

## Sustaining Climate Justice Work: Reflections on Being “Grounded”

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### **Abstract:**

As the COVID-19 pandemic has caused us all to take necessary and continuous measures for health precautions, at times it has felt a bit like “being grounded” - like when we were kids and suffered “grounding” as a punishment so we couldn’t go out and play with our friends. For me, a curious and avid globe-trotter (who is trying to reduce my ecological footprint in the name of climate justice) I also sensed “being grounded” from flying, as many flights were canceled or grounded due to health risks. On the plus side, this has resulted in some unexpected benefits for people and the planet. For example, many social workers and service consumers can now attend a plethora of free, virtual conferences and workshops, when previously they would have faced barriers to participation (due to fees or travel). This is also great for climate justice, as our collective ecological footprint on travel has shrunk significantly (for more on what an ecological footprint is, check out the IFSW Climate Justice Program).

**Keywords:** social work | COVID-19 | climate justice

### **Article:**

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

# Sustaining Climate Justice Work: Reflections on Being “Grounded”

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As the COVID-19 pandemic has caused us all to take necessary and continuous measures for health precautions, at times it has felt a bit like “being grounded” - like when we were kids and suffered “grounding” as a punishment so we couldn’t go out and play with our friends. For me, a curious and avid globe-trotter (who is trying to reduce my ecological footprint in the name of climate justice) I also sensed “being grounded” from flying, as many flights were canceled or grounded due to health risks. On the plus side, this has resulted in some unexpected benefits for people and the planet. For example, many social workers and service consumers can now attend a plethora of free, virtual conferences and workshops, when previously they would have faced barriers to participation (due to fees or travel). This is also great for climate justice, as our collective ecological footprint on travel has shrunk significantly (for more on what an ecological footprint is, check out the IFSW Climate Justice Program).<sup>1</sup>



Recently, I have also been reflecting on how to sustain climate justice work as I face my own fatigue, climate anxiety, eco-grief, and burnout. Naomi Ortiz puts forth the concept of being “grounded” and “rooted” in her book, *Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice*.<sup>2</sup> She notes, “self-care means being aware of ourselves, where we are rooted, aware of what is around us and evolving from the lessons we learn in order to survive and thrive” (p.14). Ortiz “is grounded in social justice work through community anti-violence work, disability justice, and intersectional organizing within movements.”<sup>2</sup>

I am thankful for the springtime weather here in Greensboro, NC where I am “grounded.” Our community

has lots of outdoor spaces to safely enjoy eco-therapeutic activities for radical self-care.<sup>3</sup> Connecting in nature inspires me when I desperately need a break from work, and refuels me to keep going. And I am happy to have found ways to continue to connect to friends and colleagues virtually, and also ways to ground myself in local work. One example: a community-engaged project to establish a memorial garden to honor military service members and veterans who are transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary. See: *More than Words: The “Service and Bravery Commemorative Garden” (SBC Garden) Launch*.<sup>4</sup> Being grounded and rooted in this project has helped me to feel like I’m making a real impact in my local community by creating opportunities for individual and collective contemplation, reflection, healing, care, and growth. In developing this project, I have also benefited as I have enjoyed outdoor covid-safe meet ups with community partners and students at local, existing gardens.

Where are you grounded? What ways have you been able to become more connected to your community? And what are ways you can promote healing and climate justice for yourself and the world? For more about pathways towards healing in social work, see a recent article, “Embracing an ecosocial worldview for climate justice and collective healing.”<sup>5</sup> ●

#### References:

1. International Federation of Social Workers. (n.d.). Climate Justice Program. <https://www.ifsw.org/social-work-action/climate-justice-program/introduction/>
2. Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice. <https://www.reclapress.com/books/naomi-ortiz/>
3. Radical Self-Care for Social Workers in the Global Climate Crisis. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Radical-Self-Care-for-Social-Workers-in-the-Global-Powers-Engstrom/05e067c02c8d18b2c5a9bbc0dcboab7b1749819b>
4. More than Words: The “Service and Bravery Commemorative Garden” (SBC Garden) Launch. <https://hhs.uncg.edu/swk/news/more-than-words-the-service-and-bravery-commemorative-garden-sbc-garden-launch/>
5. Embracing an ecosocial worldview for climate justice and collective healing. <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/listing.aspx?styp=ti&id=33893>

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Over the last year, [NASW North Carolina has stood unapologetically](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020) ([bit.ly/3fbLJuT](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020)) in our stance that Black Lives Matter and in our commitment to end racial injustice and white supremacy in our field, in systems, and in government. We’ve done so through our Equity and Inclusion Committee, our conversations, our conferences, and our intentional focus on anti-racism, equity and inclusion. Today, in honor of Andrew Brown Jr., George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Daunte Wright, Adam Toledo, Ma’Khia Bryant, and so many others, we reaffirm our stance and commitment to being anti-racist.

White silence is compliance! Each day we sit idly by and fail to act, we are complicit in creating and supporting systems that do harm to our fellow human beings. Our profession of social work and our NASW Code of Ethics demand us to engage in this work whole-heartedly and with the urgency that lives are on the line—because they are.

Social workers have a role to play in systemic reform of our nation’s law enforcement practices and criminal justice system, including expedited passage of the [George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020) ([bit.ly/3aM2aOO](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020)) introduced by Congresswoman and Social Worker Karen Bass, and dismantling of the racist and particularly the anti-Black practices that pervade many institutions must occur. The goal must be ending the increasing incidents of excessive use of force, violence and death of Black and Brown people.

NASW as your professional association is your ally and accomplice and can multiply your advocacy strength and seek long lasting significant policy changes. I hope you will join us and add your voice to this critical effort. ●

Learn more here:

- [NASW-NC Anti-Racism Resources](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020) ([bit.ly/3fbLJuT](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020))
- [NASW Racial Equity](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020) ([bit.ly/3ntxd7c](https://www.naswnc.org/2020/12/15/nasw-nc-statement-on-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act-of-2020))

