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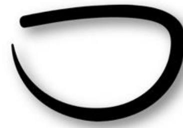
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Interview

"Dismantling the structures and sites that create unequal access to food": Paul Taylor and Elaine Power in conversation about food justice

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Abstract

Paul Taylor, Executive Director of FoodShare Toronto from 2017 until early 2023, has become a key voice for food justice in Canada. As a Black man who grew up in material poverty in Toronto, Paul brought his experience, knowledge, and skills to Canada's largest and most influential community food organization, FoodShare Toronto. Under his guidance, FoodShare focussed on collaborating with and taking its cues from those who were historically excluded as leaders in the food movement, including Black and Brown people, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, queer people, and poor people. FoodShare also turned a critical eye toward its own practices, seeking to model food justice within the organization.

In the summer of 2019, Elaine Power, a Professor in the School of Kinesiology & Health Studies at Queen's University, interviewed Paul for a research project on community food programs. In the interview, Paul explains that growing up poor, Black, and hungry in Toronto was the best education for his position at FoodShare. He shares his philosophy of leadership, his understanding of food justice, and the ways that non-profit organizations can contribute more meaningfully to food justice. Paul understands food insecurity as a lack of income, which disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and people of colour. Therefore, non-profits concerned about food justice must pay living wages and close the gap between the highest and lowest paid

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employees. To be more effective in the pursuit of justice, Paul advises non-profit organizations to listen to their clients—and take their advice.

Keywords: Food justice; food insecurity; BIPOC; community food programs; food movement; Canada

Résumé

Paul Taylor, directeur exécutif de FoodShare Toronto de 2017 jusqu'au tout début 2023, est devenu une voix majeure de la justice alimentaire au Canada. En tant qu'homme noir ayant grandi dans la pauvreté matérielle à Toronto, Paul a apporté son expérience, son savoir et ses compétences à l'organisme communautaire alimentaire le plus grand et le plus influent du Canada, FoodShare Toronto. Sous sa direction, FoodShare a misé sur la collaboration avec celles et ceux qui ont été historiquement exclus du leadership des mouvements alimentaires et sur l'écoute de ces personnes. Cela inclut les personnes noires et brunes, autochtones, ayant des handicaps, queer et pauvres. FoodShare a aussi adopté un regard critique sur ses propres pratiques, visant à être un modèle de justice alimentaire à l'intérieur même de l'organisme.

À l'été 2019, Elaine Power, professeure à l'École de kinésiologie et d'études sur la santé de Queen's University, a interviewé Paul dans le cadre d'une recherche sur les programmes d'alimentation communautaires. Dans cet entretien, Paul explique que son expérience comme jeune pauvre noir et affamé à Toronto fut la meilleure éducation qu'il pouvait recevoir pour jouer son rôle chez FoodShare. Il partage sa philosophie du leadership et sa compréhension de la justice alimentaire, et aborde les manières dont les organismes sans but lucratif peuvent contribuer davantage à la justice alimentaire. Derrière l'insécurité alimentaire, Paul reconnaît un manque de revenu, qui affecte de manière disproportionnelle les personnes noires, autochtones et de couleur. C'est pourquoi les organismes sans but lucratif concernés par la justice alimentaire doivent offrir une rémunération décente et combler l'écart entre les salaires les plus élevés et les plus faibles chez leur personnel. Pour augmenter l'efficacité de la progression vers la justice, Paul suggère aux organismes sans but lucratif d'écouter leur clientèle – et d'accueillir leurs conseils.

Introduction

Paul Taylor is a dynamic, relentless, life-long activist for social justice and equity who has become a key voice in the conversation about food justice in Canada. First at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House and then at the Gordon Neighbourhood House in Vancouver, Paul established himself as an outspoken advocate for the right to food. Under his leadership, Gordon Neighbourhood House was identified as one of the first Good Food Organizations in Canada by Community Food Centres of Canada.

As the Executive Director of FoodShare Toronto from 2017 to early 2023, Paul re-oriented the organization's operations toward food justice (FoodShare, n.d.a), using an equity lens to center those most affected by food insecurity who have been historically excluded from leadership in the food movement. Knowing that FoodShare must model the transformations it wants to see in the wider world (Taylor, 2022a), Paul spearheaded significant changes to FoodShare's hiring and employment practices, including becoming a living wage employer, implementing a three to one salary ratio between the highest and lowest paid workers, and publicly releasing its pay grid (FoodShare, 2022a). In 2022, FoodShare's new policy to pay job applicants seventy-five dollars for each interview, in recognition of associated costs for interviewees (Taylor, 2022b), received national news attention (Davidson, 2022).

Acknowledging the Indigenous traditional territories in which FoodShare operates, the organization created an Indigenous Advisory Circle to provide guidance on its work, and it collaborates with Indigenous groups to work toward Indigenous food sovereignty. Seeking to dismantle intersecting systems of oppression, FoodShare developed an action plan to combat anti-Black racism (FoodShare, 2022b), a statement on body liberation and fat acceptance (FoodShare, n.d.b) that includes guidelines for working with partners and funders (FoodShare, 2021a), a policy for police engagement (FoodShare, n.d.c), justice-oriented fundraising guidelines (FoodShare, n.d.d), and statements on defunding the police (Taylor & Sinclair, n.d.), expressing solidarity with the Asian community (FoodShare, n.d.e), stopping the genocide of Indigenous peoples (Sinclair & Taylor, 2021), and more. At every opportunity, FoodShare has sought to support and spotlight the creative leadership of those historically excluded, for example by creating a Good Food Box with produce from local BIPOC farmers and featuring Black chefs and women chefs of colour at annual fundraising galas. In 2019, Paul worked with the University of Toronto's PROOF Centre for Research on Food Insecurity to examine racialized inequities in food insecurity. This ground-breaking research, which showed much higher rates of food insecurity among households headed by Black and Indigenous people, pointed to anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism as key drivers of food insecurity in Canada (FoodShare, 2021b).

Under Paul's leadership, FoodShare has garnered several awards, including the Toronto Foundation's Vital Ideas & Leadership Award (2018), the Aviva Community Fund prize (2017), an employee-recommended workplace award by the Globe & Mail (2017), a Maclean's Magazine award for being among the top 100 charities in Canada (2018), and more. Paul now teaches leadership and fundraising skills at Simon Fraser University's Non-profit Management Certificate and Leadership Essentials Certificate programs.

Paul is a regular media commentator and op-ed contributor who has been recognized as one of Canada's Top 40 Under 40 (2020), one of Toronto Life's 50 Most Influential People (2020) and Now Magazine's Best Activist in 2020 (and runner-up in 2021). In 2021, the Food Network Canada recognized Paul as one of ten Black Canadians making an impact in the food and beverage industry, and he received an honourable mention in the City of Toronto's Access, Equity, and Human Rights Awards. In his "activist manifesto" (Taylor, 2022c), Paul offers four principles for activism, which he elaborates in the interview below:

1) Your activist journey begins with what's important to you.
2) Stay connected and accountable to your communities.
3) Don't start with a goal. Start with curiosity.

4) Remember, nothing is fixed. Anything and everything can change for the better.

The following interview between Paul and Elaine was conducted in July 2019, as part of a SSHRC-funded research project on the ability of community food programs to contribute to advocacy for justice. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript has been lightly edited for clarity. The research project was approved by the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board.

Food justice: Dismantling the structures and sites that create unequal access to food

Elaine Power (EP): Can you tell me what drew you to FoodShare? What are your ideas, dreams, plans, and visions?

Paul Taylor (PT): I spent a lot of time in activist spaces in Vancouver and in the downtown east side, working with folks doing thoughtful, innovative work. Really pushing the envelope, including being critical of food banking, the food bank model, and the role food banks play in society. And for some reason, I decided to apply to be the Executive Director of the largest food security organization in the country, knowing that food security is not about food. It is about income. I think I was born desiring a real challenge *(slight laugh).* I guess from being born Black *(both laugh),* that's where it first starts. But I've always just been drawn to challenges.

So, I showed up at FoodShare asking a lot of questions. I showed up here at an organization that for decades positioned food as a response to poverty and food insecurity, in a way that is potentially not helpful. We know that, over the years, we've seen increases in the number of people accessing food banks and charitable food. We have government officials who take selfies sorting tins. It just makes me absolutely irate. I want to say, "stop sorting the tins and sort the policy. This is not the best use of your time." In a lot of ways, FoodShare and other food-based organizations have neglected meaningful policy to eradicate poverty.

My approach to leadership is one where I don't come into an organization with a vision. I come into an organization with a whole bunch of questions, and I spend a ton of time with the questions and then develop a whole bunch more. In the early days, it was really important for me to separate Paul from FoodShare. Because we were very different. And I was on a journey to see how much would be or could be reconciled through curiosity. I had worked at community-based organizations but not one focused on food-based interventions specifically. So, what I found, as I started asking more questions, was that "wait a minute, we've been doing this stuff for twenty-five years and the only things that we're celebrating are our innovations. We're not celebrating significant milestones around reductions to food insecurity or poverty, which is what we were originally tasked to do."

I spent pretty much my first year just having conversations with everyone who works here. Sitting and having a cup of tea or coffee with about 100 colleagues. And I sat and got to know everyone. It took a while. Some conversations were shorter than others. But I got to connect, ask a few questions, and introduce myself. One comment really stuck with me. Lots of them did, but one especially. It was from a woman of

colour who no longer works here; she said, "oh you know what food security is to me? Do you know what food justice is to me? It's having a good job." She talked about her work at FoodShare and how that helped her access food that she needs because of having more income. And that was the piece that was so key.

If we want to do this [food justice] work, it's not just about being seen doing this work and it's not just the sexy new program that's going to land you in the [Toronto] Star. It's about having people feel that they're respected and cared for. And also challenging ourselves to introduce the type of changes that we want to see in society. So, we said, "we're not going to advance our impact on the backs of low-wage workers." We gave the folks at the bottom of the pay scale a 25% increase and everybody else got a little bit of a pay increase, except the folks at the top who got no increase. And we're also starting to have conversations about having a ratio between the lowest-paid worker and the highest-paid worker.[1] Maybe this doesn't happen in a lot of corporations, but I think at the very least, non-profits could be having those conversations if they're really serious about income inequality.

EP: I'm delighted to hear you say "food is not the answer to poverty." I have a little theory that I'm just going to run past you. My theory is we've been Americanized, because the United States has used food as their response to poverty since the 1930s [in the form of food stamps]. And that in the 1980s, we imported food banks and we imported their model of addressing poverty, in a neoliberal political era.

PT: You're absolutely right. That point that you bring up is pretty much what inspires me to run for [political] office. That very point. We abandoned the European style of income-based interventions and wholeheartedly adopted and integrated American food-based interventions. The scariest part of that was that there was *no* political discourse, there was no opportunity for public debate, there were no media articles about that. So, this decision, that has advantaged corporate interests, was made likely in boardrooms and not in the House of Commons. That's not the way that we need to be making key decisions in this country, decisions that have significant impacts, particularly on people who are the most vulnerable. So that's one of the reasons I've said, "this is ridiculous." I've also spent a lot of time protesting outside of government buildings and offices. Sometimes it's cold and rainy, and I'm outside and they're inside. Sometimes it's very hot and they're inside in the air conditioning and ultimately not listening. Things like social assistance and ODSP, things that I've been fighting to have increased, both in BC and Ontario, are all things that are just the *basic minimums*—I wouldn't even call them minimums. They are just something to prevent people from actually starving—or more so, I would say, to prevent a revolution. To prevent people from kicking the doors down. And I feel like it's time for us to kick the doors down. I'm tired of policy that doesn't reflect the lived experience of people across this country. Especially the four million people who are food insecure.

What we're looking for is not this incremental stuff. We need big, foundational, fundamental change to deal with the crisis before us. For FoodShare, we're really taking a bunch of steps back and saying, "first of all, who's hungry? Who is it that's poor?" When you look around at the food space, it's a lot of middle-class White folks who are university-educated running these organizations and receive funding to lead the solution-finding. So, there's a fundamental disconnect because it

[1] This was implemented in 2021, as discussed above.

means the interventions that they're designing, even in the food space—even though food isn't really the issue—the interventions are based on a middle-class bias, I think. We have an omnipresence of community gardens—there's lots of value to community gardens, but I think what we've done—there's even low-income people who are community-gardening talking about how this helps with their food security because this is the language, this is what we've taught them to say, and I think in a climate like ours, that actually doesn't help in a meaningful way. It does all sorts of other things that are wonderful.

EP: To say to grow a few carrots, and some lettuce or some eggplant or whatever, can meaningfully increase food security….

PT: It's outrageous. It's incumbent on organizations like ours to take big steps back, and we've established a few things that really guide us in our work. First, we have a nine-member Indigenous advisory circle who advise in terms of the work that we're doing, to really guide us. They're very generous in giving us space to be a little bit clumsy and ask questions. We share with them, "these are the resources available to us. This is what our work has looked like. Is there anything from this that could lend itself to supporting the issues in the Indigenous community that you're connected to and build things out of that?"

We also have an advisory committee made up now of sixty folks that we host here a couple of times a year. We pay for dinner, child-care, provide an honorarium. We have a whole range of folks but we prioritize folks of color, folks coming from communities that are most likely to experience food insecurity and poverty. When it comes to our strategic planning process, when it comes to things that we're thinking around the Good Food Box, and when it comes to looking at our food justice statement, we brought those things to those groups to *really* dive into what they thought would be the most helpful. And out of *that* has come some really awesome innovation. Like the Good Food Box: we realized, and when you looked at some of the data, the people who are accessing it were people who had higher income levels than originally was intended and was happening originally. So, we said, "ok, if this is something that we're doing and it's not doing what we're trying to do, well then we've got to make some change." So, we've turned that into a social enterprise that we hope, as we work to close the gap, is generating revenue to support the other work that we do to advance food justice. And then we've also just released a Food Justice Good Food Box. We know that farmers, particularly BIPOC farmers, urban farmers, struggle. So, we have this box where we're buying directly from Black, Indigenous, people of color, or farms that are led or run by people that are BIPOC. And it's been super exciting! It's been really excellent to see us create a market to bridge that gap between these people who are wanting to support something good and folks that would benefit from more of a platform and, importantly, some money.

EP: I loved reading on the website about your event featuring women chefs of color.

PT: It was *amazing* and it was our tenth anniversary event. It didn't come without controversy. It asked us as an organization a really tough question. And it was, "do we all understand food justice? Do we all understand equity? Do we all have an intersectional lens to how we think about these sorts of issues?" And then the immediate question after that is, "are we willing, if we don't?" When we hone in on our approach and language that we're going to use and direction for that approach, it really helps people make decisions of

whether or not they have the skill, knowledge, willingness to contribute to an organization like FoodShare, doing work in the way that we've come to do it. So, I think that was an important opportunity.

EP: Can you tell me what *you* mean when you say food justice?

PT: I think about it as dismantling the structures and sites that create unequal access to food, disproportionately folks that are Black, Indigenous, people of colour. So now, fully embracing a food justice lens, we're talking about and showing up in a bunch of places where we never showed up before. It's not just about notions of food deserts. When I was growing up, we went here because bananas were on sale, and then walked forty-five minutes to get potatoes and peppers because they were on sale there. Actually, it's more likely it was corn flakes and tuna. And peanut butter here and juice crystals there because those were the things that were on special, and we travelled a great distance. So, this notion that if you don't have access to food within a kilometer of where you live, the answer is to put food in that space—it's really about *affordability*. I've seen spaces where there's food located in communities but they're almost like mirages because people can't afford to buy the food that's there.

I think about this in the context of my mother picking me up from school. I went to school at Spadina and College, Lord Landsdowne Public School, right downtown, and would spend some time at Kensington Market. There were big mountains of fruits and vegetables, it was like art. Pretty early on, I realized that I stopped seeing them because we couldn't afford it. So, it was not something that, on the way home—despite the fact that it was there on our journey—that we could have stopped and bought a couple of those beautiful mangos.

EP: That's such an interesting way you phrased it though, it's like you didn't even see them anymore. Because it was just out of reach.

PT: Totally. And I also think that when we say food *desert*—was it Karen Washington in the US?—has been saying that they're not food deserts because that suggests that they're naturally occurring things. This is systemic racism in planning, and she started to call it food apartheid.

EP: But it's also a little different in the US. Again, I feel like we import these ideas really easily without questioning the context, the political context, the geographic context, the historical context.

PT: I agree, I agree.

EP: I was so struck by the differences between the strategic plans on the website, the latest one and the earlier one. One of the differences is that commitment to listen to people and to facilitate difficult conversations. That is so exciting.

PT: It has been so good. We're working on a food justice conference in October. We are inviting academics and corporate folks who are somewhat close to us, to push them a little bit as well. Really, it's going to be around, "how do you embed equity and ideas around food justice in your way of being?" We are excited about that.

EP: Do you have some ideas about how you do that? How you embed equity?

PT: Oh yeah! We've spent a lot of time looking at things like our hiring process and how someone goes from being out there in the world and knowing about FoodShare to being an employee. Well, we know that there was a period of time where at FoodShare we had

mainly middle-class, university-educated white women working in management and in offices here. And then we had folks of colour working in our warehouse, on the trucks, and in low-wage work. I would say FoodShare is probably more diverse than lots and lots of other organizations *but* that diversity, there was a class-lens, a race-lens to that which we needed to acknowledge, understand, and appreciate. So, we've done a lot of work looking at the transition and thinking about how—where does unchecked bias pop up, how do we work to dismantle that, and how do we do that within the system? Because we will often default to those biases. We're still working on it. Every week we're doing something differently and we're taking it back to our advisory committee.

EP: But you can only do that work with an explicit commitment to basically hold each other accountable. It's implicit bias because it's implicit and you don't know it's there!

PT: Exactly, exactly. The food justice language, the new strategic plan—I spent a lot of time being curious and unearthing things and throwing some things in the air and seeing the things—like the right to food language seemed to stick for folks, and people really wanted us to stay focused on the right to food. And then peeling that away—then there's this idea of food justice and how does that lack of food justice impede the right to food, as two key pieces, and just that continued commitment to *push* and demand better of others and ourselves. So that's been really neat.

But I was going to say one thing earlier. There are a couple of conversations that we're showing up in, that as an organization that calls ourselves the largest food security organization, that we weren't necessarily in before. We are recognizing that even though there may be a place for someone to go and purchase food in their neighbourhood, we recognize that the policing of bodies of color has an impact on who *actually* gets to purchase. So not only do we have these systemic pieces that direct folks from equity-seeking groups into low-wage work, but we also have these systems that act to create uncomfortable, unsafe, highly policed experiences when accessing something that's a right.

Also, I'm really excited about something we're doing in October. We're launching a photo exhibit that features part of our food system that organizations rarely talk about. Dishwashers. So, we have a photo exhibit of dishwashers in their dish pits. And, also having a panel discussion to go with the photo exhibit launch. We're inviting the folks from Fifteen and Fairness to participate alongside us and talk about the type of work that we're creating in our food system, particularly unseen work.

EP: I have so many questions. I'm curious about how you came to your analysis of these issues?

PT: Good question.

EP: You said earlier it probably started being born Black.

PT: And poor.

EP: Yeah, Black and poor and not seeing those beautiful fruit displays. Could you say a little more about your education and experiences that have led you to this incredibly clear—so clear and so strong—analysis? Fierce, in a good way.

PT: Wow, thank you. I don't actually know. I think it's just the path—I'm absolutely curious. The most important education I've ever had was the time that I spent being poor and hungry. Those experiences have equipped me more than anything else to do this work. And I mean some of the little nitty gritty that people are

afraid to talk about, that I feel like I'm no longer living in poverty, no longer food insecure. And I know that some people in our society, lots of people in our society, they bestow shame on those folks. So, I feel pretty comfortable talking about those experiences, and it's informed my work in such a big way. For example, one of the things I often talk to people about is when I was a kid and we didn't have food to eat at lunch. I would go for a long walk and hide the fact that I was hungry so that no one could see. And I think it really helps people appreciate the shame that we bestow and how even *children* engage with that, from an early age. When we think about some of our programs, although they're food-based interventions—things like our Good Food markets—they really create an opportunity to engage people in leadership. In their communities. It's not unlike food banks in that food is being brought to communities, but it's *sold* to communities. So that's a little bit different. And the food is certainly different, it's produce. But what's really neat is we're helping cultivate community leaders who are trying to solve something in their community. One of the things I'm really curious about is how do we help those community leaders have a space to engage with conversations around policy, and work alongside us to advocate for policy-based interventions and not food-based interventions? So, we're starting to do things like challenge the premier to live on the rolled-back minimum wage. We challenged him, and said, "if you think that's good enough for Ontarians, you should live on $14 per hour for the remainder of your term."

You asked me how I came to be doing this. And I think it's just people that I've connected with over the years, and following my nose. So, when I ended up in Vancouver, I ended up at an organization called the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House, in the downtown east side, where there is a significant amount of food charity that spans maybe ten blocks, if not more. A lot of which is traditional charity, a lot of lineups for stale bread and salty soup and day-old Starbucks muffins. I thought, "this is just terrible!" The Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House that was saying, "wait a minute, charity is not the answer. We need to be talking about the right to food." And how could programming be based on the right to food? And then what does that mean in terms of our responsibility to advocate, if we're operating from a right to food framework? And I just said, "oh, sign me up." I learned *so* much organizing and working alongside low-income homeless folks and other activists, pushing for better.

EP: In your strategic plan, there's a statement that says "food insecurity is complex." Can you tell me about that?

PT: Mmm. I think that's our nudge to acknowledge that it's not about lack of food. And it's affected by things like the colour of your skin, where you live, what your last name is, all of those things that impede someone's ability to get a job. It's more complex than, I think, the current narrative around, "well, let's just take the food that's going to go into the garbage and let's just bring it to poor people." Why don't we bring it to rich people? And take the food out of rich people's fridges and their bank accounts—increase their taxes alongside that—and bring that to the rest of Canada. It's this idea, again, this middle-class bias where people are deciding what they think is better for low-income people. I rarely ever hear low-income people say, "really, what I would like is someone's leftovers." I don't think I've *ever* heard someone say that *(both laugh)*. "Really what I'm dreaming for today is just a quarter of that sandwich that someone didn't eat...." That's wild. Or, some bruised pears or a carrot with three legs. These are all other people coming up with programs and projects that they think will work for low-income people.

And that's why listening is so important. But even sometimes when you listen—I did some work in BC where we would ask people things like, "so how do you feel about the food that you get at the food bank?" They'd say, "oh, it's so wonderful, and without the food bank, I don't know what I would do." You've probably seen this, you prod a little bit, "no, you can say it's shit. You can say it's always peanut butter and tuna, no fruits and vegetables. You can say what you really think"—and then people just open up.

EP: But the expectation that they should be grateful for the castoffs.

PT: Mhmm, mhmm. It's wild. We had so much tinned cranberry sauce growing up, in cupboards. Talk about food surplus. There was a surplus of cranberry sauce, always. And there was always more peanut butter. We always had two or three jars of peanut butter going before that one would finish.

EP: Are there foods you don't eat anymore because of that? Like canned cranberry sauce, maybe?

PT: Definitely not, yup, don't do any canned cranberry sauce. There's lots of foods but mainly because of the impacts it's had on my health and other people's health. I'm a diabetic and we spent years eating other people's castoffs. We spent years eating the subsidized no-nutrient food-like substance that is being sold as food. It's like corporations are making that food available at food banks. That's the food that's marked down. That's the food that there's a coupon for. So, they are creating this, normalizing the access to this type of food and expectation of this type of food. So, I think a lot of those things, I just refuse to participate in, as best as I can. I'm fortunate enough to be able to afford purchasing the things I want to eat and make my own food choices. Now.

EP: Earlier, you made a reference to the faith-based food programming. Could you say more about the problems you see with that?

PT: So, when I was a kid, I went to a place called the Scott Mission, at Spadina and College. I think my mother sent me there because they had a subsidized daycare on top of the soup kitchen and homeless drop-in downstairs. Which meant, again, another wonderful education. People being people, you can't pay for that kind of education. One of the things that would happen is—my best friend and his mother had come here from Iran. She wore a hijab and I was absolutely befuddled as I saw my [Muslim] friend sitting and praying with me at the Scott Mission and singing Johnny Appleseed before we could have lunch. When I reflect on it, there were subtle ways in which we were being introduced to Christianity and it was a part of the process around accessing the charity. It is essential to any food program that there are no strings attached. I don't want to listen to—this is not one of those situations where I listen to this presentation about your vacation property and then you give me something, I don't want *any* of that. I just want to eat, and I think when any other type of group gets involved in working to address some of these issues, we have to be really critical and ask, "what are their motivations? And what is the impact of the way in which they do that? What does that impact have on people?".

EP: Do you think there's a way to engage faith-based people who are doing food work, from whatever motivates them from their faith—I guess I'm curious if you think there's a way to engage them in broader discussion?

PT: Absolutely. Absolutely. I got involved with an organization that I had so much fun with in Vancouver called the Metro Vancouver Alliance. First time I'd ever done anything like this—the organizing model is based on what I've since learned is the Saul Alinsky model of organizing. And it had four pillars in terms of who we worked with. It started with trade unions. Trade unions, faith-based groups, community organizations, and then eventually academia. So, thinking about the places where people go to seek meaning in life. And training and supporting folks within those institutions to be leaders in their institutions and in their movement together. And what we did is we trained folks to animate listening campaigns in their institutions. So, they went off and we did months and months and months of training—whether it was a large group, small one-on-one conversation, but how do you listen in a way that helps draw out key issues and helps you identify what are the issues that people want to work on and creates a mechanism to be able to get to know each other within these institutions. And then brought those leaders together for a discernment meeting in advance of a municipal election. And people shared, from all of the institutions. There was a lot of organizing that went into this. The Metro Vancouver Alliance represented about 600,000 people. So, then we had a discernment meeting where we listed what people were hearing and gave opportunities for people to say: based on what you were hearing, now I've got this big list, which ones do you want to prioritize? We selected four through that process, very democratic process. They were social isolation, poverty, transportation, and housing.

We formed research action teams out of each of the four issues, including people working together that had never worked together before. And what they did, these research action teams, is they looked at—they didn't recreate the wheel—but they looked at work that other people were doing or models that may have been working or often policy-based interventions. Really what they were looking for was a policy opportunity *at* the municipal level to advance these issues. Each group came up with those, brought it back to the whole group. There was a lot of sharing around how they got to that place. Then we had an election accountability assembly where we invited leaders of all the municipal parties—because in Vancouver there are local parties—and then did a lot of work to encourage people to come. We had about a thousand people in a room which is *powerful*.

EP: Wow.

PT: Yeah, this was one of the debates that the politicians couldn't avoid. So, we had a thousand people in the room representing so many people across the region and instead of political parties saying, "this is my platform," as is often the case, "which one of our platforms do you like?". This was a community-based platform where we said, "we want to see you, the poverty group, we want to see if you're elected, will you make the city of Vancouver a living wage employer?" And the debate really was, that's our question, this is why we think it's important, you have two minutes, yes or no. And every single one of them said yes. Gregor Robertson was elected as mayor. We followed up with him after that, the poverty group, and said, "congratulations, we really appreciated you coming to the election accountability assembly. We look forward to working with you to make the city of Vancouver a living wage employer." The city of Vancouver is now a living wage employer.

EP: That's pretty amazing.

PT: It's pretty cool. They were also a real leader in helping us encourage other municipalities to become

living wage employers. But that's one of the things we could be doing. There's so much we could be doing.

EP: Thank you so much, Paul. I so appreciate your energy and passion for justice.

Conclusion

"There's so much we could be doing." Paul's passion for listening to, learning from, and working with community members, and his apparently limitless imagination for how to change the everyday manifestations of oppression, is inspiring. His transformative work at FoodShare has pushed back against the pervasive Whiteness and class privilege of the alternative food movement (Alkon & Guthman, 2017; Chennault, 2022; Elliott et al., 2022; Kepkiewicz et al, 2015). The changes in FoodShare's hiring and employment practices, such as paying a living wage, implementing a salary ratio between the highest and lowest paid employees, and providing compensation for interviewees, point to the multiple, intersecting, and systemic ways in which structures of oppression operate—and how they can be changed.

Paul's intrepid campaign for food justice is an example of civil rights activist John Lewis' "good trouble"—shaking up the status quo for justice and equity—and a reminder of Arundhati Roy's declaration that "another world is not only possible, she's on her way." As he states, "it can be hard to have hope" that we can transform the structures and sites that create unequal access to food (FoodShare, 2022a). But Paul reminds us that by keeping connected and listening to communities, maintaining an open, curious heart and mind, and being willing to engage—relentlessly—in good trouble, "anything and everything can change for the better."

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Paul Taylor is an anti-poverty activist and was the Executive Director of FoodShare Toronto for six years. He ran for the NDP in the federal riding of Parkdale-High Park in 2019 and 2021. In 2020, Paul was named one of Toronto Life's 50 Most Influential Torontonians (Toronto Life, 2020), was awarded the Top 40 under 40 in Canada (Block, 2020), and was voted Best Activist by the readers of Now Magazine (Bloomberg, 2020). He is the co-founder and principal consultant of Evenings & Weekends Consulting (n.d.).

Elaine Power is a Professor in the School of Kinesiology & Health Studies at Queen's University and has been researching food insecurity for almost thirty years. She is the co-editor of *Messy eating: Conversations on animals as food* (King et al., 2019), *Feminist food studies* (Parker et al., 2019) and *Neoliberal governance and health: Duties, risks and vulnerabilities* (Polzer & Power, 2016), and co-author of *Acquired tastes: Why families eat the way they do* (Beagan et al., 2014). Her most recent book, co-authored with Jamie Swift, is *The case for basic income: Freedom, security, justice* (Swift & Power, 2021).

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