

Dignity and Joy - Season 1, Episode 3

Food price peril: Community solutions for a fairer food system with Laura Hammond

S1E3 keywords: community, food, people, land, support, youth, learning, mindset, housing insecurity, poverty, programming, intergenerational, connections, garden

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S1E3 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 feed themselves, their loved ones in their community with dignity and with joy.

Sheldomar 0:43

Well uh hi, I'm Sheldomar Elliott, and welcome to this episode of Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare. Today our guest is Laura Hammond. Laura is a community leader and co-founder of the Birchmount Community Action Council, and Director of Operations for Frontline Connections. She is also an urban farmer, a beekeeper, a TO Ravines Champion, and a mom of six. Laura established the Action Council with neighbours in her Toronto Community Housing building as a response to, well, no response, when it came to the supports for her residents. The volunteer-led Action Council coordinates – among other things – youth training programs, a community garden, and a food distribution program that provides gift cards and food hampers to members of their community in the Scarborough area neighbourhood who are facing food and housing insecurity. Welcome, Laura.

Laura 1:06

Thank you for having me, Sheldomar.

Sheldomar 1:46

Amazing, I'm really excited to have you here. And I just gotta say, it's, it's funny how the first time we met was a few months ago during an interview. So this kind of feels like a full circle. And I'm really glad to be talking with you today.



Laura 1:59

Yes, yeah, I know. It doesn't feel like it was that long ago, but yeah.

Sheldomar 2:03

Definitely. Well, before we get into it, I 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 Indigenous peoples who presently live on this land, those who have spent time here, and the 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. At FoodShare, we believe that advancing Indigenous sovereignty is deeply and inextricably linked to Black liberation, and we remain committed to advancing both. So, Laura, I really like to start off with icebreakers just so that we can ensure that their conversation is going to be really easygoing and free-flowing. Are you open to answering some relatively funny but food-related questions for us?

Laura 3:16

Sure.

Sheldomar 3:17

Amazing. So the first one is an easy one I like to start off with, which is what is your favourite food?

Laura 3:23

Ooh, ackee and saltfish with provisions.

Sheldomar 3:26

Oh, right off the top, right (laughs).

Laura 3:29

Right off the top (laughs).

Sheldomar 3:31

Why is that your favourite food?

Laura 3:32

Other than the amazing flavour, it's so healthy, just with the ground provisions. And you know, in terms of you know, having a pescetarian diet, the saltfish. Yeah, I can't I can't even lie, the flavour – the flavour, the flavour, the flavour. And it brings back a lot of memories. My mom used to cook that for me a lot. And, yeah, whenever I asked for it, she would go out of her way to get it. It's not cheap. It's not cheap. And yeah, it just brings back a lot of good memories.

I agree. It's really delicious food, right there. Really off the cuff, and I think it's kind of funny to ask, considering that you're a mom of six. So I think it'd be funny to ask you. If your family was a bag of anything, whether it's like a snack a treat, vegetables, fruits, maybe more specifically your kids. What – what would that be? What would that treat be that you feel like would symbolize them?

Wow, um (laughs). I know I'm laughing at the fact that I have too, I'm just gonna say a bag of nuts (laughs).

Sheldomar 4:38

Yeah (laughs).

Laura 4:40

And I know it sounds funny, no pun intended. We are not crazy. But you know, like yeah, I just feel like they're each so rich and unique. Like my daughter, macadamia and you she's so like, rich with her own knowledge of self, and like I learn from them in different ways, like each of my children like I can go on and on about talking about each and every one of them, like my eldest started, he's extremely humble. He would be like a peanut. Because like, similar to the fact that peanuts can be used for so many different things. Yeah, that would be him. He's so well versed, and like he catches on to anything that he attempts to do, in a very humbling manner. So that's two of them. I gotta go through the other four now.

Sheldomar 5:31

I mean you don't have to (laughs). How poetic every single – go for it, yeah.

Laura 5:38

Some cashews (laughs) – but yeah. They're all so, so unique and rich. Yeah.

Sheldomar 5:45

That's yeah, that was beautiful. Thank you for answering that. That's, that's so funny. It actually throws me back to my childhood. My nickname was peanuts. So that, that unlocks a lot of memories for me, funny enough.

Laura 5:55

Right? And then you know, I can't forget my husband, he'd be a walnut, hard to crack, but once you get in there, it's good. It's good.

Sheldomar 6:02

I love. I love that, I love that. I think that's a great way to start this conversation. And I know in the intro, I touched on a little bit around the community work that you got into around co-founding the Birchmount Community Action Council whatnot. But maybe, like, before we get into that I love to hear about your journey into community work, and what were some of those initial motivators to get involved?

Laura 6:34

Yeah, well, I really, I naturally just gravitate to making friends and being around people and love learning and learning about people's lives and their interests than just even how to do things. You know, it can be a blessing and a curse to think that you can do everything. But I love learning from people and how they do things. So naturally, when I moved to the Birchmount community, I was in awe of all the community space that I saw. And I was coming from a smaller community that didn't really have space. So just the building itself, there were so many rooms in the bottom, there was so much land green space around the building, as well. So I got excited and thought, you know, it's gonna be a great place to live. And as things settled in, and learning more about the community culture, and the lack of it, because from so many residents from just meeting them, and talking in the elevator, I would hear stories of how things used to be. And that was just such a common theme in all the conversations and to be very disgruntled and constantly talking about what they don't like. And so I saw a call out for a grant, and it was a youth action grant, back in 2015, when I was a youth. And it was, it interested me because I thought, oh, okay, this is a grant for residents, youth to give back to the community and launch a community project. So in talking to people, I would also see that there is like a few residents who took it upon themselves to like plant things in front of the building. And so I spoke to them, and they said that, you know, they would like to do a community garden if possible. So I went ahead and applied and through getting the funds and talking to the residents, we decided to do a launch a beautification. So we planted flowers around the area. We tried to do the costing, we didn't actually have enough to do the type of gardening that we wanted. And through that work, other partners kind of came on when we started looking out for additional donations to expand the project and met with Park People. And they connected us with a TD Park grant to help us build a garden and we actually built it with TCHC youth and youth that were actually hired on as TCHC as well, their Youth Works team. Shout out to Stacy Golding for that, she's actually one of the Economic Development Animators who made sure that the youth were out there with us and paid for their time. And it was a really fun experience, because I actually got to meet more residents and heard about their stories of how they grew food. And people were just so willing to share information, their time, even their seeds, and come out and grow food and connect.

Sheldomar 9:39

Yeah, that's amazing. And I really love how food was almost like a natural thing to get into as a community-building project or initiative. And on the topic of food, I'm curious, were you a farmer before you decided to take on this community garden project, or what was your relationship with food and food going before that?

Laura 10:05

Yeah, so before that I had some experience like working at a food distribution, a food bank actually was called a food bank at a women's shelter. And in terms of growing food, I didn't know much. I mean, I had some knowledge and like early childhood memories of going to my grandfather's house and being in his garden and eating out all the mint, and tasting the different herbs and just even seeing my mom, take care of the garden, my mom was a big gardener. So not so much edibles, because we didn't actually have a lot of space, a lot of outdoor space. So she would plant like flowers and beautify, and so forth. But at my grandfather's house, she

would be planting more like peppers, tomatoes, and it was really, that got me interested, I got to take part in that. But then along the way, really lost that and found it again, once I had my children through the community garden. And one thing I do want to add, like a lot of the youth in the community that we were working with, were pretty ostracized, like and stereotypes for being violent youth. And the garden actually was a space of healing, because they were working alongside seniors who would just pass them by, or have negative comments to say about them. But when they're ready to push the wheel barrel and alleviate any physical stress, the seniors were happy to have them around. There was conversations being had and relationships being formed. So it was a really enjoyable project to see it flourish. And yeah, to this day, Miss Sylvia takes care of that garden, anyone who wants to come out and garden with her. She's, she's there.

Sheldomar 11:59

Yeah, that's incredible. Yeah, I think that's so powerful to be engaging young people like that in those ways. And to also have that mentorship piece and like those older folks being involved in that also. So I feel like this kind of leads me right into this next question, which will kind of gives us more context to this conversation, which is, why did you co-found the Birchmount Community Action Council?

Laura 12:22

Um, well, I would say I always use "we" when I talk, because as much as people see me running around and doing things, when I say co-founder, I say, co-founding with the community, this is a communal effort. As much as I'm seen as a leader, nothing is done with just my hands. And yeah, I actually don't like taking credit for anything, because I can't, realistically, it's always a group effort, whether it's our partners or residents supporting, that's, that's what makes things happen, that connection. And so even on that note, like, we have that opportunity to just stay as a grassroots group and work with FoodShare Toronto so that we can continue on our work. And the reason we want to stay at this level is because it helps us avoid a lot of the red tape that and taking away from the autonomy that we have to, like adjust the needs in our community. And it really stemmed from a need for safety. There is a high need for mental well being programming, I would say within social housing, period. Poverty is definitely a mindset, I can say that with confidence. But at the same time, that mindset also allows for physical barriers to exist. And in saying that there's a need for us to come together as residents to support each other with just like the social network, but also for us to like, teach each other because there's a lot of turmoil sometimes within TCHC, when there's like mental health issues that are not being addressed. So that was our overall goal for us to be able to connect, and do something about some of the issues that we saw arising in our community, and to just take action.

Sheldomar 12:28

Definitely. I think that's so important. And I'm really glad you brought that point around. You know, these efforts being a collective thing. It's not an individual, but it's, it's a group of people that make these things happen. And it reminds me of a lot of the times I hear this saying that there's never a hero or one person that will solve the problems, but it's, it's a group, it's a collective, it's all of us. I really resonate with that. I'd love to ask you maybe to talk a little bit

around your work at Frontlines and I know you're the Director of Operations. And I'd just love to hear some more about some of the work that you folks do as it pertains to Community Care – yeah, just sharing.

Laura 15:06

So definitely. So Frontlines Connections is a grassroots network of community leaders and grassroots groups that are passionate and devoted to their communities. And we were already partnering in different forms prior to the pandemic, but the pandemic really made it evident that we needed to work more closely together, and unify our approach to food security, to mental health programming, and just be there as supporters to avoid burnout. I laugh now, right, I can laugh now, but I was crying before, you know, having six kids at home, you have virtual programming every room, infringement of privacy to the fullest. And, yeah, and then still work to do. Right. So it was it was intense, and just being able to lean on one another and bounce ideas off each other, like we really showed up for not just our communities, but for one another. And that that was what really kept the ball rolling. So like I alluded to, food security was our priority during the pandemic. We were planning though, to address other needs for economic development, housing insecurity was something that we saw was equally as urgent of a need to adjust. Because we weren't just serving people living in rent geared to income housing, or just people dwelling in apartments. It was homeowners that we were delivering to as well who were really impacted financially by COVID.

Sheldomar 16:51

That's such amazing work, and I know that it reaches to many neighbourhoods across the city of Toronto. So I think it's so crucial that this support is happening now. Because as we can see, the prices of food are just exponentially rising to unimaginable heights. And I, not to put you on the spot here, but I kind of want to centre in on your own experience, because I know that it's sort of the topic that's on everyone's mind right now. And so you know, thinking about supply chain issues that have been caused by COVID and whatnot. I really want to hear and sort of wonder how this has all affected you and your family on a personal level.

Laura 17:35

Yeah, for sure. Thankfully, I had some experience with homeschooling my children for a year. So COVID just brought back a lot of memories of that needing to be done. And I say that because the the education that my children were getting, unfortunately wasn't up to par with virtual school being so new. It was like unsuccessful daycare. Yeah, that's what the engagement felt like for my family. Right? That was one thing that kind of led us to like getting outside, especially when it warmed up in the summertime just taking the kids out, growing food with them in our backyard. That was a huge learning experience for them. And then I was fortunate enough to have some friends who do do urban farming, so we would go out there and help them as well. And so much learning can be done on the farm. It was a great space for them to to have schooling, but in terms of like budgetary constraints and so forth. We really try to mobilize quickly to find alternative things to do from like virtual assisting, trying to roll with the punches, understanding cryptocurrency and investing. Even like I did my best to over program my kids into if I was sent an application, we would blast it out. And I would hit apply and like put them in

as many things as possible so they can gain more skills. And I think one of the best things we did was our bulk buying program where myself and a few neighbors we would be buying eggs in bulk direct from farmers and our meat as well. So that was a huge help. I think I ended up buying another deep freezer to freeze food. Then there was that whole thing about the food shortage. So like okay, we got to be packed up.

Sheldomar 19:39

Yeah!

Laura 19:40

But um, yeah, so we did our best to be very strategic. And I come from a household where I remember at times, you know, cupboards being empty things being very challenging for my mom at one point due to my sister having like major medical issues, but I'd look in the cupboard and I wouldn't see any food. But yet, there'd be food on the table. So it's like, mom, where did you get this? Like, you know, rice can be a lot of things, it can be in porridge, it can be, you know, put into a flour. So also being creative. And my partner, he is a chef by trade. So that was really helpful, food-wise. So yeah, just being really creative, and eating a lot of veggies was extremely helpful. Because when we go to the store, like we would see, we would feel the impact – two bags that used to be \$100 were \$200, like I would honestly say it felt like prices doubled.

Sheldomar 20:44

Yeah, it's beyond me right now, as to the prices of regular things or food that we would have gotten at a decent price. And now it's just, like nearly astronomical, it's wild. And I just want to say thank you for being so open and honest about that experience with your family. So maybe to zoom out a little bit. I imagine, like any food program, the Action Council's food program has seen a higher demand, could you share what you're seeing in the community?

Laura 21:13

Oh, yes. So a bit about that, too. So things really merged. So a lot of our food distribution, we partnered with Frontlines Connections, just to not burn out our volunteers. Because we didn't skip a beat that April, when things were really heightened in 2020, we were out there arranging our donations and putting them out to community and making sure other communities had as well. But when people are just learning about you, the numbers weren't so high, but I can say we pretty much tripled in numbers. So at first, it was just 50 families. And then when word got out, within I would say two weeks because we were doing this weekly. At first, we're doing it twice a week. And then we're like, okay, put the brakes on a little bit, once a week. And then within, I would say three weeks, definitely less than a month, we saw numbers triple. From there, when we started handing out gift cards, it was wild. And then we had to start getting more donations to meet the needs of people because we went from about 300 to close to 500. Within I would say, two to three months. And yeah, we did have to close off registration at one point. And then when we got more drivers involved and secured more donations and partnerships, we were able to outreach to other communities, because we were actually having neighbouring communities coming in. And it was very taxing because we were not funded for quite some

time. And with that, we were relying on volunteers who were spending their own funds for gas. And as well as maintenance for a vehicle like, it'd be surprising how fast tons of food can weigh down your car and shift your alignment. And, yeah, it was definitely a learning experience. But what kept us going is just knowing how many people who were serving and what it meant to them and the thank yous that were pouring in and just the dire need, like, I would really like to highlight our seniors, like there are seniors who due to the mental trauma of COVID, were not leaving their house. And they were relying on our food just to maintain, because they really did not feel comfortable, especially those who were immunocompromised, leaving, and just the mental trauma in itself of COVID I think did a huge number on some of the tensions that we even saw at the food distribution, and us having to like advocate for community to you know, stay civil and understand that, you know, let's not have that scarcity mentality, this food will be back again next week. There's no need to you know for lack of a better example, punch each other in the face over food. Yeah, but it's that mindset of I'm not going to have I'm at the back of the line, it's going to run out. And so we learned to put the food out in phases, because we also like to have a dignified approach. We're not choosing everything for participants when they're coming in, we want our committee members to be able to feed themselves based on their own diets as well. So you know, we would take their dietary information and then still have food out like meats and breads, so they could have their own options of what they wanted to have. But yeah, that was you know, a learning progress on how to like make the logistics run more smoothly.

Sheldomar 25:03

Definitely, you know, Laura, I really resonate with a lot of your what you're sharing there. Because I'm, you know, I'm here talking on a podcast right now. But I also have a position at FoodShare, where I also was coordinating a food delivery program for folks across the city. And I, the part where you're saying around seniors and the supports that they need is so I just feel not seen and not valued and understood. Because part of the program I was running, and what it looked like was providing food boxes every two weeks to people. And then I would give them a call at the end of the week to just do a really quick check in to see how they're doing and whatnot. And these conversations were averagely supposed to be maybe five to 10 minutes, but very quickly, I was having upwards to like half an hour, hour conversations with these people, because they just didn't have anyone else to chat with. So I really, really respect the work that you folks are doing there. Because it's it's so important. And like the food part is one thing that is so crucial, but also the social connected piece, right? And COVID has made us so isolated, that it's hard to, to feel like you're you belong to something or you're a part of something else. So yeah, that's so important. Thank you for sharing that. So I'm thinking like, it's difficult, right? We have these services, for example, the program that you folks are running the Food Rx program that I was running, we know that they have such a great impact on individuals. But yeah, we need to see systems change. And I would love to hear from your thoughts like what, what do you think would make things better for folks? Is it a matter of land access and being able to grow food? Is it a government support? And more like, more help in that? Is it a combination? Like what, what do you think it is?

Laura 27:03

Yeah, I definitely think it's a combination approach. You know, back in 2018, I was so fortunate to have the opportunity to partner with Country Heritage Park out in Milton, shout out to Jamie Rom, who was a CEO at the time. And you know, here I was wobbling over down there on my due date.

Sheldomar 27:24

Oh, wow (laughs). You're out here, Laura.

Laura 27:28

Yeah, and, you know, he took the time to listen to what our needs were, you know, we asked for access to land, and he provided it. And there's so much that we learned from being able to grow out there. Not just the resources that are needed to grow food, but the resources people need to be able to learn and grow food, there's so much that needs to happen before people are even ready to learn. And I think those basic needs can be, you know, compiled in a way that support food security to happen. And I'll give a more tangible example. But throughout the pandemic, we were also doing work with the Golden Mile revitalization. And it really brought focus to me that, you know, the housing crisis is definitely tied to poverty reduction, and economic development to say it in a more positive way. But in order for that to happen, you need training and you need opportunity. And it fueled me to want to learn more about what the requirements are in order to gain access to these assets. So I became licensed as a mortgage agent so that I could be on the other side and be able to provide like tangible supports, when people are in TCHC, not just TCHC just rent geared to income period, sometimes there's a mindset of okay, I need to really hold onto this. And then what we see happening as the youth get older, there's a lack of equity that many parents have in order to support their children to support other opportunities, like moving out. And, you know, just being in different circles and seeing how those who can afford to help their children are really giving their children like huge headstart, and then circling back to communities that don't have that equity built up to pass something down some generational wealth down to their children, due to a lack of ownership. Children are now left on their own to fend for themselves. And then when you put in the whole psychosis of education in there. You know, if you are not educated, there are limited opportunities at times whether that's an institutional education or you going out doing your research. So all that being said to say that it definitely is a systematic approach that needs to be taken to afford the opportunity for people to have access to land. This is something that I'm making part of my work and working with lenders to understand what these requirements are to gain access to land, I'm trying the backdoor route of being able to lock out a blueprint, and then have community come onto that, because I've seen some projects happen. But without equity transferring to those who are most vulnerable, who are participating in a project, then it's that, you know, that nasty word that we hear every now and then it's poverty pimping. And there's so many people making money off the backs of those who are remaining participants and who are not rising up to a point where they're able to support themselves in a sustainable way. So what I would like to see like, ideal dream would be, you know, access to land and support with, you know, business writing, in order for those to make a proper forecast of how they'll be able to sustain the land through agro processing, and growing food, and then have land ownership built into it. And I feel like it can be

done in a way where, like, multiple parties can profit, both the lender as well as those needing support to finance the project.

Sheldomar 31:30

Absolutely. Those are such important recommendations there. And, yeah, it just reminds me that there's so much we can do as a community. But there's also a lot that we need still, in order to achieve the things that we need. However, I can't lie when I say, honestly, Laura, just speaking to you, and knowing you for the short amount of time that I have, you really seem like someone who embodies the ethos of like, if you want something done right, you got to do it yourself. And of course, with the support of community and others around, it just seems like you're always stepping in when you see gaps. And, you know, I also took the time to look you up on Google and saw photos of you doing community work with the baby in a sling strapped to you. And I honestly, I was struck by how much women do and how always, have always done to take care of all of us, families and communities. And in your case, you're doing it simultaneously. So what's that been like for you? And I think the more important question here is, who else do you think needs to be here in service of their communities?

Laura 32:36

Oh, nice. Nice question. You know, I got to the point in community where if I didn't have a baby on me, people would be like, where's your children? (Laughs) Yeah, I have to say, it's been a huge blessing, because then my children have been able to witness and take part in community events, and even meetings, like, you know, even though sometimes they're not speaking, they're listening. And that's been a huge blessing, because a lot of these things that I'm learning are in my adult years, and I'm doing my best to, you know, help them, like broaden their knowledge and understanding of what it means to take part in anything and how to do it in a way where, you know, it's tasteful, because you're not just looking out for yourself, you're looking out for others, and just that collaborative mindset. Who else I think needs to be here? I really would appreciate seeing, you know, decision makers come to the table, and property owners, land owners, there are so many ways to work together in a way where it's mutually beneficial. And just understanding that, you know, someone's lack of knowledge is not an opportunity for wealth. It's an opportunity to share knowledge and make our community stronger. And I feel like, the more that happens, the less othering there will be. And then there's an increased feeling of safety. You know, we don't need to have have-nots in order for people to have, like I strongly, strongly believe that. And yeah, I think the more people see that they have an opportunity to share something, the better off we are when we really address these issues of like food security, housing insecurity, ageism, and lots of isms. I know, we only have a little amount of time, but there's a lot of isms out there.

Sheldomar 34:50

A lot of em. Yeah, I agree. I think that's that's solid. And I think the table is big enough to have all these people there. They just gotta it's gotta come, you can't bring them if they don't come. So yeah, I hear that. I'd love to hear Laura, what else is coming up in terms of programming or initiatives for you and in your community?

Laura 35:10

So we're really ramping it up right now with the mental wellbeing programming, really wanting to talk to people about mindset, first and outlook. And for us to realize how amazing we are as people to be able to create and do things, so we're working with Elevate Resiliency. And within that network collective is our Be Connected programming, where we're really taking an intergenerational approach to going out in nature and connecting with self through nature, and understanding the abundance that's out there. Other than that, we are also doing more work, like I mentioned, with, with housing and advocating for affordable housing ownership through the Golden Mile revitalization project. And on my I have another project that I'm really looking to ramp in with my urban farming friends to acquire some land and that callout, once it's ready, I'll definitely send it out to you, Sheldomar. I feel like it's something that can really be achieved that mutual ownership to land, and I'm talking about, you know, subdividing land in a way where we can ensure that we pass it on, and we still have generational wealth growing. So we're working on that and Frontlines Connections is not stopping a beat, doing food programming both virtually and in person. We know for a fact that, you know, just because we want to put out culturally appropriate food doesn't mean that everyone knows how to prepare them. So we really want to do that food literacy work. And showcasing the opportunities we have to cook some really good food at home.

Sheldomar 35:23

Wow, you're you're busy, you're already busy. You're very busy now Laura, but no those things sound amazing, amazing. Definitely keep up with it all and yeah, I'll stay connected, of course, to hear what comes next. But I think you touched on something really important as you were sharing all that. And it kind of goes back to a piece you were saying before around, when you first moved into the neighbourhood you're living in now, there was a strange, I don't want to say tension. I don't know if that's the word, but there was some sort of feeling that you noticed between like elders and young people. And then now I'm hearing you say that there's programming and initiatives that are being centred around intergenerational learning, and connection to land and nature. So I'm curious, what is the importance of intergenerational learning to you? And how do you see that play out? For the impacts of young people and youth?

Laura 37:53

Oh, wow. Um, so as I mentioned earlier, I love learning from people, and you can sit with an elder and get like, hundreds of years of knowledge.

Sheldomar 38:03

For real.

Laura 38:06

You know, and you hear it from their mouth. So you can ask, like, specific questions. How is this? How was that? Why did that happen? What do you think about this, and they're able to go back with you. So it's like, time traveling, you know, and just even hearing their perceptions. Like, to me, that's something that I find very intriguing, you know, what people's perceptions. And I feel like when young people get to identify with an elder, and when that elder is in a safe

space, because that is also very important. You know, I think I've experienced projects where, you know, there were times when elders weren't ready to share their own trauma. And although it was, you know, sad, and actually hurtful, at certain times, it was still a learning experience, that that's where they were, at that time for a reason that would honestly being kind of dubbed up to being like poverty, you know, that the mindset that you know, in this specific instance, it was that youth are taking from me, and not that feeling of that they owed knowledge to youth. Right. So I feel like there's, there's, you know, things can be twofold sometimes right, where there's some disappointment that youth can face. But within that disappointment, you're still learning, you're still learning how maybe you're going to change that narrative, and break generational curses or, you know, just have a different outlook and understand what certain mindsets can lead to. Right. So it's just so rich either which way whether the experience that is being shared is negative or positive, it's still learning and talking with our elders just puts us at a huge advantage.

Sheldomar 40:04

Absolutely. There's so much to learn there. So, so much.

Laura 40:09

And then sorry to interject on the flip side, talking to young people. They are just invigorated. Right? Like they have so much life with those fresh eyes and fresh outlooks on things. And there's many seniors as well who have a fresh outlook on things, right. But from our young people having a clean slate with very little bias at times, it's amazing to hear your ideas, and it's very inspiring as well.

Sheldomar 40:41

Yeah, no doubt about that, as a young person myself, I can attest to this. Also to be real, like it's something that I'm very mindful of, and in many spaces I am a part of, and it's still that constant – I won't call it a struggle, but understanding of how do we make this intergenerational learning reciprocal? And how can youth be open to learning from older folks and elders and vice versa, because oftentimes, there's a discrepancy in that. But I think what you shared is so important. And I'm sure that a lot of that has been championed in the work that you folks are doing to your community. So I commend you for that. And, you know, I, speaking to all this and to slowly start wrapping this up, perhaps what is your vision? And what are you hoping for?

Laura 41:33

Yeah, I'm really hoping for more meaningful collaboration. I've always had this mindset, this is what's really comforted me at times, even when things are challenging to know, you know, you're a person away from an opportunity to do something impactful, a person away from solving an issue, you know, so I think the more we stay connected, the better off we are with sharing resources and knowledge. And, you know, that being said, I'm definitely looking at hiring a social media person. My connections are like all physical, on the phone or in person. But I got to branch out to that world because I'm told time and time again, you know, like, there's so many people you have access to on a world scale. So I'm definitely looking forward to that. But definitely got to hire someone.

Sheldomar 42:27

Yeah (laughs), definitely, yeah. Socials will get you exposure in that way. And that's good to hear that's what you're hopeful for. I gotta ask, though, what makes you hopeful? And what motivates you to keep that up?

Laura 42:40

You know, I don't know if it's just something that's ingrained in me. But I really don't stop (laughs). It can be kind of relentless. But you know, for me, I feel like things are attainable. We just got to find a way to do it. And, you know, I'm no stranger to failure. Like, it's happened many, many times. And I say failure in the sense where the desired outcome wasn't achieved, but there was still learning. So yeah, just keeping it moving. I feel like I don't like to wallow in misery. If I need to cry, the best place to cry is in the mirror, and keep it moving.

Sheldomar 43:23

I love that. I love those tips. And yeah, I feel like something always seems impossible until it's done. And you're like, wow, it's not. It's very possible. No, that was great. And honestly, I wish we had more time, Laura. So thank you so much for coming on this podcast.

Laura 43:41

Oh, very welcome. And thank you so much for having me. It's always great talking to you, Sheldomar. We had so much fun that one day that you guys all came out. It was a blast. So that was cool. Anytime, anytime.

Sheldomar 43:54

Yeah I just got to say I still do have that – I forgot the word for it. But that beeswax stuff?

Laura 44:01

Oh the propolis?

Sheldomar 44:01

The propolis. It is sitting in a bottle of rum, and it looks like medicine like this stuff is ready to go.

Laura 44:11

Nice. Yeah. And can I tell you I really swear by it. It is definitely a cure all you know, during COVID when you know you're afraid of going to the doctor's. I also put mine in olive oil. That's another tip. So I know I told you the rum, if you put it in olive oil, also very good. And it's just so healthy, so healthy. Don't be afraid to taste it. Okay, believe in your crown.

Sheldomar 44:36

Oh I take a sip every once in a while that stuff is keeping me good. That's how I'm smiling right now. Thank you for that Laura. Thank you for everything. Well, that's it for this episode. You can find the Birchmount Community Action Council at actioncouncil.net and connect with Laura's beekeeping work on Instagram at [@letsbeeconnected](https://www.instagram.com/letsbeeconnected), and that's "bee" with two es. Dignity and Joy is a podcast from FoodShare Toronto, we're a food justice organization advocating for the

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