

Dignity and Joy - Season 1, Episode 2

The kids are alright: Black youth and food sovereignty with Sheldon Caruana

Episode 2 keywords: youth, food sovereignty, community, Black, food, land, systems, farm, opportunities, research, connection

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Episode 2 transcript:

Intro: 0:01

You're listening to Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare. On the pod, we confront the systems of oppression that impact who has access to food and the land it's grown on and who doesn't. Achieving something better will take hard work from all of us and can only be done if we listen closely to the people who are already leading change in the way we think about food. In this three-part series, FoodShare's Sheldomar Elliott delves into the connections between food and justice with folks who have their fingers on the pulse and their hands in the soil. Together, they dream in colour, and consider what it would take to build a just and hopeful city; a city where everyone can be themselves, their loved ones and their community with dignity and with joy.

Sheldomar 0:50

Hi everybody, I'm Sheldomar Elliott, and welcome to this episode of Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare. Today, our guest is Sheldon Caruana. Sheldon is passionate about strengthening Black communities through education and agriculture. As Project Coordinator for the Black youth farming collective, he's been at the forefront of the development of Brompton's first Black-led youth farm, a Child and Youth Care alumni at X University. He's an advocate for youth led initiatives and community-building through agriculture and the lands. Welcome to the pod, Sheldon.

Sheldon 1:23

Hey Sheldomar, thanks for having me.

Sheldomar 1:25

Definitely. I'm so happy that you agreed to be a guest here, Sheldon. And I'm really looking forward to this conversation. Before we get into it, however, I do want to start by acknowledging that I'm here in Toronto, sacred land that is the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, the Anishinabeg, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. And that this territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant. At FoodShare, we think it's important to start any conversation on this land by recognizing the many nations of Indigenous



peoples who presently live on this land, those who have spent time here and ancestors who have hunted and gathered on this land. I also want to acknowledge the many people of African descent who are not settlers, but whose ancestors were forcibly displaced as part of the transatlantic slave trade, brought against their will and made to work on these lands. FoodShare believes that advancing Indigenous sovereignty is deeply, inextricably linked to Black liberation, and we remain committed to advancing both. So Sheldon, I know that folks on the pod may know at this point that I really like to start this conversation, relatively easygoing. And to just kind of introduce what we'll be talking about, I like to start things off with an icebreaker. Are you okay with answering a few rapid-fire questions?

Sheldon 2:43

(Laughs) that sounds wonderful, I would love to.

Sheldomar 2:47

That sounds good. Alright, so the first one I ask, which a pretty easy one is what is your favourite food?

Sheldon 2:53

Hmm, that's a good question. As you may know, I'm someone who loves to eat. And I think probably some of my favourites, or one of my favourite foods kind of comes around the holidays around that Christmas time. And that's oxtail. There's just something special about food being prepared by a grandma, you know.

Sheldomar 3:16

Come on, there's nothing like it.

Sheldon 3:18

Exactly.

Sheldomar 3:19

That's great. Thanks for that. Next one I got for you is: what is your ideal burger or sandwich toppings?

Sheldon 3:26

Yeah, I think for me, as someone who loves burgers, I've definitely been exploring some vegetarian options. And I'm really enjoying burgers that have avocado, or guac, portobello mushrooms, lettuce, tomato, of course, you gotta have a little bit of cheese. And yeah, and generally some kind of like sauce. Maybe I tend to like Sriracha sauces.

Sheldomar 3:51

Mmm, yeah, that's what I gonna ask what about the condiments, but yeah, sriracha's definitely a good pick there. And I guess last question I got for you here is if you had to eat one meal for the rest of your life, what would that be?

Sheldon 4:07

Oh, that's a that's a tough one, Sheldomar.

Sheldomar 4:10

I know, it's not fair.

Sheldon 4:11

(Laughs) I think I'd maybe – this is cheating – but I would go for smoothies. I think smoothies can be so versatile, and you know, you can really kind of like mix them up and kind of put whatever you want in them. So maybe that would be like my workaround.

Sheldomar 4:28

I like that. And that way, you can also stay hydrated, get all the nutrients. I see that. I see that. Cool. Thanks for answering those questions, Sheldon. And I really just want to open this discussion up by starting to hear a little bit about you and how you got involved in the work that you do and the youth advocacy that you're a part of.

Sheldon 4:51

Yeah, absolutely. So, for me, I was largely motivated to get into my work with youth as it relates to kind of social justice. Growing up, I had some experiences some personal experiences with child welfare. And I think I came to the understanding that there were a lot of challenges and systemic challenges within those systems, especially as it relates to Black youth. And I wanted to do work to support young people that were particularly in residential care systems at the time. So that kind of like naturally led me along a path to begin to study, actually Child and Youth Care at Sheridan. And from then I kind of continued working in different systems. As I began to expose myself more to some of the challenges that youth in care face in residential systems, I began wanting to kind of like upgrade my education. And so I ended up working for the, the organization doesn't exist anymore, unfortunately, because of budget cuts, but the Office of the Provincial Advocate, and it was during my time with this body that I did a lot of systemic-based youth-led advocacy. And that was something that really opened up my eyes in terms of the potential of youth-led initiatives and the importance of working with young people to create change, both in the political system, and in bringing about change in residential child welfare.

Sheldomar 6:13

That's really great to hear, you know that, I think that's really amazing to kind of pick up a lot of the life experience that you may have had at younger ages, and sort of give back to community and find a way to work with youth and support them in what they're going through. But this also makes me think about your current work now, right, as the coordinator at the Black Youth Farming Collective, and I guess, maybe just to step back a little bit, how did you get into food work? And like, what was your trajectory into growing food as opposed to just being an eater of food?

Sheldon 6:48

(Laughs) That's, that's a really good question, Sheldomar. And I actually kind of felt like it was

almost more of a calling. So after doing this advocacy work, in child welfare, I ended up doing a short stint working, actually, for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. After working there for a little bit, I kind of found that some of the systems and the ways of navigating change can be bureaucratic, and it I didn't enjoy it as much as the grassroots work that I was doing on the ground. And I kind of experienced like a little bit of like, it wasn't a midlife crisis, because I was like, in my early 20s, but I had this feeling that there was like something more for me, and it was kind of like a deeply spiritual experience. And I took that time to actually travel abroad, I went to South America, and I spent some time at a retreat centre, working with different kinds of plant medicines, and working with Indigenous communities out there for a period of six months. And during this time, I learned a lot about different plant medicines, I learned a lot about the importance of community healing and bringing people together. And really, it piqued my interest around something called horticultural therapy, and how we can use community and how we can use food and agriculture to essentially address issues of mental illness, and how we can look at building stronger communities through these different types of kind of being with people. And so when I had come back, I thought to myself, well, there's like nothing like this here. And so I started, I was actually in the process of studying my BA in Child and Youth Work, and I started doing my thesis on horticultural therapy: How can Child and Youth Care Workers, and how can people working with young people use plants to improve their well-being? And in the different settings that I would work, I would always put together gardens and I'd invite the kids to come grow food with me, it was something that like I really enjoyed and something that I found that the kids really enjoyed as well. So I started writing about it, and that's actually when I met my professor, Dr. Julian Hasford, who had a large interest in agricultural community-building, who was had some ideas and some visions around creating a Black youth farm in Brampton, and kind of developing this project that I'm working at now. And through connecting with him, we ended up sharing ideas and talking a little bit about our goals. And I thought, that's kind of what got me into growing food and being in the position that I am in now.

Sheldomar 9:30

Amazing. Yeah, that's so powerful, Sheldon, I love how you're able to like travel and take those experiences and bring them back and realize that they can be applied in other scenarios and settings. And as someone who has been aware of the Black youth farming collective and the work that's happening there, it is quite simply astounding to see Black youth and adults and everyone in between come together, around food connected to land, and just exploring all these topics around Black food sovereignty – what does connection look like? How does this impact our mental well-being? These things seems so interesting to me. So I would love to hear more about the Black Youth Farming Collective like, can you please describe like, what's happening there for listeners at home?

Sheldon 10:19

Yeah, absolutely. The Black Youth Farming Collective has been around for I think we're coming up to about a year and a half now. And we started off with the essentially with the idea of developing this demonstration and research farm in Brampton. And there was a number of kind of core group members that kind of came together. Essentially, it's a it's a collaboration of different organizations. So it's the Asase Institute, as well as En'tyce Community Services and

Mentorship, and a steering committee that evolved from these two groups, a Black youth-led steering committee that evolved from these two groups to kind of guide the project and move the project forward. And so we started off about a year ago with a grant looking to conduct a feasibility study of this project. And whether or not this is something that is going to be kind of like, not just economically feasible, but looking at the need for it within the community, looking at how this project and how this farm would be able to impact issues of food insecurity, how it would bring together youth in the community, and in terms of supporting youth education around agricultural education as well. And so one of the really cool aspects of this project and one that, you know, I know that you've been involved in as well Sheldomar, is the idea that – is community-based research. And so when we started conducting these feasibility studies, we started doing community research, and we had 12 Black youth who are part of this project out conducting interviews with Black businesses, we were conducting interviews with grocery store owners, we were connecting with the local community doing surveys. We ended up working together and creating a research report as a group, and really doing this entire community-based research as a unit together. And I think that was a really powerful testament to the type of work and relationship that we want to cultivate when we're developing these types of community-based projects. You know, oftentimes, we have research that can be conducted on certain populations, without involving them in the actual research themselves. And the idea of community-based research is bringing together the research populations in which research is being conducted on and involving them directly in that research so that we're not only building knowledge for the researchers, but we're also building knowledge within the community being researched. This was kind of the starting of the youth steering committee and kind of, you know, what gave us kind of the foundations and upon this research that we started building, we ended up planning to do something called a Summer Leadership Program over the summer of 2000 – time is going by so fast –

Sheldomar 13:14

(Laughs) What is time anyways?

Sheldon 13:15

(Laughs) Yes, what is time? Um, of 2021, we did our Summer Leadership Program, and that was from July to believe it was October. We actually had youth in the school systems come out and participate in a four-month employment education program where they were helping to develop and build the infrastructure for the Black Youth Farming Collective, which is currently located on the Black youth farm, which is currently located as a community garden section of McVean farm. And so I know like that part in itself was absolutely amazing. Because when we talk about issues of food insecurity, and we talk about issues of Black food sovereignty, there are so many interrelated kind of systems which impact Black food sovereignty, you know, and food insecurity. We think about, you know, issues of employment, issues of actually growing the food and having access to nutritious and affordable food. We talk about education, educating our community, about food systems, and how they can access it. And these were some of the things that were coming out of this project and some of the things that we were educating young people, for example, I know this year was the first year that we had the Afro-Caribbean food market in Toronto. And, you know, taking them out to explore that to experience different

avenues for supporting food systems within their community and Black-led food systems, exploring different conservation areas and understanding for a lot of those youth, that was the first time that they had ever been on a farm.

Sheldomar 15:00

Wow.

Sheldon 15:00

And it's it's funny, because when we first started, you know, a lot of a lot of the young people were a little nervous about getting their hands dirty. And by the time the project was over, every one of them had taken such deep ownership of the community and of the land, it was just an incredible experience to see, truly.

Sheldomar 15:24

Yeah, that makes me smile so much. I got a big grin on my face. And I'm ready to snap, because I think it's so it's so powerful to get youth connected, again, to land, to food, to community, to all these important ideas, and also talking about Black food sovereignty and what that looks like. And before I jump into that piece there, I'm just a little curious around those findings that were conducted from the community research that you're touching on. Could you share some of that? Or maybe anything that perhaps surprised you from those results?

Sheldon 15:58

Yeah, I think, for me, a lot of the research that took place during those that community research was deeply interrelated with the impacts of COVID, because we were seeing COVID shut down small businesses. And we know that a lot of Black food businesses are essentially in that small to medium size, business kind of landscape. And, you know, A – like transportation costs increasing and reduced transportation, we were seeing flights, for example, we were seeing flights shut down because of travel restrictions. And a lot of these Black food businesses that were importing food, let's say from the Caribbean, were struggling because they saw spikes to the cost of importing food. And it just really, it really made us more aware of – and this isn't just Black food businesses this, we were also seeing this in grocery stores, just food in general prices were going up. And it just made us more aware of the importance of creating sustainable local food systems, as well as addressing issues of transportation internationally. And how do we as Black businesses come together and support one another, when it comes to exporting and importing produce from Black countries?

Sheldomar 17:18

Yeah, that's, that's crucial, right. And I think it's so neat that there's youth being involved in these opportunities around economic research and feasibility, because oftentimes, they don't have those sort of opportunities. So that's really cool that they're being part of the process. And, you know, before we jump more into Black food sovereignty, I gotta hear like, do you remember the first time you were on a farm?

Sheldon 17:42

(Laughs) I'm just trying to remember, I think, probably my earliest memories of being on a farm. And I don't even know if you could consider it a farm, like a "farm" farm. But I remember riding, I think it was like, like the ponies at Chinguacousy Farm. When they have the little they have the little animal, the little animal farm there, that people can kind of walk by and view and I know I've always had a passion for animals and connecting with animals. And I I think those are probably my earliest memories of of kind of being on what something that semblances of a farm. I don't I don't know if, I do know that they have some community, like a little bit of a community garden there that they're growing. I don't know if they had it back in the day. But definitely, seeing those animals there reminded me of, of a farm.

Sheldomar 18:41

(Laughs) That's so wholesome, thanks for answering that. So you know, I know we're talking a lot about food and lands and connection. And I think it's only fair that we talk a little bit about Black food sovereignty, and what that is. And I know for myself, I've really interpreted it differently, because I recognize that the definition is always evolving and changing, and also really has an emphasis on where it's been applied to, when considering land and place and whatnot. But I wanted to ask you, what are your thoughts on Black food sovereignty? Or how would you define it from the position that you come from?

Sheldon 19:17

I feel like, especially kind of more recently being involved in, you know, in participating in the Black food sovereignty and, and having conversations with the project as well as kind of hearing other international organizations perspectives of Black food sovereignty, that it is kind of it's a movement, and it's not just local, it's global. I think it's really about bringing control and re-establishing control of our food systems within the Black community. When I think of Black food sovereignty, it's not just food systems, like it's bigger than food systems. It's about re-establishing that community piece. And I think that piece is so important. Because when we're looking at creating Black food sovereignty and what it means we need to establish those networks within the Black community for us to be able to essentially build the foundation of what is a Black-centered and Black-owned food system?.

Sheldomar 20:22

Definitely.

Sheldon 20:23

Yeah. And so I'm definitely it's something definitely that I think there's so many different layers to it. And as we ask different communities, I think the definition of Black food sovereignty is going to be it's going to be different also, based on those those different needs of the communities as well.

Sheldomar 20:42

Mm-hmm, that's so real. And I think we're in such a interesting point in time, as I'm sure you know, like the City of Toronto has recently passed the Black food sovereignty initiative, as an

official initiative that they will support with funds and resources. And because oftentimes, this work goes unpaid unseen, and it's a lot, you know, for folks in a community to try to move and make change when they're so limited. And there's, there's only so much that is possible. But now it just seems like the momentum is rising. And I think with the Black Youth Farming Collective, and the Black food sovereignty initiative, and all of these things, there's a real energy going on that I feel and I'm sure that you're, you're feeling too. So I kind of want to explore that a little bit more. And I'd love to get your thoughts on, like, what these kinds of opportunities, which are like being connected back to land and food look like in the future? Or I guess more specifically, what, what routes does that look like for youth? And what do those opportunities potentially look like for youth to get more connected?

Sheldon 21:55

Yeah, absolutely. I think I think you said something, you know, really important. And, you know, that's thinking about, like our food system, and, and creating opportunities in the future and the energy around this movement that's happening. And I think it's so important because we, it feels like we at this time are, we're looking for solutions, we're looking for solutions within our communities, we're looking for solutions to issues around anti-Black racism, anti-Indigeneity, we are looking for ways of, of and models of being not only with the land, but with each other and with community that are less capitalistic, more centred on people, and wellness and sustainability. And I think the when we talk about opportunities in the future of Black food sovereignty and these types of movement, I think this is the direction that it's pointing us in. And I think, you know, one of the things that that excites me so much about this work is around that educational piece for youth, you know, we – creating opportunities, you know, movements in general, especially Black food movements have always been largely and energized by young people who are at the forefront, who are bringing the energy who are attending the rallies who are participating in the communities. And this type of education and this type of involvement with young people are are creating opportunities for us to rethink our relationship, not only with the land, but with how we do business. And one of the things you were mentioning, it was around, you know, this type of work not always this, this wasn't this type of work, farming and food-related work wasn't something that was always compensated well, and, and it's so important that we see and we create opportunities for young people to see themselves making a living doing work that is meaningful, but also sustainable for them and their future families or their current families. And so, when we're thinking about, you know, the different opportunities and the future, kind of going back to your your question, I think there's a lot of different opportunities. I think this is really like we're kind of it's not the beginning because this work has been has been going on for a long time. But there are so many opportunities around thinking through creative solutions to land access, you know, thinking about how we address issues of food insecurity, you know, we're at a pinnacle time where food insecurity within the Black community and all around the world is being a new focus. And I think Afro-centric models and Indigenous models of bringing food to communities is going to be kind of have an opportunity to take the forefront in terms of looking at new ways of how we do things and how we build these systems within our communities.

Sheldomar 25:02

That is so powerful. Thank you for sharing that I, there's so much in there I want to touch on because there's, yeah, there's so much there, right? Like there's there's so many opportunities, and they're just often not seen or not made viable. And I do want to ask this before I lead into the next question, which is, I know you talked a little bit about your own healing experience with growing in South America. So could you share more on the benefits of using lands and food as a different way of approaching therapy for young and engaging youth? Like, what what is it about forming that is healing, in your experience?

Sheldon 25:43

Yeah, so I think for most people – I know it's not, it's not just myself – but there's something special about being connected to nature. You know, you hear things like go for a walk, you know, if you're feeling stressed, or get outside. And for me, that has always resonated with me, you know, some of the times I feel the most human. And the most kind of at ease with myself are times when I'm connected to nature, times when I have my hands in the dirt or in the soil, or when I am touching another living plant, or fruit or vegetable, that you just seem to connect to these things on a deeper level. And when I think about the opportunities for wellness and healing through agriculture, I think another really important or one of the things that I that I love about it is it combines that nature element, of being outside of connecting to the land, with the element of community, especially community-based agriculture. Not only are you being with land, but you're connecting with people, and especially in projects such as the Black food sovereignty movements, and the Black Youth Farming Collective, where you're creating safe spaces for the Black community to come together and to embark on a project that is Black-led, Black-owned, Black-mandated. And it becomes such a powerful experience and such a safe a safe space to be when you know sometimes, because we know that sometimes outside of these spaces, it can be the systems can be quite frustrating, and and challenging.

Sheldomar 27:29

Absolutely. And I could just imagine being the Project Coordinator, you've had a great impact on the youth that you're engaging with at the farm. And I'd love to hear like, what are those changes or those impacts that you've seen with the youth in these programs. And I know you shared before, like a lot of them, at first, were really hesitant and nervous to just be touching bugs and soil as many young people are. But I think it's a matter of exposure and care and being a community that allows for that to just begin to flow. But what else have you noticed in the youth that you folks are engaging?

Sheldon 28:06

Part of what one of the focuses of the Summer Leadership Project that we were running at the farm was, was to begin to support Black youth to be leaders in their community, leaders in social justice, leaders in change. And even after our just the first summer of working with these young people, there were a few kind of like key moments that came back to me that, you know, just filled me up with pride. One of them was one of the students that we had worked with or had participated in the program over the farm actually reached out to me not too long ago, and had asked me for an interview, because he had chosen to do a research project with his school or at

his school on the impact of animal abuse at factory farms, and how organic farming and how farmers can essentially support practices that protect animals. And, you know, I thought to myself, and one of the things that I asked him is, hey, you know, like what brought you onto this topic, you know, like what piqued your interest in this? And he had said that it was largely the work that he had done at the farm. And so to see the work that we're doing there translate into young people taking these skills, taking these leadership qualities, and then going back and then doing work in their own community and research in their own community to make changes around issues that they're passionate about, is really inspiring, and it's really motivating.

Sheldomar 29:37

Absolutely, it's that full circle effect and like it's right, that's so incredible. You know, I can't help but think about youth and I kind of want to put a spotlight on youth at the moment. Because I know recently the Black Youth Farming Collective hosted the – correct me if I'm wrong – first international Black Youth Food Sovereignty Forum. Is that right?

Sheldon 30:01

You are absolutely right. Yes, we did.

Sheldomar 30:03

Yeah. You know that, in itself is a long title, but means a lot because it's so crucial to, I imagine bring young people from around the world into a conversation around Black food sovereignty and their own relations to food and lands in their respective places. And I think you folks had people from the States, Ghana, Jamaica and Trinidad, right?

Sheldon 30:32

Yeah, absolutely. It was, it was incredible. And just wanted to also say that it was a collaborative project between a number of players that included X University, and Village Academy in Jamaica, and I know Afri-Can FoodBasket played an important role in it as well. And so it was an incredible opportunity to bring together young people to highlight the different types of works that they were doing in their projects in different food-related projects internationally, and really begin to kind of, you know, we talked about Black food sovereignty, but really begin to understand what Black food sovereignty means to our community and to the Black community on an international level.

Sheldomar 31:11

Definitely. And I'm so curious, like, what were some of those lessons and values that were shared from youth in other places around the world that perhaps, we don't think about often, or may inform the work that the Black youth farming collective will do moving forward?

Sheldon 31:27

Yeah, absolutely. I think part of the some of the things that heard that I heard and kind of resonated with me, was really thinking about, you know, the seeds, you know, when we go back, and we talk about growing foods, and how we grow food, we know that there is an ongoing issue of these seeds being patented, and a need for seed banks and seed savers, and for us to

reconnect to the kind of like heirloom and Indigenous seeds of our lands, for growing. And so this was an issue that was raised multiple times in the forum in terms of, you know, creating those spaces, and those infrastructures for seeds to be shared, how do we share them on an international level? How do we get, you know, seeds to places like, for example, you know, if we want to grow something from the Motherland or from the Caribbean, how do we do that, and where do we go for these types of resources? But also the need, you know, there was this kind of like larger call for the need for creating that community space on an international level for people to come together and begin to continue this work on Black food sovereignty, because, you know, meeting for the International Black Food Sovereignty Forum, on an annual basis is incredible, and an amazing way to share resources. But how do we stay connected with people and continue building this work and moving forward, and I think this was a great space to begin that conversation, and to begin thinking about how we do that.

That's, that's really beautiful and powerful. And I can imagine that those relationships will only be fostered and continue beyond the forum. So I'm really excited to see what that looks like and how that develops in the future. But to centre back on the Black Youth Farming Collective, what is next for you folks there? And what what does the future of that work look like? And has there been any thought around that expanding outside of Brampton or moving elsewhere? Any of that if you could share?

Yeah, so right now, we are currently doing work in the school systems, which is quite exciting. We are partnering with our kind of community school board, the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board, and we are looking to connect with students in terms of and conducting essentially a feasibility study that's going to connect food systems experts, with students, very similar to the way that we have done community research in the past, where we are teaching young people and providing young people an opportunity to participate as researchers on this project and to learn about the needs, the gaps, the challenges that the Black community faces, and barriers that the Black community faces when kind of entering into the Black food careers. And so we're really excited for this to be taking place. And we want to use this knowledge that we gained from this research to begin to inform a training and education program curriculum that will provide to Black students to better prepare them to enter into the agri-food to become agri-food leaders in the in the Black food space and in the food space. Thinking about, you know where this project is going and the work that we're doing. We're also looking at, you know, continuing on with our Summer Leadership program over this coming summer. You know, last year, we spent a lot of time developing the infrastructure, or the beginning infrastructure for the farm, and we're going to continue doing the work this year, with growing more foo. We are working on, you know, land access always is, can be is a challenge. And we are working kind of to secure, you know, a longer kind of term for our land access, so that we can continue building and investing in the in the space and growing and kind of growing the project. And in terms of kind of expanding into the future and the work that we have to do, I think we are always, you know, excited for the possibilities of, of what is on the horizon. And, you know, we we have a small but passionate team. And I think we're going to continue to kind of look for new opportunities and continue to expand as the team grows and the opportunities arise.

Sheldomar 35:56

I can just imagine, and I'm really excited to keep up with the work that is happening there. And, yeah, I can just, it sounds like y'all are keeping it up. And the idea of it being expanded to schools, I think is such an amazing way to keep other youth engaged and to bring more people into the conversation. So kudos to you all there. And, yeah, really excited for the future of that. So I feel like we're coming to the end of our conversation here. And I kind of just want to get your thoughts on the future of this, and perhaps your own experience with working with young people and as a young person yourself, I guess, like how do you feel today's current generation of youth are doing things differently? And I know that there are many examples of youth leading movements, and really taking the charge on things. But I guess compared to how you felt as a young person, close to the age of the people you're engaging, versus now like, what do you what do you feel is changed? And what makes you hopeful about that?

Sheldon 37:03

(Laughs) I'm just thinking about what I was doing at the age of some of the youth in the project.

Sheldomar 37:11

Right? Yeah.

Sheldon 37:11

And it was it was definitely, I mean, to see young people in high school, and in their early early post secondaries, you know, 18s to 20s, you know, doing this type of work so early, when you know, I was at that age, probably just goofing off, is really it's inspiring. It's inspiring. And not only are they doing this work, but they bring so much new insight, they have so much they have such a deep understanding. And maybe it's kind of like it's like a spiritual connectivity or connectedness in certain aspects that I that I find so invigorating. And I feel like if there's any, if there's any group of people that are, you know, we can kind of trust to carry the torch and to lead us into the future. You know, I would put my money on on this generation of youth because they are, they are incredible.

Sheldomar 38:14

Absolutely. These people are game changers – take my money! (Laughs)

Sheldon 38:17

Absolutely. Absolutely. (Laughs)

Sheldomar 38:19

Take my money. Well um. Sheldon, this has been great. Thank you, honestly so much for being a guest here. I really appreciated everything you shared, for all the work that you do and your commitment to making change and bringing care to our community. So I can't thank you enough for that.

Sheldon 38:40

Thanks Sheldomar, I really enjoyed the conversation and you were an amazing host.

Sheldomar 38:43

(Laughs) Appreciate that, man. Thank you. That is it for this episode. You can find the Black Youth Farming Collective on Instagram, @BYFC_official. And Sheldon where can people find you if they would like to get a hold of you?

Sheldon 39:00

Yeah, absolutely. They can follow me on my instagram at @sheldoncaruana or if they're interested in following the project they can follow the project at @BYFC_official.

Sheldomar 39:14

Amazing. Dignity and Joy is a podcast from FoodShare Toronto, and we're a food justice organization advocating for the right to food and working to challenge the systemic barriers that keep people from accessing the food that they need to thrive. You can learn more about our work at foodshare.net. If you have feedback on the pod, we'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at info@foodshare.net or on our social media. We're @FoodShareTO on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and on Instagram. Dignity and Joy is produced in collaboration with Lead Podcasting with sound engineering and editing by Michael Allen. The production team at FoodShare is Renee D'Souza, Moe Pramanick and Andrea Thompson. Special thanks to Amanda Cupido. Thank you so much for listening.