**Youth Perspectives on Climate Justice**

*Edited for clarity*

**Malory:** All right. So welcome everybody to our installment on Youth Climate Activism in Toronto, we have two excellent activists here with us today. We have Allie Rougeot who is a UofT student who also does coordinating for Friday's for Future Toronto, and we have Savi Gellatly-Ladd who is a youth activist as well who’s done stuff with Climate Justice Toronto and so many others. I'm so excited to have you both here today. I'm going to ask some questions, some are more specific than others, but just like all the other interviews it's totally open to wherever the wind takes us, whatever direction we want to go in. So the very first question I want to ask is: Could you both tell me a little bit about yourself outside of climate activism? A lot of the time we think of activists as only doing one thing; they do climate activism and that's their whole life, but I want to see what else do you guys do? Savi could you start?

**Savi:** Yeah, sure. For a while activism was just like my whole life, but then I realized I had other interests and stuff. I really like being creative and making art, and I just started making earrings, which is so fun. I also really like spending time with friends being like, your typical teenager. I feel like a lot of people view activists as just activists, like they’re a different type of person from everyone else, but actually I just am like everyone else, kind of.

**Malory:** Yeah. I think that that's something [that happens when] we highlight certain youth in the media. Everyone knows Greta Thunberg. So we see that this is what it means to be an activist. It means you're traveling to the UN, it means you're doing all these big global things, but I'm sure even Greta has like things she does for fun that aren't related. And it's true for everybody who's ever been engaged in social change. So Allie, how about you?

**Allie:** Yeah, I think I’m exactly like Savi. I had a moment and I still have waves where it's just activism. And at first that often feels actually awesome. You really are in a mode that you're super productive, you're doing so much. And then it crashes. Usually you feel like, ‘Oh, I need to be young again.’ Like I'm now 21 and we're have the past three years been? At Queen’s Park. So you have to redo that. And there's a bit of guilt sometimes. Like sometimes I'll be going out instead of organizing. But a lot of what I do outside is definitely hanging out with friends. I really like to go around Toronto to cafes, I like the party quite a bit. So there's that every time. And sometimes just organizing, not for necessarily a cause, but I'm really involved into orientation or organizing events in general that are just for the social aspects and not with a big mission behind it.

**Malory:** Yeah. That's a really great point. I like how you said “be young for a little bit.” And that makes me think of this other question I was thinking about: How would you even define youth? We're talking about youth led social change right now, but what does it mean to be youth? It's kind of vague, is there an age limit? Is it a mentality? What do you think?

**Savi:** Using the term youth sometimes feels restrictive, and what is that age? Everyone has like a different perception of that. But my view of it is more like an energy, like a youthful energy. Like loud, in activist spaces, pushing boundaries, just like rebellious stuff like that. I don't know.

**Malory:** Having a little more youthful energy. I like that. I'm curious, do you think that youth are motivated differently than other generations, especially when it comes to climate justice? And if so, why? Allie, I'll let you field this one.

**Allie:** Yeah, for sure. I do think youth have a certain motivation. With climate, it's obvious to our own livelihoods. I do think going off of what Savi said, that we do have a capacity to imagine and dream up things. With climate and with climate justice, we also see the option of changing a lot more things that past generations wanted to change, but they weren’t fighting for that specifically. We see this massive opening and also imperative. It's not just an opportunity, it's a real threat. So I think the reason there are so many youths behind the climate justice movement right now is because we've been learning about these past movements and we can incorporate them with the massive deadline that we have like the climate emergency.

**Malory:**  Yeah. And we've seen environmental movements before, throughout history. You have the seventies of like the flower power kind of energy and all kinds of anti-extinction work from the nineties and early two thousands. But what are some other ways, even beyond environmental movements, in which youth led social change. How is that reflected throughout history? Do we see the climate justice movement as a pattern of something we've seen before, or is this different? Is this kind of a new? And that's tricky, there's been a lot of social change in history, so maybe it's hard to pinpoint. What do you guys think about that?

**Allie:** I don't know. I obviously don't know every movement that's happened, but I see similarities with what we're doing. I learned a little bit about the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and I remember the best part of like the book I was reading about it was when the youth and the labor movements finally get together and they have this powerful march. And it was like, Oh my gosh, guess what? Maybe if youth in labor got together, it would do something cool. And that's definitely what we're going for with the strike scenario. So I don't think we're inventing anything really, we really are walking in the path of past people. But maybe what we have is more like driven by an urgency that I don't know if all generations had before, where I feel like there's really a deadline to our activism, which brings a lot of stress. But I think might also fuel a bit our movement in a different way.

**Malory:**  Yeah. That's really interesting. This idea of like a deadline we are working towards something that scientists have put dates on the issue when there's no going back. And for a lot of issues, it’s like, we want to stop this as soon as possible. We need to get this moving on this. We still have that energy in climate justice, but something that's a little different in this landscape is like this date.

So moving onto a different idea to get to know you a little bit better--how did y'all get involved in climate activism? Specifically in Toronto, but maybe before you were here or anywhere else? Um, Savi to let you lead with this one?

**Savi:** Um, so I started in activism with anti-sexual assault stuff in schools and moved from there. I was very focused on women's rights, queer issues, stuff like that. And then I got opened up to issues of school education cuts, and then also sexual education. So I started there and then I started realizing that all of these issues are connected and all come from the same place. And to solve these issues we also have to focus on the root causes instead of just temporary fixes. So I started there and then once the climate movement started picking up a lot of speed and I saw so many young activists talking about it, I got kind of panicked and I was like, what can I do to help this? I felt helpless. And so I joined Climate Justice Toronto and was like, let's do this. I kind of jumped right in and it was kind of scary because making the jump from specific issues to this big impending crisis that is already happening was overwhelming, but that's how I joined from other movements.

**Malory:** Yeah. I think that makes a lot of sense. Climate justice and climate change is an intersectional challenge, right? This is something that is caused by a myriad of issues and we see this myriad of solutions, going in at all these different angles. So it makes sense that a lot of our activists come from different areas and start working on climate justice after having done that work previously. Allie, how about you?

**Allie:** I feel like I've told this story many times and every time I rethink about it, it makes more sense to how I got there. But I started as a kid, I was a bit of a nerdy kid that really, really liked animals. And my mom would let me use the internet to only watch things about science. And so I would be watching documentaries about biodiversity loss and look at these very specific species going extinct. And so I would be really concerned by these and I would do very small local campaigns on these. That was my chunk on biodiversity. And then the refugee yeah crisis hit in the Mediterranean sea, and I lived in France near the Mediterranean. So then I joined Amnesty and I was super adamant on our refugee rights and having Europe do something about this crisis and welcome these people. That was my chunk on this. And then I went to women's rights and feminism. And so my teenage years, I had my chunks of two years of ‘I'm really involved in this.’ Then I got to here to Toronto and all of a sudden, there's a linearity that happened in my head where it was like, ‘Oh, these are all very, very related issues that I didn't connect before.’ And it still took me a while to connect them after. So even when I started organizing Fridays for Future Toronto, I was still very focused on, ‘Oh, Doug Ford is bad for the environment. And Doug Ford is denying climate change.’ And it actually took me a lot of learning, including with people like Savi, to be able to vocalize that it's actually a climate justice issue. So those past blocks that I had, I still was putting them behind as other issues when I was talking about climate change until I think I met other people that were making those connections and it reconnected my brain, years of activism.

**Malory:** Yeah. That's so cool. I was thinking about making one of these segments, intersectional climate justice, and then I realized every single one of these is going to be intersectional climate justice. How could I differentiate that at all? I think that makes sense, I see that path and for so many of us. So on that note, in Toronto specifically, we're a major metropolitan area. We have a lot of different activists of all walks, in all kinds of different organizations. I wondered if you had any specific orgs you wanted to kind of shout out right now? Maybe related to climate justice or environmental justice or beyond, or it exists in an intersectional dynamic, or just kind of giving them a shout out. Or pointing out why we, as climate activists and those who care about climate justice, should be supporting them as well. Any stick out to you?

**Savi:** There's so many, there's so much important work being done. I'm just thinking about Not Another Black Life. Their organization is so powerful in their events that they organize to like lobby to defund and abolish the police is so incredible and imaginative, being creative with the possibilities beyond what we have right now with our systems. And recognizing past movements—their organization is really great. I'd also say Migrant Rights Network, which is across so-called Canada. Yeah, they're really great, especially both of them, these are really related to climate justice too. With the intersections of communities being displaced from their countries and meeting to find work in other countries and relating to food justice and farm workers being treated really terribly. Those are great, good organizations.

**Malory:** Yeah. And you know, I'm thinking maybe even a better question I should have asked, if we're struggling to think of any—How can people find these orgs? Especially if you're not involved in activism. I know I found some just through Instagram, but mostly through people who I already know. Allie, do you have anything to add on that?

**Allie:** For sure. I'm really glad that you mentioned farmers and farm work and food justice, because I think that's one part that the climate movement has for so long been like, ‘Just go vegan.’ Yeah, thanks, great one. And right now there's a lot of good work being done on Status for All and having migrant farm workers actually obtain the status and protection they deserve. So I think these groups I think I was putting that in the back of my mind. And right now they've been doing good work to highlight why it's so obvious in a pandemic that we need to have protection for these workers. How I find most of them is actually through following other cool people that post in their stories. I know Climate Justice Toronto does it, Fridays for Future Toronto tries to do that too. Putting [posts] in your story from other groups, that's a good way to find them. And for folks that don't use social media, I know that depending on which area in the city you live in some more progressive elected officials at all levels actually can connect you with local groups. So if you know that your elected official is pretty progressive, try reaching out and they'll actually put you in touch with grassroots groups there. And I know that I met a few people through Mike Layton, the UofT area City Councilor, and that's a really good way as well to discover groups.

**Malory:** Yeah, that's great. I didn't know that. That's great though that some of our reps are holding onto this info for people to access. Kind of in that same vein, I think a lot of people out there, like we've kind of hit on, have this image of what an activist looks like and how to get involved. They think there's such a barrier. Are they welcome? Is this some space they are allowed in? And I think I know like that y'all would say anyone is welcome, come on down. So can you tell me a little bit more about if you're someone who let’s say just moved to Toronto and you are ready to get involved, what sort of path should they take? Or even in other cities, what sort of paths do you see arising for people to access this sort of community? Savi, I'll let you lead with this.

**Savi:** Well, I'd say especially during this time with the pandemic, a lot of things have changed. Before there were meetings that were in person, stuff like that. And lots and lots of protests were going on. So it was kind of hard to avoid seeing, but now we've realized that all of our movements have struggled with accessibility. Especially with people who are new to organizing or who can't exactly show up in person to events, we're kind of like reevaluating how to approach getting new people engaged. A lot of stuff has moved online and that's the way for people to join now for a lot of groups. So that would probably be my suggestion. Just looking up groups or issues that you care about, stuff like that. But we definitely have a lot to work on with making our movements accessible to people who aren't that experienced and organizing more who don't exactly have those connections that allow them to be exposed to all of these different groups.

**Malory:** Yeah, absolutely. I love that you bring up the idea that a pandemic has in a lot of ways limited the structures we had. But in a lot of ways, it's opened our eyes to tools that make it accessible to those who should be here and whose voices should be loud. Allie, do you have anything to add?

**Allie:** I think in the same similar vein, we saw an uptick of people coming in our groups during the pandemic, which was the opposite of what I was fearing. Obviously students had more time more or less, but also there was a deliberate effort. We had like real intake calls that were much more personal. And we we put in place things like feedback form so that people who had ideas for projects that we weren't covering at all could directly go into that instead of having to like wait for six months in our group before they could submit their ideas. So things like that. But more generally, to someone who is watching us thinking, ‘I have no clue how to get involved.’ I may be a shy person or an introverted person or a person that doesn't have the same physical abilities as everybody else and doesn't know how the group is going to know respond. I would say you're allowed to attend meetings for several groups or attend intake calls from several groups and take the one that's fit for you. I don't think it's a problem, and if any group gets offended that you actually end up stepping back from them, then that's on them because we all have our different ways. And if you don't like leadership style in one or even the mission statement of another you can get out and go to another one. We want you. We should be catering to you, not the opposite way.

**Malory:** Absolutely. I think that that's something that I've been trying to think about for this project is to help people understand that there are all kinds of activists. Like that's such a broad term. There are organizers, there are educators. There are a million kinds. The goal of this is to go through and see that. And both of you are definitely organizers in a big way. You're definitely out there mobilizing others to help put on events and put out statements and get the word out there about what goals we need to have. So I kind of wanted to ask in your vein of activism, how would you define yourself and what would you say, for yourself, is the gold standard of activism? Is there even a gold standard? I don't know. What do you think? Allie, I'll let you lead with this one.

**Allie:** That's a really hard question. I’m introspective a lot, right now. I would say definitely a lot of how I would define my activism is coordinating because I feel like I'm not always doing the grunt work of doing the graphics. They can make that post, but I'm just trying to like piece together things. And that's just more my personality of being able to like retain a lot of info and it connects itself. So that's a lot of what I feel like I'm doing is just being like, you should meet this person and you should work with this. I really don't know that there's a gold standard. When I used to work with Amnesty, they had this fantastic way of having all these resources for you and you like pick the campaign and you take what you want. And that was great. But I think in a way it could have been limiting or it never actually pushed me to think as much because I was just picking the resources I liked the best out of the campaign and then applying to it. So I don't think there's a gold standard, but I do think quickly to what you were saying about there being organizers and other kinds of roles [in activism]. I think what we are still lacking is a lot of like caretakers in our movement. I think a lot of us do not know how to take care of ourselves and it is great to have the parental figure of the group be like, ‘Oh, did you check on yourself recently or on each other?’ And yet we still need more of that in our groups for sure.

**Malory:** That makes sense. I mean, we're a youth led group. A lot of people are youth led groups. There's a lot of youth in this movement. And so sometimes youths have a tendency to forget how to take care of ourselves and be sustainable in our own behaviors. Savi, do you have anything to add on that?

**Savi:** I really like how you mentioned caretakers, because we're seeing, especially with the pandemic, a lot of people are needed extra support. Community care and mutual aid is something that a lot of movements are moving towards or implementing. Definitely, that really is so important. Part of my role or what I want to be doing is bringing people in to the movement and growing with each other and learning from one another. We all have something to learn from each other, even if you don't have as much experience. You still have knowledge and skills that you can bring and help build these movements that we can make irresistible and powerful. I guess just bringing in people, reaching out to people, stuff like that is super important to me.

**Malory:** That's great. I love that, building community at the local level for a global change is what I always try to think of it when I'm feeling like I'm not helping anybody but my close friends. But well, that's part of it.

So the last question I have. We live in a world with a lot of doom and gloom, especially in climate justice and social justice at large. It can be upsetting. It can be challenging and that's not something to ignore. I think that segues great from our idea of incorporating caregivers more appropriately and more emphatically in our work. So I like to end kind of all discussions in the classroom, especially in conservation work with this: What are some victories that your work has led you to that you want to bring up to remind the people that are watching that this does work, there's something happening. Savi, let you lead with this one.

**Savi:** I view victories as moments and moments where there's a lot of re-evaluation or changing our ways of doing things. I see a victory here in the city wherever I go. I see you ‘Defund the Police’ or like ‘ACAB’ or ‘Abolish the Police’. And I see everyone at least talking about it. When people who you don’t know talking about issues on the street, that to me is a victory. Getting people to actually think about these things and think beyond what we have right now is a victory and same with all of the protests that have been happening, all the campaigns. Those to me are victories. Even if there aren’t concrete things being won, the fact that even in a pandemic, people are still continuing to organize and that people are still being brought into movements and movements are growing is a huge victory. And that gives me a lot of hope.

**Malory:** I think that's really wise. To exist in this world with a perspective that differs from one that is hurting us and is it's the norm, that is a victory. And that is how we make change happen in such a real way. Allie, do you have any other examples or things you'd like to add?

**Allie:** I think what Savi was talking about was this cultural shift that you don't notice this happening. And all of a sudden you see it. Like when the whole environmental movement was just down—or most of them, people around me at least—were down to talk about defund the police right away. And we didn't have a whole month of back and forth. I hadn't noticed that the shift had happened, then all of a sudden there was a proof that it had. And that was like, ‘Whoa, yay. That's done.’ You see that more and more in the media, when the Guardian says we're not even going to be accepting funds from certain companies, or we're not even going to be tolerating some ideas that are factually incorrect or extremely harmful—that just shows the cultural shift. Truly this is mostly what it's about. It's going to be we all change what we prioritize and what we want out of this existence. So yeah, those are the major victories and they're really heartwarming, honestly.

**Malory:** Yeah. That's I think that's great. You know, this is change comes from when we all agreed together that we want this change. And so that's the work, like that's what it is. It's spreading the good word. And with that, I feel like that the end of where we've reached, I love to end on an inspirational note. If you're watching right now, we'll be sharing access to different orgs, their apps, and their handles that we've mentioned as well as any contact info for all sorts of groups. So thank you so much for watching, coming by and hanging out with us. Thank you, Allie and Savi for giving your time so willingly to be a part of this.