Hello and welcome to the west meeting room. We’re broadcasting from the Map Room Studios at Hart House and you’re listening to CIUT 89.5 fm. We acknowledge that we’re taking up space on Dish with One Spoon Territory. I'm Ari and I'll be your host for today's show with my co host Sabrina and Mica, if you want to say hi,

Sabrina 0:38
hello, hi.

Ari 0:39
And we also have a guest in the studio today who happens to be one of my best childhood friends Selva, if you want to say hi too

Selva 0:45
Hi

Ari 0:46
And today we're going to be talking about food. I've loved cooking since I was really little about four and recently I've been trying to like cook more and try new things and like cook things that I've been too scared to make. But I've also been studying food systems here at U of T And that has been, like, frankly, super horrifying and very eye opening. So I thought it would be an interesting topic to like delve into. So for the first half of today's episode, I thought we could sort of talk about experiences with food either like culturally or personally. And then later on, I'm really excited to share an interview with Paul Taylor of foodshare Toronto with you all and talk about some more serious topics about food, but for now, I think we're gonna, Yeah, sort of talk about little more fun things. And I know that Selva, you have a lot of stuff to say about food. And I remember like, a few weeks ago, we were talking about sort of your time in Vienna and learning how to like, cook a little bit more, and I'm wanting to, want to maybe start with that.

Selva 1:46
Sure. Yeah. So I was away for a year. And I was just, I live at home so I'm so used to having my mom's food which is very, very Indian. Like what I feel like whenever I go into my home, it doesn't feel like almost like Canada anymore. It feels like it doesn't feel like India, but it just feels like it's our home. We have our food and we eat with our hands. And I always smell like food. I remember growing up, my friends would say I smell like spices and that used to really irritate me but being away and I couldn't smell the spices on me that irritated me and being back now and I smell like Indian food. I'm almost happy to smell that just because it means I'm home. By being
away it was the first time I started cooking for myself because I think I mean I wasn't Hamilton
and not so far away. My mom would come drop off food and it's so easy to just find Indian
spices. But being in Vienna and just not knowing where where to buy the food or buy any of the
spices meant I just didn't have it for a long time when I first got there, but eventually I did find
some food and spices and I had to force myself to cook. I just don't generally cook at home it's
just me sitting on the countertop watching my mom cook. She'll get annoyed at me and say, Oh
my gosh, this is burning because of you. And I'll always be like, It's you. It's not me. It's you who
you're watching or you're cooking. But I missed my little spot on the countertop too. And I'm
back to it. So that's nice. But yeah, it's just, I think the way that I guess I just didn't realize how
important food was to me until I was away, and I couldn't taste any of home anymore. But I
started cooking for the first time in Vienna. And I had to go to so many different stores to try to
find the right spices. And I also couldn't find a lot of South Indian spices in Vienna. I'm from
South India, I'm from Thumber. And our food is pretty different, I think, to North Indian food, but
it was nice to get the flavors of India in general. And I started cooking North Indian foods and a
big thing I think, there's a part of our culture is feeding other people. A lot of I think Thumber
culture is based on feeding other people and having maybe events where you just cook a lot of
food, and then you go serve it to people. Serving food is a very big part of our culture. And I was
able to do that too. And it was a good way to make friends. Because I mean, where I was, I was
the only racialized person I think in my group of friends. And most people were European and
just, or just very, very white. And they didn't really, there is also a lot of different things that went
on there. And I felt very alone a lot when I first got there. But food was a way to have these
conversations, to bring everybody over to my space and just be like, oh, we're going to do what
we do when I'm at home. We're just going to eat with our hands. We're going to put all the food
in the middle, I'll serve you because that's just how these things go. And then we just sit around
we can talk and I can tell you about what it's like, my experiences like here and you can share
yours and we can makers about learning, rather than I think, me being like, me feeling alone.
And I'm sure a lot of them were saying that they felt alone too, because we all come to where I
was working. We all came to Vienna from very far away places. And we didn't know anybody
there and you're kind of stuck with those people. But it was nice to have these little evenings
where people would come over and I'll put my piles of food in the middle and we would just sit
around and talk and eat with our hands and it was fun and they bring sometimes their own little
treats from their cultures. And it was a nice way to just feel I guess, part of something and, and
share I guess our love for food. And also, it's funny is it wasn't just Indian food. I don't even like
protein that much. Remember when it was Canada Day, one of my friends there was Canadian
and she had her, her boyfriend came and he dropped off like cheese curds, the gravy and
everything and it was Canada Day and she made food for us, and we just had it in the middle of
the table and there's like three Canadians around this with a fork. And we just went at it for like
an hour and a half and we didn't talk about anything else but food the whole time. It was also
when we just started to get to know each other and but it was perfect. I think after that we really
felt a lot closer. So I like that i was able to use food as this way to bring people together and
feel more at home. In a place that just doesn't doesn't and won't ever feel like home for me.
That's it's really funny because I remember when you told me that i was like I did that exact thing on Canada Day and I hate Canada day and I don't love poutine. But yeah, we like we couldn't find cheese curds but I remember we like went out and found like the like, the most curdy cheese we could. Like everyone like made gravy and no one no one else was Canadian where I was working, but we like forced them into this and we were like, this is what we eat and they were like, this is just chips and gravy because they're all British. I don't really know. It's different. The cheese! like yeah, it's cheesy chips. But like, okay, yeah, fine. Maybe the food like Canada, quote unquote has invented is not very good but like, on Canada Day, I kind of want poutine and I kind of want to be back home.

Selva 7:13
Yeah,

Ari 7:14
Yeah. And I also remember you posting like, I think you like I don't know, there was something on some social media platform where you were with a group of friends in Vienna like on the floor like you were describing with like all this food that you've cooked. I remember seeing it first and like my first reaction was like, someone made that? My second reaction was like, Oh, that's really nice. I'm jealous. I wanna be there.

Selva 7:38
I had to trek for like, I found paneer. I can you can make paneer at home. It's a type of cheese as well. But it always looked really difficult. My mom like Indian mums, buy their pioneer at least the Indian mums I know buy their pioneer. So I was, I found pioneer and was very glad. And that was when you saw it was it was actually my goodbye and it was interesting. Because I didn't I have different groups of friends, I don't really put them together because they don't, they don't always get along. But I had everyone there in my room. And it actually, like it became kind of intense because there's, there's one there, there was just one guy who was just very just, his very interesting views on a lot of different things. But I found I was just a lot, but I feel like the part that worked was the food. And it was it was great that that was there because even though that I had couple friends who just couldn't get along and had such different views, they were able to at least like have this discussion and maybe even change their views on certain things because there was food there and we're all sitting around and talking. It was an easier conversation.

Ari 8:48
And I also want to hear from you too. I want to ask you Mica specifically about probably like the best thing that I've heard of. I'm gonna let you introduce this because I don't even know what, what how to describe it.

Mica 9:01
I'm kind of dead right now. But basically, I have like an incredibly obsessive personality. And I get like fixated with types of foods. So like, at one time it was like empanadas, so I would only
eat empanadas. Last year, or like a year and a half ago, it was tacos. I went to all the taco places in the city, it's the only thing I would eat. And then it during my sophomore year of university, I was like, I became obsessed, but like genuinely obsessed with hotdogs, and like the toppings and the idea that like, you could put a lot of sauces on them. I don't know like I really love that. And so my best friend and I, she's now on exchange so which is why I think like, the blog kind of died down. We decided let's go to all the hotdog stands in this in like on campus and rate them out of 20. So yeah, we were eating a lot of hot dogs. And if you want to follow us on Instagram, I think It's called hot dog, what's it called?

Ari 10:03
I don't know. I can look it up.

Mica 10:04
dog TO. I don't know, but I don't know I think like hot dogs are really cheap and they're warm, and you can put a bunch of toppings on them. Also some people are like afraid of eating, like street meat. And I say you shouldn't be nothing happened so far. So.

Ari 10:22
I know I've asked you this before but A) what was like the best hotdog stand in your opinion on campus and B) where's the best place to go for tacos in the city.

Mica 10:33
The best one on campus is Mama's best, which is in front of Sits Smith. And he's always playing music like he has like a lot of toppings and I find that the bread is never stale because we basically did a rating out of 20 points. So it was like experience. Like if lines were long or like whatever the service, the bun, the meat, the toppings. Oh, so yeah, so you would read them out of five and A total of 20 and he got really high up that stand. And I go there all the time. It's also like I think the cheapest one on campus, so I recommend it. And best tacos, I think. So I recommend two experiences. I think they're really different. Seven lives for more of like a gourmet taco that's not very traditional, but very tasty and I specifically like the octopus ones. They're really special and it's cash only. And then close to seven lives. This is also in Kensington Market, there's this place called Taqueria Ooze. And this is more traditional Mexican small taquitos with the toppings and everything that you put yourself and I actually used to go to their stand inside of like one of the Kensington Market markets, which was called the La Chilaqua. And then they opened this like bigger restaurant. That is still super casual, and it's cheap and delicious. So I recommend it. I haven't found any empanada that I like in Toronto yet.

Ari 12:02
That was really salty. I was like. So what, like what makes a good empanada for you?

Mica 12:07
I think there's, well there's two types of them. But it's like that when I think of like in my life so you have Uruguayan empanadas that are more of a like, the, like the so an empanada is
basically like a pastry with meat inside. And so the Uruguayan empanada, it's similar to like a pie crust with meat inside or like cheese or whatever. And then Colombian empanadas use use a different sort of, it's I don't know what it's called, like the covering. How do you call that like the dough? Yeah, the dough is the same dough that they use to make arepas. And those are, I think, yummier than the Uruguayan ones, but I haven't really found any place yet.

Sabrina 12:54
Yeah, I don't know. I feel like I always feel disconnected. from, like my culture, like my family's culture, I'm very Canadianized is like, there's like accents that I can't reproduce, but like my brother can reproduce like potswell. Which I can understand. But like, it's questionable and I can't reproduce it. Music and culture like all that stuff kind of evades me, but I don't know, I feel like when it comes to food, maybe it's just because of my experience. Like, I feel like everyone knows about these things. And then I start like talking about things that I eat and people are like, I don't know what that is. I feel like food is where it comes out where it's normal to me, but then I talked to my friends and they're like, I've never heard of that before. So yeah, from like, especially like the Jamaican side like, I grew up eating a lot of patties, which people tend to have because they're at like school cafeterias and stuff. They're really easy to buy frozen and just put in the oven, but especially when I started a relationship with my partner like he'd come to my house. And my mom would make food and he just be like, what is this like he'd have no idea what it is. And kind of like watching him try things that I've been eating for years. Has been really interesting. Because you're always kind of sitting there. It's like when you find like a really funny YouTube video, and you're like, showing it to your friend, and you're just like, staring at their face the whole time, like, hoping that they laugh at the parts that you're laughing. Yeah, and that's, yeah, that's that. Yeah. So yeah, I don't know what to say.

Ari 14:38
That's like, interesting, because I feel like with me, I always felt like, I don't know, like connected to my mom's side of the family with every aspect of her culture aside from food, because that was like when they came to Canada. They like, very much assimilated and one of the ways that they did that mainly was through food. So I feel like now I'm trying to like Ashkenazi food, and me and my mom are sort of like learning together. So it's interesting that like, yeah, I feel like we've had very, like different experiences with that where it's sort of like flipped. Like, I made my parents like, a bankah stuff. And they were like, I've never made this before. And it was really bad, but they'd never eaten it. So they thought it was good. I was like, Yeah, you're welcome. This is very dry. I'm sorry. And they were like, no, it's perfect. Yeah.

Mica 15:25
I feel like I have sort of a similar thing with being half Chinese. Like the only thing like going back to what you said, Sabrina? Like, I don't speak Mandarin. Neither does my dad. Like I know very little of the culture. But like something that I do, like I have a group of friends that were all half Chinese and like, we eat Chinese food. And I think that's the one thing that like, my grandparents have given me and that, like I use as a way to sort of like validate my identity because, well, this is radio but you guys don't know what I look like but I look white. So it's like
through food is the way that I like, stand proudly as being like half Chinese, and then similarly, but like also in an opposite way. It's like, so my boyfriend is north, North Indian. He's Punjabi. And like, I've been learning slowly how to make all his favorite dishes. But at the same time, I don't feel like I've ever had like the real version. So it's been really difficult to be like, This tastes good. But does it taste authentic? And then, like, what is authentic? And all these questions? So it's been like a really interesting experience that I think has also helped sort of bridge like the cultural differences that arise in our relationship and like, help me understand so many more things about him because like, I do think in his family and like, within his culture, like food is such a communal and like central part to his identity and, like so is it for me just like from like a Chinese aspect, I guess, or Chinese culture. So it's been a It's been a journey. He brought me spices back from back home. And I've been playing around with them but I don't know cooking is hard.

Sabrina  17:11
I like look up recipes online I'll text my mom and I'll be like, how do you make the thing like how do I make the thing and she was like, oh only take like 15 minutes with the recipe will be like only takes an hour half, three hours later. It's getting in the oven. Like it takes so long to chop things I've learned like it'll be like prep time, like 20 minutes and they'll just be like, just chop your bell pepper, your onion, your garlic, your carrots and your broccoli and like that takes 45 minutes alone. Nevermind measuring everything out. I think it's I don't know maybe it's my hands are just gonna like my knives are not sharp enough. But whenever I make I make this casserole because it last like weeks once I literally made like a month's worth of casserole and we were all tired of casserole but I didn't make it for like three months after that. And it took forever to chop everything. But I didn't want to say. Selva? You talking about just like watching your mom cook and then stop burning and and her being like, it's your fault. Like, that's literally my mom, I'll be in the living room, I won't even know that she's cooking something. And then she'll be like, she'll have like rice on the stove and should be making chicken and like something else and like she'll turn to get something out of the microwave, and then something will burn. Like, Sabrina, this is why this happened because you never helped me like, I never get any help, like no one ever assist me. And then they're always eating my food. And I'm like, first of all, I didn't even know you were cooking. Like you didn't tell me anything. Honestly. I should have just know like, I'll be asleep and then I'll come down and the food will be ready and be like, yeah, everything's fine. But the race was like a little overcooked because like, I didn't have any help. It's like I was literally asleep. But okay, so I definitely get that feeling of like, you are responsible for the food, even when sometimes will ask if she needs to open this up like no, like you just won't. Like you won't do it right like I just I know what I'm doing.

Selva  19:08
My mom, my mom. At least now she laughs before she would she I think she was a little bit salty, but now she's like, happy because I'm back on my on my little spot too. And it's been a while. So when it burns, at least she's like, okay, you're here. You're here.

Sabrina  19:22
Yeah. What? Oh, no,

Mica 19:24
I was just gonna add or like asking your mom how to make a recipe and then she's like a dash of this and then sprinkle that. I'm like, I don't even know how to chop an onion. Like, I don't know what a dash means. It's like, my mom makes this like special lentil stew that I'm obsessed with. And so like when I went back home to Uruguay this summer, I was like, Okay, I'm going to learn how to make it like, Where's the recipe? She's like, Oh, I don't know, like what's in the pantry? Like, what do we have in the fridge? I was like, but I don't have anything in my pantry. Like, I don't have a household to be doing these things. And it's so hard to learn that way. But like, I don't know, I think there's something really special about like, hanging around the kitchen, like when your mom is cooking. And like, I guess eventually, like through osmosis, like you'll learn something I'm hoping, I don't know.

Sabrina 20:15
I did want to say about the spices was like, I'm on the other side of that. So my partner is like, white and Jewish, but he's just like, like ethnically Jewish and not like religiously or culturally Jewish. So like, he grew up eating a lot of like, and his, like dad's white and his dad cooked, and he grew up eating like a lot of like, chicken and like, spaghetti.

Unknown Speaker 20:36
with a small bit of salt, right? It was like, Yeah,

Sabrina 20:41
like even like no cheese like, they don't like no cheese like, yeah, so um, the first time he made like breaded chicken, it was just like, the flour and the egg and the chicken and I was like, Where are the spices? And he was like, the what? And I've recently talked to his dad about this and his dad uses spices. So it's it was my partner just not not like getting that. So I have had to teach him how to like, spice things. And he was like, so how much black pepper do you use? And I'm like, I don't know, you just feel it. Like, like, No, you just like with the pepper in until your hands stops. I don't know, same thing. Like, I'll use recipes like I'll watch shows like nailed it on Netflix where people can't like bake or like people are bad, like worst chefs and whatever. And like, I'll follow a recipe if it's like, you need bell pepper, onion, garlic, like I'll get those things. But then I'm like, I'll buy like two if it says two because I'm not gonna buy five because it's expensive. But then it's like, I just chop until it feels right. So maybe you'll say like, it calls for two but only chop like a pepper and a half, you know, or like, for garlic. They'll be like, Oh, you only need like one clove of garlic but then I don't know it's like I want to smell the food while it's cooking. Like if I can't smell the food then it's not flavorful enough. I don't know.

Ari 21:53
Oh yeah, I always know like if there's garlic in a recipe I'm gonna put like five times more than these exactly. I'm sorry.
Sabrina  21:58
Oh my god. Yeah.

So I don't know you just like, feel I'm literally that like Max will be like, Okay, so how do you make that thing? Because like, I want to make it and then I'm like, yeah, you just like, put the cheese in. And then he's like how much cheese and I'm like, you just, it comes through your soul.

Mica  22:15
You know? No, you know, I tried to teach. No, I did teach and he's doing it really well now, like, I tried to teach my boyfriend this like, take on an Asian marinate. And like, he was like, Okay, so how much do I put of each thing? And I was like, well, less of this, but more of that and then like, look at your palm and measure. And then he was like, umm What? So like, I don't know, I guess you're right. Like it reaches a point with cooking that like, especially if you're not baking because baking is a little more scientific that its.

Sabrina  22:47
Even with baking I just do what i want.

Mica  22:47
Really,I'm scared.

Ari  22:50
I feel like I bake so much that I like I can just like I can see the dough and I'm like, yeah.

Selva  22:55
Bring us your cookies.

Sabrina  22:59
Remember the cookies I brought you guys at one meeting like literally, it was like softened butter. And I was like, I don't have time for this. So I just like melted it and then it said one cup that you know, and it's like, solid it's hard to tell like how much is a cup so then I melted it and it was only like, like a quarter but it like it was just like,

Selva  23:15
Those were delicious.

Sabrina  23:16
Thanks. That's the thing like when I bake it will be like only this much sugar like I make these lemon squares that I was gonna bring in but then I didn't have time maybe I'll bring them next week. Like the crust so it just like added I just add more powdered sugar like I just add things and then you just feel it right it just like comes out of your soul.
Well that's the thing about baking. Is it like it is like very scientific and it does need to be like right if you want to exactly replicate the recipe that you're making, right? A change isn't necessarily a bad change like and everything I never put as much sugar and as they say because I don't like sweet things even though all I do with my time is bake. But yeah, I don't know. But back to what you said also like my dad is like one of those doesn't know how to season a single thing and he, my mom and I yell at him about this every time he cooks and he's like, I want, I want to taste the chicken. Is that so wrong? Yes, it's wrong.

I do want to say, this is going to be published that my partner's dad like, does know how to season things. It was just my partner like blaspheming his recipe because we had a whole conversation, we ironed it out. I was like, sir, where's your black pepper, and then he's like, Oh, I use like Old Bay seasoning and like, whatever. And I was like, Okay, this makes a lot of sense. My partner just ruined it. But you know, we're moving. I wonder if anyone else also has the experience. I don't want to touch I did want to touch on that. Like, now that I have a household. I'm not just cooking for myself, I cook for my partner and I cook for my roommate. I'm always afraid that like, I'm not going to make enough food. Like I'm there's not gonna be enough food and then someone's going to be hungry and it's going to be my fault. And it's been like all this time cooking and it's not gonna whatever. And that's how I make like enough casserole to feed 20 people and there's only three of us and I think find too, like we made like a club size lasagna that like one of those frozen ones. And then the servings between the three of us. I ended up serving like half of it, because it was afraid that people weren't going to like be fed and like, I don't know, I'm just like, always, I like turned into this like domestic like grandma or like my grandma. And I'm just like, are you hungry? You look hungry. Like you should keep eating like you finish your plate. Do you want more food? And they're like, I've had five servings stop asking me if I'm hungry. And I'm like, No, are you are you sure? It's like when people come over and I'm like, we need to clean our bedroom. And my partner's like, they're not gonna see our bedroom. And then I just turned into this person. It's like a compulsion. I can't even I don't know where it comes from. But I'm just always afraid that people like there's not going to be enough food or it's going to be bad, or it's under spiced. So then you can literally like see the spikes on my food. Like you could like pick up the pepper with your fingers.

I have that too, Yeah, like when you came over. We thought they were going to be like three or four of us. And then like six or seven people ended up showing up and I was like, almost like crying into the like, French toast that we've made. I was like, This isn't enough. And everyone's like, it's okay. So, ya know, I feel that and we also like my roommates always cook for each other and stuff. So I feel like yeah, and like turning into my mother, like, they'll come home and I'm like, do you want me to make you a grilled cheese like are you hungry?
When did we become this person?

No, it's, it's, it's awful. I like I like, I don't know, it really stresses me out too. It's like, like, Okay, my partner, my boyfriend, whatever. He'll eat like, eight chicken thighs in one sitting. And like so now if I'm ever cooking for the both of us, like I have to buy like, two trays of chicken to make sure he eats enough. And I'm like, it's just it's really stressful. I'm always like, I don't think there's enough and then like, what if the rice comes out badly so you have to depend more on the protein to like, balance it out and I don't know it. It's a lot like, it's weird because I feel like we look at our mothers. And they just like host so effortlessly and like the dinners always on, you know, on the table and everything's always perfect. Like, I'm sorry, but when have you ever not had enough food at your mom's house? Like, I don't think I've ever had to be like, Oh no, like, we're out

Okay, not even just that, but I was cooking for my mom like, it was like Thanksgiving and we make a lot of like rice and salmon. We really like salmon. And I always find that like, something gets if I'm cooking more than one thing, something gets cold in the time that I'm waiting for something else to come out. And my mama is comes and she's like, the food's good. And I'm like, but every time you cook for me, it's like everything comes out at the right time. The rice is done when the chickens done when the vegetables like everything's done at the same time, and I'm like, how do I make sure that things don't get cold and she was like, just put aluminum foil on it.

The last time I looked for like, like a dinner party situation my oven caught on fire. So that was like not I remember calling my mom and I was like, do you think I can still do you think I can try like turning the oven on again? And she was like, no, that's not worth it. And I was like, but I mean, the fire will cook the food, right? Like, it's just so desperate to like, host this perfect like

How many times I FaceTime my mom and this is look done, just like, turn it a bit and I'm like, okay, but what about this and then I'll like hang up five minutes later, I'll call her again. I'll be like, so I'm at an event. Like Gordon Ramsay in the phone.

Okay, so we're gonna take a quick break and when we come back, we'll be playing an interview from earlier this week that I did with the wonderful Paul Taylor from food share Toronto. You are listening to the west meeting room on CIUT 89.5 FM, the sound of your city. Stay tuned.

And welcome back to the west meeting room here on CIUT 89.5 FM. I'm Ari, your host for this episode, and today we're talking about food. Earlier this week, I was lucky enough to be able to
meet with Paul Taylor, Executive Director of food share Toronto, a nonprofit here in the city, which is doing some amazing work and food justice. So here's that interview.

Paul Taylor  29:34
My name is Paul Taylor, and I'm the executive director of an organization called food share Toronto.

Ari  29:39
Um, so to start, I'd like to talk a bit about food justice, the food justice movement. For listeners who have maybe never heard of food justice before, what's it about and what does it look like specifically here on this land in Toronto?

Paul Taylor  29:53
Great. So I think food justice is something that's inspired many of us here at Food Share. And I think it's probably because many of us have sought to combat hunger in a number of ways, hunger in communities in a number of ways. And, you know, many of us end up at things like volunteering at food banks, that sort of thing. But food justice takes it one step further and recognizes that they are organizing principles that actually hold and perpetuate food injustices or and food insecurity. So things like white supremacy, things like colonialism, things like patriarchy, ableism, all of those things that if we want to make sure that everybody has the food that they need, we recognize that we actually have to dismantle and disrupt those structures that cause that cause food injustices. So here at food share, we look at a number of things we think about, we apply a food justice lens to our work. So we recognize that within the communities that we work with, these are often racialized folks in these communities who are disproportionately separated from the opportunity to access power and power resources. So we, rather intentionally as part of our food justice approach, recognize that 4 million Canadians in this country are hungry or experienced food insecurity to some degree. So we recognize that, you know, for the last 30 plus years as a country, we've kind of invented these community food programs, whether it's food banks or community kitchens, that sort of thing. They actually don't address the underlying issues that cause food insecurity, and aware of the view that those underlying causes are structural or systemic. And we actually in order to make sure that people have the food that they need, that we actually need to dismantle those systems like white supremacy, anti black racism, transphobia, colonialism, patriarchy, all of those things that kind of inform who has food, who doesn't but also inform who has a seat to the decision making table around addressing these issues, and who doesn't. So one of the things we look at is as an organization, one of the largest organizations in the country tasked with responding to poverty and food insecurity, we really think about how we have an opportunity to dismantle some of those systems within our own work. So that's where we've spent the bulk of our time looking at how do we make sure that it's not always the same kind of middle class white folks that get hired into these positions in organizations that receive funding to address issues that are you know, that folks of color racialized by pop folks are disproportionately affected by.

Ari  32:39
Yeah, sort of like a political economic taken on dealing with these problems. So the biggest issue is that these these issues are so systemic, and they're from like, the very beginning of the like food production to like the very end of like, the grocery stores, right.

Paul Taylor  32:55
yeah, you run me of another another point. You know, our first food system in this country is really built on racism and oppression. So much of the food that's grown in this country is grown on stolen land. So it involves recognizing that and really thinking thoughtfully around how resources are, how resources are distributed, how we grow food, how we acknowledge the history of the land, and the impact of people's infinite effort.

Ari  33:29
So I guess sort of, to I guess, jump back to basics a bit like what are these issues? Like? How do these issues take form that we are trying to mitigate?

Paul Taylor  33:39
So things like white supremacy, for example, how does this take shape in in our world? Well, we have I'm going to go back to the issue of food insecurity and poverty. This is an issue that we're working on. And we know that in the city of Toronto, you know, we're a little over 12% of the population experiences food insecurity or sorry, lives in a food insecure household. When we apply a race based lens to that, we see that that number increases to about 25%. So more than double. So we recognize that white supremacy has created opportunities for white folks, which include access to food that our society hasn't afforded in the same way to racialized folks, especially people who are black and indigenous. But it's deeper than that. When we look at the systems, we see that in prisons, indigenous folks, black folks are over represented in prisons, we look at things like you know, black folks account for 8% of the population of Toronto, but when you look at who's suspended in classrooms, you know, we see that it's black children that half the time someone is suspended they are a black child. So it's around. How do we actually in integrate into our food work conversations around those systems that act as pipelines to poverty and hunger. How do we disrupt things like white supremacy? So one of the things we do, I'm jumping around a little bit, but when it comes to our hiring process, you know, we have thought long and hard about how we, how we engage folks and how actually we can work to dismantle some of those systems. So we do things like an anonymized screening process. So we have one person who anonymizes all the resumes, that person is not on the hiring committee. So the hiring committee then gets a bunch of resumes that don't include someone's name, where they live, where they went to school, all things that I think are not equally distributed in society access to those things, particularly around where someone goes to school and post secondary education where someone lives, but all could potentially present barriers to folks for accessing employment. So we remove all of that stuff and really focus on the qualifications associated with the job. Far too often I think organizations and businesses throw on "must have degree in this", where as you know, I've never heard someone say in a workplace put that down, you can't do this part, this part of the job because you don't have a degree, you don't have a general arts degree. So. So we remove all of those things that act as barriers that folks aren't necessarily
...thinking about when they're posting those jobs and actually prioritize that we would like to hire folks with lived experience, because those are the folks that most importantly, we need in our work to address the issues that folks have experienced. And I feel that that's so important because I feel like as a leader that's experienced food insecurity and hunger, you know, it's really changed the way that I look at this work. And I think challenge is a bit of, you know, not only white supremacy, but a middle class bias that permeates much of the interventions that have been designed in the space.

Ari 37:09
I guess I also should have asked this at the beginning. But could you tell me a little bit about the history of food share and like when and how it got started? All that.

Paul Taylor 37:17
You bet food share started in 1985. We got a $20,000 grant from the City of Toronto in response to emerging hunger issues in the city. So started off as something called the Hunger Hotline, people were able to call a call us and then get information on where they're closest Food Bank was anytime any type of those kind of resources and it just continued from that kind of investment of $20,000. It allowed us to hire a half time person, to now an organization with closer to 100 people and a $7 million budget. You know, we've really just sought to be able to Demonstrate in a variety of ways that it is possible for people to access the food that they need. There is a role for community to play in that. So over the years we've just developed and tested and toyed with a bunch of different interventions from the mobile produce track, to the market to a whole host of things that kind of disrupt the way that people typically access a food. One of the big things we started was the Good Food box in 1994. And in the last few years, we've really revised it to reflect kind of what we've learned about who was purchasing it. And the like, you know, when I think about our work at food share, I actually think about something that opened four years before food share opened. There was in 1981, that Canada's first Food Bank opened and food share kind of evolved in response to that in 1985, and I really think about our work in ways that depart from the traditional food bank model one, we don't give out free food. But to a couple of things that are really key to us one, we recognize that everyone has a right to food. The federal government ratified the right to food in this country in 1976. So our work is to help the government ensure that everyone has access to their right to food. And we also recognize the traditional notions of charity. So you know, largely what it's looked like for years, middle class white folks, or more wealthy white folks in neighborhoods and coming into low income communities and giving out leftovers to hungry folks. So that's not what we do. We actually realize that the interventions that we design have to be led by community if they are going to be effective and if they are going to respond to the needs of folks in that community. So one of the things we do we do a lot and I'll never able to mention all The things we do, but we do a lot. And I would say one of the big things we do is we work with over 50 communities across the city of Toronto to develop what we call, or what we call good food markets. So these are subsidized produce markets, kind of like farmers markets, except quite a bit cheaper. And in spaces where low income folks connect often in things like Toronto Community Housing buildings, there'll be set up, so 50 to 50 of these markets across the city, but they're not staffed by someone outside...
of the community. They're staffed by someone who said, You know what, in my neighborhood, we've got a problem with access to affordable produce, and I want to be a part of the solution. So our work is really not to go into communities and handout leftovers at all, but instead, work alongside communities that are wanting to advance change and we can support them and use our capacity as a large food organization that grows a lot of food, buys a lot of food to help these communities set up market. So we do markets we do urban farming. We have a couple of farm sites, one on a rooftop at eastvale collegiate and another one at Burhamthorpe Collegiate Institute out in the field. And really what we're doing is yes, we're growing food, we're hiring youth. But we're also providing employment opportunities for folks. And I think for me, that is the the really significant piece because food and food security comes down to income in a lot of ways. So being able to put cash in people's pockets, I think is key. Yeah. So those are some of the things we're doing. We also have what I call a food truck that sells produce. So it's a decommissioned real transit vehicle that we then had redesigned to be able to sell produce, so that goes into communities as well and sells sells produce. We do workshops in schools. And then we're also really heavily involved in student nutrition work. So over 200,000 kids in the city of Toronto access meal in their schools through one of the programs that Food Share helps develop.

Ari 42:13
And when you're setting up the urban farming, what does that look like?

Paul Taylor 42:17
A good question similarly to everything we do, it's working alongside the community, you know, we recognize that we have some capacity. We've done this work for a long time. So we can certainly support to help communities along this journey. But ultimately, we're not interested in developing more and more farms and things like that just so Food Share can have more and more farm sites. So really, it's about developing food growing spaces alongside members of a community and making sure that it's being set up in such a way so that when food share steps back or is less visible in the project of the community is well set up to continue to grow the initiative. And that becomes an actual Community Food asset and not an asset of food share’s.

Ari 43:09
Yeah, yeah, that's I think, like, one of the most, I don't know, I guess, important things when you're when you're like working with and helping communities is that like a lot of charity tends to be, from what I've noticed and researched, like, very sort of colonial in structure and very sort of imposing and like sort of helps perpetuate those systems. And I guess sort of going back to what you said earlier, there's a lot of emphasis about community in the work that you do here. And I guess I was wondering if you could touch on that and sort of why that aspect of future so important and yeah.

Paul Taylor 43:47
Absolutely. Because community leads the work that we're doing, yeah. We are a resource to community, but we are really not leading driving, powering this work the 50 good food markets
across the city they are powered and led by community, individuals and groups across the city. You know, we have a significant advisory committee made up of about 60 people who predominantly come from communities that are most likely to experience food insecurity, they lead and guide the work. We help make their vision possible. So community is front and center in everything we do and and will remain such.

Ari  44:30
And, um, I guess to sort of go back to, to like what Food Share does has there been a specific initiative or moment or like something that you've that has been your favorite initiative or moment in the work you've done here, anything that stands out, I guess.

Selva  44:52
I think shortly after I started food share actually pretty much immediately after I started food share, I made scheduled meetings to connect with as many of my colleagues as possible. And I'll never forget one conversation that I had with someone who isn't here, who's since moved on. But they said to me, Paul, you know, food in sick food security, to me means having a good job. And I've got a good job here. And for me, that was a really pivotal moment. You know, often we're in nonprofits, we think about this work. And we think about the community only in the other and we don't necessarily think about the conditions. You know, it's almost an afterthought. And it's so often that you see nonprofits paying people, poorly, overworking them, and all sorts of things that are quite problematic. So that was really helpful for me to realize that be helped and realizing that a good job is key. And we've got to start within our own walls. So we've done a lot of work around what it means to be an employer and to be a supportive employer. You know, in our last review of our pay grid, we decided to apply a poverty reduction lens to that. So we gave folks at the bottom of the pay grid. So the lowest wage workers are 25% increase. And then as people went up, they got a little bit more a little bit of an increase except for folks at the top. So the executive director and the director saw no increase. And also, he recently introduced a lowest paid to highest paid wage ratio of one to 3.7, which means the highest paid worker and food share can make no more than 3.7 times that have the lowest paid worker. One of the ways we challenge income inequality so in doing that, in our organization, and challenging and encouraging other organizations to adopt kind of a decent work agenda within their their walls I think has been really important to us and We recognize that food is about income, the more employers that we can convince to create good jobs, including in the community food sector, and everyday businesses, the better off we are.

Ari  47:10
Right? And I guess, this might not be the easiest question to answer. I have no idea what the answer to this question is. Um, but in an ideal world, if you can picture a food system that works for everyone, what would that look like? And how, even if we even can, could we get there?

Paul Taylor  47:29
Good question. So what does that? So I think we were as a nation, we're on the right track, you know, in 1966, when the right to food was first introduced, and in 1976, when it was ratified, but
we went to miss somewhere because we went from ratifying the right to food in 1976 to now having over 4 million people that are food insecure. So I think we actually need to go back to the right to food. What does that mean? Well, it obviously doesn't mean that the government is going to be giving out free food, but creating the conditions to allow people to access the food that they need. So, you know, I see policy interventions having a significant impact on people's ability to access food. And the types of policy interventions that I think are going to have the most impact are ones around income. So when we see the provincial government, the current provincial government roll back a plan to increase, the plans to increase the minimum wage, it was meant to go up to $15 that actually taking us further and further away from our ability to actualize our right to food. So we would love to see some solid income based interventions. In an ideal world, we wouldn't be talking about minimum wage anymore. You know, just wrapping our minds around the fact that we have what is the minimum that we can pay so that an employer can pay someone but yet no conversation around maximums that people can earn so in an ideal world we're using policy which is funded through taxation, to address things like poverty and food insecurity, we should be talking about living wages, we should be talking about a universal basic income. Those are some of the things that will help people access the food that they need. We should be talking and recognizing this dismantling systemic racism, and those are the things that are going to have a big impact on making sure that people have the food that they need. And I and I want to note that, you know, any income based interventions need also applied to migrants who are here working, especially migrant agricultural workers, who are a part of our food system that we often don't talk about. You know, we like to say, you know, in this country, people talk a lot about local food. local food isn't inherently more just. And we might not be flying food thousands of miles, but we're flying people thousands of miles and we're treating them quite poorly and legislating their poverty. So for me, living in a world where people have access to the food, and the food is grown and nurtured by folks who are also nurtured and have access to the food that they need.

Ari  50:24
And I guess my sort of last two questions. The first one is, how can people get involved in this?

Paul Taylor  50:30
Yeah, so a number of things. If someone wants to get involved in our work and support food share, they can purchase a good food box and every good food box that we sell, helps us do the work that we do. So you can have a box filled with produce for as low as $16 delivered to your front door. So if you search the Good Food box, Food Share's good food box, you'll see that pop up. I got mine a couple of days ago. It was packed with groceries with wonderful produce. So that's one thing people can do to support food trouble folks are living in communities where they're struggling and feeling like oh my goodness, there's four places where I can buy Doritos, and that's great. But I also want to be able to buy apples and bananas. And we don't have that really in my neighborhood. We're happy to work with those folks to help set up good food markets. and the like. And then you know, folks are they can also just get in touch and come and help out and volunteer. We're always willing to engage volunteers. Yeah.
Ari  51:36
yeah. And where can people find like social media or anything?

Paul Taylor  51:40
Yeah, so people can find out more about us on our website at food share.net. But we're also on Twitter. We're on Facebook. We're on Instagram and probably more things that I'm now forgetting.

Ari  51:51
And I guess my last question, what is your favorite go to comfort food?

Paul Taylor  51:56
You know, I like things that are roasted. So I love a good roasted chicken actually. And I think that goes so beautifully with some mashed potatoes and gravy. Yeah. Something green on there.

Ari  52:11
All right, thank you so much.

Paul Taylor  52:12
My pleasure. Thank you.

Ari  52:15
Thank you to our guests Selva and Paul Taylor and to my co hosts, Mica and Sabrina, and to Saba for working the soundboard today. And most of all, thanks to you, our listeners. We'd love to hear from you. You can find us on Twitter @ HHpodcasting and Instagram @Hart House stories. We're here every Saturday at 7am on CIUT 89.5 fm. And we post all of our episodes under Hart House Stories on Soundcloud or intro/outro music was composed by Dan Driscoll. I'm signing off as your host for today. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next week.

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