

The story I would like to share centers on one of my earliest experiences with activism and community service. I was once part of a group called "The Placebo" which is an arm of a non-profit organization (Ink People Center for the Arts). We put on all-ages, drug and alcohol free music and art shows for local youth. This was in rural northern California, and was often very little for young people to do. Our goal was to give young people (ourselves included) a safe space to express themselves and/or simply have a good time. The group was made up mainly of local musicians, artists, and high school and college students.

Everything we did centered on sharing resources, both tangible and intangible. The tangible resources we shared included sound equipment (some of which was owned by the organization, and some which was owned by members), the spaces we rented for our events, the spaces we held our board meetings, and transportation. The financial proceeds from charging admission to our events went back into the organization after paying bands, and we all volunteered in varying amounts to help events run smoothly. Management was fairly loose and it didn't always work perfectly, but we did have set procedures for running meetings in which duties such as taking minutes were shared. Because our mission was "fun-centered", the culture of our organization was generally playful. Financial decisions and decisions about the adoption of major projects typically required overall consensus of the group, or at least an overwhelming majority of the members at a given meeting. At each event there were roles to be played (e.g. equipment setup, charging for admission, merchandise booth, running sound) and these were typically taken on by the people who booked the event and others who were qualified and wanted to help. Individual members who had been with the group for a while and had earned confidence by the other members were allowed to book small events with a great deal of autonomy as long as they didn't take up too many resources that could be used in other ways, in which case the consensus process previously mentioned was required.

We would also hold fundraising events, which often doubled as music performances and/or potlucks. One of my fondest memories is one such event. It was called "24 Hour Yard Sale", and that was precisely what it was. It was also a great example of sharing resources. Placebo volunteers pooled together all of their unwanted items and we held a yard sale that lasted all day and all night, the proceeds paying for expenses incurred by the group as a whole. The event was enjoyable because it mainly consisted of good friends spending time together outside; we also achieved our intended goal and became a lot closer together as a group.

While I was only a volunteer with The Placebo for a couple years about a decade ago, the group began several years before I joined and continues to this day. It has helped build a strong community and support the arts among the youth in my hometown. It has also offered leadership development opportunities to young people, something that I benefited from greatly during my time as a volunteer.

The Placebo could not have existed, let alone helped the community as much as it did, without mutual trust among the members to broadly share the benefits and burdens that the organization generated. Trust was key to this sharing of resources because there were so few formal rules. Because the group was started by friends and centered around common artistic and musical interests (and a passion for providing a safe space for youth to have fun), there was little need for disciplinary action. I believe the absence of formal rules, and in their place a sense of community (with greater responsibility taken on by some of the older members) helped to make the organization as successful as it was when I was a part of it.

Trust is key. I think people need a shared understanding of why what they are doing is important and how they and those they are coming together with fit into their community.

We need to break down the artificial social barriers between people that a fast-paced and technologically driven culture (among other things) tends to create. I think people feel socially alienated and would be more willing to share resources if they knew their neighbors, in the literal and figurative sense of the term.

People would conserve scarce resources and hopefully have more of the resources that our culture often makes "artificially scarce" (e.g. down time, leisure time, useful information, etc.) There would likely be less waste due to over-consumption. Joint consumption of some resources would be more efficient economically and socially. There would be more social cohesion and people would be less suspicious and more charitable with their assumptions about the people around them.