

Signal Boost Transcript

Episode: 3 - Community Building During COVID-19

Guests: Agnes Thompson, Local Champions Network

Ko Hosoya, Parkdale Women's Leadership Group

Local Champions Network

SARAH

Hello

Welcome to SIGNAL BOOST, a podcast brought to you by the Centre for Connected Communities and Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Centre for Connected Communities is a community development strategy organization that supports people, organizations and institutions to unlock the potential of connected communities everywhere!

Communities are the building blocks of cities. But communities can't exist without people. In each episode of SIGNAL BOOST, you'll hear from people on the ground about how grassroots solutions are leading local change. This season, we're highlighting the work of community builders across Toronto that are actively engaging in ways that make their communities more livable

Agnes Thompson and Ko Hosoya are grassroots leaders in Toronto's Neighbourhood Improvement areas. In this episode of Signal Boost, Agnes and Ko met virtually to chat about how they've been responding, and their hopes for a "new normal" post-COVID-19.

AGNES

My name is Agnes Thompson, I live at Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park area. I'm a grassroot leader, Local Champion in my area, and also a resident. I work with residents in my area, bringing in lots of workshops and events in my area, through Local Champion, and my community organization which I've been volunteering with for over five years. I am a mother of three grandmother of five.

KO

Hi, my name is Ko, and I live in Parkdale and I am a member of the Local Champion group since 2018. I also volunteer in community since 2005. Currently I'm volunteering for Parkdale Recreation Activity Centre.

AGNES

Ko, in what ways do you think grassroots work has been impacted in your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

KO

I think the impact is so huge and my own committee work is sort of stuck. Other members just organized, very very quickly, the supporting group called the Parkdale Pod, and they organized each resident to support each other for food, medication, those delivery things or so, change that a lot, but then I have conditions that I can't go out. My own are completely, almost completely stopped. I am a member of local women's group, and we have facilitated dropping workshop which focus on mental health in our community members. We started planning meeting in beginning of March, and then all stopped. We don't know how to modify those drop-in group, because we have to stay at home or keep social distance and some people doesn't have internet so for meeting it was very hard to continue so it's kind of in the air, nothing happened. It's really big impact on community activities.

AGNES

There is only so much you could do as a grassroots leader. Yes, you could help, you could you could help but you have to do it from a far distance, whereas before you have this, it's, it's impacted a lot, you meeting everybody and you're getting together and being able to communicate, or, or doing work on a one-on-one level but right now, you have to take a step back and do it from a distance and there is only so much you could do so. I do believe grassroots work has been impacted. We can't work effectively as we want to, so I'm looking forward when this all over to start back from where we left off. Are you doing anything at this time for your community?

KO

Our organization had a food box to deliver to the community. So people who can't use the food bank or free meal service in our community seems to be receiving those service. And also the Parkdale Pod received funding from Recipe for Community. They're providing the essential supply like not only the food and medication but also some other supplies to the community and also the organizing WhatsApp group, and as a communication tool. Then they donate things, each other or support each other in a mental way or share the information with each other.

AGNES

For me, when this first started, one of the organization worker, which is somebody from The Storefront, called me and said to me Agnes, do you need food, let me know. So I said yes we need, we need some food and she was able to make the connection with someone to drop off food for myself and my daughter and like my two grandkids, I have to say I'm so thankful because when they drop off the food, my whole kitchen has so much food I didn't have a place to put food. I had to call people and give away some of the eggs because I didn't have room for and. And then we have the Boys and Girls Club in the area, who drop off food for us every Thursday and then we have another restaurant in the area, the food bank in the area that does the food bank on Wednesdays. I must say in this community we are blessed to have the people in our community working together to help each other in this community. So for that I'm really grateful.

KO

Wow, that's amazing, beautiful.

AGNES

How are you feeling right now, not being able to do your community work the way you used to?

KO

It's a bit frustrating because so many neighbor residents need support, especially those who has, has condition or elderly people and isolated. So, there are so many things we, I, I could have done for them but since I also can't go out so what I can do is so limited, only checking in those members to the phone and calling them, and checking in, how are they doing what they need, those kinds of things. It's very limited. That is very frustrating.

AGNES

I know for me it's a little bit...It's frustrating also, but I try to call my community residents and in my community because I have a phone log at home so I call everyone we keep in touch with each other. Now we're doing phone conference with, with our organization which is the East Scarborough Storefront and the leaders there, and we talk about what we want to do when it's all over and what we would like to see get done. You know what are the changes we like, we like to make and things like that. We still finding ways of communicating of reaching out to each other and trying to get to know each other get to know what's going on with each other and there is, if there is food in the area serving in the area. We let each other know and to share the word around so that

everybody could know what's going on. So that's what we're doing right now in our community

KO Since our regular meeting, face to face meeting stopped, which is really sad things, but I'm very grateful that I still have been joining the zoom meeting. Sometimes my internet is very unstable and hard to hear those people what conversation but we can chat through the phone. So it's really important feeling I'm belonging to somewhere and then doing something, and also through the discussion of the video conference, your project is still going on and we can see what we are doing, which is really great things which are one the important factor that I can handle this kind of self jail situation. How about you?

AGNES You know, when this is all over, we learn a lot. I know we have learned a lot. We as grassroots leader will appreciate each other, each other more. We appreciate the resident having to see each other on a daily basis. It's gonna be, it's gonna be different. It's right now, it's not the same because everybody's so far apart, and even still, they could say they're ok, just because they don't want you to know that they not, you know the residents could say they are okay, because you're on the phone with them, but they don't have to be okay. You don't... we can say for sure they're ok, but as a grassroots leader you you see them, feel them. You watch them in their face you will know whether or not they're okay. Sometimes when I leave home and they go on the street I will meet one of them or two of them and they will say, Agnes I'm not okay I'm not okay. What happened you know you right there you feel so helpless, because you can... number one, you want to embrace that person to let him know that you are there for them. You can't do that because you have to keep distance and you know they need you now, more than ever. It's really, it's really hard it's it's a it's a hard thing to deal with because you just want it to be over to get back to the normal. I don't know if it's gonna be on there gonna be another normal or there's gonna be a new normal what it's gonna be like but I'm looking forward for for when this is all over

KO Since this all happened I saw a lot of very generous support each other even they don't know each other but as a resident, they started supporting and very working hard. Those beautiful stories, made me, I don't know how to express, but then how people are generally nice and kind. Those things are very clear. Now, even it stopped, I hope that this

community feeling like supporting network keep existing in my neighborhood, then it would be so nice

AGNES

The love we show each other now when we far apart is the love we should show each other when we close. That's how I feel the new normal should be

KO

I miss you Agnes though

AGNES

I really, really do miss you when this is all over, we will sit down together

SARAH

Thanks Agnes and Ko, it's so important to hear how communities on the ground are responding to COVID-19, and how you're continuing to stay optimistic about what comes next. Thank you for sharing how you've been feeling and your hopes for a post COVID-19 future. Today's guests were Agnes Thompson and Ko Hosoya grassroots leaders in Toronto, who are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This has been SIGNAL BOOST, amplifying the voices of community builders on the ground and at the grassroots. SIGNAL BOOST is brought to you by the Centre for Connected Communities and Ontario Trillium Foundation.

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