



June 11, 2024

Dear Norwalk ACTS Members & Partners,

For anyone who has followed my time as leader of Norwalk ACTS, you know that I have always operated with vulnerability, authenticity, and honesty. In keeping with these core personal values, I am writing to share that I will be taking a personal leave this summer.

The demands of leading our organization, coupled with the complexities of the nonprofit sector, the unique challenges inherent in systems change work, and the multiple crises we face related to racial justice, economic inequality, mental health, climate change, toxic politics, global conflicts, and more, have taken a toll on my well-being.

As the saying goes, "you can't pour from an empty cup." To continue to be my best self for my family, the organization, my community, and me, I will be taking leave between July 15 and September 15. I have spent many years preaching about the need for self-care but like so many people, and women in particular, I am better at caring for others than myself. I know I need a break that will allow me to prioritize my health, recharge, and get re-energized to come back to my work with focus and inspiration.

I have been reading and listening to a lot of podcasts about burnout and one of the best things I heard recently was someone who challenged the term 'compassion fatigue' as a way to describe burnout. Their argument was that burnout is actually due to an inability to fatigue from being compassionate. It's the crushing weight and burden of caring so much and wanting to make things better on so many fronts that leads to burnout. That resonated deeply with me. As a social worker, I have spent nearly 30 years in various roles in Fairfield County nonprofit work, from acute, devastating individual and collective trauma, to the systems change work that I believe so much in. In living my values, I believe it's my role to shine a light on the less spoken about, but extremely prevalent issue of burnout in the nonprofit sector that needs attention.

I hope by sharing this challenge that I help open a door for others to share theirs as well. By modeling what this looks like, I hope to encourage conversations in the spaces you operate in too; just as I was inspired by the sabbatical last year of Jennifer Blatz, the CEO our national partner, StriveTogether. In her words, "when we tend to ourselves, we tend to the mission."

I couldn't step away from the work without the support of the board of directors and the incredible staff. Our talented and dedicated team will be led by Jesse Buccolo, Deputy Director, and supported by the board during my absence.

I look forward to returning this fall energized and ready to celebrate the first ten years of our collective impact journey. So please save the late afternoon/early evening of Tuesday, October 22nd and stay tuned for more information!

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer D. Barahona".

Jennifer Barahona

Norwalk ACTS, CEO