Kasey C.
Andrea Berlinghof	Bunky and Peggy King	Deanna Hernandez-Arza	Gemma Falivene, <i>in memory of Blair Dreyfus</i>	Jenny McGrail	Kate Bastida
	Caitlin Nagle	Deanna Ping	Gina C., <i>in memory of Ellen & Robert</i>	Jerrold Weiss	Kate Crary
	Callie Eldredge	Deborah Valentine	Grace Garey	Jess Wood, <i>in memory of CJ</i>	Kate Daniels, <i>in memory of Ellen and Robert</i>
	Camila Zilio		Grace Simmons	Jessica Chang	Kate Kelleher
	Canning Robb		Gregory Weiss, <i>in memory of Mom</i>	Jessica Hester	Kate McLaughlin, <i>inspired by</i>
	Cara Saunders, <i>in memory of Rose Klein</i>		Hallie Dietsch		
	Carla Fernandez		Hampden Macbeth		
	Caroline Hall, <i>in memory of Brad Hall</i>				

Carla Fernandez	Lauren Basler	Mark Ambler	Nancy Guarna	Manny and Bob	Susan Olson, <i>inspired by</i>
Kate Shannon	Lauren Noll	Marty Tidd	Nancy Kuemmerle, <i>in memory of</i>	Sam Wener	Lauren Olson
Katherine Parker	Lauren Olson	Mary Anne Cook	Roy Christman	Samantha Toy	Sundari Malcolm
Kathleen Morell	Lauren Racaniello	Mary Jones	Nataj Walker	Sami Feld	Susan Dudley, <i>in memory of</i>
Kathryn Carnazza	Lauren Snyder	Mary Kate Pedro, <i>in memory of</i>	Natalie Pinkerton, <i>in memory of</i>	Sandra Toledo	Lorraine Stanfield
Kathryn Grody	Laurie Oki, <i>in honor of Lennon</i>	Peggy Pedro	Johanna Justin-Jinich	Sara Elster	Susan Rettig
Kathy Petrini	Flowers and Isaac Grody-Patinkin	Mary Wolfe, <i>in memory of Steve and</i>	Nathan Friedman	Sara Barrack, <i>in memory of</i>	Susan Vincent Molinaro, <i>in memory</i>
Kati Connelly	Lauren Perry	MaryAnn Quigley	Neil Soni	Jase Barrack	<i>of Marlene Linz</i>
Katie Beaubian, <i>in memory of</i>	Leah Fotis	Mary Zaborskis	Nicholas Gioioso, <i>in memory of</i>	Sara deCarvalho	Sydney Griffin
Roy Christman	Lennon Flowers	Marybeth Robinson, <i>in memory of CJ</i>	JoAnne Gioioso	Sara Fay	Tanya Castella
Katie Goldstein	Leslie Ferriell	MaryLyn Carabello	Nina Del Junco	Sara Keeble	Tara Ashraf
Katie Huey	Lianna Kissinger-Virizlay	Matthew Bishop, <i>in memory of</i>	Nivi Ketty	Sara Wilder, <i>in honor of</i>	Tara Keir
Katie Mullins	Lily Hood, <i>in memory of Curly Magat</i>	Michelle Bishop	Nora Canzoneri	Mary Lou Palomo	Tavy Chen
Katie Power	Linda Thoman, <i>in honor of</i>	Matthew Donahue	Pablo Azar, <i>in honor of Jasper Liem</i>	Sarah Arnac	Taylor Cassell
Katy Rose Glickman	Jennifer Thoman	Matthew Rosen	Pam Ford	Sarah Evangelista	Terrence Bean
Kayla Heelan	Lindda Blackstonr	Maya Chaudhuri	Pamela Hamann	Sarah Levin Goodstine	Theresa Plant
Kayla Tarr	Lindsay Bigda	Maya Glasser	Patsy Fyfe	Sarah Morrow	Tierra Jones, <i>in memory of Gus Jones</i>
Kaylee Mills	Lindsay Walton	McGhee Orme-Johnson	Paul Demonte	Sarah Nalven, <i>in memory of</i>	Tiina Peritz
K.C. H.	Lindsey Witmer Collins	Megan Kershek	Pauline Remhof, <i>inspired by</i>	John Snyder	Tim & Michelle Sanchez, <i>in memory</i>
Kelly Carlson	Lisa Papurt	Megan Weiland, <i>in honor of</i>	Richard L'Heureux	Sarah Stevenson	<i>of Lorraine</i>
Kelsey Crowe, <i>in honor of those who</i>	Liz Emmett	Linda Wales Callahan	Peter Denny	Sarah Tralins, <i>in memory of</i>	Timoteo Guy
<i>died without their loved ones</i>	Liz Stanfield	Meghan Dawe	Peter MacBeth, <i>in honor of</i>	Myles Tralins	Tom Howley
<i>beside them</i>	Liza Gellerstedt	Meghan Kelley	Lennon Flowers	Scott Horn, <i>in memory of Nancy</i>	Tonya Jones
Kendall Collins	Logan Morrow Macnee, <i>inspired by</i>	Melanie West	Phoebe Blyth, <i>in memory of</i>	Virginia Ellertson Horn	Tracy Meyer
Kendra Walduck	Sarah and Prosser Morrow	Melissa Alumbaugh, <i>in memory of</i>	Ope Blyth	Scott Shigeoka	Tyler Mixa
Kent Chen	Lucy Moreno, <i>in memory of</i>	Joey Arnold	Phyllis Flowers, <i>in memory of</i>	Sean Sun	Tyler Wozny
Kenz Turner	Lucia Peralta	Melissa Broder	Wanda Sue Flowers	Sebastian Buck	Vanessa Jerolmack
Kerry Rose Harris	Lucy Zappone	Melissa-Iris Lau	Rachael H.	Selena Beal	Victoria Helmly
Kerry Stranman	Lukasz Leoniewski	Meredith Mason	Rachel Glasser	Selina & Joe Chow, <i>inspired by</i>	Victoria Larson, <i>in memory of Kimlyn</i>
Kim Cuoco	Lynde Herzbach	Micaella Baum-Tuccillo, <i>in memory of</i>	Rachel Jansen	Liz Stanfield	<i>Edwards and Jack Baggett</i>
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Krissy K.	Madeleine C. Deininger	Anna Williams	Ramona Murphy-Adair	Shaina Stolworthy	Virginia Putnam
Krista Jones, <i>in memory of Prosser</i>	Madeleine Colvin, <i>in memory of</i>	Michael Cunningham	Rebecca Kling	Shannon Fyfe	Wilhelmina Waldman
Kristen Pengelly	Christina Yen Wright	Michael Galarraga	Reid Williams	Shannon Melsted, <i>in memory of</i>	Willem Pessers
Kristen Runne	Madeline Tamagni	Michael Ignacio	Richard Patch, <i>in memory of</i>	June Melsted	William Archibald
Kristina Hayes	Magdalena Sikora	Michelle Markus Tozer	Nancy Horn	Sharon Matthews	Xand Griffin, <i>in memory of</i>
Laura Beason, <i>in memory of Steve</i>	Maggie Durant	Michelle Sirott, <i>in memory of</i>	Rick Wetmore, <i>in memory of LBG</i>	Shaun Kime	Giovanna Griffin
Laura Hedrick	Maggie Horikawa, <i>in memory of</i>	Josh Olszewski	Riel Lise	Shauna Bona	Xhris Castillejo
Laura Lavoie	Claire Arnod Horikawa	Mindy d'Arbeloff, <i>in memory of</i>	Robert Varvara	Shonna Sommer	Yael Dyckman
Laura Nielsen	Malissa Borden	Lorraine Stanfield	Robin B. Katz, <i>in memory of</i>	Sora Harris-Vincent	Yuka Johnson, <i>in honor of</i>
Laura Quigley, <i>in memory of</i>	Mandira Singh	Molly Gascoigne, <i>in memory of Chris</i>	Max A Katz	Stephanie Long	<i>Prosser Morrow</i>
<i>Mom and Dad</i>	Mandy Owen	Mikaela Brewer	Robin Gilmore	Dr. Stacey Levin	Zach Powers
Laurel Druke, <i>in memory of</i>	Marguerite Belcher, <i>inspired by</i>	Miranda Siddall	Rubye Peyser	Stephanie Hayden	Zoe Glas
Gabi Jensen Benz	Liz Stanfield	Monique Merritt Romick	Ryan Carey	Stephanie Shin	
Laurel Edson	Marguerite Horikawa	Muamer Cisija	Sabina Bhasin	Stephanie Tsai	
Laurel Harris, <i>in honor of</i>	Maria Puron	Nadine Menashe	Sadie McLean	Sue Phillips & Tandi Rogers	And shout-out, too, to our 63
Lennon and Isaac	Mariam Youssef	Naina Lohana	Sam Friedman, <i>in memory of</i>	Susan Kalish	anonymous donors: Thank you.



MEET THE TEAM



Shavonne Bell (she/her),

Community Support Coordinator

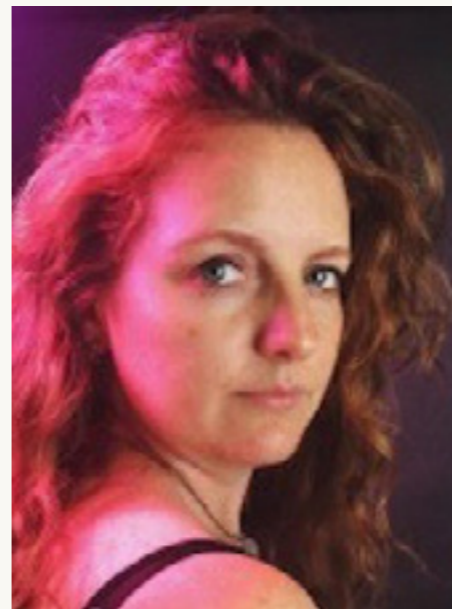
Since losing her mother at age 18, Shavonne's been on a journey of deep healing and remembrance. She has come to realize how precious life is and is moved by explorations of the human condition – joy, grief, and all of the mess in-between. She believes in the transformative power of vulnerability, emotional alchemy, open hearts, and learning from the shadow aspects of ourselves that often go unloved. Shavonne's excited to be on-board, helping to collectively nurture such a sacred mission. Bubble tea, candles, and inside jokes with her inner child are just a few things that also spark joy for her.



Mary Pauline Diaz-Frasene (she/her),

Community Manager, The People's Supper

grew up in a Pilipinx immigrant family with that “Did you eat yet?” kind of love, where hospitality is forefront and tangible. She brings to the People's Supper an energy for forming communities of care, previously managing a resource center with people who were unhoused; creating a poetry class with men in substance use recovery; partnering with church communities on justice in our neighborhoods; and gathering the occasional living room open mic potluck. She loves seeing people recognize their own gifts and celebrate them together in spaces like these. Mary Pauline is pursuing a Masters of Arts in Theology and Culture at The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology with training in hospital chaplaincy. She is a cat person (but would love to see any of your animals) and actually enjoys public transit.



Carla Fernandez (she/her),

Co-founder, Communications Director, Workplace Resilience Director

The family dinner table is sacred ground in the Fernandez family – so when her dad José passed away from brain cancer in 2010, having a potluck with other people who'd lost a parent was a natural way for Carla to unpack the experience of life after loss. As the co-founder and original host of The Dinner Party community, Carla is humbled and delighted every day by the thousands of Dinner Partiers turning their heartbreak into connection and forward motion. She's inspired by people using their creativity to find their own way through grief in a culture that has been severely lacking ritual and connection around loss – until now. She leads the organization's communications efforts, and founded the Workplace Resilience program. She's an NYU Social Entrepreneurship Fellow, a member of the women's leadership group Belizean Grove, and a Senior Fellow at the USC Annenberg School of Communications Innovation Lab. Carla is a Monterey, CA native, and now splits her time with her partner and their rescue pup



Aggie Fitch (she/her),

Communications Manager

Raised in a home that continually held spontaneous dinner parties of all sizes, Aggie learned about emotional intimacy, community, and joy around a table. So, three years after the death of her older brother, Sam, in a motorcycle accident, she finally found a voice to talk about her brother, and her grief over his loss at The Dinner Party table. After graduating with a degree in Urban and Environmental Policy she went looking for mission driven organizations she cared about, and is grateful to be given the opportunity to work on a cause so close to her heart.



**Lennon Flowers (she/her),
Co-founder & Executive Director**

Lennon lost her mom during her senior year of college, following a four-year fight with lung cancer. Three years later, she hitched up her wagon and headed West. Three-thousand miles away from home, she found she no longer had anyone with whom she could talk about her mom, and explore the way in which her life, death, and absence continued to affect her. When Carla, a friend, colleague, and soon-to-be roommate, invited her over for dinner, it was a no-brainer. She remains hell-bent on creating spaces where humans can be human, out of a belief that nothing is done in isolation, and self-help only works in community. She previously served as Community Director for Ashoka's Start Empathy Initiative. Lennon has written for CNN, Fast Company, YES!, Forbes, Open Democracy, and others, and her work has been featured on OnBeing with Krista Tippett, NPR's Morning Edition, CBS This Morning, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and dozens of other publications. Lennon is an Ashoka Fellow, a Field-Builder with the New Pluralists, an Encore Gen2Gen Innovation Fellow, and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill.



**Mary Horn (she/her),
Director of Community Experience**

Mary lost her mom to ALS in August of 2015. Mary and her dad were her mom's primary caregivers while her mom lived with the disease for 2 years. Being both a caretaker and a daughter, Mary sees grief from multiple perspectives, and knows that suffering and loss can cause indescribable pain as well as deep love, compassion, and connection all at once. She is thrilled to be involved with The Dinner Party--talking candidly about grief has helped her feel less alone in the midst of significant loss. Mary grew up in Boulder, Colorado, lived in New Haven, Connecticut while working on her Ph.D. in music history, and recently relocated to Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, where she now feels quite at home. Mary enjoys baking, practicing yoga, reading, and doting on her dog, Lucy.



**Sundari Malcolm (she/her),
Director of BIPOC Well-being**

At 27, and after 7 years of being her Caregiver, Sundari lost her mother to Breast Cancer. At 31 years old, she lost her father to Brain Cancer. Since then Sundari has dedicated her life to the support of Caregivers and all those managing life after loss. Outside of her work as the Director of BIPOC Well-being for TDP, Sundari is a birth and death Doula. She is a Yoga and Meditation teacher and has just finished traveling around the US in a converted school bus for 2 years, writing about racial injustice on her blog NamasteUSA.blog and talking about designing your life post pandemic on her podcast, *The Collective Reset*. She is now a recent expat to the island of Curacao and author of the book *Grief Gems!*



**Mandy Owen (she/they),
Chief Operations Officer**

Mandy lost their dad to metastatic colorectal cancer in high school, and their mom to suicide just a few years later in their early twenties. Both of these experiences deeply shaped every facet of #lifeafterloss for Mandy, and is what brought them to The Dinner Party community in 2016. Mandy is continuously inspired by how resilience, empathy, and gratitude gained from the evolution of relationships with loss, injustice, and reckoning continue to shape the communities served by The Dinner Party Labs. Mandy joins the organization after over a decade supporting customers and product development across Netflix, Google, and Airbnb, with a passion for scaling organizations through strong infrastructure and culture building.



K Scarry (she/her),

Community Director, The People's Supper

An avid journaler and self-proclaimed master of the cupid shuffle, K, (yes, just the letter), sees herself as made for life around the table. The table has been the space where she has learned what it means to be human, and where she has seen profound connections made between the most unlikely people. Driven by a conviction that people should have consistent space where they are welcomed in, K launched an open community meal in her hometown a few years ago that continues today. Her love of people has led her to a number of different work spaces, including addressing sex trafficking with She Has a Name in Columbus, Ohio, living as a fraternity house director in Atlanta, Georgia, and working as a chaplain in a maximum security prison.



Rachel Stout (she/her),

Community Manager, Buddy System

Mostly because of the alliteration, but also because it's true, Rachel's go-to answer for what she enjoys in life is always "coffee, crosswords, books, and bikes. Each of these things also elicits strong memories of her mom, who Rachel lost when she was twenty-five years old to effects of treatment for breast cancer. As can be the nature of these things, it all happened very quickly, within the span of only a couple months. Though Rachel has had endless support from friends, and has joined her fair share of New Age-y group therapy (not focused on loss, but definitely focused on dancing around a circle of candles in a dark room), she was drawn to The Dinner Party seeking that response of understanding, of "getting it," and has found in it exactly what she was looking for. Rachel lives in Brooklyn, where she's been for ten years. Outside of The Dinner Party, she works as a freelance book editor and book proposal writer, where she gets to inhabit the minds of others and help shape their stories.



Pull up a chair.
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The Dinner Party Labs is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization (EIN# 86-2104143).