

Signal Boost Transcript

Episode: 4 - Youth Engaging Youth

Guests: Ariba Siddiqi, Co-Chair, ACEY (Association for Committed and Engaged Youth)

Khuzaima Rana, Administrator, Communications, ACEY

Pranitha Rathakrishnan, Animator, Communications, ACEY

Tasfia Rayhan, Animator, ACEY

Nabiha Khan, Facilitator and Finance Liaison, ACEY

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.

On this episode, ACEY -- The Association for Committed and Engaged Youth, is a Scarborough-based youth-led grassroots organization. They have been supporting youth in their community by providing digital spaces for connections, resources and distraction. They met to discuss how youth are supporting youth and how adults can be supportive allies.

ARIBA

Hi, my name is Ariba, and I'm the co-chair of ACEY, which stands for the Association of committed engaged Youth. We are a youth-led grassroots organization based in Kingston Galloway and Orton Park area. Our mission is to reaffirm the power youth hold as leaders at the forefront of generational change, we want to help youth impact changes in the community and bring forward changes that we want to see in the community. And right now, we've been focusing on the 3D initiatives called diversity dialogue and disruption, we want to investigate how you feel in the spaces they occupy like how they feel in schools, libraries recreation center. And what we want to do with all this information is

compile it into a report that we help to disseminate to youth leaders, anybody who's basically in charge of overseeing youth programs like guidance counselors and teachers, hoping that they can improve their services for youth. We've been hosting these workshops physically at schools at these recreation centers. But because of social distancing we had to move our initiative online so if we've been hosting it on Instagram, Discord livestream.

TAFSIA My name is Tafsia. I'm an animator with the Association of Committed and Engaged Youth.

NABIHA My name is Nabiha. I'm also a facilitator for the 3D workshops, and I'm also the finance liaison of ACEY.

KHUZAIMA Hi guys my name is Khuzaima. I'm an administrator at ACEY, and I'm a part of the communications team.

PRANITHA Hey, I'm Pranitha, I'm an animator with AC and I also have a few roles on communications.

ARIBA How has the pandemic affected your leadership and how you impact the community?

TAFSIA I'm also the co chair of a group called satellite ACEY. So we've moved the Association of Committed and Engaged Youth to a school as well. I can't see the students in class face to face when I'm online post COVID forming these sessions. I can't really show my position and I can't assert that leadership in the same way.

PRANITHA I am also a co chair of satellite ACEY. It's something that isn't possible anymore and can't really be moved on to a digital platform. So I think, leadership, like all of our other aspects of our lives have been changed. They either have to happen at home now or digital or they don't happen at all, but even, it doesn't even have to be leadership in that sort of traditional sense, I think what leadership is it's kind of about learning how to bring up those around you, and to empower them so you can still take these skills that you learn and use them to try and foster a sense of community amongst your friends, maybe help each other out with

homework or reach out to those introverted friends who are having trouble reaching out to people

NABIHA Another thing that I found particularly tough, is that we can't really interact with each other in the same way

KHUZAIMA Also some initiatives that were usually done to full capacity have kind of been cut almost in half because we can't fully do it because it's not in person it's online

ARIBA How do you feel the virtual 3D sessions are helping youth during this time of isolation?

PRANITHA It allows us to talk about issues, and it creates a lot of conversation and the conversation, always flows to what's been weighing heavily on people's minds. So, these 3D live sessions offer space and they can be quite therapeutic

NABIHA I like the word distraction. I mean, we don't really see it in a good sense but I think when something as heavy as this pandemic is going on. It can be really hard to sort of sit there and like have to take it all in all the time. If anyone joins our ACEY live sessions or our 3D sessions it's like you'll see you people just talking like normal like they're so happy to just have the opportunity to like talk to other people again and just complain about like what's going on

TAFSIA Before COVID-19 I think our retreat was our screens. And so now that we're like, on our screens 24-seven, even the dialogue that we have on our 3D sessions they unpack a lot of what we do, off our phones as well and on our phones like the dialogue on the different platforms we use so I think that's something great that happens

PRANITHA I think there's just so much solidarity with everybody, despite you know what your specific situation is

NABIHA I feel like with the solidarity there's also like so much resource sharing that goes on like in our comments, we'll talk about something and then all these people are like, Hey, I can help you with this problem I can help you with this and they're like start sharing these resources that they're actually

using because it's not just coming from us, even as facilitators it's coming from other youth. I feel like it's doing so much more than if we're just handing them out a sheet of paper saying use these resources

TAFSIA

Tying back to the solidarity as well like I really felt included and like my concerns are being talked about as well. I, as a student had resonated with one specific topic that we touched upon, when we said, I think there was one phrase that we were talking about that we are, we're not bumming around that we have a lot of subjects to manage especially at the beginning of when e-learning had started, and we just expressed the sentiment that you know a lot of teachers have been piling us on with a lot of assignments and trying to overcome the gap. So I think, not just that sentence with the feeling that came with it, of like sharing your concerns I think that, like helped me

ARIBA

Yeah I feel that we're building a whole online community for ACEY and like everybody just to get together and speak and talk about their problems. So was there anything said or done during the sessions that resonated with the group or resonated with you as a facilitator?

NABIHA

I knew it was gonna be a hit, you know, the one thing that shocked me like I was seeing the same people attend over and over. And I was like oh my gosh like that's so sick like people actually came back and that's how you know that like online community spaces for youth are like so needed.

ARIBA

I know personally when I did one of my sessions somebody just straight up told us Hey the activity you did was kind of like wasn't integrated well, so I'm happy that people are actually attentively like listening to the live. So do you have any ideas, for example, even how teachers are piling a lot of school work, you guys have a lot of solutions anything else want to say about that?

NABIHA

Well I mean because so much of our audience is students and they're currently in school. A lot of the stress they brought up was related to school so I think we definitely need more academic support online. I know it's complex, and it might be hard to sort of set up online but it's so necessary because I know just from talking to these students. Even my own family members, and my friends, like we need online support that's

outside of of emails and live chats, but I feel like so many students are being left behind and it's, it's just unnecessary stress on them, it's not fair.

TAFSIA

I think that, like there are ways that we can like not 100% solve these problems, obviously. But to start I think not only helping the youth themselves but by helping the teachers as well, like for example if we all give, I guess through online live sessions for the teachers and for like facilitators to have online sessions and to improve their systematic approaches

ARIBA

It's not like we haven't been using our computers or laptops for school since ages

NABIHA

If you know that your students are struggling with technical difficulties, an email saying please make sure you don't have technical difficulties like what does that do? If you're doing an exam test or assessment and your internet shuts off or your computer stops working. You can't predict that. How?

TASFIA

So you have no input output no basically no communication except for emails at all. Another one of my advice is I guess maybe to the TDSB would be like a facilitated dialogue. And so because I had tried to reach out and I don't really know I never got a reply. I talked about my concerns, especially with the, I think that fact as well, that we're not really receiving the proper communication from all our teachers. Led by the TDSB, their teachers and youth have an open dialogue maybe. It'd be more, to be more accepting of the criticism, they've received from both teachers and youth would be amazing and I think that would open up the floor for much more.

NABIHA

I'm hearing this across all levels of like students, even from like middle school, high school and university students is like using platforms that nobody's familiar with is not going to help anybody you know, ask us about what we're comfortable using talk to your students reach out, instead of just implementing something totally foreign and then expecting people to play catch up. It's frustrating because like I know students are struggling so much with this.

ARIBA So do any of you guys have advice for other youth leaders in the community?

KHUZAIMA There's a lot of opportunities especially online to reach out, just like we are obviously you see discord you see even Instagram lives. You see a lot of different chat forums that you can reach out to people. This day and age basically like 90% of the youth they use social media, they have some type of social media and I feel like even if you can get one post out that can resonate with someone, you're doing a good job and I feel like no volunteering or anything should be cut down just because they can't do it in person

NABIHA Right now is the time for youth leaders to take advantage of this new like willingness and openness of organizations to collaborate that we're seeing like there's so many groups that are saying, like, hey we can create networks and we can collaborate and put on joint initiatives to help youth through this and I think we need to take advantage of that

TASFIA Putting yourself out there as an organization that you have people who are in a group, a youth organization, and just be like okay you know what we remember you from school, just because school's not face to face doesn't mean you're not, you know, in our minds and, and you weren't ever a part of that group would be really useful to me and many other students to like, just keep us connected and keep us updated.

ARIBA Yeah, I totally see that. I remember when we first got the social distancing rules in place, we were kind of like bummed out like how are we going to do any of this. But you're right this new era of like communicating with people in a different way emerged. We have so much more potential as well. You don't have to have a whole plan or started to be set in place, Just use the skills you have to do whatever you can to help everybody in isolation or just somewhat communicate, just so we know that they're still there, it's not like the organization just stopped because of quarantine. So what do you guys want the new normal to be?

TASFIA What I wish to be the new normal is like just less judgement and more acceptance of, you know, just the situation that everyone's in

NABIHA For me I want the new normal to be people accepting each other and

accepting each other's struggles and being more open to discussing what we're going through. Just come out mentally sound and healthy like that's what we should be prioritizing

KHUZAIMA

Now as the virus has changed, basically the entire world we really see how not hard but how difficult it is kind of, to really communicate fully and honestly about the stuff that's going on around and how like important it is to like school and everything and leadership and volunteering, everything.

SARAH

Thank you ACEY for sharing the ways that digital spaces have changed for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, and your insights into how youth can support each other most effectively.

Today's guests were ACEY -- The Association for Committed and Engaged Youth, a youth-led grassroots group based out of East Scarborough. You can connect with ACEY at ACEYKGO@GMAIL.COM or visit ACEY on [Instagram at ACEYKGO](#)

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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