




Case Study

PRIORITIZING WELLNESS IN A PANDEMIC

Themes: leadership, organizational culture,
organizational policies, external communications

Morgan Fletcher
she/her

 morgan.a.fletcher@gmail.com
 morganfletcher.com

 (434) 258-2299

Overview

Girls for Gender Equity, Inc. (GGE) is an intergenerational organization committed to the physical, psychological, social and economic development of Black girls and women based in Brooklyn, New York. Through education, organizing, and physical fitness, GGE encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives.

Like all businesses in New York City, we were forced to transition to working from home. The last several months tested our staff's individual and collective resilience as they balanced shelter-in-place orders, caring for loved ones, the demands of work, responding to the movement moment, and community care.

As a member of the GGE leadership team, I shared the responsibility of developing and rolling out organizational policies and shaping organizational culture.

As the pandemic continued, I observed that GGE staff were facing challenges sustaining themselves through a five-day work week. The pressures and responsibilities caused by the pandemic and City's response were pushing them towards burnout.

Senior leadership had already made the decision to keep GGE's doors open and continue to support the young people of color in our programs who were experiencing some of the worst repercussions of the pandemic.



Challenges

We had to ask ourselves:

1. How can we best support our staff during this time of global crisis?
2. How could we do so while continuing to not only provide our existing programming but also pandemic-responsive resourcing to Black girls and their families while maintaining financial support from funders?
3. How could we communicate our decision(s) to our external audiences?



DIGITAL STRATEGY & CAMPAIGNING

Morgan Fletcher, she/her

Solutions

I first advocated for a shortened work week, and after internal discussion, we created Wellness Wednesdays. Starting in early April, GGE would close at 3pm on Wednesdays, allowing staff to take time mid-week to care for themselves, their families and communities. The flexibility to run errands such as grocery shopping and picking up prescriptions at less heavily-trafficked hours were critical for staff morale.

As the pandemic persisted, it was clear to us that the staff needed more. Wellness Wednesday was a salve, but it did not offer a substantive amount of time for staff to fully recharge. I began advocating to my fellow leadership team members for GGE to close for two to three weeks, with the promise that they would continue to earn their full salaries and not lose any existing vacation days. My vision was that during the first week all GGE staff would be off, but during the second and third week leadership would reconvene to work on delayed team building efforts that would help us strengthen our collective leadership and plan for the remainder of the year.

“Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles.” - Angela Y. Davis



Outcomes & Messaging

GGE leadership team agreed that the organization should be closed for two weeks: June 29, 2020- July 10, 2020, reopening July 13, 2020. After this period of rest, GGE will continue its practice of Wellness Wednesdays through the end of summer, and will assess the need for this policy based on the pandemic landscape in September.

To notify our external audiences—including young people, supporters, funders, and coalition partners—of our plan, I wrote a package of digital communications that were rolled out a week before the date of close.

These communications not only notified our audiences of our limited availability, but contextualized the radical nature of our organization-wide commitment to the wellness of our staff. As the pandemic continued its world-wide impact, it was hitting our communities the hardest. At the onset of COVID-19, Black Americans were dying at three times the rate of white Americans (source: [The Guardian](#)), and the already feeble systems that provided relief to working-class Americans were buckling under pressure. The psychological impacts of the stay-at-home orders, rising death counts, and lack of clarity about how the virus spreads was yet another layer of impact.

Black women and femmes have historically been tasked with holding a disproportionate amount of emotional, physical, and mental labor for their communities. Choosing to protect Black women—to offer them respite and to be highly-visible in that act—was choosing not only ourselves but the long-term wellbeing of our community at-large. Particularly as the Black Lives Matter movement charged on, and the murders of cis and trans women and girls continued to catch major media attention. All of this was taken into consideration for our external messaging.



Messaging: Email Announcement

"Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension— all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles." - Angela Y. Davis

Dear Community,

As a staff of predominantly Black women and femmes, we are unfortunately way too familiar with the reality that Black women are tasked with showing up for everyone else before showing up for themselves. If we want to dismantle this damaging expectation and create opportunities for healing and rejuvenation, its on us - and our organizations - to practice what we preach.

It goes without saying that the last several months have tested our individual and collective resilience. The GGE team met the moment by doubling down on our commitment to amplify the voices of Black cis and trans girls, gender nonconforming and non-binary (GNC/NB) youth of color and to removing the systemic barriers that keep them from living self-determined lives.

Black girls will continue to be disproportionately impacted by converging pandemics as the systems we live within come undone. Responding to the crises all around us will require not only strategic and visionary thinking, but also the tenacity and vigilance to make small changes everyday. If it wasn't apparent before, the crises of this moment make clear that our movement for gender and racial justice is as relevant as ever.

Resilience is a necessity for engaging in movement work. Practicing resilience at this moment requires us to find new ways to recharge our spirits, bodies, and minds so we can sustain ourselves for the long haul. Like so many of you, members of the GGE team are balancing shelter-in-place orders, caring for loved ones, the demands of work, responding to the movement moment, and community care. In order to adjust to the current and evolving needs of our staff, our team will be taking time to intentionally rest. To that end, **GGE will be closed June 29, 2020 - July 10, 2020, and will reopen on July 13, 2020. After this period of rest, we will continue to maintain a practice of Wellness Wednesdays through the end of the summer, encouraging our team to take a pause after 3pm ET.**

During our two-week period of rest, every GGE employee will have an extended opportunity to find meaningful ways to engage in radical self-care, and our adjusted weekly hours will allow us to sustain ourselves more mindfully in our commitment to our work.

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." - Audre Lorde

We are committed to fighting for our girls, and resiliency is how we will win.

Onwards,

Joanne N. Smith

President & CEO

Messaging: Instagram Announcement

From June 26th - July 10th, we'll be taking time to rest, rejuvenate, restore, and expand ourselves so we can continue to fight for and alongside Black girls and TGNC and non-binary youth of color.

Caption: As a staff of predominantly Black women and femmes, we are unfortunately way too familiar with the reality that Black women are tasked with showing up for everyone else before showing up for themselves. If we want to dismantle this damaging expectation and create opportunities for healing and rejuvenation, it's on us - and our organizations - to practice what we preach.

GGE will be closed June 29, 2020 - July 10, 2020, and will reopen on July 13, 2020.

Black girls will continue to be disproportionately impacted by converging pandemics as the systems we live within come undone. Responding to the crises all around us will require not only strategic and visionary thinking, but also the tenacity and vigilance to make small changes everyday. Resilience is a necessity for engaging in movement work. We are committed to fighting for our girls, and resiliency is how we will win.

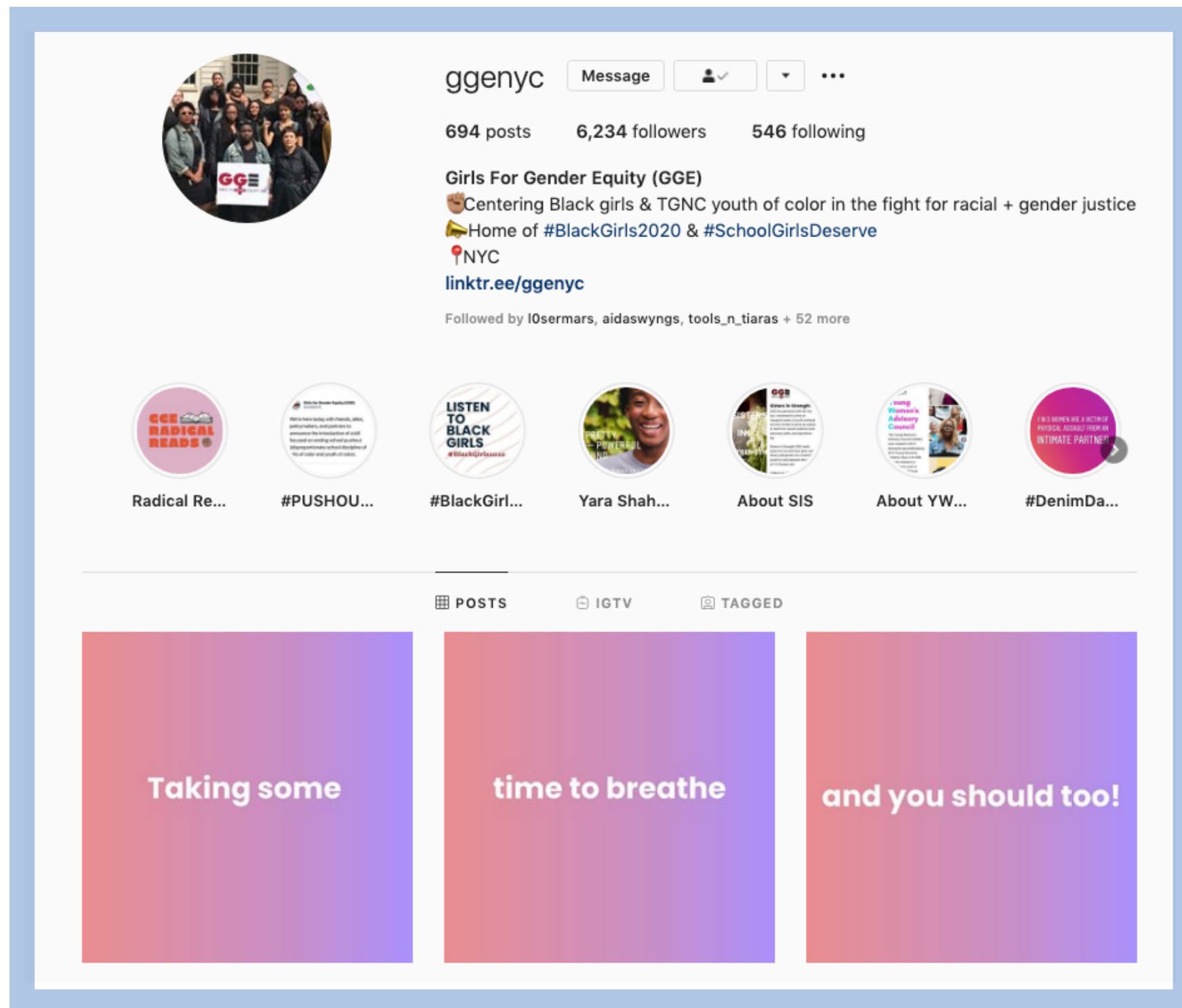
“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”
- Audre Lorde

#ggenyc #restisresistance

DIGITAL STRATEGY & CAMPAIGNING

Morgan Fletcher, she/her

Messaging: Instagram Announcement (cont.)



Caption: Rest is resistance. This movement moment requires us to find new ways to recharge our spirits, bodies, and minds so we can sustain ourselves for the future. To that end, GGE will be closed 6/29 - 7/10, and will reopen on 7/13.

We're so grateful for the love and support we've received from our community around this decision. It's never easy to step away from the work, but it's a critical choice for our wellness so we can be whole and energized for the fights ahead. We wish you good health and many opportunities to fill your cup, too. ☐

DIGITAL STRATEGY & CAMPAIGNING

Morgan Fletcher, she/her

Messaging: Twitter Announcement

📌 Pinned Tweet

 **Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)** @GGENYC

Rest is resistance. This movement moment requires us to find new ways to recharge our spirits, bodies, and minds so we can sustain ourselves for the future. To that end, GGE will be closed 6/29 - 7/10, and will reopen on 7/13. Read our full announcement bit.ly/3fKOaol

5:38 PM · 6/22/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

21 Retweets 77 Likes


   


 **Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)** · 6/22/20

 Tweet your reply



 **Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)** · 6/22/20
Replying to @GGENYC

Black girls will continue to be disproportionately impacted by converging pandemics as the systems we live within come undone. Responding to the crises around us will require not only strategic + visionary thinking, but the tenacity and vigilance to make changes big and small.

 1  1  22 

 **Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)** · 6/22/20

If it wasn't apparent before, the crises of this moment make clear that our movement for gender and racial justice is as relevant as ever. We are committed to fighting for our girls, and resiliency is how we will win.

  2  18 

 **vaendiskona** @vaendiskona · 6/22/20
Replying to @GGENYC

This is so important and thank you for the positive modeling. 💕

 1   2 

 Tweet your reply



Thank You!

Morgan Fletcher
she/her



morgan.a.fletcher@gmail.com



morganfletcher.com



(434) 258-2299