## Identification

| Community: | FoodShare Toronto Case Study (multi-neighbourhood) |
| Major Theme of Case Study: | Health & Nutrition |
| Community Co-Lead (include all contact information): | Sarosh Anwar  
FoodShare |
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Overview of FoodShare Toronto Case Study (1pp)

a) Summary of Focus of Case Study: The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project collaborated with FoodShare Toronto to study the dynamics of grassroots community organizing and learning processes, as applied to the process of engaging low-income Torontonians in food security activity and activism. APCOL researchers and the FoodShare project leader used Participatory Action Research methods, meeting weekly with a group of seven (7) Toronto Community Food Animators – referred to as the Food Activist Group -- to identify the barriers they encountered in engaging community members in food activism. This engagement resulted in the collaborative creation of a series of popular education tools, including adult education workshops on various aspects of community organizing, mobilization and leadership. These workshops build upon FoodShare’s existing efforts to provide low-cost, effective tools for community organizing which can be utilized by other Community Food Animators in various high needs communities in Toronto and the GTA. Parallel to the popular education tools development, APCOL researchers conducted in-depth interviews with participants which delved into their personal experiences with coming to anti-poverty activism and the factors which sustained that engagement.

b) Relation to APCOL Project Themes: The collaboration between APCOL and FoodShare Toronto focused on the following APCOL Project Themes:
   • Understanding the process of activist learning and development through both formal and informal learning processes; and
   • Understanding the factors in activists’ lives, previous experiences, socio-economic circumstances, personal and social relationships (or social networks) that sustain or block activist engagement.

c) Linkage to Community Need: The adult education workshops developed were entirely based on the needs identified by Food Activist Group members within their respective communities and based on reflection and dialogue about their own activist practice. These needs were identified as:
   • Identification and / or development of strong community leaders or leadership teams through knowledge- and skills-building, resources and support;
   • Fostering formal and informal partnerships and networks based on teambuilding, trust, creativity and mentorship;
   • Building and maintaining passion and morale for activism in difficult times;
   • Connecting FoodShare activists and projects to the wider social movement community.

d) Summary of Major Achievements / Outputs: On the popular education side, the Food Activist group developed and delivered five (5) workshops on aspects of community organizing. These workshops have begun to be delivered in the broader community, which will continue through 2011. Food Activists also made a range of contributions to popular education and food security conferences and government consultations based on the APCOL project, and developed other
resources for ongoing use and adaptation by FoodShare activists. In terms of research, five (5) semi-structured interviews were conducted with Food Activists, ranging from 1.5 – 2 hours in length, exploring each individual’s experience with supports for and barriers to their own activism. The transcribed interviews constitute the beginnings of a rich, qualitative database necessary to build evidence of the personal, social, and political economic factors that shape the experiences of grassroots community organizers. In terms of knowledge mobilization outputs, the case study has produced several newsletter articles (for both FoodShare and APCOL) and a report for the City of Toronto’s Food Strategy Consultation. In preparation are (at present) three academic articles and one conference presentation based on the research, although additional academic outputs are expected.
2) **Description of University-Community Research Partnership** (1p)

In this case study, APCOL researchers and FoodShare Toronto worked closely with community leaders who have been part of FoodShare’s Community Food Animators Project in an in-depth and collaborative reflection, training development and training delivery process. Throughout, APCOL researchers (namely Rachelle Campigotto and Christine McKenzie) provided technical and organizational support, particularly on questions of popular education pedagogy. In **Phase 1: Reflection**, Sarosh Anwar (FoodShare Toronto) facilitated group discussions with seven (7) community leaders – called the Food Activist group – on the following questions:

- What leads people to become active in transforming their communities around food issues?
- What keeps people engaged in the work of community transformation as the work becomes difficult?
- What interventions and approaches can help community leaders and supportive organizations to be more effective in bringing about larger change?

These weekly, interactive, activity-based discussions served several purposes:

- They elicited dynamic responses from participants to the questions above;
- They served as occasions to model and experiment with popular education tools, practices, and facilitation methods; and
- They created a safe space for learning and relationship building between participants to foster capacities to work together outside the APCOL project.

This 2-3 month reflection phase led into a 6-month **Phase 2: Training Development and Delivery**, in which Food Activists developed five (5) workshops for use in developing and engaging community-based food activists. FoodShare’s role here was to:

- **Elicit training priorities from community leaders:** The dialogue, process and training developed were geared towards promoting food security, enhancing the capacity of community gardens, community kitchens and Good Food Markets, and supporting community engagement and organizing in general.
- **Provide resources** to develop training on these community-identified priorities, including:
  - Gathering a group of community leaders who would enrich each other’s work and continue to be resources and mentors for each other in the future;
  - Facilitating access to past workshop curricula used by Community Food Animators;
  - Providing opportunities to attend, contribute to and learn from public events put on by other groups;
  - Modeling facilitation techniques and group activities;
  - Providing feedback and support on training design and delivery;
  - Creating space and opportunity to practice delivering workshops and to build confidence; and
  - Providing support with organizing in their own communities.
3) **Financial summary**

{Not Included in Condensed Final Report}
4) **Summary of Work Plan & Case Study Outputs (3pp)**
   a) **Final copy of case study work plan document:** See Appendix C.

   b) **Training and Skills development:** In addition to the weekly meetings described in Section 2 above, which were in both phases oriented to skills development, the following session was also delivered:
      - **Popular Education Tools Workshop:** In December 2009, Christine McKenzie from OISE / APCOL presented a workshop on popular education tools that the Food Activists participated in and drew on for designing their own workshops.

   c) **Events**
      **Workshops Presented Internally:** The Food Activist Group developed and delivered the following workshops internally, in March 2010:
      - Community Engagement
      - Community Peacebuilding I
      - Community Peacebuilding II
      - Participatory Organizing I
      - Participatory Organizing II

      **Workshops Presented for a Community Audience:**
      - Participatory Organizing I was presented for staff of community agencies in the Weston-Mount Dennis neighbourhood
      - Participatory Organizing II was presented for a community garden group in Scarborough at the Gordonridge Community Centre
      - The remaining three workshops will be presented for communities in Toronto Community Housing that we will be supporting for the startup of community garden projects in 2011.
      - Workshop Presented at Stonegate Community Health Centre—One of the participants conducted a workshop with children, adapting some of the community engagement activities that the group developed in their other workshops.

      **Conference Attendance:**
      - *Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium, November 2009, Toronto:* Community leaders attended this event as a way to learn how other groups are creating a call to action and engaging their audiences.
      - *Bring Food Home: Connecting Ontario Farm and Food Systems Conference, March 4-6, 2010, Waterloo, Ontario:* Presented a conference session titled “Community Animation—Skills to Bring Food Action to Life”
      - *Encuentro: A Popular Education Encounter, April 27, 2010, OISE*
Community Focus Groups:
- Focus Groups on the Toronto Food Strategy: Three of the Food Activists organized a focus group in their respective communities to discuss the City of Toronto’s new Food Strategy and to make recommendations for it (see Written Outputs).
- Community Consultation on improving community gardening at Toronto Community Housing

Video and audio narratives:
- One of the community leaders conducted a number of audio- and video-taped storytelling sessions with Toronto-area food activists.
- Video narratives on food issues were also recorded by youth from Amlakawi Beteseb School.

d) Written outputs

Published
- Rachelle Campigotto. (2010, April 2). Toronto Food Strategy Consultation: Gordonridge Place. Report submitted to the City of Toronto (9p.).

In Progress
- Stephanie Ross and Rachelle Campigotto. Immigration, Personal History, and Activist Engagement. [to be submitted for peer review]
- Stephanie Ross and Christine McKenzie. Theory and Practice in Social Movement Popular Education. [to be submitted for peer review]

e) Summary of changes in community and/or community partner capacity for anti-poverty activism

The major changes in both FoodShare and community members’ capacity issuing from this case study, supported by comments from the participants themselves, are as follows:
The importance of Providing Community Participants with Leadership Roles and Opportunities: FoodShare strives to work with strong community leaders or leadership teams in order to engender fully independent and sustainable projects. If such a team does not exist, they create opportunities for participants to build knowledge, skills and leadership qualities in a community before beginning a project and as they operate. FoodShare aims to identify community members already sparking change, build relationships with them, connect them to community supports and resources, and support their projects related to FoodShare’s mandate. The APCOL project allowed FoodShare to create additional opportunities for existing community leaders to enhance their leadership capacities by reflecting upon, discussing and giving depth to community development concepts and practices. The Food Activist group enhanced their existing skills by applying insights from the reflection process in workshop development and delivery. Three of the participants also took on public speaking engagements on food security issues in government, academic, non-profit and community arenas, thereby strengthening the voice and political effectiveness of these community leaders in general, and of leaders from low-income communities in particular.

"At the time I felt that I didn’t know enough. Step by step going through the process, I built on what I’d just learned, as I developed skills and gained new insights."

"Facilitation is not an easy thing for me, I’m not a linear thinker. I had to develop a template for my workshop presentation, at times I felt lost. My colleagues were always encouraging and supporting. I was very judgmental of myself at first. But I learned how to go up in front of people and deliver a seminar or group discussion, and work through all of these awkward feelings."

"From my involvement, I went to an event where I’d been put on the speakers’ list. Something I didn’t expect. So, I learned that I could speak publicly, and teach."

"While I had misgivings, and was quite critical of myself at the onset, I learned something about myself and the ways in which I interact with a group and how I work alone. Usually, I see myself as a one-on-one supporter, or someone who is comfortable being part of a team, or in the background. As the group supported me in this workshop development process, I realized that I could create. I was able to focus, see my best learning style, my best task style. I gained confidence in myself as a person capable of delivering to a group. This was the first time that I took something public. The experiences were awkward at times. With support I knew I could work my way through it. Support was available; [the facilitator] presented different ways of looking at things, or suggested that I work with someone else who could give me a different perspective."

The Importance of Teams, Collaboration and Delegation to Sustainable Projects: While individual leaders are very important, it is equally important that they not do everything, both for their own well-being and for the long-term sustainability of community projects. Since a common theme in the reflection phase was the challenges encountered in moving beyond a small group of active community
members to foster broad engagement, the training workshop development process therefore emphasized ways of enhancing collaboration and delegation. Practicing facilitation techniques, democratic ways of talking and listening, and conflict resolution was particularly important. The group also developed a new approach to volunteer engagement, creating activities such as exploring life narratives to help community members reframe their contributions from “volunteer work” to personal growth work and to better reveal the linkages between community work and personal transformation.

- “In the group, we had differences but we worked through them by discussion and realizing that there were a variety of ways, not only one way was the right way to do something.”
- “Somehow people are already in this movement and they don’t see it. By going into the past they see that they are already there, they have already been a part of it. In this project we were able to go into our pasts and see that we were already there, in this movement. It re-energizes people and re-activates them to become more active.”

- **The Importance of Space and Community for Sharing Knowledge, Skills, Experiences and Resources**: The Food Activist Project helped create increased independence, ability and self-sufficiency in projects and participants by creating opportunities to build knowledge, skills and confidence in community. Participants’ weekly meetings at FoodShare exposed them to the full range of food security projects there and helped them develop connections with staff and programs they had not been previously connected with. The APCOL project also provided opportunities for networking, mutual mentoring and support, and created new working relationships within the Toronto food movement that are expected to last beyond the term of the project. The ability to reflect collectively on activist practice was particularly important for maintaining morale in periods of difficulty. The Food Activist group reflected on the common challenges and frustrations faced in working with both community members and institutional partners, which deepened the understanding of and effective responses to low levels of community engagement.

- “Being able to be at FoodShare and being around like-minded people who inspired me gave me the possibility of change.”
- “When [a program] brings leaders together, it creates liaison between different organizations in the community and the rest of the community. And when it does that, it creates a space where community needs are magnified and brought up more and there is an opportunity for those needs to be worked on.”
- “For us organizers, this networking has been hugely helpful; it allows us to meet, to share advice, and to talk about what can be improved and how to do it; it’s a great thing to have that resource base there; you learn a lot.”
- “There’s a new value of self that comes up. And self-esteem. Even though I have no money, I am still a social philanthropist. I am heard. I contribute. I am appreciated.”
• **The Importance of Naming Activist Practices for Effective Knowledge Transfer:** The Food Activist group engaged in a quasi-formal popular education-based training process, but also shared what they had learned in their previous experiences with community engagement and advancing strategic changes on a larger scale. Through this process, the group came to name and recognize the strategies they were already using so that they could more easily share them with a broader audience. In that context, the group strategized about offering their consultation services to other Toronto-area community food projects, particularly those taking place at Toronto Community Housing.

- “Individually, a lot of our work was from the heart, emotions. The work involved storytelling, participatory democracy, creating projects together. In some ways this felt new. In other ways, I felt that I’d been doing this all along, without really recognizing it as such.”

• **The Importance of Feeling Part of a Larger Movement for Social Change:** The training and social interaction made possible by the APCOL project had significant impacts on Food Activists’ identities as participants in a broader movement for social change. Participants become more to inclined to see themselves as activists as well as volunteers, which gave them a new way to recognize the value of their contributions. Through their interactions with each other, with FoodShare and APCOL personnel, and with other movement actors via their participation in the range of events described above, participants came to see their present work as encompassed not only by the Food Security Movement but also by a wider movement linking struggles for social justice, environmental justice, and spirituality. Broadening beyond their immediate projects opened up new possibilities for collaboration, learning, leveraging efforts, and developing shared languages that link different movements. By participating in broader movement events, participants were also able to observe and evaluate other groups’ strategies to create group identity and shared purpose, raise awareness and instigate inspiration. The Food Activist group incorporated some of these strategies into their workshops.

- “We started to see that our work is not just concentrated in our small community. We started to see that there is a broader community that works on the issues. When we went to the conference we saw the academic world caring about the same issues but with different concepts and we even saw people from around the world like Australia and Egypt. To me, it opened wider opportunities and made connections for us. We are part of a much larger movement.”

- “The Bring Food Home Conference gave me an overview of the whole food system. I got a look at how many people in the province are in the food movement. The movement is becoming a powerful force. All the energy and resources that are needed to produce food. Locally we need to have an infrastructure in place, closer to what we had pre-war. We need to use what we’ve learned what works. Everybody needs to eat ... safely, daily, and nutritionally. There needs to be a paradigm shift as to how we value and pay for food, where it comes from, how natural it is, etc. This conference helped as did other events to form activities, educate ourselves, and our community.”
5) **Research Findings** (8pp)
   
   a) **Summary of academic and policy research literature relevant to the concerns of the case study**

   Of the various academic and policy literatures relevant to our research, three in particular stand out given the preliminary findings from both the semi-structured interviews and participant reflections on the collaborative popular education and training process. The first is the role played by **social networks** in facilitating entry into activism, sustaining activist engagement, and blocking or militating against that engagement. Social network analysis in the social movement literature is especially concerned with the evolving patterns of social attachment between activists, former activists and non-activists in relation to anti-poverty organizing/activity. In general, research shows that people are often recruited into activism through family and friends. Once involved, their participation is often sustained by personal ties of trust, loyalty and friendship as much as through a commitment to the issues. Anti-poverty community organizers at FoodShare clearly have a grounded understanding of this process, as reflected in the central aim in the Food Activists group discussed above. Their goal was to create the kind of activist social network, with deep personal connections and a strong group identity, that would supplement and solidify pre-existing issue-based commitments, maintain morale, and sustain engagement. This resonates with the findings of McAdam and Paulsen (1993), who show that individual attitudes and beliefs, and even the presence of some social ties to movement organizations, are often insufficient for sustaining activism. Instead, given the presence of other social ties which often devalue activism, organizations must create and sustain strong activist identities that are also supported by important or ‘salient’ personal relationships; otherwise, when one’s activist identity conflicts with who one is in other emotionally important relationships, engagement becomes much more difficult to sustain. This is perhaps particularly important when activists like in neighbourhoods or community contexts where the sense of empowerment or belief in the efficacy of collective action is low, as is indicated in the interviews.

   A second literature related to that of social network analysis concerns the role that emotions play in bringing people to activism, a theme which was especially prominent in the framing of the popular education work. As Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001) argue, much of the social movement ignores or fails to analyze the way that emotions mediate the important processes which facilitate activism. For instance, the influence of social ties that pull friends and family into activism is partly due to the “affective bonds” they are based on, the feelings of love, loyalty, desire for approval and acceptance they tap into. The power of collective identities fostered by social movements is also rooted in the feelings that people derive from them – pride, for instance – as much as from cognitively-based understandings of shared interests. The ongoing capacity of a movement organization to create a rich internal culture that itself brings people pleasure and meaning is crucial to both recruitment and the sustainability of projects.

   A third relevant literature concerns the political-economic and social-structural features that shape individuals’ lives and capacities for activism. In this case, the impact of forms
of exclusion linked to immigration, poverty, and labour market exclusion on activist engagement is quite central. Clearly, the interviewees were all people for whom the experience of economic and social marginalization (and often of multiple and intersecting forms) acted as a spur to engagement in social change projects. However, they all lived in communities of people with similar experiences of marginalization whom they reported were difficult to mobilize. Some researchers (Perkins et.al.1996) have documented that, while poor communities can generate participation rates similar to those in more affluent neighbourhoods, there are important variations between individuals within poor communities: those with more access to access to resources will have higher likelihood of participating than those with less. More relevant are the social factors which permit poor neighbourhoods to generate sustainable social activism. Several researchers (Sampson et. al. 1997; Brodsky 1996; Bolland and McCallum 2002) point to the crucial role of mutual trust and neighbouring behaviours (rather than an individual sense of empowerment) in facilitating engagement in community organizations. This theme was prominent in the interviews, raising the issue of how anti-poverty activists can foster such relationships.

b) Summary of initial data analysis

Between October 2009 and April 2010, six¹ (6) interviews were conducted with members of the Food Activists Group. These interviews focused on five key dimensions:

1) **Social networks**: the nature of social relationships and their role as either barriers to and support systems for activism;

2) **Social differences**: the impact of demographic differences, immigration, education, income, etc. on activist engagement

3) The character of **labour markets** serving specific neighbourhoods: under/employment, wage levels, job security etc.

4) **The grievance construction process**: the way individual challenges or problems were linked to broader social structural problems within the community

5) **Material communication and cultural resources**: the range of material and cultural supports available for community organizing, such as space to meet, finances, etc.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed and, using grounded theory and the interview guide, themes were identified. In total, thirty (30) themes were named. Immigration as a driving force to activism, social networks in support of / barrier to activism, learning (either formal or informal), and the role of partnerships with organizations were among some of the themes present across the interviews. Interview transcripts were coded using HyperResearch, which helped to identify similarities and differences among participants, as well as provided a searchable document for analysis. In addition, impressions of the subjects, the overall tone of the interview and progress of the discussions was reflected upon and each interview was summarized, with

¹ The recording from one interview was lost due to technical malfunction of the recording equipment. When asked to redo the interview, the participant in question refused. We take this to mean that her consent to participate was withdrawn, and so material (ie: the interviewer’s notes) from the interview has not been included in this analysis.
supporting quotations. The purpose of this procedure was to provide a glimpse into the interview, comparing each interview across various themes and among participants. This will provide a useful framework for integrating these interviews into existing literature on the experiences of anti-poverty activists to generate reports and peer-reviewed journal articles.

**Major Themes**

The interviews suggested that there are important patterns relating activism to the experience of social difference, and in particular differences related to family history, the experience of immigration, and the direct experience of poverty, primarily due to marginalization / exclusion from the labour market. Participants indicated that family history was a strong force to becoming involved in activism. This was a common theme among all participants interviewed, though it was especially strong in those who immigrated to Canada. Of those interviewed, the four of the five participants indicated that there was a history of activism in their families, which was especially prevalent among parents who were immigrants. Having parents that emigrated from Italy provided one participant the opportunity to know how to survive a struggle and instilled a desire for justice. Her parents taught her that there isn’t justice out there. Being an immigrant, coming to this country, I saw a different side of life [...] because being born here, your parents being born here compared to the struggle of someone who came with nothing or limited resources and struggling and making their way. So I got to see that, and I am very thankful for my parents for doing that. I see folks out there that are totally lost ... totally lost (FS4).

Immigration also acted as a push towards activism. The experience of immigration was labelled as a depressing, scary and frustrating experience; alternatively it provided a hope that in action, solutions can be found. While one participant struggled in her native country to fight against injustice, she found a new voice in Canada. She revealed that

In Canada, when I landed...I am an immigrant. I came here and it’s again...I was looking at things here and what made sense to me, and then I was volunteering ... the first thing I noticed that here in Canada is ‘volunteering is volunteering’. We never had that at home, back home, then I thought, “That is a good idea, these people are really smart!” We can engage so much people with this ... you can reach people like volunteers and it gives them so much. So I started to do volunteering with North York communities (FS1).

One objective of the APCOL project was to better understand how those involved in anti-poverty organizing understood poverty, and if this view changed based on their personal situation or their increased involvement in community organizing. Participants’ attitudes towards poverty were rooted in their direct individual experience of it. Two of the participants live in Toronto Community Housing, and one is currently on a disability
pension. They speak of their first-hand experience being in poverty and what they do within the system both to manage their own survival and to make change through forms of activism. One participant believed that his personal experience with poverty is necessary to truly understand and empathize with others. He argues that you cannot understand poverty until you feel it. I know what it is when somebody knocks at my door and says “the kids are going to school but I have nothing. Do you have eggs?” And then I go and look in my fridge and I have a dozen eggs so I cut a half a dozen off and give them to her. I know what it is, I have been there, I have done that. So, their five minutes are up, they can't talk to me – I have walked the walk and I have walked the walk (FS3).

Participants were living in poverty themselves, and spoke about how systemic barriers were experienced first hand and shaped both their sense of possibility as well as that of their neighbours. The lack of trust in government programs and systems by those in poverty led either to a lack of involvement in anti-poverty activism, or acted as a drive to make changes by organizing. One participant described the skepticism and mistrust of those in power:

They are people with a great skepticism about everything and everybody ... and when they start to respect you and trust you, you dare not do anything to create doubt or question in their mind. That was the biggest thing that I had to overcome: the skepticism about trusting anybody, and that is something ... I have discovered is right across the Toronto [Community] Housing community (FS3).

The structure of the TCHC community and the skepticism felt by the residents is an important barrier confronting anti-poverty activists as they attempt to create projects that are sustainable beyond their own individual efforts. One participant, a retired government worker, offers a unique perspective. She discussed the structure of the system by saying “Even looking at community housing ... it creates more negativity even where I worked in social services. It became the major label, you know that person lives over there, therefore there is problems, and it’s the worst kind of people that live there” (FS4). This stigma, and the barriers within the system, was a common thread among all participants. Many had to face this stigma themselves, as members of the TCHC community. All this of course raises the larger question of what factors lead some people living in poverty to become activists, to challenge the stigmas of poverty through collective action, while others remain isolated, withdrawn and skeptical of the possibilities of collective efforts at social change.

The challenges of trying to mobilize their neighbours in anti-poverty initiatives led all the interviewees to express feelings of frustration about activism. While one participant spoke of facing the system head on, by being a leader within his community and choosing not to believe in barriers, some others admitted that it was difficult to stay determined in the face of so much apathy. One participant noted that he puts large
amounts of energy into projects and others “want you to be such a great organizer, and it is important but at the same time ... I constantly feel defeated” (FS2). The activists felt they were not only fighting government systems that kept people in poverty, but also people within their community themselves, or more specifically their apathy and unwillingness to be engaged in organizing.

Despite noting the role of a history of family activism of some kind, every participant also seemed to share an experience of the **stigmatization of activism**, of people within their families and social networks not understanding the meaning of activism or the reasons for being one. It was often difficult to make others around them see that what they did was worthwhile. One participant stated:

> I think that it is not ‘unnormal’ [for members of her family not to understand her activism] but sometimes that is disheartening to think about that. In my own family, yes ... I have one side of the family that is, like, ‘You know how much money you could be making by working?’ (FS4).

While a lot of time and energy, for the activist, is spent on doing the work – volunteering, creating community gardens, linking community organizations together to better allocate resources – a surprisingly large amount of time is spent explaining the value of what is being accomplished in a society where ‘valuable work’ is often defined as *paid* work. (FS5) said it best when she noted:

> In a way, because we think still in this time, society, in the orders of pensions etc. I knew long ago, I am not going to have enough retirement to support myself but I have humongous capital in community. I think this is what holds us together because we need support of each other. It is easier, cheaper, more productive and joyful to live that way (FS5).

Another participant explains the stigma of being an activist, even when it is a paid position. In order to explain to the community and her husband what she does in her job for ACORN (a not-for-profit organization), she exaggerated it by saying she worked for the City of Toronto. If she says her job is

> activism [...] they will put me down, they will say it’s not important, so I would exaggerate it. I would say it’s with the City. If I say it’s an activist [job], they would say ‘what is it?’ and I would have to sit there for two hours, maybe, to explain it to them, which they wouldn’t understand. My husband at first, he didn’t understand the work I am doing, but fortunately he did a bit of studying with unions, so he knows that ... he says,‘It’s like union, right? I think I see you collecting garbage, right?’ (FS1).

The exploration of personal experience and stories revealed important clues to the way that family history, immigration, social networks, and a direct experiential understanding of poverty are integral to the activist experience. This personal history affects the way activists organize, learn, understand their role and communicate that to others.
On the issue of the **role of formal and informal learning** in activism, many participants have had formal training through organizations, or regularly attend workshops. If they cannot afford such formal training, one participant will "ask if my salary can be directed to that. It makes it much more valuable for me. Direct it and go there. So that is how I learn about many many things" (FS5). However, another participant warned that an activist cannot be created or trained into action, noting "with activism it cannot be like that. It cannot be just a job, it becomes a life for you, and you live it. You are not just doing it, you are living it with each member. You see people struggle and even their victories and you live it with them (FS1).

Finally, the discussions provided an opportunity for exploring definitions of **what it means to be an activist**. Each participant had his or her own unique definition. One participant believes there is power found in exclaiming, "I am an activist" (FS5), a view which met with consensus amongst the group. Another participant suggests that asking the right questions and being visible is what activism is about:

> Reality, or activism, call it what you may, it is one of the instruments that is available to shine some light on this problem. If that is the course we have to go, then we have to go that course. The only thing about activism that I have a little problem with is that they are not visible enough. We need to make ourselves more visible nationally, not only on the community level that we are, very visible. We have to make those people up there realize this is how visible we are and we will not accept being ignored anymore (FS3).

Interestingly, activism had a very grounded and local definition for the participants, and engagement in movements on a global scale is generally not front of mind. Activism is simply about "taking the responsibility, taking action about making things right in a general kind of way. I wouldn’t say I am a radical activist. I am turned off by radicalism" (FS2). Activism is about thinking about a situation and taking action towards justice: "An activist, most of the time, they look at something and then they go and act on something that makes sense to them, it is right, and most of the time it is right" (FS1).
6) Lessons for Improving Learning for Anti-poverty Organizing

Evaluation of the project was conducted in a variety of forms, including comments made throughout the training development process, a focus group on structuring community partnerships led by APCOL researcher Christine McKenzie on April 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2010, and email feedback solicited from participants and compiled by APCOL researcher Rachelle Campigotto.

- Collaboration and dialogue amongst a **diverse group of participants** is important in creating inclusive activist communities. The project made it possible for people with different backgrounds, ages, levels of activism, varied views and approaches to work together. The Food Activists group concluded that making space for listening to people’s stories, their accounts of the varied pathways that brought them to the point of our encounter, their accounts of what is urgent about food, etc. was critical to forming group relationships, opening everyone up to different possibilities in activism, and setting up a context for inclusivity. This also revealed that community activism can take many legitimate and effective forms that have their value.

- “Being able to find people with different backgrounds in social activism ... Finding them and bringing them together was an achievement.”

- “To me it was so important when I saw different people with different backgrounds and ... with uniqueness of experiences. Before I didn’t have an idea that this kind of experience is important in activism. In her eyes I saw different possibilities in activism. She came from a totally different side. The blend of it was so rich and so different. There is no formula for it; every time it can be different. Inclusion, everything can be brought in and incorporated.”

- **Activism is driven by personal/emotional as well as intellectual / political commitments.** Much anti-poverty work in marginalized communities talks about community food projects as creating **access** to food and addressing food **insecurity, barriers, and vulnerability**: “We speak to people’s **survival** senses.” However, community leaders found expanding engagement through issues-based outreach and promotion quite challenging: “I felt frustrated because I’m not sure that people were understanding the big picture of food security.” These frustrations raised a series of questions: how to invite people to be engaged in a way that starts to build strong personal connections to projects and to the people involved in them? How to keep people coming together enough to get to the point where we can raise awareness about systemic issues? Participants concluded that engagement and volunteerism in community food projects is built most successfully through personal relationships, through an appeal to the personal: “We need to speak to people’s hearts as much as we speak to their needs”, “involve people from their heart-songs”, “beyond their impossibilities and into their dreamspace.” The activities the group created to share with others in their community projects created a context for people to reconnect with and express their higher values, and frame activist work as an expression of personal growth.

- “I would say that with this project ... we really explored our feelings and we used that as a tool in engaging people as well. It should be seen as a tool. It’s a new
tool, paying attention to feelings of people and engaging them through their feelings. We paid a lot of attention to this in this project and I think it worked. Before, I would say no to certain things because I didn’t see their space in this and now I can see that there is a way to bring things in and work with them.”
Appendices

{Appendices not included in Condensed Final Report}