



More Than Nutrition: Food, Social Justice and Wellbeing

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Webinar Transcript

SPEAKERS:

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[pause]

0:00:44.1 Tanya Tucker: Hello everybody. Thanks so much for joining us. We're gonna get started in just a minute. We'll let folks start rolling into the room, we're also waiting on one of our speakers who hopefully shows up soon. But we'll get started very soon. Glad you're all here.

[pause]

0:02:21.0 TT: Alright. Let's go ahead and get started. Make sure we're making the best use of everyone's time. Thank you so much for joining us today for this Wellbeing Blueprint event. More than nutrition, food, social justice and wellbeing. I'm Tanya Tucker, with the Full Frame Initiative and FFI actually serves as the backbone organization for the Wellbeing Blueprint. And the Blueprint is both a growing community of action, a public sector community business, non-profit leaders, as well as a road map to drive structural change that will move us towards a country where everyone has a fair shot at wellbeing. And before we actually dive into our session today, I wanna actually take a moment for a land acknowledgement, to formally recognize the historical and continuing connection between Indigenous people and their Native lands. I acknowledge that Washington DC, which is where I live and work, is the traditional territory of the Nacotchtank, Anacostan and Piscataway people.

0:03:51.7 TT: I acknowledge this legacy as well as the ongoing struggle faced by the Indigenous communities around Washington DC and indeed around the country for recognition and land ownership. We all have a responsibility to consider the legacy of colonialism in our history as a nation. I recognize the privileges we enjoy today because of colonialism and strive to understand and break down the systems that perpetuate these harmful patterns while building and supporting systems that are just. So I hope you all take time to acknowledge the Native lands you sit on from wherever you're joining us today.

0:04:37.5 TT: So I am truly thrilled to be joined today from some friends, some new friends in New London, Connecticut with fresh New London, Julie and Alicia. We are waiting on one of our other speakers who hopefully will arrive soon, 'cause I'm really excited to hear about the work that she's doing, but that's Delberta Frazier with the Umóhoⁿ Nation Public Schools in Macy, Nebraska. So hopefully she's able to join as well. But we don't only wanna hear from our speakers today, we wanna hear from you. There was something about this issue, this event topic that brought you here today to take

some time out of your busy schedule, so we invite you to share your questions through the Q&A function, to share comments through chat throughout the session and we'll be able to track those questions in Q&A throughout and we'll have a dedicated time at the end of our conversation for a formal Q&A session, but if you share your questions throughout, I'll try to pepper them in throughout our conversation. So please don't be shy and engage in the conversation.

0:06:06.4 TT: We know that wellbeing isn't something extra, right, it's not something that's nice to have. It is actually the foundation for each one of us, it is fundamentally how we live our lives. We are individually and collectively healthier, we're more resilient, more productive, more mutual, when we feel that we belong, that we can count on others, that others can count on us, that we matter, that we're safe, that things are somewhat predictable day-to-day, month to month, that we actually have some influence over what happens around us and that our material needs can be met without shame or danger. And so I know when I think about my own life and food, it has been an important component to all of these wellbeing drives. Food is what brings my family and friends together, it holds my traditions, my culture, my history, it's an important anchor in my daily routines that gives me a sense of stability and I was just talking with a new member of the FFI team today in a little session to kind of get to know each other and food came up and she actually said, you know, food to me is love and community.

0:07:49.9 TT: And I loved that. So I know that I'm not the exception and that food plays an important role for all of us in our drive for wellbeing. But too often, our discussions around food really tend to focus on sort of individual responsibility and how do we change individual behavior and not really focusing instead on the inequities that are built into our food systems, just like every other system in our country. And so that's the deeper discussion that we're hoping to have today. So let's jump right in. And I actually wanted to start, before we even get to more details about the work you all are doing in New London, I actually wanna start with hearing a little bit about your personal connection to this work and what's the passion that drives you to do this and what motivates you? Julie, can I start with you?

0:09:06.7 Julie Garay: Of course. I had a feeling you were gonna start with me, so I was mentally ready. Thank you, Tanya. My name is Julie Garay, I am a part of the small Puerto Rican diaspora here in Connecticut, I'm very proud to identify as someone who is of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States and I go by she/her/hers, they/them/their pronouns and I'm really thankful to be here.

0:09:35.1 JG: So yeah, what connects me to this work? So before I jump into that, I am the Senior Program Manager at FRESH and I have been at FRESH for 11 years since I was 14 years old. I started during my spring break program, which is gonna be in a couple of weeks for our high school students here in New London, Connecticut, so this is really exciting. And what brings me to this work is many things, as some may know or may not know, the lineage or the folks that come from Puerto Rico are of many different... Specifically, three different categories of race or ethnicity and they're Spaniards who colonized our islands, like many other islands in the Caribbean, then there's Taíno, which

is the Native folks, the Indigenous folks of Puerto Rico and then we have African folks who were brought over to work the land in enslavement. And so these three identities are important to me for many reasons because it tells a food story with every single one of them. How we experience food, how I experience food, how my family experiences food and how my ancestors experienced it as well.

0:10:52.9 JG: I'm a proud... My family comes from growing food in their backyards, whether it was a tiny little backyard or a giant backyard, which not many of us had any giant backyards and something that is really special to me is my grandmother. My mother was an orphan and when she was younger, she remembered that her mother had this amazing green thumb and she says that I inherited that green thumb and there is an avocado tree in the backyard of my uncle's house, who used to be my grandmother's house and it was a little wooden shack before and that avocado tree is still growing strong and my uncle is still eating from it. So what brings me to this work is because of the struggle that comes from food, the anxiety, the pain, the love, the culture, the relationship building, that food brings us. We can sit at a table and you may not know someone, but sharing some bread and sharing some rice and beans, you get to know their whole life. So growing food is really a blessing to me, I'm really proud to say that I feed my community in New London, I feed my family, I feed so many folks in New London through my hands.

0:12:13.3 JG: That's such a blessing and it's such a wonderful way to heal my people and I'm always ready to fight, right? There's always this energy to be like, "Okay, how are we gonna keep growing food here? How are we gonna keep growing food in this tiny little city? Where do we find places? We just need water access. A little bit of sun, some water and let's just feed that whole community." So it's this amazing energy of let's strive, let's be resilient, let's fight, let's continue forward in building something for our community and they already... Our communities have so much strength already, let's just make it more tangible with food, let's fill their bellies with some good stuff. I thank you for this question 'cause it always makes me really excited to be like, "Oh my God, yeah, I have so many reasons. I'm personally connected to this work." So, yeah, thank you, I'm really excited.

0:13:08.6 TT: That's great. Thank you so much. Alicia?

0:13:14.8 Alicia McAvay: I do this work 'cause I get to work with Julie, I think she said it all and that's the best reason. Julie, that was beautiful. Thank you. Hello everybody, my name is Alicia McAvay, I'm the Director of FRESH New London. A little about me, I'm a cisgendered White woman, I use she/her pronouns, today I'm wearing a black shirt and some pressed flower earrings made by Julie and I'm coming to you from the Pequot territory, otherwise known as New London, Connecticut, occupied Pequot territory. What brings me to the work?

0:13:46.6 AM: Wow, that was so beautiful, Julie. And I was walking with a colleague the other day and thinking about this question and she's a youth organizer doing education justice work and she shared... She really comes to this work from a place of love and I just

really enjoyed the beauty of that and I have to share that. I wish that was my truth, but it isn't my truth, my truth is that I come from anger into this work and Julie knows, I will stand on my soapbox and share that I'm angry at how unfair the systems are, how intentionally they've been set up about the decisions that get made for people, I'm angry at the power structures, where the resources go and this work gives me a positive place to put that anger because I need that. I wanna feel like I can contribute to some change and I get to work with people who come to it from a positive place of love and so while I come to this work from anger, I stay in the work because it's brought me such love and joy and it's really taught me that it isn't just about being angry and yelling and changing things and fighting, it's a part of it, but the love and the sharing culture and the food and building up our community and finding ways to connect with each other is what sustains the work for me and keeps me going in it.

0:15:11.7 TT: That was wonderful and a great start to our conversation, which I can already tell it's gonna be a great one today. So to kind of ground people a little bit, can you give us a bit of an overview of FRESH New London, what it's all about, your mission? The kinds of work that you do, Alicia.

0:15:36.4 AM: Absolutely. So I like to say that FRESH is a tiny but mighty food justice organization. Our mission is to build momentum for food system change. And we do that through urban agriculture, youth power work and connecting our community. And basically, we reclaim blighted parcels in our distressed but very beautiful diversity. And we put them back into productive green use. And we do that with not just the help and volunteerism of folks around us, but with the input about how land should be used and which parcels we should reclaim. And part of how we do that, recently, we sort of enlisted a bunch of folks on an 18-month process to build a five-year urban agriculture plan. And we came up with the initiative called Edible New London, which is a city full of food grown with, for and by us in New London as residents. And it's all rooted in a set of social justice values and racial justice values that dictate just about everything we do. Lots of amazing innovations have come from that. But the one I love to talk about is snack bed gardens. And snack bed gardens sort of serve as a model for all of the other ways we're trying to rethink the way that we do this kind of work.

0:16:54.1 AM: And so snack beds are these little raised bed gardens. They're strategically placed throughout the city. And we plant them with our youth employment program and our youth leaders. We plant culturally appropriate crops that folks asked us to grow. But anybody can pick them, who walks by. That we're just thinking about accessing food together and not having control over the resources or the way people access food. And a bunch of other things came out of our five-year urban agriculture plan, including trying to build up a very large urban ag center that folks can really think about growing enough food for themselves throughout the year and then also having fruit trees and different ways that we can interact. But the main thing was really thinking about ways that we can do this work together and really acknowledge the fact that we all have things to bring into the urban agriculture in Edible New London's structure. And of course, all of that wouldn't be possible without our youth who are centered in the work. And I'm gonna pass it to Julie to talk about our youth program.

0:18:00.1 JG: Yeah, totally. Thank you. So I'm kind of the expert of the youth program. 'Cause I started the youth program when I was 14. I went through it and everything and went through the pipeline. So our youth program is every-season. It used to just be spring and summer but now we do it season... Like every season, year round. And so there's a lot of learning, a lot of partnerships, a lot of connecting to the community. And it's kind of like one of our co-workers who just started. She's like, "I've never worked at a place that runs with the seasons." We grow during the spring. We do a lot of our growing in the summer, then we rest in the winter, which we actually realistically do not rest in the winter. But it was cute. She had... The thought came in mind. [laughter] So in that, we do... Young people are introduced into the spring program. And they start to learn what is food justice? What is the food system? How does it impact me? And then in the summer, they start to learn, "Oh, this is how food injustice is harmful to us and our bodies and our communities." And they also, during the fall, get to learn a lot of their power, the voice that they...

0:19:11.7 JG: The power that their voice has and what kind of change they can do in our community. And something that is especially special [chuckle] about our program is we do a lot of analyzing of our current food system. And we really talk about why is this? We start off with what land? Who was first in this land? Who took that land from folks? Who was brought here to work the land? Why was that? Not very good reasons. But those were the reasons that they had. And then how has this food system that we currently live in, how has it morphed into the one that we have now? And I think part of that is a really important question that we're gonna talk about later on, is not feeling embarrassed and not feeling blamed for the food system that we live in and the choices that we have. Because a lot of us do not have the choice of the food access that we have and we can afford. So it's pretty amazing how we... A lot of our young people are of New London. They're from New London. They grew up in New London. Their families migrated here. And they get to learn about their own city. And they get to learn how can they change things in their city. And they get to make a lot of decisions like, where do garden beds go? What kind of food are we feeding our community? What food do you wanna take to your own family? And lastly, we try to build a pipeline, a solid pipeline.

0:20:41.0 JG: We want our young people that start off like crew members like me, to end up like directors like Alicia. So we want our people to be the ones with the power and the ones doing the most in our city. So we're working on that pipeline right now. I'm kind of like the guinea pig in that. But yeah. [chuckle] So yeah, that's our youth program.

0:21:05.0 TT: That's great. Well, I mean, you are speaking to my heartstrings. I come from a youth development background, so I could ask you a thousand questions about the youth program component, but I'll contain myself and maybe we can talk offline. But obviously, in what you both have shared in terms of an overview of your work, you know, I didn't hear anything that was like, "We do this work so we can teach people how to eat healthier," or "Folks can learn more about... We need to educate them about nutrition and what they're putting in their bodies." And not that that is not important. But there's so much more in just that brief overview you gave us. And so I'm interested in if and how

history and culture comes into play in the work you all are doing. And I'll stick with you, Julie, on this, I think.

0:22:07.6 JG: Yeah, thank you. As we've mentioned, we talk a lot about the history of how we got to where we are with our food system and we bring up specifically the history and the stories of Indigenous Black and Brown folks in our land, in the land that we currently occupy. And we bring and shine a light on the perspectives and the lives that they currently live here right now because that's part of history. We're making history. And we honor the history and the culture of all of our people. The majority of folks of color here in New London are Caribbean. They come from Caribbean descent, so there's a lot of Puerto Rican, Dominican, Haitian, Jamaican folks. And we bring up their culture and we try to honor their culture in many ways. As I was saying, you can learn a lot from someone just by sharing a plate with them, just by sharing the table with them. And like a lot of cultures do, we share stories through food. We share love through food. Some families, their parents never said, "I love you," but a plate of food is like, "I just yelled at you and hey, you wanna come eat dinner?"

[laughter]

0:23:24.3 JG: We share those experiences and we gather and really build on one another in that way. And there's so many stories in our culture and there's so many like... Oh, actually, I remember one time in our community garden, my grandmother, she grew a lot of food. She passed last year from COVID, but she always grew so many vegetables. She always had such a really tiny backyard and she always grew so many crops and foods and all these things and I brought her to one of our community gardens. She came to visit from Puerto Rico and she... This little 4'8" woman was running around the garden, "Oh, my God, I know what that is. Oh my God..." Like, throwing things in her mouth, she was so excited and that really shows the generational wealth that there is in our stories. Living in a capitalist society, a lot of times, we just see our wealth through money and ownership and there's so much wealth in our history and the memories that we keep with us throughout our entire lives. So it's amazing to be able to honor our history and culture at FRESH in many different ways. And Alicia, if you wanna add anything to that.

0:24:42.1 AM: Sure and I think as a White woman, I come to this from a little bit of a different place of really understanding how important it is to acknowledge that settler colonialism and chattel slavery shaped our food system. It shaped our agricultural economy. It shaped who has land and wealth now, so when we talk about traditional capitalistic wealth, I think it's really important for White folks in the work and other privileged folks to acknowledge this before we can get into any food justice work. And it doesn't always have to lead, we don't have to go into a party and say, "Oh great, you're sharing your food culture. Did you know..." We're definitely wanting to bring our whole selves to the table and enjoy the love, like I mentioned, but it all has to come from a deep understanding of privilege and power and the historical trauma in this community and in this country. And so I guess I just want to share that, for us White folks in the work, for people who are doing the work from a service model perspective, particularly when we think about individual decisions and nutrition, that the power to make those choices has

really been taken from many communities. And it's really important that we know that and that we also can bring our whole selves to the table.

0:26:05.6 AM: I come from a European descent culture that is... Our food culture is not delicious. [chuckle] And I'm sorry if my mom watches this. She won't be surprised that I will not be talking about her amazing cooking. And I am so lucky that Julia, Julie's mom has cooked for me and our neighbor Jen Wong has taught me about bitter melon and just to be able to enjoy so many of the things that have come to me through these food cultures. And to think when I first got into this work... I got into the work around Farm to School and so often people would say, "Oh, great. You must teach kids about kale smoothies and broccoli." And I would always just sort of cringe and be like, "Oh, no. No, someone's teaching me about bitter melon and I'm learning about collard greens."

0:26:58.2 AM: In a way, we sort of institutionalize that at FRESH, is to really think about the crops we're growing and what's culturally relevant in our community. A few years ago, we made a big shift in our crop selection to include Caribbean peppers, which we didn't even know sometimes that we could grow here, which are a traditional staple for our Puerto Rican Sofrito, or our Hamrios from Peru. And mainly, we started the big shift with noticing there was a lot of kale left on our table all the time. Why was that? Well, a lot of folks in our community like collard greens. Collard greens and kale are the exact same crop from a gardener's perspective. They grow the same season, they take up the same space, they're from the same family and there's really no reason that we can't grow collard greens. Hi, Delberta, it's so nice to see you. I'm gonna end with that, so that we can say hello to Delberta.

0:27:53.2 TT: Thank you both. Delberta, thank you so much for joining us. I have to apologize because I have done my best in preparation for this event to confuse our speakers as much as possible about time and date of this event, so I am the reason Delberta is joining us late, but we're so happy to have you here. And we're just sort of actually diving in to the work and so we'd love... One, I'd love to hear from you, what's your personal connection and passion to this work? And then you can go straight into telling us about this wonderful outdoor classroom you all have as part of Umó'hoⁿ Nation Public Schools. You're on mute, which I do all the time. There you go.

0:28:55.9 Delberta Frazier: Okay, well, hello, everybody. My name is Delberta Frazier and I'm Dakota Santee Sioux of Nebraska. I married into the Umó'hoⁿ tribe, I've lived here for 30 plus years. I've always lived on federally recognized reservations, often on maybe... I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, when my families lived down there, when... I was born there and then we moved back to reservation and then that's where I moved to different places. I don't know if anybody is aware of how Native American reservations work, but each tribe has a land base and we have a big area and there are four in Nebraska, very small, very small reservations. So I married into the Umó'hoⁿ tribe. I have 12 children, I have eight sons and four daughters and I married into a wonderful family here, my kids' great-grandmother, her first language was Umó'hoⁿ language and she comes from the boarding school era where her parents, they only spoke Umó'hoⁿ. Then her generation were the ones that were forced to go off to boarding school and that was

in the '20s, all the way... 1920s, all the way up till now. We still have boarding schools, but it's not... It's a choice now.

0:30:29.9 DF: So she shared... When I got this job here working as a teacher, she would share all the stories about how she grew up having to live in two worlds. She would always be... Work as an interpreter for the ones that didn't know English and then she talked about how hard that is and they see the world differently, especially because they express themselves differently. And I'm pretty sure a lot of Native... Other Indigenous languages are like that, they see the world through nature, they see the world and express themselves through nature, through their plants, through their animals, through the seasons. So I had a... She shared so much... She was 88 years old when she passed away in 2015, but I spent a lot of time talking with her about the changes and how culture is going away. So, our culture... Our languages are gone. I think the most... We have maybe a handful 20, at least, fluent speakers left and they're all elders over the age of 60, 70 years old and they're the last.

0:31:52.9 DF: So coming forward to 2017, 2018, I met a lady, her name was Brenda Murphy. She had an approach to teaching because she grew up outside and sitting inside with a bunch of... With little Native American students, we have... It's hard for them to focus, we have all these problems, we have low test scores. So they're throwing out all these different things at us to help adjust the problem to bring up our education experience. And so her thing was, "Let's go outside, we can learn about all of the science, all of this stuff outside." So she talks about the very first time she took her kids outside and there was a fence there and on the other side was some timbers and a field and stuff and all those wonderful plants were over there. And she said, "You know what? Let's just go over the fence. We'll probably get in trouble, but that's okay." She said, "I'll take the heat. But I want you guys to have this experience."

0:33:03.9 DF: So since then, we have been jumping over the fence, [laughter] breaking out of traditional education and taking our kids outside. And one of the things that we... So, we teach through the cultural lens, we teach through the Umó'ho' culture and a part of that is seeing the world how they see it and they have a thing to explain part of the world, it's called "t'haté douba" – it's the four winds. The four winds are the four grandfathers that live in all four directions and they bring all the seasons to us and they all have their turn to come and be with us every year. And so the Umó'ho' have a very highly sophisticated culture written down. It was documented in the 1800s and we get to refer to that. So part of that, we found out that Umó'ho' people were master gardeners.

0:34:01.9 DF: In this book, they talk about all of their different strains of corn and watermelon and squash that they grew. And reading and understanding the Indigenous people before colonization and I'm pretty sure everybody on this panel, or everybody here understands what colonization is, because we all live with the effects of it. They could sustain themselves, they knew where to go look... They knew how to grow their food, they knew how to go forage, they knew how to hunt, they knew how to preserve their food without refrigeration, without electricity. [laughter] They had all of these high-tech way of understanding and preserving their food and making it last for the year. And I

said, "This can be reclaimed." We can look... If we look hard enough, we'll keep looking for stories, we have to look for stories and share the stories of people, that's where that... It's not gonna be in a textbook, it's gonna be in our common people every day.

0:35:10.3 DF: Did your grandma or grandpa, or did your relatives share stories? And in those stories, there's always the little details about things that if you listen carefully... And so one of the things, I was listening to a story last week about a lady, she was talking about four... Probably 40 years ago in Macy, every household had a drying station on the side of the house. And a drying station is where they dried their corn, because that was one of their staple foods, was corn. And I remember maybe in the '70s and '80s when I... Or in the '80s, when I came here to Macy, I seen them, all through the town, all of the homes had them. And then, we started getting food stamps from the federal government. From the states. Before the '70s, everybody lived out in the rural areas on their farms, in the '70s, HUD built all these projects for us. And I've heard they did that in the cities too, they built all these projects to give people nice, affordable housing. So that happened here on the reservation. And when that happened on the reservation, the people left their farms out in the country and they came and they moved in towns, into the projects and these houses.

0:36:31.6 DF: And when they did that, that's when the state started giving out... The food stamp program was given. And then so, "Oh my gosh, I got all this money now, I can go buy food. I don't have to grow my food, I can go buy food." But the food that they were getting was not healthy for them. Because they came from living off of garden foods and they started buying processed stuff. And one of the most terrible things for a Native person is white flour. The flour has so much... We don't have enzymes in our body to digest a lot of that stuff.

0:37:11.2 DF: So, fast forward to now, back in the '70s and '80s, we have a high rate of diabetes. In the '90s and early 2000s, we were losing so much people, we were having funerals, I mean, three, four people a week. We were losing so many people, they had to... They did a recent census on us and our mortality rate is 50 years old, because of diabetes. And everybody is like, "Oh my gosh, what can we do?" We gotta educate them about diabetes, how to address the illness. But when we were sitting in the classroom, I was like, "You know, if we go another... Peel another layer off the onion, it's the food that we eat and we don't have access to that fresh food and all of the farm stuff that we had before. So, we were talking about problems that we can address and the skills that we wanna teach these children and we can do it through science, math and these trail walks, by taking them out and teaching them, reconnecting them back to their environment.

0:38:15.0 TT: I love that.

0:38:15.5 DF: And so, we started... [chuckle]

0:38:17.8 TT: Yeah. First of all, thank you for the history lesson. I'm like a student at your feet right now, like, "Tell me more, tell me more."

0:38:25.9 DF: It's an important part of it.

0:38:28.5 TT: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I do wanna show just a really brief clip from the short film that was done about you all's work in the outdoor classroom. The film's called Harvesting Hope. I will admit that I have watched it, I don't know, maybe five or six times now. [chuckle] We're gonna show you just a really brief clip. Thanks, Sacha.

[video playback]

0:38:56.8 Speaker 5: We had this idea that we were going to grow a garden. Well, that garden idea kept getting bigger and bigger and it ended up being the size of a football field. We had 18 students who were employed this summer.

0:39:16.5 DF: It's an amazing opportunity, especially here on the reservation, because we have lack of employment for the adults, the adult population. We have to travel 30 miles to the city to work and those are only like factory type jobs. It was so satisfying that the students, they kept coming back, kept coming back. By July, as they were getting paid, one of the students said he had \$1,000 saved up already.

0:39:44.8 Speaker 5: One...

0:39:46.0 Speaker 6: First year project, we had a lot of learning curves. But it was amazing. It's amazing to see the entire staff and administration in the school supporting something like this when we were out here and it was 100 degrees and these high school kids showed up every day. And they showed up with smiles. How do you not love that?

[music]

0:40:15.6 TT: So that is a... It's a great short film, it's only 13 minutes, it will be the best 13 minutes you spend out of your day, so I highly recommend it. And at the end we've got a slide that has the web address for you all to access it. But what you've all been talking about really gets at the systemic issues around food and food access and our food systems. And so I'm wondering how systemic change and that systemic lens, shows up in your work and why you feel it's a really important piece of the work you do. So can you talk a little more about the systems change work you're trying to do, Alicia?

0:41:13.3 AM: Yes, sure, 'cause it's so important. Oh, Delberta, did you... Go ahead, Delberta.

0:41:18.7 DF: How it shows up in our population, our students, is that the federal government intentionally created policies to destroy our food systems. And so the end result is that we all live with historical trauma, our population lives with historical trauma. Because then they tried to fix the problem throughout, we want you to live another culture. But they couldn't replace our culture, we just end up becoming traumatized. So now we know that this historical trauma has a physical manifestation and our suicide, our homicide, our diabetes, these are things that we are experiencing on the reservation. And

our children come to school that way because living in poverty and I'm pretty sure a lot of people, those are physical manifestations of the lack of opportunity.

0:42:22.4 DF: And then also... So what we did is we brought that cultural lens in, that's the difference there. Letting the children be proud of who they are and helping them reconnect to that. And so we do... If you watch the video, I do a ceremony, a little spirit, we call it a spirit calling song to help them settle down and connect to the energy of this world and I tell my students this all the time, nature is not at war with itself. Nature is at peace, nature is in balance, we need to look to nature as the answer to our problems. So when you're having a bad day, we're gonna go outside and we're just gonna take that in, so.

0:43:10.0 TT: Thank you. Thank you, Delberta. Alicia?

0:43:14.6 AM: That was beautiful. And as you're sharing, Delberta, I'm just thinking about how interesting it is that we're on the East Coast in this urban area and you're in Nebraska and what you've shared with us is a rural area and our issues and the things we're facing in our communities are the same. In the video talking about employment where a big part of our youth program is employing young people, because you deserve a job and a good job, to make your community a better place and we don't have a lot of employment options around here, particularly good steady jobs and ones that can be rewarding in so many different ways and thinking about just the ways that food intersects everything. It's never just food, it's not just about getting calories, it's about these systems that are in play and so we're really intentional about acknowledging that and we're really intentional about teaching that out and talking about it in so many different spaces.

0:44:13.5 AM: One thing we talk about, like this exercise, we actually got from the food project in Boston and we ask in... We do this in college spaces and other spaces, but we think about how many places we can walk to from either our homes or our schools where you can get a Coca-Cola or a beer or a nip, which is something that's kind of prevalent in our community and from my house and I live near our gardens, I can think of 11 without skipping a beat and I can think of one place that I can get a head of lettuce outside of the FRESH gardens. There's one grocery store that I can get a head of lettuce or a tomato. And these things are set up intentionally. This wasn't by accident. It's set up because capitalism wants to benefit some people and put other people down and I think we just always have to really acknowledge that.

0:45:06.6 AM: And, oh, another way that I think it shows up in our work is just the way that we'll talk to other organizations about the work they're doing and we really try to promote people to think about the end user and the feedback loop around what people are... How people are consuming services and so we're sort of rooted right in our community, but we work with a lot of folks in the emergency food system, there's a new fad that is giving gardens, which is a beautiful thing. People take collective land, they grow food, they give food to the emergency food system, so often folks are not interacting with the people using the food on the other side and so it'll be like, "Oh well, I

don't understand why that crookneck squash wasn't taken off the table." Why didn't people take beets, you know what we should do, let's have an education program. Let's teach people how to use that stuff. Well, you could do that. I don't think it's gonna be very successful. You could just grow the vegetables that people want. You could have a feedback loop where you connect with the people who are eating the vegetables and you all talk together about what seeds to save and what to grow and how to take care of the earth and the people at the same time. And so that's just one of the ways, I'm sure, Julie, you could probably share more.

0:46:16.1 JG: Yeah, I just wanna add, like this urban farming fad, right? Not a fad, but it's like, it's coming up more and more, urban farming and we're blessed enough to have an amazing partnership with a family, a couple from New London who had a three-layer like land, that was totally open to farming, which is kind of unheard in this very tiny city, right? So we have been able to get soil tested, we've been able to create these partnerships with nearby colleges, Connecticut College here in our town, to do these experiments of like, "Okay, toxic soil, how is it impacting our crops and how are we ingesting it and how is it being reflected in our diets and in our bodies?" And part of that that's really big and interesting, is the planning and zoning in our city. We have no law or any kind of creation or language around urban farming here in New London in this city.

0:47:25.6 JG: So we're all learning and we're all building this system very new and it's like a baby and when we want to be safe about it, about creating farming in the city, but also we don't know what to do. So there's a lot of systemic things in having to work with city legislation and creating these partnerships, which we have some really great partners in the city, thankfully, that we can bounce ideas off of and we have to be really involved in our local politics in many different ways. Someone who comes into urban farming and they're just like, "Oh yeah, this is great." Someone who has no idea what urban farming is, it's like, "Get to know your city legislation, that's part of urban farming." So it's interesting, these systems at play that can really at any point, if someone's like, "No, you're not gonna grow here in New London," they can easily do that, they can easily take that away from us, so that's a really scary system that's also at play with us.

0:48:33.9 TT: And so much of what you all have raised so far is so aligned with the Wellbeing Blueprint and that's why this is a Wellbeing Blueprint event, but as you bring up, the system is intentional and I think, Delberta, you said it, intentionally designed to work this way and benefit some and put barriers up for others and if it's intentionally designed that way, we have to intentionally re-design and re-imagine and re-envision what these systems can be and that's so much of what the blueprint is about and the principles and the recommendations that we put forth. And the first is really, how do we actually start with what matters to people and wellbeing and really intentionally center community, not center our program, our organization, our political influence, but really what matters to people.

0:49:43.9 TT: And I've heard sort of, bits and pieces of this come up in the comments that you all have already shared, but I wanna double down on what that actually looks like and means when you center community, 'cause what we're really talking about is more

than, well, we did a focus group or we did a survey and again, those are great tactics, but what does it really look like when you're shifting that power and community really gets to frame what the problems are, what the solutions are and to set their own goals. So what does that look like? And Delberta, you wanna go through? Yeah.

0:50:28.4 DF: Yeah, something really wonderful really happened out of this. So when we first started, a couple of years ago, we had a local farmer who worked for the tribe and he planted all of the tribe's corn and beans for them every year and now remember, Nebraska's an agricultural state, but it's mostly corn, beans and beet and beef, it's not really food to feed the population in Nebraska, it all goes away. So the Umó'hoⁿ tribe owned... Their land base is on one of the most prime farmlands in America, we have very, very... We have a lot of land. But the majority of the land was being leased out to local farmers and for years, the Bureau of Indian Affairs superintendent for our area set that up, so that the ones who weren't living, who didn't have the ability to farm their own lands way back in the day, he set that up, so they were all getting leased and they would get a little lease check every year from the farmers, some of them would share crop and get a part of the profit.

0:51:46.6 DF: Now since we started doing this, we met the farmer and we said, you know what, we wanna grow a farm and we wanna be able to teach the kids to grow vegetables to feed themselves and their families and he goes... I said, we would like to do... He said, "You know what?" And he said, "Right down the street and that's how we got that big old field. It had, according to EPA, it has to sit for five years, restore itself and it was ready to get farmed again." And so that's how he got it. It was just like two blocks away from the school. And so he talked to the tribe and he got that for us. And when you look at seven acres, that's a lot of land especially if you've got a lot of kids. But anyways, so we put the garden in the first year and we invited the Tribal Council over and we showed them what... Explained to them our program, what we were doing and they were so fascinated and interested and they appreciated our goals and our mission statement that now the Umó'hoⁿ tribe has now...they're working with University of Nebraska, with the commissioner, the extension office, they wrote a \$2 million grant to shift from leasing their lands out to help people learn the skills to become farmers and farm their own land again. Which was intentionally... That was the intention. So this has all been in the process in the past year and when they invited us to a meeting and they said... There's something that's called a "hulaga" and that has to do with the four winds, the four directions. And there's an entry way at the beginning of our program is the entry way for the community members to start their journey on becoming a farmer and reclaiming their food sovereignty. So they shifted it and man it was like, "Oh my gosh, yes."

0:53:44.5 DF: So they wrote the grant, but the Umó'hoⁿ tribe, you know, majority of their land is leased out and they do grow their own corn and beans and stuff that they sell for profit and they use that money every year to buy the kids... They give the kids clothing vouchers, all the students, all the enrolled tribal members get \$250 to go buy clothes for school every year. So they put that in there, but now, since we're teaching our students to become gardeners and we have a pathway all the way up to high school, because then when they get into high school, they're gonna learn how to become entrepreneurship,

they're gonna learn marketing and then now the tribe will have a business, a place for them to go work and put their skills to use as an adult. And hopefully be employed and live here, happily.

0:54:37.4 TT: That is wonderful.

0:54:37.5 DF: That's how it shifted. It just did that and we're gonna... We're reclaiming our food sovereignty, but it's just the beginning.

0:54:44.5 TT: Yeah, thank you, Delberta.

0:54:47.5 DF: Yeah.

0:54:47.6 TT: Alicia or Julie, how does true centering community show up for you all?

0:54:56.1 JG: Yeah, I think... Oh, thank you, Delberta, that just gave me so much energy. I'm like, "Okay, I'm ready to answer this question." So I really appreciate, Tanya, you kind of mentioning the research and the surveying and all of these practices that are very much seen in our society and I think something that I really wanna highlight about the research and the surveying of our community, a lot of times, if you don't have relationship with the community that you're surveying and researching, you're dehumanizing and you're using their stories and you're not building that relationship and a lot of times you're taking from folks who barely have anything. You're taking from people who honor their stories more than anything and you're taking those stories from them and you're stripping them of that.

0:55:51.6 JG: And just like a fun... It's not fun, but a fun thing I like to think about is a lot of theorists, like our very popular Paulo Freire, went and did a lot of his research in Brazil and did a lot of his research with community organizers of Brazil and then he used all of that research and put his name on it. This is common practice for a lot of our communities, a lot of folks in colleges, a lot of bigger institutions that have money come into our communities, take our stories, take our experiences and then go and publish it somewhere else and we don't see anything from it. So part of that, how do we truly center community? Is by building relationships and showing people that you are human, I am human and we're gonna treat each other with dignity. I think dignity is something that it may seem like oh yeah, dignity is so easy, like, "Oh yeah, I respect you, Alicia and now you have dignity and now I see that you're a human," but it's not as easy as that. We have to look back at how have these... Because a lot of us, specifically folks of color in poor communities, they have trauma with trust. So their families, their generations have been used for so many things that there's so much trauma in building trust. So the ability and the privilege to build relationships with your neighbors and your community members goes a long way.

0:57:26.2 JG: And that's something that me and Alicia, we talk a lot about, that I'm really thankful for in FRESH, is that we have built like 15 years of creating relationships with our community members, to the point where if we're like, "Hey, we're gonna do a survey,"

they're like, "Oh my God, give me the paper, I'm gonna fill it out for you. And what are you gonna do with this? Oh, dope. That sounds amazing. Go. Go ahead. Hit me up if you want more stories." It's about honoring culture and traditions, but also just saying, "I see you and I'm not using you for your number, I'm not using you... I don't see you as a ticket, or a little check off the box, I see you as a human and I respect and love you."

0:58:11.0 TT: Yeah. That's great. And so how do we not be extractive of people in communities and their stories and history and in order to build the relationships? I go back to I think it was you, Alicia, saying early on like, "We've gotta acknowledge the harm that we've done to people." And perhaps not on the individual level of the harm Alicia has done Tanya, but the harm that our systems have done. We've gotta acknowledge that, acknowledge that in public ways and do some healing as a country.

0:58:53.9 TT: I'm looking at the time and I wanna make sure I get to people's questions, but I will give you all this one last question, 'cause I do think it's important and important for the group we've assembled here, which is a diverse group. And we say as part of the Wellbeing Blueprint and really to bring about transformative change, it can't be just transforming one system at a time. If only our problem was only one system needs to be fixed and then... All of our systems need transforming and they're all interconnected, but yet we work in these very siloed ways. And so we talk about spanning boundaries is really important. So even if you are not directly a part of an organization like FRESH, or doing wonderful work like you, Delberta, with the outdoor classroom, there are ways for all of us to be involved in this work and to try to advance this work, 'cause certainly, the food system touches every other system in all of our lives, so what would each of you say and advise folks in terms of how should people be involved? And whoever wants to go first. I won't even call on anyone. [chuckle]

1:00:23.7 DF: For me, all the learning that I've done, a story comes up over and over again of all the harm that has been caused to the land. We take 'em out... We're not only focused on growing food, but in the winter months we do storytelling and we talk about the seasons and things like that and the people really need to understand that there's... Like in our area, we're just now learning about... And this is a lesson that we do with our kids and reconnecting to the earth and learning... And we do it... We're reconnecting to the earth in a culture way 'cause we call her our mother. This is our mother and we're gonna go out and we're gonna... We do worm farms. So we're gonna go out and dig and **see** "inahme donde" that's what they say in Umóⁿhoⁿ. See what she has in there. And then when they're digging, we're talking to them about what's in there, the worms and then now we're learning that the farmers have stripped away all of the...

1:01:32.2 DF: And then there are... And their pursuit to their American dream or whatever it is to make money, have a nice home and do it at the least expensive way that they... And quickest way that they can do it. So they've created all these great big machines and stuff that strip off the land and they don't have any cover crops and now all this carbon is being released from the earth and it's amassing in our sky. So if people aren't aware of that... Now that I'm aware of it, I see all of the land that goes barren and it's a desert for at least six months 'cause there's nothing growing out there and all of this

massive carbon is coming out of our soil. So if you're not aware of these environmental issues that are going on, there's not gonna be a world for us to have all these wonderful projects. And you're not gonna be sustainable if we don't look at these critical environmental issues that are going on today especially with our trees and our forests and our sacred lands. So we're connected to all of that in a physical, spiritual way, but also in the... Excuse me for my term. I say, my White man's way. [laughter] I'm a res person and that's how we talk.

1:02:57.1 TT: That's fine. That's absolutely fine.

1:03:00.6 DF: I'll say non-Native way is to make money is the economy. The economy has a life of its own now and people, they prioritize that over our earth where we have to shift away from that. And I tell my students this, we lived and sustained ourselves without the dollar for thousands of years and we have to de-colonize our minds. That's all I would say about that much.

1:03:29.7 TT: Thank you. Thank you, Delberta. Julie or Alicia, how would you tell folks to get involved?

1:03:40.3 JG: Okay. Alicia pointed to me. So it's my turn. Okay. So I would say very... In relation... Oh my God. I'm so sorry.

1:03:52.4 AM: There's about to be a meeting right behind Julie. So I could pick this up and then you can jump in, Julie. I apologize for that. Yeah. First of all, Delberta, go ahead and call out toxic White culture 'cause it exists and that's a thing that we can all know and acknowledge that capitalism is part of a toxic White culture cycle and it's been really harmful and we could break free of that is a beautiful vision, I think. I just wrote a little note on here to create the conditions. What can other folks do? Create the conditions for people like Delberta and Julie to thrive and for our communities to thrive. Those of us with privilege and access can use that. We can share our power and share our access and we can acknowledge the history. And we can acknowledge the love and the beauty, which is another thing that toxic White culture keeps from us sometimes or capitalism keeps from us sometimes, is to think about the ways in which we're enriched by things that aren't money and profit. And so, yeah, but I think my biggest thing is use your privilege to create the conditions for people to thrive.

1:05:00.7 TT: Yeah. That's wonderful. So if you do have questions, you got a little bit of time left. Put them in chat. There was a question in chat that was about the snack beds, Julie or Alicia. So love the concept of the snack beds. Who maintains them and is that maintenance part of a community-owned process?

1:05:27.7 JG: Yeah. So, great question. I was doing another panel a couple of weeks ago and I was referring to garden beds and then snack beds and someone was like, "Do you grow potato chips on snack beds?" I'm like, "Oh my God. I wish."

1:05:40.3 TT: Oh God. [laughter] That was like music to ears.

1:05:44.4 JG: Right? [laughter] But, yeah, so snack beds are beds that we build for our community. So we usually look for a site that is very well-traveled. So, for example, one of the places in New London that's one of our main streets is Broad Street and it's across Dunkin' Donuts. There's a whole bunch of local businesses that are on that street and there's a ledge like health district that has a lot of health services for our community and they have this huge, little front yard basically. And they were saying, "Hey, we have water access if you want to put some snack beds there." And that's how it usually happens. As long as there's water access, as long as there's some sun, we are happy to place some snack beds and we're the ones that basically maintain them. So we do a lot of the weeding. We do a lot of the seeding, planting, all that stuff and then their folks are free to harvest whatever they want. A lot of times it's a lot of fun to... I don't know. During the summer in the mornings when kids are walking to school with their parents to summer camp, they see a couple yellow and red peppers and they just grab them and are munching on them on their way to school. So it's pretty special, but yeah.

1:07:04.6 TT: That's great and I love that both of you all's work, Nebraska and Connecticut, involves young people and their leadership and paying them, right, for doing jobs and gaining job skills. So I love that component about both of you all. I wanna wrap up with this final question for you all and I'll wrap up the session. I mean, you guys have me ready to get out there and do more. So you have totally energized me this afternoon. Oh, let's get this question from Cheryl. Let's see. It was on my screen anyway. Let's see. Do you have more land in New London for growing food and where does it come from? Is it they get large schools and are you facing pressures from developers who wanna make lots of money through development projects? So is that a big issue in New London?

1:08:21.2 AM: It's an issue. Yes. Yes, so the land comes from a bunch of different sources, but we are facing pressure, like many community gardens and urban farming centers are around development currently. We have our main community garden on a space that was owned by our city. It was our city's community center and the city didn't have the budget to maintain it. In our distressed city, we have a hard time keeping the tax dollars to maintain our buildings and the city decided to sell the building for private development and our garden is on that and our local senior center actually. And so we currently have negotiated with the city and we've done some organizing work to really build the power to stay there for now and we have a lease, but we could...

1:09:14.7 AM: If those private landowners decide to use it for something else that lease can be at risk and we can see that in other spaces. I know that Philadelphia, there's gardens facing the same pressure and I know there's pressure in Bridgeport, Connecticut. A lot of times... And I won't get too far on it, but gentrification is a thing that is really plaguing a lot of the urban centers that are developing, especially in New England, but I'm sure all over the country. And gardens beautify blighted parcels and sometimes can be a damaging step towards gentrification, because it's a halfway, "Oh look, it can be cleaned up. Oh, look, the neighborhood can be nice. What can happen?" And we always have to be aware of our role in doing that when we're reclaiming blighted spaces and

how we have to maintain our power to watch out for that.

1:10:11.4 TT: Thank you so much. Delberta, before we lose you to a low battery, 30 seconds, what gives you hope about the future of this work and transforming our food system?

1:10:31.4 DF: My hope is seeing that it can actually be done and being part of that. Putting seeds in the ground and saving seeds and sharing that. And that I know that the dream that I had of making, of doing this kind of work, when I meet other people, they're dreaming the same dream. It's wonderful and I always say that. I say, "Wakonda, or God, that means God, gave us all the same dream." And these kind of platforms like this where people can come together and share this and continuing on in a good way for our people and for the land and for our future, you know, that's what gives me hope. So I wanna thank all of you guys for this chance to speak and I don't know too much about the East Coast. I've only been out there one time, but I know there's... When I was flying over in a plane, I was like, "Where does the city end?" 'Cause every town is connected to the next town. And it just kind of like, "Oh my gosh," because out here, we got... Our towns are miles apart and then you guys... And then that you guys are bringing these little spaces back to life. And Mother Earth can give her fruit and bounty back to her children, her sacred children who walk this beautiful land, so that's it.

1:11:58.9 TT: Thank you so much. Same to you, Julie and Alicia, what gives you hope, as I'm gonna pull up our sort of last slide here with you all's websites and things on it, but what gives you hope?

1:12:12.4 JG: Yeah, what gives me hope is the young people that we work with. I think like there's a young person in our program right now that both of her siblings were in the program and now she is like the third generation in a sense in her family to be a part of FRESH New London and she wants to do farming and urban farming is a passion of hers. And she's 17 years old and it makes me really proud and excited because I can see myself in her being 17... I mean like I love urban farming and I love working with the community and my hope is to do such a great job that we work ourselves out of a job someday, right? Where we don't have to have an organization running urban gardening and urban farming, it should be a community-led project, so that's kind of... That's my hope; to not have a job in the future. [laughter]

1:13:15.4 AM: You took the words right away from me and as Julie was talking about the young person coming up behind her, Julie gives me hope. And I say that to her all the time. Hope that I can work myself out of a job so that she can have my job. But yeah, I think it's all the young people and the fact that these conversations are happening and they're happening more often makes me hopeful, so thank you for hosting it.

1:13:39.1 TT: Thank you and we hope that everybody who joined us today is actually leaving more hopeful and wanting to get engaged and involved and there's lots of ways for you to do that. I invite folks to please visit wellbeingblueprint.org and you can, if you haven't already, sign up for our newsletter and get updates on events like this and other

great conversations that are happening. We'd love for you to actually sign on to the blueprint and show your support for the systemic transformation that we know we need, you can sign on as an individual or as an organization. Start a conversation with us, we love to hear from folks and hear about what you're doing and perhaps think about possible partnership with each other and share your work. We wanna know about the wonderful innovations happening around the country. So thank you all so much. Thank you, Alicia. Thank you, Julie. Thank you, Delberta. This has just been a wonderful, wonderful conversation and thank you all for joining us today and I hope you're leaving energized and ready to take action. Have a great rest of your day everyone, thanks so much.

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