

Stories of Collective Care in the Time of COVID-19: Part One Video Transcription

- Welcome and thank you for joining us today for Stories of Collective Care in the Time of COVID. My name is Nadine Villasin Feldman. My pronouns are she and her. I'm the director of programming at Myseum of Toronto. For those of you who are new to Myseum, we are a Myseum without walls that aims to tell the narratives of Toronto both past and present through exhibits and programs across the Greater Toronto Area as well as online through programs such as this. This program is part of an ongoing series of online programs that looks at how various communities across the city are experiencing and responding to the COVID epidemic or pandemic. And we're very pleased to have with us today our panelists from Greenest City, Parkdale Project Read, KGO Literacy, as well as the Milky Way Garden. And we'll be sharing with you today artwork and stories by Jillian Tamaki and Victoria Miller. So I just like to start by handing things over to our moderators for today, the Kwentong Bayan Collective who have been the artist, the artists collective and residents with Myseum over the past year and have been our collaborators on this program today. So I'd like to welcome on Jo SiMalaya Alcampo and Althea Balmes to start things off, thank you.

- Hi, thank you, Nadine. Thank you, Nadine. My name is Jo SiMalaya Alcampo. The pronouns I use are they, them, and .

- Hi, my name is Althea Balmes and I go by she and her.

- We'd like to acknowledge that this place we're meeting as presently known as Toronto is part of the Dish With One Spoon territory. The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee to share this territory and be in relationship with all of creation, including the elementals, land, water, other living beings, and each other. Those who have come to this land, including immigrants, newcomers, settlers are part of this treaty agreement. As we begin this event, we ground ourselves in this understanding, and thank you for joining us. While land acknowledgments are important, there's many ways to embody good relations, and one is to support indigenous-led businesses and organizations and just wanna take a moment to give a shout out to our friends at NishDish, a First Nations owned and operated business offering traditional Anishinaabe food. They've really been hard hit by this pandemic, and unfortunately, we'll be closing their Christie Ambler location where they've operated the restaurant catering business for the past three years. NishDish is calling on the community for support, and if you can, please support them. You'll see a link there for their fundraising campaign. And the goal is to continue their vision of indigenous food sovereignty in the city as they go through this time of transition.

- Thank you, Jo, so to begin this whole panel series, we wanted to kind of create the context of what the Connect series is about, and it's titled Stories of Collective Care in the Time of COVID,

because what we wanted to bring into these conversation, these online conversations is folks from, who are working as a social workers, food justice advocates and adult literacy community, and really learn about the collective strategies of mutual support and grassroots organizing that's currently happening all throughout the city. But also we want to experience some of the cultural practices that folks who are, on the ground, are creating in this time of global pandemic. So this panel specifically, we will discuss about community care in Toronto and beyond.

- So this discussion focuses on Toronto's Parkdale neighborhood and how people are providing collective care to their different communities. It's also looking beyond this COVID-19 pandemic. What can we learn from these strategies? And are they here to stay? Parkdale is a very vibrant community, and that's going through many drastic changes, including gentrification. The thriving small businesses, particularly in the Tibetan community, are at risk of losing their space due to this gentrification and also many residents are experiencing precarity in housing. This program, this neighborhood is also closely linked in community programs. For full disclosure, Althea and I are community workers in the Parkdale area, so this topic is close to our hearts. We wanna acknowledge some of the folks that have really led this advocacy and grassroots movement during this pandemic like the Parkdale people's economy, who started the Parkdale Mutual Aid Network in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Parkdale Community Legal Services who continue to advocate for tenants who can't afford to pay rent, and are at risk of eviction and homelessness. So let's move into the panel discussion. Let's meet our guests who have connections to Parkdale and beyond.

- Yeah, so we have three panelists today, and I'm just going to introduce them one by one and then I will ask them to tell a little bit about themselves and the work that they do in the community and a little bit about the organization that they work for. So first stop, we will invite and Angela Elzinga Cheng into the conversation, Angela?

- Hi, thank you for having me today. My name is Angela Elzinga Cheng. My gender pronouns are she, her. I work and live in the Parkdale community. And I work at an organization called Greenest City and collectively and collaborate with my team there at Greenest City of about, I think, five or six of us right now. The Greenest City, just to give you a little bit of context about what Greenest City is, we started off as a very traditional environmental organization, and when we shifted to being rooted in Parkdale, we really centered our work around food and connecting to the land and nature. So our key values and principles as an organization, which are like diversity, leadership, collaboration, personal growth, respect, and writing relations with the Earth and indigenous people. We really work all of that through our food, our food growing, and we have, we work with about 190 amazing food growers and we do all sorts of different programs in the community and collaborate with the community and all of those.

- It's amazing, thank you, Angela. So next we have Tish Carnat.

- Hi.

- Hi.

- I'm Tish Carnat. I teach for the Toronto District School Board, adult ESL. I've been teaching for 32 years, and now I teach in Parkdale for the past 16 years. I don't have the privilege of living in Parkdale, but I feel very committed to working there. So I think my background at popular education and I consider myself a networker. And I think in this conversation, it will evolve how I bring that into my teaching. I use the pronouns she, her.

- [Jo] Thank you, Tish.

- Thank you, Tish, and then finally, we have Felicia Davis-Wesseling joining us. Felicia?

- [Jo] Welcome, Felicia.

- Jo, hi Althea, thank you, and thank you for everyone for joining the conversation today. My name is Felicia Davis-Wesseling and I'm a resident of Scarborough, have been living in Scarborough for the past, I would say, 35 years, but I'm connected to Parkdale because I'm a board member, I proctor at Project Read, so I see a lot of connections between Parkdale and the KGO community. And KGO stands for Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park. Seven years ago I started an organization called the KGO Adult Literacy Program, and that was based on the reality that residents in that particular neighborhood struggle with low literacy. So at the time, it was over 50% and with very limited resources for adults in terms of supporting their skills in that regard. The program started through the resident action grant from United Way. And from there, we have remained grassroots and volunteer-ran ever since. And a lot of the work that we do is very place-based, So we generally support residents in KGO, but it is open to all residents throughout Scarborough.

- That's great, thank you, Felicia. And I'm just gonna take a moment now to introduce the storytellers who will be featuring some of their creative collaboration here. This is the book, "Anything I Want To Do, I Can Do" by Victoria Miller Johnson, illustrated by Jillian Tamaki. Victoria is an adult literacy learner and Jillian is a volunteer tutor who had been working together for the past three years at Parkdale Project Read. When Victoria writes a new story, Jillian will do a doodle at the bottom of the page to accompany it. And most of the illustration in this book are based on those doodles. The book was in its initial phase when they had to stop meeting due to the pandemic. And Jillian has been making illustrations while in quarantine, and Victoria has chosen which stories to include in the upcoming publication. They've given permission to share an excerpt now, which I'm going to read. It's a story called, "You Cannot Trust Everyone "When You Cannot Read." "It is important for women to improve their education "and learn to read and write. "It is good to do these things "so that no one can take advantage of you. "I know a lady who cannot read or write, "and she relied on her sister to read for her. "Her boyfriend went to England "and began corresponding with her, "and her sister was writing

back for her. "He asked her to marry him. "The shocking part of it is the sister who could read "went instead of her and married the guy. "How could a sister break her sister heart like that? "If she could read, her sister could not steal her man." And we just shared an excerpt there from Jillian and Victoria's collaboration. We'll be sharing another excerpt at the end of the panel, and we're just displaying one of the images there. And in this drawing, there's two sisters one is listening to a letter being read, and the other one is reading it. Thank you, Jillian and Victoria. At this time, we're gonna ask our guests to join in this conversation starting with Felicia. Felicia, could you please tell us a bit more about the KGO community and how it came to be and what you mentioned earlier, the similarities between Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park area and the Parkdale community.

- Sure, thank you, Jo. So KGO came to be, to start, KGO is, as you mentioned earlier, it's a very vibrant community. There are a lot of resident-led initiatives that take place in KGO. And so one of them is the the adult literacy program that I started seven years ago and as mentioned earlier, it was based on a need in the community. It was based on the reality that adults in the neighborhood struggled with low literacy, but was also, personally for me, a call-to-action really, because if adults are not able to do the basic skills, primarily reading, reading, and doing math, then they can't really participate in the communities around them. They can't navigate daily realities such as going to the groceries, doing banking, voting, being involved in civic activities. And so that's how the program got started, really. And so we've been around for seven years. One of the key things for us is we look at adult literacy as a social justice issue, because if adults don't have those those skills, then they can't, as mentioned, participate in their communities and engage in all sorts of ways where they're able to succeed and thrive, really. And so how we do our program is a lot of that work is sort of melded into that mission that we have. So a lot of the organizations and the partners and collaborations that we do are really melded into our mission. And so we, over the last seven years, our program is small, but we've managed to support 60 or so residents over the course of the seven years we have been around. And what makes us quite different is that we're not funded by the province of Ontario. And so that allows us to do our work quite differently in terms of not having to meet targets and numbers and sort of look at adult literacy in a very holistic way that takes account of how people learn what challenges they go through while they are learning and how to support them moving forward. That's not too say that adult literacy programs that are funded by the province don't do that, they do, but our approach is different as them. And so with the connection to Parkdale, being a board member there, I'm able to bring in that experience to Parkdale Project Read, which is funded by the province. And so having those two dichotomies and those two realities, I'm able to sort of create a bridge that allows to think about adult literacy from a grassroots level, but also then apply that when a organization is provincially funded. So that's how we operate and we keep ourselves pretty much operating through in kind donations and our fundraising efforts. But we also are quite effective or we've kind of built good relations with our elected officials over the last number of years. So that also hasn't helped us to sort of advocate. I think that's the key, to advocate for why adult education especially during a time of COVID where you have adults who sometimes don't have access to digital technology to get access to resources.

Therefore, why adult literacy is so important. It doesn't just encompass the basics, it encompasses a whole host of other things.

- Right, we appreciate you bringing that holistic approach to the discussion. We will come back and talk a bit more about advocacy and some community grassroots-based strategies. It's remarkable, first of all, that KGO, throughout all these years, has been volunteer-run. So continued strength in that movement. We wanted to remind folks that we're gonna have a Q&A at the end of the panel where you can ask any of our panelists questions directly, and that'll be in the last 15 minutes.

- Yeah, thank you. Tish, you're also an educator with TDSB, teaching ESL students at the Parkdale Library. Can you tell us more about the students that you work with and also how that connects with the work that you do with a Milky Way Garden?

- Of course, so what happened was when I got to Parkdale, I'm teaching in the basement of a public library. A lot of the adult ESL classes are community-based, which is a wonderful thing. But the library basement, it's beautiful plain, but a big, empty, sterile space and I had a whiteboard. Now this is ESL literacy, which for the most part means the learners lack first language literacy, so they have no literacy skills in their first language, which worked back home 'cause they had a rural lifestyle, they didn't actually need literacy skills. And they come to Toronto, they're crowded in downtown Parkdale and high rise buildings, also a new experience for them. They had a form to fill out in what I call the olden days, and it said profession, which is also a lofty idea for lifelong refugees, but people would write farmer. And so then I was trying to teach settlement issues, shopping, you know, you don't have too much money if you're on social assistance. You pay rent, you have very limited money for food, that's it, there's not much more shopping to do. So I really tried to make my lesson meaningful and relevant, and I just felt like I wasn't fulfilling that. And I kept seeing this empty space behind the library, just a big, empty, unused space. And I just kept thinking, we should garden because these students were farmers, they have skills. And in the classroom, some of them are holding a pencil, for the first time, they felt inadequate. And I just felt my role as their teacher was actually to show them how valuable they are. Even though they lack formal education, they have lifelong experience, which they could share with us. So, through support from the community, everything in Parkdale is collaboration, partnerships, and helping one another. And I was able to contact the owners of the land and they were willing to lend it to us. But Greenest City came to the rescue because my job is to sit in the basement of the library and do my very best to teach. But Greenest City got us all the tools we needed, the resources, a gardening teacher, and we took off from there. The other thing I just wanna say is that image of a letter was so important, because one student said to me, "Teacher, I'm never gonna be doctor, lawyer. "Of course, I know that. "I just wanna read my own mail." And I just thought that is a fundamental need to read your own mail, which that story proved, so then you don't have to rely on others. You can rely on your own abilities.

- That's great.

- Yeah, that's great. And I know that, Tish, you have some photos of the Milky Way Garden and I think it would be nice to show how beautiful this garden is, and it's been existing for like--

- Just with boxes, clean boxes, and the growth, the overgrowth in the back was our ever challenge to cut that down, but you'll see we managed, we actually managed later on. So we got boxes built, that was like utterly amazing, and could grow more, the land is polluted. It used to be automotive land, and we can't grow directly into the land. So the students come alive when we go to the garden. That was what I noticed. In class, they're nervous, they're anxious. They don't feel adequate, which they are, of course, but it's hard to keep reassuring people. But when we go to the garden, they just come alive. Everyone finds a job to do and they have a wonderful time. The Tibetan learners bring a lot to Parkdale. They pray every morning, they bring calmness, they just bring a beautiful spirit to Parkdale. They keep everyone on even keel, I think just with their their abilities of calmness and reflection. Here we are sharing the vegetables which we did every week. This is a communal garden. It's different than separate plots, and the students feel very proud. They can bring home vegetables to their family once a week, and they feel like they're contributing. And we bought the land with Parkdale Neighborhood Land Trust, started. The idea is to own our own land for urban agriculture, housing, buying the rooming houses so that we're not kicked out. It was great to see that Akelius was slammed, the multinational landlord was slammed by the United Nations yesterday. The students live in their buildings and they're being pushed out. And here we are at a dinner at a community dinner, which was provided by Greenest City and brought 100 people to sit down and enjoy a meal, have entertainment together and build community. My students just love building community, integrating as much as they can. They would love to interact with other people. This provides an opportunity to do that.

- Wow, thank you, Tish, I love looking at those photos because it just shows the embodied way of learning and how you're you were able to do that as an educator and we're it's really expanded the way that we think about literacy as well and that, it could also be with their body, and really thinking about it through the lens. So, thank you for that, it's really, I wanna go to the Milky Way Garden soon, hopefully, but thank you.

- There'll be links in the discussion chat there for the Parkdale Neighborhood Land Trust to learn more, and also the Milky Way Garden. And we just wanna let people know we'll be doing Q&A at the end. And there's already some comments from staff saying this is inspirational to connect land and literacy. And also Susanna saying, "Tish, you're a real role model for everyone, "and it's such an oasis to see the garden there." So thank you, I'm gonna shift over to Angela. Angela, Tish talked a little bit about the relationship between Milky Way Garden and Greenest City. We'd love to learn more about the community-building initiatives of Greenest City and what we're gonna talk later on about some of the strategies after the COVID pandemic, the things that are put in place, but can you tell us about what was Greenest City focused on and what is its connection to the Parkdale community?

- Thank you, Jo, so I just wanted to say when I moved into this neighborhood in 2006, it kind of gives context to how Greenest City started here. I supported just with my family, I have three kids. And so there's a lot of pictures of my oldest child and myself digging in the newly made community garden. So the HOPE Community Garden which stands for Healthy Organic Parkdale Edibles, it was the first growing space in our neighborhood, and I actually voted against that name, but I love it now, it's a great name. but we voted on everything and so the whole process was very democratic in starting up the community garden. And in order to be part of that community garden, you are not allowed to own land. So it's a way that Greenest City focuses on with an equity lens. That's one of the ways that we focus on having an equity lens, so people who are equity seeking in our neighborhood. For people who aren't familiar with Parkdale, it's been mentioned many times that our neighborhood has immigrants and refugees where our neighborhood is a landing place for immigrant refugees, which both means that there's great inequities in our neighborhood as well as phenomenal assets in our community. So those things happen at exactly the same time. And I think what happens at Greenest City is that as a very small, nimble, but mighty organization, we collaborate together with community members to be able to do all of the different programs. So one of the programs I mentioned, and that Tish mentioned, was our food growing and Tish mentioned the Milky Way, I just mentioned the HOPE Garden. But we also have a Dunn Garden, which is a learning garden that we have. And each of these different spaces are all run very differently. But really the foundation of it is that we have a respectful relationship with the land and we have a collaborative relationship with the people that we're growing food together with. And then we also, are now, we have cooking, and so we do cooking with youth and children. And we're gonna be moving into cooking with adults, that's starting, and we have something called the Good Food Market that happens in the summer and really what that is, it has low cost food at it. But really, it's like a community-wide event that happens weekly over the summer months, and there's a beautiful picture in the Milky Way of our community dinners. We wanna bring people together around food and as we know, across cultures, food is such a great way to bring people together. Again, it's that same thing. It is a way to demonstrate inequity, so great injustice happens with food, but also a really wonderful way to bring people together around food. And those dinners are an epitome for all of us of being able to bring us together in our neighborhood in a collaborative, collective way, where we're crossing many, many boundaries of race and class in our community. So those are some of the key things. Most recently, however, one of the things that is really key to where Greenest City is going. As a land-based organization, it became increasingly apparent how important it was that we are connecting, writing relations both with the Earth and with indigenous people. And so in the last year, we've been able to work together with different groups and individuals in the indigenous community to be offering indigenous programming in our Dunn Garden and our Milky Way Garden. And we are able to continue to do that doing that. But we'll talk about that when we talk a little bit more about our COVID.

- Thank you so much, Angela, appreciate that. We will now shift into how groups are coping with a global pandemic, some of the grassroots strategies around collective care and what that means for each of your communities. I want to ask Tish and Felicia a little bit more about this digital divide. So the digital divide is this kind of terminology. I first came across it when I saw an Alpha Plus infographic, you'll see the the link there in the chat, about how learners are impacted by limited access to technology. So I know that just recently the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, MTML, recently gathered information from 26 adult literacy organizations in Toronto, and six in the York Region, outlining the impact of this pandemic on learners and programming. And they submitted a joint letter to the Ministry of Labor, Training, and Skills Development. And one of the biggest concerns was learners' ability to access technology, and this pandemic is creating this digital divide between those with access and without, or with limited access. So Tish, I want to start off with you and ask how are learners impacted by this limited access to technology in your classroom?

- Sure, well, I think Felicia will speak academically, I'm just gonna be very emotional because my employer, suddenly, they gave us two one-hour Zoom tutorials, and said, "Teach your class on Zoom." And it's just very disrespectful to the learners to who they actually are. My learners, as I said, are literally learners, they're not technologically proficient on many household appliances, and they certainly do not have computer skills, why not? Because the board never offered them. They've never taught them at home. They have no data, no devices. And as I said, they've never learned computer skills. Also, we have to look at the reality of people's homes. I'm privileged, I'm in a three-bedroom house, and we're two people. My students might be six people in a one bedroom house. So even if they had a device, which they don't, to find a corner of the room to have a lesson, my students are learning the alphabet, how is a keyboard going to be viable? So my employer talks about real world tasks, but how about real world skills? And the other question is, whose world and whose reality? Because there's very different realities if you're middle class and if you're living in poverty in a crowded area, how can you social distance in your own home? Some people in the home may be going out to work. So I talked to them on the phone, which was my idea, before I was instructed to, I just wanna keep in touch with my students. And for me, my goal is to be sure that they're functioning well enough as well as can be expected in this time. I mean, I'm getting anxious in a pandemic, and I have all kinds of skills and resources. So I can only imagine the stress and pressure on others who don't have all the resources I have. So what I do, I just call them, and actually they tell me what they got in their Good Food Box, Greenest City and FoodShare's, initiative of Good Food Boxes. So that's one of our lessons, they recite what they got and I ask them for recipes, what they're doing and we just try to keep touch informally by phone, even though I'm supposed to be sending in attendance because, as again, I'm privileged, I'm still on the payroll. And I'm doing my best to teach from home, but not with technology, it's just a great divide. My students have grandchildren, some of the younger ones, many are seniors, some of the other adults have kids. One student has four children, no devices, how are they supposed to keep learning? And some adults in other classes say they can only get on the internet at 10 o'clock at night, because their children needs the internet during the day. So even the telephone, we can't really monopolize it

for very long because the whole family may be depending on that one phone. So trying to do my work. I want to, my desire is there but it's very, very challenging at this time.

- Thank you for that reality check, Tish, we appreciate it. I'd like to invite Felicia to comment as well.

- Sure, so yeah, so thank you, Tish, for that, too. And I can also relate as well, because right now, KGO is not operating because one, we operate within a church, so that church is on pause for now until notifications get sent that we can come back. And so in terms of the digital divide, it was very real before COVID actually happened, and it's become more apparent now as I do weekly check-ins with learners to see how they are doing but our program, learners are into type of camps, where, one, is they don't have access to digital technology at all, or they have access and have a device but don't know how to operate it confidently. And so that's, that poses a challenge in terms of, one, having them find our resources that are in their neighborhood and getting access to those resources. But also, I think what is key too, especially in adult literacy world, like if learners don't have access to whether that be a computer, an iPad, or any digital device, then their learning is on pause as well. And so whatever their objectives or goals were prior to COVID are on pause indefinitely or until things get back to normal. And so for us, that's always been a challenge for KGO is because we are a grassroots organization. We don't have the funding that other literacy and basic skills programs have. So we and we also have that contact with an employment training consultant to get those resources in order to ensure that learners are still continuing their learning if they choose to because right now, it's a very anxious times or a stressful times, so sometimes learning is often, it can be at the backburner. And so for me, I, as mentioned, I just do weekly check-ins with everybody. When COVID first started, it was asking them, what is your digital access? Like, are you able, do you want to continue to do something while this is happening? And then it became more of like, just more, just chatting. And so our weekly check-ins are just chatting, seeing how things are going. If they need any sort of supports, for instance, one of the learners in the program, she's a mother of five. She has two children who have learning disabilities. And so TDSB was giving devices for families to use. And so what we did, because she doesn't have access to a computer, I used my computer to fill in her information and ensure she gets a device for her child. So that's kind of how the ways on the ground level that we're providing collective care. It's what I always wish it could be at more capacity, but we just do what we can based on the resources that we have. But the digital divide, as mentioned, is very real and has become very, very blatant in the adult literacy world. And it's quite a shame that it has taken a pandemic to actually see that, to actually realize that there are so many adult learners in literacy programs across the province who do not have access to digital technology of any means, especially in the 21st century where things are, now even post-COVID, things will definitely go online more. And so there needs to be that recognition that, that there needs to be more of things in place for people to actually get access to things so they can get the resources that they need to be successful, and to do, go about their daily lives. So those are just some of the challenges KGO is experiencing, but

yeah, that's sort of at the forefront of my mind now is how can we push this forward to ensure that the individuals that we work with are supported on all fronts.

- Yes, thank you so much, Felicia. We're at about a 10 minute point before we get to the Q&A, but I want to know, do you want to comment at all about the rural advocacy plays in addressing these inequities?

- Sure, are you referring to me?

- Yes, yeah.

- Oh, okay. Thank you, Jo, sorry. Well, advocacy plays such a, it's so important. It was, I think, for KGO, we've always advocated just because of just how we've started. So KGO has been like this call to see this picture that there are adults in this city, this province, this country are struggling with low literacy, and that has so much social and economic impacts, that I'm often surprised that there are a number of people that still don't get it, even policymakers, because we see things in such a numbers-based framework that we forget the humanity of it all, really. And so for us, we have advocated with our elected officials time and time again. And that also comes in the form of doing a number of community events that we've done over the last seven years. And so when we do these events, it's a way to invite the community to come see what we're up to, but also to invite our decision makers to actually see what is going on, one, in their own backyard, but also to how they can actually be advocates for this type, for this as well. And so in the past, so we've done a number of different events where we've done storytelling, where we've done photography. Two years ago, we celebrated our fifth anniversary. so we did a community consultation, where we invited the entire community to sort of dream about what KGO can look like, but also like what can adult literacy look like as a whole. And so when we're talking about advocacy post-COVID, what I don't want to see is like new iterations of the status quo. Like, it's just the same, it's new language, but we're just, but it's still the status quo, whether that means is well, we're gonna change this, but you still get the same amount of funding, things like that, but there's no sort of acknowledgement that this actually happened. And so I would be very disappointed that things go, quote unquote, back to normal. I know there's talk about that normal didn't look good, and that's very, very true. And so we have to really do like a 180 in terms of our approach, how we engage, how we build alliances, solidarity, and just how we just work for a better world, really. It sounds so idealistic, but that's just who I am. Like, we just have to just think about the work that we do so differently, and that is around, and that's why advocacy can't stop at all especially now.

- Thank you so much, Felicia, thank you very much. So Althea has--

- I'm mute.

- Mute.

- Let's see. Thank you, Felicia and Tish for sharing us about the the literacy aspects of how this pandemic has really exacerbated, as you mentioned, all of the inequities that people are already experiencing. But for Angela who works in more on the food advocacy part of organizing, we wonder how has Greenest City changed the way that that you have to work because of the pandemic and in what ways are you providing collective care to your community despite all of these like obstacles?

- So when COVID hit, one of the biggest things. I mean, we're a small not-for-profit. And I think that's something Felicia, Tish, like, we are small groups of grassroots organizing. And one of the, being small and locally based means that you can pivot nimbly and figure out what is it that then you can do and you can shift. And so as both of them said that these issues existed before so, and then after, now, they're amplified. And so the key things that we saw that were amplified, of course, is being able to pay rent, being able to have good food and mental health were big things for our community that were named gonna be amplified during COVID. And our focus for us as an organization is able to shift into more food, things. So the key collective care that we are able to do is, one, FoodShare is partnering with us to do something called emergency Good Food Boxes. They are beautiful boxes, either small or large of fresh produce. We're doing 200 a week, and right now, we have enough funding to do that for another seven weeks. We also have received some funding for grocery carts to help people in other ways as well to be able to buy other foods other than fresh produce. Now that we've gotten permission from the provincial government and from the municipal government, we're gonna be rapidly increasing our food growing. So our community growers are now gonna be able to access our growing space. We already were starting to grow food, so that's happening. Number three, indigenous programming went online. So both online gatherings as well as ceremony, being able to do ceremonies or pieces of ceremony that can't be online, but ceremony is continuing to happen. And then our indigenous program coordinator is also able to give out medicines with the Good Food Box. And we're able to partner with other indigenous programs in our neighborhood to get the Good Food Boxes out. Then we're also working with Sand in Water which is known as Making Room, and Sand in Water, we're partnering with them, but Sand in Water is leading that, and they're running five events a week that are really focused on community gathering online, and to answer one of these equity pieces, because everyone can see each other, but only people have access to computers. So they decided, they have one a week that was just on phones in order to support a little bit more of this equity piece. So phones, they found people getting very descriptive so that we can address the piece of the equity. And then we're finally able to also work with other organizations to offer space, to partner, who are supporting the Food Network, so what else is out there being able to make sure neighborhood-wide was thinking about all of the food pieces that are available. If I were to think of longer term, what needs to change, I think what this amplifies, highlights, is this need for our guaranteed basic income, that's huge. Our rent caps are really big, there's need for support for small businesses, small locally based organizations, not only we most affected, all of us, most affected by COVID, but also most able to respond locally, and in a very resilient ways.

So I think, I mean, we've lost half our funding as a small organization and of course, we know if not more of our funding we'll lose. And that's just the same thing across the board. Our small businesses are leaving, our small, and many of these small organizations and small businesses are led by racialized people. So it's further increasing this divide of inequity. And so those are the key things I would say and looking at food security nationwide. So a food nationwide plan to support our farmers and to support our community members and how we all access healthy food, I think is key after this.

- Thank you so much, Angela. We're just about to head into our Q&A. But before we do that, Althea's gonna be sharing another story by Jillian, another excerpt from the book, "Anything I Wanna Do, I Can Do" by Victoria Miller Johnson, illustrated by Jillian Tamaki. The story is called "About Food".

- Yes, so it's called "About Food". "I remember when my mother cooked food. "I like fish and rice. "I like to pudding cornmeal with coconuts. "I like to eat carrot muffin "and I like June plum and soursop. "My mom used to make me tie-a-leaf pudding "and I love it so much. "When you make the tie-a-leaf pudding, "you put coconut milk and sugar and cornmeal "and flour and cinnamon and vanilla and nutmeg "and salt in a bowl and mix it, then put in the banana leaf "and tie it with a string." "Put a big pot of water on the stove "and when the pot is boiling, "you put the tie-a-leaf pudding in. "I like to eat it warm."

- Thank you, Jillian and Victoria.

- [Althea] Thank you, Jillian and Victoria.

- I like to see that book, it's wonderful. Thank you so much and now we're all hungry.

- Yes.

- Okay. So we're gonna move into, we'd like to invite all our panelists back online. We're gonna move into our question and answer section. And it looks like we've had some a lot of questions here.

- Yeah, we do have a lot of questions.

- Yeah, we're asking, people are asking, when is the Milky Way Garden reopening? And yeah, maybe we'll ask Angela 'cause I know Angela was just saying that you just did like, you were covered in straw the other day preparing.

- I have managed to transport 15 bales of straw in my car.

- Awesome.

- I'm lucky enough to have a car and it's full of straw. And we've left the last piece of straw in our window just as a reminder after cleaning it up. So the Milky Way Garden, we have to meet government guidelines, the two gardens, the Dunn Garden and the HOPE Garden are both on city-owned land. So those two, and we're following all of the protocols and all of the gardens. Very particularly, those two other gardens have hand washing stations that the city brought. We'll create our own hand washing station in the Milky Way. Staff is already growing food using what the gardener's had been growing in the past because that needed to get started already in April, so that's already started. Things are being watered weekly and we're working with volunteers. We cannot officially open the Milky Way Garden to everyone coming until the government gives us a green light for that. However, we are growing food already now.

- Great, somebody asked, what types of plants are in the Milky Way Gardens? Is there a specific focus on certain types? They've asked, have you tried incorporating plants to use in diverse cuisines? I feel like this is a question for for Tish. It's also a classroom for you're students, right, Tish?

- Yes, we grow whatever the students want, and we've tried to grow different vegetables. Of course, our garden is organic. We just try to grow whatever they like. It's just what you would find in most gardens in North America, but yes, they try to grow different things. Just the regular garden vegetables, a lot of different greens, and the students, certain things they don't like, then we don't really bother growing it because at the end of the day, we just share whatever there is, so typical vegetables.

- And can Milky Way students access the garden yet? Somebody wants to know.

- We haven't gotten there yet because everyone has to sign the city protocol and it's gonna be quite difficult to explain it all to them, but we'll work it out. We'll go in maybe half the class at a time, small numbers, but we're waiting for all these protocols from the city to come through.

- Great, thank you. This is a question for all three of you. Paula Yu's asked, "What do you see "as three essential supports "that should be institutionalized "to ensure ongoing collective care "when developing community gathering places?" Maybe we can start with Felicia?

- The three essential things that should be institutionalized? I think one thing for sure is that, I think overall, is I think Angela has mentioned it, is it just around sort of this more community spaces for people to do all kinds of community development. And that encompasses issues around access to food and food security, but also spaces where people can learn as well. And I'm just speaking from the adult literacy perspective because I also feel that and also trying, thinking about what what Tish and the Milky Way Garden, like these are all, these are the things that all of us do, all go hand-in-hand. And so when we're talking about access to food, good food, healthy food, but also the literacy, and the educational aspect of it, I think those are very

essential, so that's one key thing. A second thing is and I'm putting on my sort of like, policy hat is that, adult literacy or just adult learning in general has to be at the forefront of how we navigate and go about our work, because it's always just puzzled me that it's always at the back burner. But yet, if I'm not able to read and write, and do math, and so forth, and also, and I'm not able to, one, support my children if I have children. I'm not able to access different services and supports. I'm not able to apply for a job, I'm not able to vote, I'm really not able to participate in a democratic society, really. And so, that's on my wish list is to actually have some sort of like concrete policy that looks at like adult literacy as essential because I think, overall, that is about really collective care. And also I think the the third thing for me is just is very basic or, I think we just have to take a look at our work in a more, like we have to, I think around equity, this is very broad, and so I don't know how, but I think we have to have things in place that ensure that communities are treated in an equitable level 'cause right now they're not. When we look at KGO, we looked at Parkdale. These are communities that are on opposite ends of the city, but have a lot of similarities in terms of disparities around resources, poverty. And so there needs to be things in place to ensure that these communities thrive. So those are three, the three essential things that I can think about when it comes to collective care and moving forward in that sense.

- Thank you, and then, oh go ahead, Jo.

- [Jo] Go ahead.

- Oh, I was just gonna ask Angela if she wanted to contribute to that coming from like a food sovereignty.

- Could you repeat the question, Althea?

- Yes, what are some of the, what are three essential supports that should be institutionalized so that we can ensure that there's community care or collective care that's developed as part of the strategy of community?

- I think, one, we should be asking our questions around indigenous sovereignty. So access to land to grow food and to do sacred ceremony. That's how do we institutionalize. that's an interesting question to ask in the context of our indigenous community members who have, should need to have sovereignty. So how, what does that look like and how do we make that be part of how we interact together as nations. Then second of all, institutionalizing, I think I spoke about basic income, like what became really clear is that our income security is very, very low and from an equity lens, we have to, in order to be able to like education, like libraries like health care, how do we institutionalize access to these things, access to other things like food, and rent, and all of the, and we're talking about the digital divide as well. How do we make these things part of our equity lens and our universal care together, our universal collective care. Third, I don't wanna use the word institutional, but I wanna use the word something that's been

highlighted by Tish and by Felicia that by bringing together these pieces around literacy in the garden, food, and coming to get like, gathering together. I think that what we've seen is the importance of not siloing these issues but the importance of building resilience by multiple pieces, art and food, the environment and indigenous land sovereignty. I mean, there's so many ways and that we are so much more resilient as a community when we are cross-pollinating each other and building on each other's strengths together and collaborating on the inequities, collaborating against those, and collaborating for and together with these issues, bring them together multiple ways.

- Thank you, Angela. Tish, if you have other suggestions and something that's tied to kind of like this larger question of, if you have any suggestions for the TDSB on how to eliminate the technological divide. Please go ahead.

- Curious about using technology than they really have to offer it properly across the board. And the LINC program which is federally funded, they do teach computer aspect, but the provincially funded ESL classes don't. So if they really want my students and all adult ESL learners to have these skills, because summer school apparently is going online, they really have to provide devices, and also the skills so that we can teach computer skills to our learners, if that's where the future is going.

- Thank you, we have so many questions, and unfortunately, we're not gonna be able to go through them, but there are some folks who are asking how the public can support initiatives for perhaps KGO or Greenest City or even for the Milky Way Garden, if there's a way that they can provide support, please let us know.

- It could be amplifying your campaigns on social media, having a discussion around, as they're physically distancing with their neighbor or community member and also could be links that we'll provide in our chat window for donations.

- I'll go first. For KGO, you can follow us on social media for sure, both Facebook and Instagram. Definitely check out our website to see what we're up to and what we do just to learn more, if you even would like to, once COVID is over, and we can kind of see each other again, you can always to volunteer with us, you can also support our fundraising initiatives once that gets up and running. So we usually do like a bowl-a-thon, kind of paint night. And so, yeah, so you can support us that way. You can also just share amongst, like be an advocate. Really just sort of talk about adult literacy is important and all the facets that it touches, because we love to have like allies amongst us who can share the work, not just with KGO or about KGO but about Project Read and all the other amazing literacy organizations that are in the city and really across the province and the country.

- So Greenest City, we can, if you go to our website, you can, there's two key things. In terms of resource sharing, we greatly appreciate, of course, donations towards the Emergency Relief

Program, towards our urban agriculture, our general work, and you can find that very easily on our website. For resource sharing and skills, we also were asking people right now if you have any gardening skills, there's a lot of people who want to grow food, and so an opportunity to offer advice to our neighbors. We don't have the capacity. Yeah, there's a lot of people that wanna be growing food right now. We're asking people to sew masks, we wanna be able to give out mask to every single one of our gardeners, Good Food Box members that they can reuse. And we have a lovely wish list, Wouldn't it be Amazing If, and so one of our Wouldn't it be Amazing If, we could get our Milky Way construction ready, as what we haven't talked about is our plans to build the urban ag hub out in the Milky Way, which includes the food growing, and other amazing pieces so check out our website, our Facebook, our social media pieces of it but there's so many ways that we, people, can be contributing skills and if you have money to contribute as well.

- And Tish?

- Greenest City website is an excellent resource, Parkdale Neighborhood Land Trust is also a really amazing website because there's so much information on community on land. So those are the websites, also YouTube videos of Parkdale Neighborhood Land Trust, a whole series of amazing videos, including an excellent one on Milky Way Garden.

- Great, thank you all so much to all our panelists, our artists, participants, people have joined us online. And we just wanna acknowledge the Myseum curatorial team for their guidance and support. And we just really appreciate all your participation in supporting this panel. One question we didn't get to was, how do we practice our own individual collective care? So we'll leave it with that. We won't answer it here in this panel, but as we move forward, we hope that that's something that we hold in our hearts, minds, and spirits, because it's so important to take care of that so that we could also support our communities moving forward. Thank you, everybody. We're now gonna hear back from Nadine.

- Thank you, Jo and Althea. Just on behalf of Myseum, we wanted to extend a very warm thanks, again, to our panelists for the work that you do in in the community as well as for sharing your strategies, for supporting people who are struggling in this time of the COVID pandemic. We would like to thank Jo and Althea for being such wonderful collaborators on this program. And thank you to all of you who have stayed with us throughout the length of this program. We invite you to please follow us through our social media channels, and to join us for the second part of this program next week where we'll hear about the experiences of precarious workers and strategies around supporting precarious workers at this time. So thank you again for sharing in this discussion with us and we hope that you are all finding ways of keeping physically and mentally healthy and safe. Thank you so much.