

# Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL)



## WORKING PAPER #11

### **Promoting Holistic Community Organizing: FoodShare Food Activist Workshop Series**

**Christine McKenzie**

September 2013

Centre for the Study of Education and Work, OISE, University of Toronto  
252 Bloor St. West, Room 7-112, Toronto ON M5S 1V6  
Telephone: 416-978-0515 Email: info@apcol.ca

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project represents a partnership effort across several post-secondary institutions and a range of community-based groups in Toronto (Canada). This project was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, under its Community University Research Alliance program (2009-2014). Drawing on carefully designed survey and case study methods as well as a participatory action research orientation - the aim of this research project has been to offer the most intensive study of activist learning and development in anti-poverty work in Canada.

The co-editors are pleased to present its official working paper series. The publications contained in this series are linked to APCOL project work and themes. They are authored and co-authored by academic as well as community-based researchers. The material is the copy-right of individual authors or co-authors. Rights for use in the APCOL Working Paper Series is granted to the APCOL project for these purposes only.

APCOL Working Paper Series Co-Editors:

Stephanie Ross (York University, Toronto, Canada)

Peter Sawchuk (University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada)

APCOL Project Co-Leaders:

Sharon Simpson (Labour Community Services, Toronto, Canada)

Peter Sawchuk (University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada)

# Promoting Holistic Community Organizing: FoodShare Food Activist Workshop Series

Christine McKenzie

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the activities and outcomes related to the APCOL Case Study with FoodShare. The focus of this case study was the development of FoodShare Food Activist Workshops to support intervention by activists on food security issues in the City of Toronto to expand participation. Description of the development of the food activist network of community leaders is provided. Specifically, the content of these specially designed workshops is seen to be informed by the challenges and successes Food Activists have faced with the goal of strengthening the capacity of community members to start, sustain, and create a better environment for projects such as community gardens, markets and kitchens. In parallel with this the paper speaks to questions regarding what leads individuals to become active in transforming their communities, what keeps them engaged once the work becomes difficult, and what interventions and approaches can help community leaders and supportive agencies to be more effective in bringing about larger change. The paper quotes at length in order to share the Food Activists stories, experiences and reflections of the FoodShare Food Activist group.

**Keywords:** FoodShare, food security, activism development, popular education

# PROMOTING HOLISTIC COMMUNITY ORGANIZING: FOODSHARE FOOD ACTIVIST WORKSHOP SERIES

## INTRODUCTION

*I walk with a sense of anticipation toward the school where FoodShare is housed. Walking on the path to the front door through the footprint garden I feel alive. There are too few opportunities to walk on the earth in my urban life. Inside, I pass the kitchen and connect with a buzz of activity. The student interns are huddled making a game plan for the lunch preparations that will soon be underway. Entering the building further, I pass the cafeteria already set up for the French immersion students' lunch. Elsewhere in the building, produce is being delivered and sorted for the Good Food Boxes that will be distributed throughout the city; staff members are working with community leaders to plan their community gardens and markets. In other corners of the school, staff are leading student nutrition programs and working on advocacy campaigns for social assistance reform and related food issues. I arrive at the classroom where I meet with the Food Activists each week. I am in the hive of activity now.*

The FoodShare Food Activist group made an important contribution to food activism through networking community leaders active on food issues across the Greater Toronto Area and developing workshops that would expand the number of community members active on food issues. I was honoured to participate in the process as a Graduate Assistant member of the team from OISE/University of Toronto. In this article, I will quote at length in order to share the Food Activists stories, experiences and reflections of the FoodShare Food Activist group.

## **FOODSHARE AND THE ANTI-POVERTY COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND LEARNING PROJECT (APCOL)**

The Food Activist group's home was at FoodShare. FoodShare is a hub of food activism, which "tries to take a multi-faceted, innovative and long-term approach to hunger and food issues. Its projects are based on the principles of self-help and community building" in order to "address short-term issues of household hunger, while also providing longer-term benefits by building the capacity of individuals and communities" (FoodShare, n.d.).

This Food Activist group was one part of a larger project called the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project. The APCOL project is a partnership between the University of Toronto, York University and various community groups. It was born out of the desire to use popular education to support community organizing and to explore the ways in which communities organize to address poverty in the greater Toronto area. The FoodShare Food Activist group was one of the case studies in the first year of the APCOL project.

### **THE APCOL FOODSHARE FOOD ACTIVIST PROJECT**

The purpose of the APCOL FoodShare Food Activist project was to understand food security as a part of the broader anti-poverty movement and to act on food security issues. We used a community based research approach, which meant the focus was to struggle collectively as allies in the food security movement to understand what is, and is not, working in anti-poverty organizing.

The main project was to create a series of workshops that the Food Activists would then organize, promote and facilitate in their communities. The content of these workshops was informed by the challenges and successes Food Activists have faced, as well as drawn from existing training materials. The goal of these workshops was to strengthen the capacity of community members to start, sustain, and create a better environment for projects such as community gardens, markets and kitchens. The parallel research

questions were concerned with exploring what leads individuals to become active in transforming their communities, what keeps them engaged once the work becomes difficult, and what interventions and approaches can help community leaders and supportive agencies to be more effective in bringing about larger change.

## **THE GROUP MEMBERS**

Through the process, the Food Activists also wanted to reframe what it means to be an activist. The notion of an activist as one who is “militant or reactionary” sprung to mind for many group members. In contrast, their ideal was to nurture and build. In fact, the Food Activists saw their work as a means to mentor others, so that they can “see their way into activism.”

Community leaders in the Food Activist group were representatives from communities that have limited economic and physical access to food that is healthy, nutritious and sustainably produced. These activists were chosen from hundreds of applicants who were interested in mutual learning and food security issues. Their activism took different forms: working to educate children, initiating and organizing community gardens and markets, and advocacy issues. All shared the vision for a world where healthy food sources become available and accessible for everyone. All shared a passion and dedication in working toward this goal.

Sarosh, Rachelle and I were the other members of the team. Sarosh is a community animator at FoodShare; she led the APCOL project’s FoodShare Food Activist group. Rachelle and I participated as students from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Rachelle is a teacher who is interested in food security. Previously, she worked in conservation and outdoor education at an Ojibwas Nature centre and produced a case study about inclusivity in farmers' markets. In a parallel process, Rachelle conducted and transcribed in depth interviews with each Food Activist.

My role was to assist with the workshop development. I am a popular educator who has worked with a variety of movements. Within these circles, I am constantly surrounded

by food activists; I wondered if my involvement in this project was the result of the universe conspiring to turn me into a dedicated food activist!

Many of the Food Activists felt that their desire for justice and their passion for food were “born in their blood.” A common thread throughout the group was the feeling that food is the link that brings people together and opens them up to healing and learning about each other and their communities.

*In the corridor outside our classroom we hear the kids from the French immersion school lining up for the first lunch time shift. They are excited about the break, seeing the FoodShare staff, and enjoying the delicious food. If we peek into the hallway, we notice the menu is barley with peas, lamb or tofu stew, carrot spinach soup made with coconut milk, salad and homemade rhubarb crisp.*

*In our classroom, we continue telling stories, sharing as we exchange skills and experiences. We are learning about ourselves and how much more is possible.*

## **OUR PROCESS**

The FoodShare Food Activist group started with a process of getting to know each other. To do this, we worked on creating a presentation of ourselves, called the “Streams of Experience.” This involved making a diagram of our lives as a river, showing all the streams and tributaries (or influences) that led us to be part of the food security movement. In doing this exercise, we considered the questions: Why are we here? What has impacted me? Where does our calling come from? And what are we political about and how did we get this way?

As a group, we discovered that we were activated by a range of experiences, many of which were very personal. These included themes such as our mothers’ good cooking, time spent on the farm of a family member or friend, our connection to the earth, readings about the environment, becoming vegetarian and healing by (re)connecting

with the food we eat, and the relationships we had with our grandmothers, among many other themes.

From there, I led some training in popular education methods to give us grounding for developing our workshops.

In the weeks that followed, Sarosh led us in many rich discussions to determine the approach and focus of the workshop series. In this process, we reviewed the current state of the food movement and explored what it would take to motivate more people to become involved. Rachelle and I led small group discussions and took notes as we moulded and shaped the workshops. Within this exploration, we shared ideas about what a new healthy and affordable food system would look like and what supports would need to be in place to support the emergence of a new culture around food.

FoodShare already offered many “hard skills” workshops on topics such as how to start a community garden or how to compost; thus, our materials focused more on ways to develop “soft skills,” such as communication skills and imagination, in order to contribute to the capacity of the Food Activists’ communities and beyond. Although emerging priorities at FoodShare interrupted our progress from time to time, we made steady progress as a group towards defining and preparing the workshop series.

## **THE FOOD ACTIVISTS WORKSHOP SERIES**

In designing the workshop series, each Food Activist took the lead on one workshop, enlisting the support, input and feedback of the rest of the group. In designing the workshops, the group thought about what processes would help them get to a deeper level of awareness, connection and motivation in their paths as food activists.

A few of the workshop topics were: Tools for Participatory Organizing, Community Food Animation: Bringing Food Projects to Life, Community Participation, Community Peace Building and Engagement. We created this series of workshops to be engaging and heartfelt, in order to create connection amongst community members. There were many



shifts during the course of designing the workshops, and they were revised over and over in an effort to get them right. The Food Activists wanted to present a new way of thinking to workshop participants, while still connecting with them where they were at.

## **ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP**

For example, Austin's workshop on engagement went through many changes as it was being developed. Austin is a Food Activist with a strong connection with food and gardening. He learned an appreciation of food from his mother and from friends in his Toronto Community Housing building. Currently, he organizes the building's Community Garden. One of his concerns is the disappearance of farm land. He feels that hunger is a central issue and that food banks should offer healthy, nutritious food.

Austin's Engagement workshop was initially conceived as a workshop about engaging volunteers. However, over time, it became a workshop focused more broadly on engagement. The goal became for people to connect to their better selves and, from this place, discover a desire for involvement in social change. Through this workshop, Austin said (April 27, 2010):

People can share challenges and successes through the power of ritual and ceremony, which motivates and directs energy... it is a way to create occasion for energy to emerge... I want people to think about volunteerism from a place that inspires them.

This workshop starts with each participant making a "seed ball,"<sup>1</sup> which is in the shape of a heart. Each seed ball is passed around, with other participants adding seeds to it in turn, and then passing it along to the next person.

---

<sup>1</sup> Seed balls are a way for distributing and protecting seeds by encasing them in a mixture of clay and compost. Supposedly, some native North American tribes used seed balls. Basically, you take finely ground terracotta clay; add dry organic compost, the seeds, and then mix. Then you add water to the mixture while stirring: just

Austin reflected (April 27, 2010):

That seed will self seed and it will continue to grow. It is hoped that you as a workshop participant will go out into your community and be that flower and you will continue to touch people and you will inspire them, and they in turn will inspire others.

You are not forcing them to do anything. But to be really inspired by the work you do, how you do it, how you feel about it. And connecting with me, because I remember connecting with others around activism and it feels good.

The ideas that food activism connects individuals and communities were a motivating force throughout the entire project.

## **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION WORKSHOP**

Bobby led the workshop on community participation. He grew up in a family of 18 children on a large organic farm in the Caribbean. He feels that this experience made taking charge and being involved come naturally to him. Bobby previously founded a food bank and has been involved with the garden at his Toronto Community Housing residence for three years. Currently, he is the Community Garden Coordinator.

This workshop was anchored by the “stone soup”<sup>2</sup> story, in which everyone makes a small contribution to a soup and it turns into a delicious meal through cooperation. The story was the starting point, and the rest of the workshop was developed around it.

---

enough to make the concoction bind together. The mixture is then rolled into small round balls and left in the sun for a day or two to dry, after which time it's ready for dispersal. The ball protects the seed until enough rain falls to break through the mixture to allow the seeds to germinate, spurred on by the compost within the ball. (Citation <http://www.greenlivingtips.com/articles/316/1/Seed-balls.html>, retrieved may 15, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> The story “Stone Soup” was authored by Marcia Brown in 1947.

Bobby said, “The group responded well to the story...There was a silence in the room as the story was told, their attention was captured” (April 27, 2010).

After the story was read, the group responded to several questions based on the story, in small groups. These questions were:

- Who are the “monks” or leaders in your community? In what ways are you a leader?
- How are people in the community invited to participate?
- How are community members opinions valued?
- How can we cultivate diverse community participation?
- If you were encouraged to open your heart, what effect would this have on your community?

Hearing the Stone Soup story and reflecting on these questions illustrated the way that each member of the community has a role to play in creating an environment where all contributions towards positive social change are valued.

## **COMMUNITY PEACE BUILDING WORKSHOP**

Vandana envisioned and designed the Community Peace Building workshop. She is originally from Europe, but she left because she was worried about the effects of war on her family. She has an ecological gardening business and volunteers in many different places around the city. She works on a living food boxes, seeds, green spaces and a rooftop garden in her housing co-operative. She is motivated to address the barriers that newcomers to Canada face. Vandana believes that gardening should be taught in grade schools, as the garden can provide a safe place to explore and learn. She also feels that plants have a natural healing power and used them to treat her breast cancer. For Vandana, “food is love on the plate” (April 27, 2010).

As Vandana developed her Community Peace Building workshop, she realized that activism starts with small actions. She noted (April 27, 2010), “We shed the expectation of needing to deliver everything.” Instead, her workshop focused on just two activities

and provided an empty space for participants to give input and connect. One of the activities was called “shaping our hearts.” Sarosh described the process, as she said (April 27, 2010):

In this activity, participants create a heart out of clay, put their good intentions into it and think about what their heart brings to a community. They shape that heart and sit with it for awhile, and then it gets passed to the next person who gets to sit with it for awhile. The heart is passed all the way around the circle, and, when it gets back to you, it feels different. And also, because you spend so much time creating your heart and thinking about it, you have a certain respect for other people’s hearts. So, that was very moving. When we did the pilot with the group, comments came back in the evaluation from the group. At the end people wrote things like “transformative.” There were so many aspects to it, tenderness, being touched by everyone in your community, the developing of trust and the feeling of giving and recognizing everything you have to offer. There were many layers; it was so rich and sensory.

Piloting this part of the workshop together was a memorable experience, which helped reenergize the group’s commitment to organizing with broader communities around food issues. Vandana further explained the powerfulness of this exercise (April 27, 2010):

I stressed to the group to put in the negative thoughts as well as their hope for change. It is also powerful that we are letting it go, letting the universe or nature to unfold the whole story. We have a genuine intention. It was quite moving to me. For me it came as a gift.

In the second activity of the community peace building workshop, people brainstormed about what peace looks like. They contemplated the question “if peace were a fruit, what would both nourish and poison the tree of peace in our communities?” Based on the collective vision of peace, the group created an agreement, committing to what they

would do in their communities to make peace a reality. Reflecting on the activity, Vandana said, “I recognized the needs of participants and need to connect them to the benefit of all. I found it quite mind opening to me. That gift, to give people a new energy to be involved” (April 27, 2010). In order to unite as a group, members had to “create a deeper space to connect at a heart level. It was a moment for a kind of slowing down, opening, listening, and breathing: to understand the big picture. This will give people new energy to be involved” (April 27, 2010). Part of this involved activities to slow down and connect to oneself and the group. Vandana calls these “mellow-izers,” in contrast to the usual energizers used in a workshop process to pick up the pace.

She reported being happy to have the courage to offer this workshop and was pleased it was well received by the group. Vandana shared (April 27, 2010):

That was so empowering for me. I am so curious how that will be received throughout our community [...] I really think we need to not have distance with participants, but to create connections [...] we are doing this to kind of make it possible.

This workshop, as well as the others designed and facilitated by the food activists, integrated elements of healing into their processes. This was also true for the contributions of Danica and Julia. Danica is a Food Activist involved in food security, cooking and gardening. She has a farming background and fondly remembers the garden of her childhood. She recognizes that, “when you’re poor, the amount of money for food is tight.” She believes that she learned invaluable lessons in being frugal from her mother, who could make a little money, go a long way. Food Activist Julia says she has been working on anti-poverty issues all of her life in various ways. Even though she is formally retired, she is actively working with seniors, organizing a food bank, and selling the bread that she makes in a community bake oven. Julia focused a lot on people and said, “People are what educated me.”

*The voice over the loud speaker announces our time to go for lunch. We excitedly leave our classroom and join the serving line with FoodShare community animators who have returned from leading grassroots education programs in different parts of the city, youth from the Native School in the same building, the food packers and administrative staff. This is always a chance to meet and chat with others in the building. As usual, it is a great selection of yummy, healthy food, with lots of vegetarian and vegan selections. We gather around a table in silence as we enjoy the food. As our hunger is satisfied, we continue discussing issues or share humorous personal stories.*

## **OUR REFLECTIONS**

At the end of the process, we reflected on what had taken place for us as a group. In this reflection exercise, I asked: as a FoodShare Food Activist, what did you learn or feel about yourself? Working as a group? Community organizing? Food activism? Workshop design and facilitation? What else took place that was important for you?

Many learnings and reflections came out of this exercise. The Food Activists noted the strength of working together and overcoming the fear of doing things differently. Several of the concrete learnings included becoming receptive to diverse approaches and visions when working in a group, the importance of listening and how styles of leadership impact the group. They also appreciated learning about new tools and ways to run workshops, such as different approaches to storytelling. While initially the Food Activists said they felt overwhelmed by the learning curve, they gradually felt more confidence in problem solving. Overwhelmingly, the Food Activists spoke about feeling empathy, connection and a willingness to share with others in the group.

The Food Activists also commented on logistical issues, such as appreciating the pay, the need for clear expectations and details prior to taking part, as well as frustration at losing momentum during the sometimes long breaks between meetings. They also mentioned the difference that Sarosh's encouragement made along the way. The group appreciated her gifts of insight, patience and understanding. The way in which she drew

on the resources of the group members, developed ideas along with them and helped to take these ideas further was also invaluable.

## **KEY LEARNINGS: DIFFERENT WAYS OF ENGAGING IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

Of these many learnings, there was one theme that stood out for me, which was the emphasis on the processes by which we engage in community organizing. The Food Activists spoke in detail about how they gained an appreciation for nurturing the connection between people while undertaking food security activism. They also reflected on how the group's process enforced the importance of honouring people's feelings in community organizing.

### **FOCUS ON PERSONALLY CONNECTING IN ORGANIZING**

Many Food Activists mentioned they had learned the value of deeply knowing and understanding the people with whom they were organizing, as opposed to being driven to immediate action without an understanding of where others in the group are coming from and what their motivations are. One way that we gained an understanding of others in the Food Activist group was through the "streams of experience" activity. Group members found this experience to be a profound shift away from organizing from a strictly intellectual place.

Nabila spoke to this important shift in ways of organizing. Nabila is rooted in food activism through her family who originated from the Caribbean where they had an organic farm. Her mother and her grandmother were both well known activists. She is proud of what they accomplished, namely owning land and adopting and fostering children. She grew up in Toronto and had a lot of friends that immigrated to Canada. She felt that she was different as a result of being born here. Later, she realized they shared many similar struggles. Nabila believes in the healing powers of food and is a committed vegetarian. She sees how a healthy diet has been beneficial to her children because it "feeds them mentally." She worries about food security and believes that one

day she will have to fight for food. She stated, “Food is a right not a privilege...it should be free” (April 27, 2010).

To illustrate the importance of honouring feelings in community organizing, Nabila shared (April 27, 2010):

The (streams) activity showed the challenges and “triggers” in our experiences – we can see what it was that brought us to this day. This is necessary to move further into activism, to working in unison so that we can have an optimal effect.

I see it as necessary in moving forward in my journey as an activist, because I know if I have a group, or my board of directors or my steering committee, I would want us to be moving from that united level, where we understand what brought us here. And I see that in a lot of organizations that is lacking [...]

Right now, we have a board of directors for our school, and a lot of times putting that kind of thing together, you do it more from an intellectual - you know, you want to have people who carry weight in the community (laughs), who have certain educational background. And if I had to restructure it, I would do it based on what has brought them to this point, what have their experiences been. [...] And, to me, that is a better example. Because you know you can have a band load of education – Masters, PhDs everywhere – but you have no experience, no *real* life experience and no emotional connectedness. And if you’re not connected emotionally and if you’re not connected through drive and wanting to do something then it is really not beneficial to community organizing, it is more for personal (reasons). A lot of time, I’ve witnessed, or I have sat on boards with, people who are more personally driven. And there’s a personal agenda where it has to be a collective and a community agenda.



So, now we are developing a new organization, and I have used a lot of what we have done here to develop that steering committee and the work. Even in choosing the staff. We have gone in a *whole* different direction where we have not used resumes and used personal life experiences and looked for people who had something to contribute to the whole, not how they would personally benefit, on paper.

We discovered that a deep understanding of those you organize with is an essential shift in emphasis, which helps build safety and trust in groups engaged in community organizing. One value of the Food Activists group's experience is that we had the time, and *took* the time, to foster trust and reflect on how this became possible. This equipped us to duplicate this kind of process, and environment, in other organizing spaces beyond the APCOL FoodShare Food Activists group.

*Lunch is over and we are settling into our classroom again, content with our full bellies and one another's company. We begin discussing one of the workshops we are designing, sharing ideas about what the focus should be. We need to speak more loudly than in the morning in order to be heard over the steady hum of the dishwasher, which is running in the next room. The hum of the dishwasher is intermittently interrupted by the clanging of dishes as the interns unload clean dishes and refill with dirty ones. From time to time, they break into song, singing loudly and out of tune along with the radio. We exchange looks and laugh to ourselves...*

## **FOCUS ON HONOURING FEELINGS IN ORGANIZING**

Another key learning was honouring people's feelings in the process of community organizing for grassroots social change. Fatima was one Food Activist who reflected at length on this learning.

Fatima grew up under a dictatorship. She says she was "an activist from a young age": there was "always a part of me that wanted to fight something...it was like a food to me" (personal communication, April 27, 2010). Her father encouraged her to speak her mind

and she worked at a radio station as a way to voice her truth. While she organizes around food issues, Fatima stressed she is not a gardener. “I was not a person with a green thumb. My mother would plant something, and, if I touched it, it died.” Instead, Fatima wanted to work with people and encourage them to see the best in one another, rather than blaming each other for problems that exist.

As an example of honouring people’s feelings in organizing Fatima said (personal communication, April 27, 2010):

From this group I got the experience of “feeling” connections. [...] This whole group opened different aspects for me. How to be an organizer that “feels” people but at the same time makes sure things are running smoothly. I can give you one example. In my community, they are trying to organize a meeting. We have a huge community, and it is very diverse. And they are trying to organize around the culture and divisions between different ethnic groups; they are trying to organize a workshop to connect people. And they called me to participate in it. Right away the things I learned here, I showed a lot of it there. The organizer who did it, she was so concrete and not taking into consideration the feelings and cultures. And I was like, “This is *all* wrong.” I just said, “You are doing it at the wrong level. You are not taking into consideration that people are really coming from different backgrounds. You are coming just with what you want to put in your report and numbers. But the community out there is moving totally in a different direction. People are searching for different things from what you are bringing and you have to change it.” And I learned all of it from this group. [...]

I introduced some tools to them that we learned here; some ways for knowing people. [...] I said “let them tell their story. Why are you talking about Afghanistan in terms of Taliban and all that? Let’s refocus. You want to connect, let’s ask them - the people

from our community - to tell their stories. They have wonderful stories if you really want to know the Afghanistan community.”

And they were like, “Wow this is really good.” [...] They were confused about what I was telling them but they asked me to organize something with them for next year. [...] They were so confused and open to that at the same time, and I think it was very good. You can organize in different ways.

Women-centered organizers have argued for decades that feelings and spiritual connectedness must be made central in learning processes (Boler, 1999; Fernandez, 2003, Horsman, 1999). These ideas are also integral to the food movement, which by its very nature is nurturing, earth-centered and holistic. In direct contrast to many other movements and social justice organizing spaces, the food movement focuses on the whole person and honours his or her feelings and personal story. The focus in these other processes is on mobilizing resources or devising a strategy, as opposed to on valuing the unique drives and passions of the activists and community members who are deeply connected and committed to the issues. It is an irony in organizing that we can reproduce the very dehumanizing systems we struggle against!

Storytelling is one way around this tendency. Stories evoke our feelings and help us connect to our common experiences. We spoke at length as a group about the power of stories and how to facilitate storytelling. We also spoke about ways to provoke community members to think about their stories through having them focus on objects, art or music as a way to answer the question: “Where are you today?” These objects or art forms can be used in a show-and-tell process, where communities members can think about what the object or art piece evokes for them and share as much as they are comfortable sharing. We also spoke about going back to powerful memories as a way to construct our personal stories.

In general, the workshops were empowering and allowed the Food Activist group to explore new terrain. Austin noted that many of the workshops were inspired by the “Awakening the Dreamer: Changing the Dream Symposium”<sup>3</sup> experience. He said he “felt empowered to have the ability to go ahead. But initially it felt like, “Oh my God!”

Sarosh echoed this as she said (personal communication, April 27, 2010):

It feels risky to me. I feel like I am stepping out of animator comfort zone. I do have some anticipation that participants will be, “What is this new age-y stuff?”

This is where there can be psychological complexity of designing a workshop. We had a glimpse of what goes into it, by people that have done a lot of work in the area. So we had something to model on, from those who have a lot of experience. For me, at least, it was my first experience of a workshop that was very psychologically defined. It was much finessed that way. So it brought in other things that we could use, a lot of reflective moments were built in. We tend to typically have a lot of higher paced workshops. We move from thing to thing quickly. I feel like the shift we went through was giving it psychological depth, giving it time and a different kind of energy and trusting in it.

Vandana concluded (personal communication, April 27, 2010):

This workshop helps in thinking more deeply and creating connection. And that is what happened in our group. And I believe it happens in any setting, if we allow it to time-wise. Any community needs to consider this. We are all goal oriented. Thinking without an agenda can be more

---

<sup>3</sup> The Awakening Dreamer: Changing the Dream Symposium is “a half-day workshop designed to awaken and inspire people to take action in pursuit of this vision of a fair, peaceful and sustainable future” (The Awakening the Dreamer Initiative, n.d).

powerful. Underlying issues come to the surface. It can be more powerful than answers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through the process of coming to know one another, exploring issues related to the food movement and designing and piloting the workshop series with the group, the Food Activist group worked towards strengthening the food movement. We showed courage to look at and do things differently and challenged others to do the same as we shared our work. We did this through reconnecting to our conviction to be active in ways that are nurturing and holistic and through renewing our collective strength through the powerful energy of the group.

The work of activists of all kinds needs time for pause and reflection, time for regeneration along the path. As a member of the group, I witnessed a blooming and regeneration as the Food Activist group had the opportunity to come together through FoodShare and the APCOL project.

*Returning home through the foot print garden, I feel a sense of satisfaction. I am fulfilled by the richness of the day. We are now resources to one another now and a strong force as a result.*

## REFERENCES

- The Awakening the Dreamer Initiative (n.d). *The awakening the dreamer initiative*. Retrieved from <http://awakeningthedreamer.org/content/view/84/133> on July 22, 2010
- Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Fernandez, L. (2003). *Transforming feminist practice: Non-violent, social justice and the possibilities of a spiritualized feminism*. California: Aunt Lute Books.
- FoodShare (n.d.). *FoodShare: Who we are*. Retrieved from <http://www.foodshare.net/howeare04.htm> on July 22, 2010.
- Horsman, J. (1999). *Too scared to learn: Women, violence and education*. Toronto: McGilligan Books.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine McKenzie is a student, popular educator and activist living in Toronto. As a popular educator and activist, Christine has trained trainer and facilitated popular education processes and community-based research in Canada and Latin America over the past 15 year. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Adult Education and Community Development in the department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at OISE/University of Toronto, where her research focuses on women's critical feminist learning in community based education programs.