

We here in Aberdeen need to be aware of these issues and openly and candidly discuss them. For a long time CCAP has been a black box for this town. Money goes in...services come out right? But people seem dubious, and rightly so, about both sides of that equation. There does seem to be a lot of money going in, but what services are being rendered for that money? Is CCAP the most effective way to help people in this town? As a local organizer you get asked all the time, "Well what about CCAP?" "Why do you need funds when CCAP exists" or the old standard, "Did you talk to CCAP yet?". All of this misinformation floating around serves to scare some into being suspicious of the company while others become complacent thinking there are Grade A social services in town. Why contribute your time or money to mutual aid efforts when CCAP surely has all that poor person stuff handled, right? Well, they don't. They are understaffed and overworked, they have serious structural issues with management, and they aren't doing enough for the people on the streets. We need people to get involved in grassroots community building and mutual aid, so that we can begin to actually change the material circumstances of poverty and homelessness. We will never get out of this if we continue to turn to the very system that oppresses us for relief. We must collectivize and get organized to take what we need.

Solidarity Forever



ABERDEEN AND THE NON PROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



**HOW THE
NATIONAL
SYSTEM OF
POVERTY
MANAGEMENT
MANIFESTS IN
OUR LOCAL NON
PROFIT SECTOR.**



Humans are, to our core, cooperative creatures. The anarchist and anthropologist, born Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin, more commonly called Peter Kropotkin, charted this fundamental human instinct, the “mutual aid instinct” throughout human history and into his modern day, the turn of the 20th century. Arguing against Social Darwinian logic, he demonstrated how cooperation provided the true evolutionary advantage. He demonstrated how it has, and continues to, aid in humanity’s continued survival and advancement as a species.

Over time, humans have been increasingly alienated from this true nature. We are pit against one another in arbitrary competitions for artificially scarce resources, yet still mutual aid continues, often most visibly amongst the most oppressed. This continues to be true wherever there are oppressed and impoverished communities, or communities in a state of emergency.



Nearly every, if not every, social worker gets into the field out of a desire to devote their careers toward improving the world, to “giving back.” The existing system of capitalist nonprofit entities exploits this willingness to serve by often underpaying it’s staff. It is not uncommon for the workers at a social service organization to be below, or barely hovering above, the national poverty level, \$13,590 a year for a single person household and \$27,750 for a household of four. [9] Middle management at many nonprofit charities make little more than the employees they manage, and are pressed by regional supervisors to do more with less. This is, of course, all despite the already shoestring budgets these companies run on.

Despite the fact that the majority of nonprofit managers are nearly always promoted from the pool of rank and file workers, new managers must adapt their foci from being exclusively on the service users to being on to managing the general well-being and continued survival of the organization. Given how tight their budgets are already, these managers have to then hunt for and attract additional funding in order to continue to pay their employees’ wages, along with the costs required for the continued operation of the site or project they manage. These pressures create natural blind spots, an inaccurate analysis of the issues, sometimes failure to consider the social conditions that give rise to the problems, and little-to-no ability to address these social conditions in a meaningful way.

Even if the nonprofit managers share the same materialist analysis of social conditions like poverty that complicate naturally occurring conditions like disabilities, they cannot meaningfully change these systemic problems beyond what the organization’s lobbyists are able to do. They must instead focus on the individual cases of each client, becoming their allies and champions in the best of cases.

“Just as the military-industrial complex exists to link the military and industry in a self-feeding loop in order to perpetuate and grow, the nonprofit-industrial complex links nonprofits and those funding nonprofits in a likewise perpetuating and self-feeding loop,” states The Nonprofit Industrial Complex.



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In the wake of the George Floyd uprising and the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of independent grassroots mutual aid efforts were started by organizers all over the country that saw the need that wasn’t being filled by the corporate nonprofit agencies. This need was apparent when George Floyd called out for his mother as the knee of Derek Chauvin bore down on his neck, because police are called to all manner of incidents where they don’t belong, where community intervention and deescalation would suffice. It was apparent when people took to the streets in the wake of the killing only to find the streets of our cities are already full of unhoused people, cast out after our national housing crisis. The need was apparent when fires broke out on the West Coast and there was no institutional help for thousands as they were displaced or affected by smoke. The need became perhaps most apparent when the pandemic hit and our so called leaders did nothing to stem the virus. During all of these manufactured crises there were everyday people willing to lend some aid to their fellow human. People stepping up to make masks or sanitizer, cook and distribute food, and come up with ingenious ways to protect themselves and their communities from these threats.

There is another more insidious form of aid though. One that makes itself seem charitable and good but actually does nothing but provide cover for the wealthy that impoverishes so many. It provides nothing but a veneer of giving to a system that, in actuality, does nothing but take from us. In the modern spectacle even this basic human instinct has become perverted to serve the wealthy. According to Forbes, the top corporate charities in 2022 are United Way Worldwide, Feeding America, and the Salvation Army. [1] For-profit corporations regularly donate to such charities for massive tax write-offs and to improve their public image. By donating large sums of money to nonprofit organizations they control, either through ownership or by being major donors, the wealthy are able to store their riches outside of the reach of the taxman.



Donors give out their funds through foundations in the form of grants, and charitable nonprofits are but one of 32 different kinds of nonprofit entities. Charitable nonprofits have to, by necessity, model themselves after for-profit businesses in to be more appealing to these wealthy donors in order to compete with other nonprofits for the funding. Naturally, nonprofits can't do anything that remotely seems like it might harm their earnings. These grants dictate exactly how the money will be spent, typically by explicitly designing a new program or position to carry out the will of the wealthy donors and the foundations they control. This reality leads to things like our local nonprofit Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP) refusing to operate a cold weather shelter because it upsets local far right political interests, some of whom serve on the board of directors for the nonprofit.

According to *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, by the radical feminist organization INCITE! [2]

“Foundations provide tax shelters for wealthy families and thereby take away tax income that could be used for social programs and entitlements. And then [the foundations] dole out little bits of money for nonprofits to replace the services that the government no longer funds.”

The book states, the nonprofit sector is

“A trillion-dollar industry, the US non-profit sector is one of the world's largest economies. From art museums and university hospitals to think tanks and church charities, over 1.5 million organizations of staggering diversity share the tax-exempt 501(c) (3) designation, if little else,”



Unfortunately the phenomenon of burn out is not unique to corporate nonprofits, many grassroots organizers experience this too. These organizers are typically unpaid volunteers, yet they face the same challenges that social workers do and with less resources at their disposal. Part of the reason grassroots organizers get so burnt out is in fact because they are left picking up the slack left by larger corporations. The limits imposed on these large institutions make them largely unresponsive to the public and their clients needs. This leaves a huge gap of services to be filled by mutual aid efforts. Many corporations know this effect well and factor this grassroots volunteerism into their budgeting. When they know we can and will step up they know that they can actually reduce services in that sector. Chehalis River Mutual Aid Network here in Aberdeen, WA has experienced this many times with our local non profit Coastal Community Action Program. CCAP case managers routinely give out their information as a resource to their clients, even going so far as to call CRMAN to help get them tents. This company gets millions of dollars each year and yet they rely on our volunteer labor time and time again. This is a type of exploitation that is not typically accounted for or discussed but one that negatively impacts grassroots organizations all over the world. These companies use our labor while taking millions each year in order to provide sub par services and actually prevent the efforts of mutual aid organizers who are trying to accomplish systemic change, not engage in careerism.

“The problem,” states the article, *The Nonprofit Industrial Complex*, “is that while providing for social change is the only long-term solution, short term services feel so good, both for those working in the nonprofit sector and for those funding them.” [8]

Paul Kivel is quoted in *Working For You, Me, Us, and Them* as saying, “The focus on the individual achievements of a few can distract us from looking at why there's not enough affordable housing, educational opportunities, and jobs for everyone.”



Charities must closely track how every dollar is spent, so service users are often required to provide detailed personal records and pieces of information, such as social security numbers, as a requirement of receiving services. This information is then transmitted to the funders to track demographics, allocate funding, track service usage, and so forth. Many times this data collection element serves as a barrier to entry for many people trying to access much needed services and resources. Whether it is because someone is fleeing domestic violence or doesn't have the proper documentation, people often would rather avoid these resources than deal with the identifying paperwork and data collections efforts of these agencies. [7]

"Of course these NGOs are helping people eat and survive," states the zine. "But people should be able to survive on their own terms, not on the terms of the wealthy, neocolonial/imperialist countries who stole the resources and money in the first place."

This is far from the reality on the ground. The rank and file workers who do the grunt work required for these organizations to function all, in the experience of this author, want to do good in the world and help others – manifestations of our shared mutual aid instinct. The problem is, however, how these workers are often not given the tools to truly solve the problems their "service users," or "clients," have given the layered social conditions of these clients. The workers do try to honor the complexity of each individual, but can only do so much on a grant-dependent, nonprofit budget. The same can be said for the middle management, as many managers are still closely involved in the daily operations, often knowing the clients as well as the workers, and in many cases barely make more than the employees they manage. The rare exceptions are the workers who have reached burnout, just there to do a job, a phenomenon common enough in the field to be openly discussed. Many nonprofit managers work proactively with their employees to avoid such a thing. A vast majority of the case workers at CCAP are generous souls looking to give back to their community while they earn a living. Who can blame them? There really is no other game in town if you want to go into that line of work and CCAP is – for some reason – always hiring. The reason of course is the incredibly high turnover rate in the industry due to burnout.



On the other hand, many for-profit retail and grocery businesses solicit donations from their customers by asking them to round up to the nearest dollar, giving them more tax-free money. The research of Katie Kelting, Stefanie Robinson, and Richard J. Lutz found, "consumers respond more favorably to a roundup than to a flat donation request, even when the requested amount is identical," at a rate of about 21% more, according to a Marketplace.org article. [3] These additional charges allow companies to take on larger projects they might not otherwise have the resources or infrastructure to accomplish and make larger charitable contributions to write off their taxes. This, the article suggests, is because it gives the consumer a "warm glow" without the "painful financial loss" typically associated with donations, forging a sense of loyalty that builds customer retention.

Far from being purely out of the goodness of their hearts, these donations serve effectively as PR stunts that allow for-profit companies to raise their prices in a way that makes the customers happy. Soliciting donations with customers also creates loyalty through a psychological loophole wherein the customer feels enabled to do good in the world through the corporation, thus making them more likely to purchase more from that company. Customers feel like partners in the quest against poverty, hunger, or whichever issue they're being solicited donations for.

Dean Spade points out in his piece, *Solidarity Not Charity*, the ruling class uses only mere reforms to address the poverty and inequality caused by their wealth. "Many reforms, if they do provide any material relief, provide it only to those who are least marginalized within the group of people who were supposed to benefit from the reform," he points out. [4]

"For example, immigration reforms that cut out people with criminal records or who are 'public charges,' or that make military service or college graduation conditions for relief, are likely to be accessible only to those least targeted by police, those who can pay tuition, those not pushed out of school by able-ism and racism. Reforms often merely tinker with existing harmful conditions, failing to reach the root causes."



These charities serve as little more than the modern version of giving alms to the poor, purchasing indulgences to get into heaven regardless of one's actual moral fiber or adherence to sacred tradition. They are how the wealthy both boost their public image, to be seen as good and noble, absolve themselves of any guilt they may feel for rising rates of poverty across the globe, and PR campaigns to make them seem like virtuous paragons who deserve their wealth, even at the expense of the rest of us. This is the insidious nature of corporate charity, it lets the wealthy feel good about being wealthy. When, in fact, it is their hoarded wealth that is the reason people want for anything. We have the means to produce enough for every person on this planet. It is the manufactured scarcity of capitalist markets that keep us from doing so.

These charities do good for individuals (for the mass of people who suffer in order to power capitalist abundance) but are only used as a tool, rather than as something that can actually resolve the issues these organizations address. On April 3rd, 2016, documents detailing the financial and attorney-client information of over 214, 488 offshore entities with records going back to the 1970s were leaked to a German journalist, Bastian Obermayer, from the newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung. The leak names 12 current or former world leaders, 128 public officials and politicians, and hundreds of celebrities, businessmen, and other wealthy individuals from over 200 countries; in other words, the global elites. These "Panama Papers," as they have come to be known, describe the methods through which the members of the global ruling class hide their wealth in trusts and foundations, making them less dependent on nonprofit charities for the same purposes. They describe how the elites increasingly use offshore accounts and shell companies to house their wealth, which has caused a steady decline in charitable donations. [5]



The funding the charities receive comes in the form of grants. These grants offer money for specific programs and positions the nonprofit charity must adopt in order to receive the money they need to keep their doors open, lights on, and employees paid. It does not take any ill intent for this to corrupt the nonprofit's original mission and slowly cause what is called in the industry, "mission drift." They also tend to look to their grantors for guidance, and to seek to impress them. The charities then become little more than wound care, rather than medical professionals who diagnose the source of a problem and take steps to eliminate it. Without changing the underlying structural problems these companies simply become entrenched institutions maintaining the status quo. Our local non profit CCAP has become a major power player in town in it's short history, gobbling up virtually every grant available and stifling competition. The Mayor of the City of Aberdeen is a board member of CCAP as well as serving as board president for the Catholic Union Gospel Mission. Mayor Pete Schave was elected on a platform of anti-homeless campaigns while serving on the boards of the two largest nonprofits dedicated to serving the homeless. This has influenced the decisions of both institutions to not pursue a low barrier shelter option in town. [6] The grants they go for determine their mission just as much as they choose which grants to apply for based on local politics and power dynamics.

This creates a dynamic some researchers and activists have called, "The Nonprofit Industrial Complex." The zine, Working for You, Me, We, Us, and Them: What is the nonprofit industrial complex and why should I care, defines this dynamic as, "A system of relationships between the State (or, local and federal governments), the owning classes, foundations, and nonprofit/NGO social service and social justice organizations that result in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements. The state uses nonprofits to:

"Divert public monies into private hands into private hands through foundations; manage and control dissent to make the world safe for capitalism; redirect activities energies into career-based models of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through 'philanthropic' work; Encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structure rather than to challenge them."

