

Courage My Friends Podcast Series II – Episode 8
Climate Anxiety and Climate Justice Organizing: Fearing the Future, Finding Hope and Fighting for Our Planet – Part 2

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: It's been two years already. If we can't get it together to deal with this world-wide pandemic, how are we going to deal with the climate crisis?

STREET VOICE 2: The future just seems so uncertain. What do say to my kids?

STREET VOICE 3: This is outrageous! The rich are getting richer, the are getting poorer. Where is the compassion? Where is the solidarity?

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: As we deal with the planetary climate crisis and contend with increasingly uncertain futures, what are the impacts on younger populations? How are young people organizing for climate justice? What is the role of post-secondary education and student unions? As a new generation of leaders takes on the intersectional and complex crises that we are facing at this moment, how do they envision the building of a truly brighter, sustainable and more just future for all of us?

In the second part of this special two-part episode of the Courage My Friend's podcast, *Climate Anxiety and Climate Justice Organizing: Fearing the Future, Finding Hope and Fighting for Our Planet*, we are very pleased to welcome. Aliya Hirji and Marie Dolcetti-Koros.

Aliya Hirji is a 17-year-old Indian-Canadian woman and climate justice activist in pursuit of a socially inclusive response to the climate crisis. She often works in the climate divestment movement, challenging individuals, governments, banks, and more to divest from fossil fuels. She is very passionate about ensuring the climate justice movement is anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial. In 2021, Aliya was recognized by Corporate Knights as one of *Canada's Top 30 Under 30 Sustainability Leaders*. She is about to start a dual arts degree with Sciences PO and UBC, where she wants to study Politics and Environmental Sustainability.

Marie Dolcetti-Koros is the National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, back with the Federation after completing a first term as National Treasurer. Marie studied Contemporary Philosophy and Political Science in Halifax, starting in the student movement with the King's Students Union. One of her first experiences of student organizing was taking over the lobby of the main administrative building on campus with Divest Dal. Marie finds energy and strength in knowing that young people are an integral part of shaping a just and livable future. She firmly believes that education is a public good and that free and accessible education for all is possible.

Marie, Aliya. Welcome.

ALIYA: Thank you for having us.

RESH: It's lovely to have you here. So Aliya, I want to start with you. What does climate justice mean to you?

ALIYA: So for me, climate justice is more than climate action. It's a justice-based, intersectional approach to solving the climate crisis. And I think that's super essential. Making sure that people of colour and other historically marginalized communities who are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis have space in this movement and are prioritized and making sure that justice and empowerment and inclusion is really at the heart of everyone fighting in the climate justice movement.

RESH: Now where none of us stand outside of this, would it be safe to say Aliya that the climate crisis has become the single most defining issue of your generation?

ALIYA: Absolutely. I think a lot of burden has been put on young people, this generation, to fight the climate crisis. It's something that we can see with our own eyes affecting young people across the world. Especially for marginalized communities and communities in the Global South. And now that we're so interconnected in this world and - you know, I can have friends across an ocean away and that we've started to find community within each other. We've definitely seen the importance of fighting the climate crisis and how essential it is for our generation to accomplish this as soon as possible.

RESH: And Marie, could you give us an overview of the Canadian Federation of Students and how climate issues are actually impacting post-secondary students and institutions? What's coming to you through the unions?

MARIE: Hi Resh and Aliya, thanks so much for having me. That's a really big question Resh and I think very simple to address, but also really complicated. And I think the like two line answer is that climate action solidarity and the student movement have always been intertwined.

And as you said, climate change is one of the most pressing things on the minds and lived realities of young people today.

You asked about what's coming up through student unions. And this is where it gets a little bit complicated in the sense that everything is related to climate justice work. Everything from ensuring that we have free and accessible post-secondary education in Canada to advocating for migrant and international students to making sure that Indigenous students have space to organize collectively and taking the lead from those students and from those communities

RESH: The climate crisis, as you say, is basically connected to everything and it is having multiple impacts in every corner of our lives. And this is also resulting in numerous health and mental health impacts. So one of the most identified among younger populations is climate anxiety. So just to continue with you Marie, is this something that you are seeing and experiencing? How prevalent is climate anxiety among post-secondary populations?

MARIE: This is a really interesting question and I think worth research because to my knowledge, we don't have concrete data on this. But I really truly believe that the realities of the climate crisis are part of our consciousness and of our everyday decision-making.

And I don't think that there is a popular discourse or common vocabulary that adequately captures and reflects all of this. And I think the discourse that does exist is kind of focused on climate anxiety that ends up stopping people in their tracks, makes people feel alone and isolated and reduces the issue, which we know is an issue of collective action, to an issue of individual choices. And that's a really big problem because even in the ways that we talk about what's at stake and what's being experienced; we're actually further distancing ourselves from the real solutions or the real ways of looking at the problem that kind of take it for what it is.

So, Aliya, I'm sure you have language and vocabulary that is much more cohesive than what I'm trying to get at here, but I think what's really important is taking the lead from the folks who are doing the work from the frontline communities and using discourse and language and vocabulary that is coming out of those communities and those organizing centers.

RESH: So that would both address climate anxiety, but also perhaps provide a strategy for coping with that anxiety as well, getting involved and listening to communities.

And Alia in your work, through your networks, even in your own life, how do you see climate anxiety manifesting?

ALIYA: I struggle with climate anxiety and climate grief on a regular basis. You know, working in the climate justice movement is not easy on your mental health, especially when you take a peak at the news and see constant environmental disasters and constant broken promises by politicians and world leaders. So, I know personally, this is something I really struggle with and countless of my friends in the movement also struggle with this. I think that this generation, having such a difficult burden of fighting the climate crisis at such a young age, it also comes with so many mental health impacts. That kind of responsibility on people as young as myself, as young as teenagers, that we are supposed to make these huge decisions. You know, about a month ago, I was like, should I go to a climate conference where I can maybe make some change I'll most likely be diminished by world leaders, or should I go to my high school graduation? Like these are decisions that young people really struggle with and we shouldn't have to. So when it comes to climate and anxiety and climate grief, it's definitely a huge issue.

The ways I think that a lot of us cope is when you work in the movement, you make a lot of friendships and connections and these people understand how you're feeling, they've worked with you. So calling friends and talking about it is always a really big help. I love putting things into art and visualizing things, even if nobody else understands it. But my favorite way of dealing with my climate anxiety and climate grief is turning that fear and anxiety into action and using it to motivate me to take on the climate crisis with more strength.

I have this theory about a healthy amount of fear. I think sometimes you need to shake people and be like, "this is a serious crisis it's happening right now. You can do something. You have to do something". But there also is a level of unhealthy fear where. You can just become immobilized with so many emotions that you feel stuck and you feel like you can't do anything about it. And so I think it's a fine line that a lot of young people are having to balance at too young of an age.

RESH: That point do I go to my graduation or, you know, do I go to this global conference to heal the world? And that I think in a nutshell really captures that burden that is on young people.

Marie, you were also saying that this could really hamper or even stop in its tracks, thoughts about the future. And one of the things that we are hearing is that young people are maybe making different choices about their future, than say their parents' generation or their grandparents' generation about jobs, about having kids and whatnot. Could you speak more to this?

MARIE: Yeah, absolutely. I would say that this is also kind of a hard line to try and navigate because absolutely young folks are constantly evaluating, reevaluating what they consider possible. And how they envision their own futures and the futures of their communities. And I know for myself, I'm 25, but I kind of started getting educated and knowing a bit more about the climate crisis in high school. And you go through these like waves ... Aliya, you were talking about coping mechanisms. And I was like, damn, she has it all figured out. I just get mind-numb sometimes and like, just try and focus on what's right in front of me.

RESH: Indeed mind-numbing because it's so overwhelming. And Aliya can you speak to the toll that climate anxiety over the climate crisis takes on the future decision making of younger populations?

ALIYA: Sure. I think it's definitely impacted how I view my life. You know, what kind of degree do I want to go into? I can't even think about what I'm going to do after a degree or after graduation. Just thinking that far ahead, it seems so unclear to me. And I do have many friends who have switched career paths. Who have gone from software engineering to journalism to bring these kinds of topics to the media. A friend told me just a few days ago, like I don't feel comfortable bringing kids into this world. I just feel like it's unfair to them. And they're only like 25 or something, same as Marie.

And so I think it's shocking sometimes for adults to hear us speak this way, but that's the reality of it . We have so much going through our heads about what the future's going to look like, what our lives are going to look like down the line.

And, you know, people right now are being impacted by the climate crisis. So I can't imagine what that is like to be a frontline community.

But there's definitely some hard decisions that young people have had to make about their future expectations and about their lives. And I don't think that's gonna change anytime soon.

I still haven't figured out most of my life. I don't have it all together. But in the near future I expect some tough decisions coming.

RESH: It is shocking to hear this, but I think more heartbreaking to hear this as well. And at the same time, really understandable in terms of what we're facing and particularly what young people are facing when looking at an uncertain future.

MARIE: Just echoing what Aliya had said. Speaking for myself, I'm 25 years old and I have been cognizant of the climate crisis for almost a decade. You go through these, mental exercises where you imagine a future, and then you imagine yourself having a different kind of future. I don't think that there is a young person anywhere whose decisions and thought process and general understanding of the world is not somehow informed by the climate crisis and by folks' lived realities in frontline communities.

RESH: Absolutely. And again, this is the largest existential crisis that we have ever faced as a species. We've shifted a planet and in a really wrong direction. But we have the power to shift it back. And Aliya I just wanna pick up on what you started to talk about that there is healing and there is empowerment to be found within organizing, within the climate justice movement.

Youth young people are very much taking the lead within climate justice organizing nationally, globally. Could you speak more to why youth leadership is so critical within these movements?

ALIYA: I think I hear a lot from world leaders, the phrase like young people are leaders of the future, but the truth is that we are the leaders of right now.

There's so much on every scale - local, national, international - so much of this climate action and this ambition and real progressive ideas that are coming from young people. I think young people have an insane amount of optimism and passion and drive that you may not see from other generations.

I know that I've been told a lot by adults, you know, when you're older, you'll understand why we're not taking climate change this seriously. But I don't think that's the case. I think that our optimism and our outlook on life is really unique. And because we have so much of our lives ahead of us, well, hopefully ahead of us, that's gonna be affected by the climate crisis. I think that we take it very seriously and that we are incredibly motivated to do something about this. And given that young people are going to be incredibly affected by the climate crisis, that, people of color, marginalized communities - I think that leadership needs to be held by the most affected people because, historically the environmental movement hasn't always been so welcoming and inclusive. And so now that young people are taking charge here, taking leadership, I think that ensuring the people who have been historically left out of this movement, and yet are still disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, deserve these leadership positions and deserve to be heard by us and the rest of the world.

RESH: And solidarity and collective organizing, therefore is really key to this, right? This is a borderless issue. It's going to take pretty much everybody. So Aliya again, could you speak to these qualities of collectivism and solidarity?

ALIYA: Absolutely. Solidarity is such an important part. The climate crisis doesn't exist in a vacuum. It interacts with tons of other social justice issues.

The climate crisis is rooted in colonialism and racism and so many forms of oppression and exploitation. And you need to be conscious of the roots of the climate crisis if you want to address it. It isn't just about emissions caps and beach cleanups. Like this is about people who have been exploited. People and land and resources that have been exploited for generations that are now left out to dry.

And so solidarity with Indigenous communities, communities of color, frontline communities, as well as other marginalized groups that are disproportionately

affected, disabled communities, LGBTQ+ community that are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Solidarity is so essential when we talk about intersectional climate justice, as I was saying before, keeping justice and intersectionality at the heart of what you're doing. Solidarity, it's just essential. And without it the movement, isn't inclusive, the movement isn't diverse. Resh, that's such an important part of what we're doing.

RESH: Absolutely. And of course, collective organizing and solidarity are the founding principles of unions, of every description, including the unions within the Canadian Federation.

Marie, can you share some examples of how college and university student unions are organizing on climate. Are engaging in these principles of solidarity when it has to do with climate?

MARIE: Absolutely. Thanks, Resh. I would say that the Federation and member locals support Indigenous climate solidarity and Indigenous student leaders in advocating for community-based resources, development and programming. And I would say as a membership-based and driven organization, our work and certainly my work in my role is directed by the membership. So, we are expecting a clear mandate to develop a campaign on climate justice. We don't have one at this time. We're guided again by issues, policy, and mandates from member locals. Some of our member locals are extremely active and have their own climate justice campaigns. And certainly we work with solidarity partners and as a nonpartisan organization work also across party lines in, whatever way possible.

RESH: One of the strategies I understand CFS has been using and probably for a while is this strategy of pushing post-secondaries to divest from climate harming activities or companies that support climate harming activities. So could you speak a bit to that?

MARIE: Yes, absolutely. It actually, to my understanding, the divestment campaign is a very old campaign of the Federation. But I would have to check my Federation history on that. But I will say that several of our member locals are engaged in active divestment campaigns. And we're actually seeing in some cases, some collaboration between university administrators and student unions. And some university administrators are taking a lead from student organizers on campus and taking concrete steps to divest endowment funds.

I think in terms of divestment the spectrum varies, but I will say that the Federation advocates for full compliance with the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which includes the Free Prior and Informed Consent for natural resource projects on Indigenous land.

And we advocate for policies that prioritize migrant justice by recognizing that climate change and environmental devastation are among the leading drivers of human migration. We also advocate for the retraining and re-specialization or additional training of students and workers in the fossil fuel industry that are displaced or

threatened by displacement. And of course, any supplemental education that encourages the development or implementation of green initiatives. And I will say that the Federation is in strong opposition to any government policies or initiatives such as lobbying that seek to undermine its commitments, past or present, towards environmental sustainability.

RESH: So it's really about divesting from all activities that are exploitative of planet, but also people. And of course, the two are very connected.

Aliya, this focus on divestment from the financial side of the climate crisis is also a real focus for you and the mandate of Banking on a Better Future that you've been with from the very beginning. So can you tell us more about those strategies?

ALIYA: Absolutely. So Banking on a Better Future, it's a youth led nonprofit that draws attention to the big five Canadian banks. Billions of dollars in fossil fuels and colonial violence. And we're educating young people and empowering them to take action on that.

As you said it's been over a year, I think in April, since we've been doing this and we've seen some real substantial impacts. Divestment is a huge part of what we do as well. The recent IPCC report says the money to fund climate solutions is there, but it's being invested in climate failure and we have to redirect that. And so divestment is a clear target for us.

How can we start investing in climate solutions if you're still investing in climate failure? I mean the two investments harm each other. So, what I think is unique about this campaign is that the money that's used for these investments is partly the people's money. I mean, if you have an account with RBC, TD, CIBC, BMO, or Scotia Bank, your money is being used to invest in fossil fuels, to be invested in climate failure, invested in violence against Indigenous communities.

And so I think it's really essential for young people, as we start to become financially independent, as we start to be educated on how to handle your personal finance, it's really important for us to ask questions. Where is our money being put? Why don't we have as much control over it? Why haven't people been demanding change for this for so long? And so I agree, like divestment is a huge push among young people. Especially as we explore climate finance. How do we finance climate solutions and how do we stop financing climate failure?

RESH: And again, IPCC - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is the world body of climate science.

So you really draw attention to what's happening with the big banks. Something that, in the everyday we might not pay attention to. Where are our savings going to. But also as taxpayers, where are our taxes going to? Even as people paying into pension funds, where are those investments going? So again, keeping our eyes on all of those investments that we are directly or indirectly involved with.

And Aliya Banking on a Better Future also offers some really concrete strategies for alternative banking. And I wonder if you could speak a bit more to that?

ALIYA: Absolutely. So our website and our communication includes tons of ways that you can take action, ranging from, I have no financial autonomy, I just have an account that my parents made for me. You know, I'm 15, I can't move my money legally. Or being stuck with the mortgage at a certain bank. To having financial autonomy and being able to move your money. So of course we always recommend alternative banking options to the big five Canadian banks. Credit unions that invest in the community and, that don't investment fossil fuels or invest far less in fossil fuels. We have guides on how to switch your money, how to move from one place to the other. If you're a young person, we have a pledge that you can make as soon as you have autonomy that you are gonna move your money. And we also have so many educational resources to learn more about personal finance. Just learning about financial education in general.

These are things that a lot of young people don't know about and we don't get educated enough on this. So we have resources on that. We have resources on the Greenwashing campaigns of the banks, on Indigenous resistance to these pipelines that are being built on unceded land that is being financed by the banks. And we regularly host actions and then online educational events. They're all targeted towards young people, but of course, like this is a movement that everyone should be part of. Just as a youth-run organization, we always try to educate and empower young people.

RESH: Absolutely. And as you said, everybody should be aware. I mean, young people might not be aware of these things. I would say, on quite good authority, many older people are also not aware of what's happening and what some of these alternative strategies are.

So Canada has made quite a few climate commitments, cutting carbon emissions and reaching net-zero by 2050, planting 2 billion trees, investing in clean technology in its transition to a greener economy. And it is really promoted as a climate leader throughout the world. Certainly at the last global climate conference, COP26. And Marie, I just wanna get your opinion, both as chair of CFS, but also as somebody who has been part of the climate movement. Do you think Canada is on the right track in terms of its climate commitments?

MARIE: Ugh, to be brutally honest, No. The latest Climate Action Tracker calls Canada's actions, "highly insufficient". Canada scored 60th on the latest climate change performance index behind the United States, China and Russia. And as we've said earlier in the interview we just keep being faced with broken promises.

Canada has about 0.5% of the world's population, but contributes to about 2% of the total greenhouse gas emissions. And we know that 64% of Canadians believe that climate change is as serious an issue as COVID-19. So no, I don't think that Canada is doing enough. I don't think that we are taking our responsibility seriously. And I

think that the public will is certainly there to do much more than, what is on the table right now.

RESH: So the public will is there, but perhaps not the political will as well. And Aliya. I want to go to you, given your interest in politics and sustainability. How do you think Canada is doing in terms of its climate commitments?

ALIYA: I'm just gonna say, I think it's doing really bad. Just to circle back to the IPCC Report that we were talking about. It very clearly says "no new fossil fuel infrastructure", and yet Canada is still building pipelines on unceded Indigenous land. It's still subsidizing fossil fuels. Especially right now. I hear a lot of people complaining about gas prices which I think is a totally fair thing to do. And it should be a great motivator to transition to renewable energy. But you don't see any of those conversations happening.

I think that there is so much that Canada owes, especially to communities in the Global South. We have historically benefited through exploiting other nations and we owe a debt, not just a monetary debt, but also providing resources for resilience to the climate crisis. And so you'll see at these international conferences, Canada portrays itself as a world leader of climate action or that it cares about other countries. But when it comes down to the details they regularly fail to act up to what is owed.

RESH: And just to continue on this. Because again, you've both raised this really important point that the climate movement, climate policy must be inclusive. It must be anti-racist. It must be decolonized. And it must involve this also within its leadership. Aliya, are you seeing this happening, that more Global South voices, Indigenous voices, the voices of racialized, all of those who are on the front lines of the climate crisis, are now being made central to the climate justice movement and to climate solutions?

ALIYA: I think there's been an effort within the movement. But it has not nearly been enough. Just because I interact with a lot of Global South communities and I have friends in the Global South of course. And I hear stories about how they feel misrepresented or underrepresented in the leadership of the climate movement. I've definitely felt disrespected, that the movement isn't nearly anti-racist or anti-colonial enough. But I also have seen growing inclusivity. So while it may not be perfect, I feel like there is hope and that affected communities need to continue supporting each other and uplifting each other's voices.

I always like the analogy that we're not voiceless we're just not being listened to. We're not voiceless communities; we don't need anybody to speak for us. But you know, if you pass the mic so people can hear us better, that's the right thing to do. And so I think instead of portraying these communities as just helpless victims and perpetuating for example, a white savior complex, is ensuring that marginalized communities have the resources and the ability to speak for themselves and be properly represented and have those essential leadership roles.

RESH: Right. And again seeing them not just as victims and statistics, but also as leaders within that movement. And this would really come out at the global climate conferences and Aliya, I know you were at COP26, which was the most recent global climate conference that happened last year. What were you seeing there? What were some of your key takeaways from that conference?

ALIYA: So off the bat, it was definitely a very emotional experience for me, just as a young person, never having been in this type of space before. It was quite overwhelming. And while I did get to work on implementing the representation of young people, for example in the Action for Climate Empowerment Work Program in Glasgow, and working on the team that got the first formal representation of young people in a work document; I definitely felt that the conference was not a very safe or inclusive space for myself. There were some days where I woke up and I was like, I can't go into the venue today. I just cannot emotionally handle it. There were young people, especially young people of color being pulled out of negotiating rooms. We were restricted from certain areas of the venue. There was heavy disrespect there. There was a lack of support for young people and people of color in general. And so especially for me as a really young person, it was super overwhelming for me. It was not what I had expected walking into the conference.

But I did get to meet with a lot of other young people, especially young Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. Which was one of the most inspiring parts of being at COP26 to me - was being able to work with an international community of young people and people like myself and be able to get ourselves represented in these rooms and on all these documents.

It was definitely a very stressful, very emotional experience for me. And I only went for one week and I flew back and I had to go to class on like four hours of sleep. I had to go back to class to make sure I wouldn't miss my midterms. So it was definitely quite a busy time for me and for many other young people that were there as well. But we made some difference. I think most of the progressive and intersectional parts of that conference came from a huge push from young people, especially young people of color.

RESH: I'm sure COVID, didn't make that any easier

ALIYA: Definitely not .

RESH: Yeah. That was also an intersecting factor.

Marie just going to this subject of, again, inclusiveness and inclusive leadership. Is this happening within colleges and universities; that you're seeing more inclusive leadership within climate organizing and how is that happening?

MARIE: Uh, Just before we get to your question Resh, I'll say that as someone who has not been to a COP meeting before, but watches from home, it is so reassuring and heartening and inspiring to know that there are young people there who are doing everything they can to make sure that the right priorities are on the table and

being discussed. And I just have so much admiration for you, Aliya and all of your friends and colleagues. Knowing that you folks are there and doing that work, it matters even if you folks, aren't seeing the results that you wanna see. It makes a huge difference just like mentally to those of us watching from home.

RESH: That's a really great point Marie, because it feels like they're carrying your, our proxy to the global stage, right?

MARIE: Yeah. Not to add pressure obviously, and we've said, everyone has a role to play and everyone can join up in their own way in their own communities. But yeah, absolutely. And again, just knowing that you folks are there, it makes all the difference. I think it also frankly, gives validity to some of those processes and negotiations. I think young folks being there is essential and critical and need to be let in to the fullest extent. And as Aliya has said, folks need to be given the mic, more than they have been and to the fullest extent that they wanna hold onto it for.

RESH: Absolutely. Marie as chair of CFS and, and once a student yourself you are working within the world of post-secondaries. And Aliya, you are now transitioning into university. Could you speak to the role that postsecondary education is playing or should play within climate justice and Marie, I want to start with you.

MARIE: Thanks Resh. I'm afraid of falling short, so maybe folks can help me fill in the gaps, but I will say that the biggest barrier to accessing post-secondary education in Canada right now is the exorbitant cost of tuition fees. We know that students are going into thousands of dollars worth of debt for a degree that in today's job-market is not negotiable. It's mandatory to have a degree. The Federation is an advocate and is committed to free and accessible post-secondary education for all. And as I've said, the biggest barrier right now is tuition. So we know that a tuition-free education model that does not compromise the quality of education offered is possible. It is a reality in many countries in the world. And there is no reason that a country like this one cannot and should not have free post-secondary education.

RESH: I just wanna continue on that idea that Canada should have completely subsidized post-secondary education. And I believe the CFS has really made a point of connecting that to a just transition.

Aliya, you're going into university, into post-secondary education. So for you, what is the role of university and colleges in a just transition, in a more sustainable future?

ALIYA: I think that education climate education specifically is so essential for young people, even in high school, not just in university, like this is definitely lacking and has been lacking. I do agree with Marie about university to be more accessible, not having that financial boundary just to learn.

I'm specifically going to study politics and environmental sustainability. So, that's what I'm hoping to get out of my degree, but I also think that other areas of education need to talk about climate justice. Even if you're a healthcare worker, I mean, the climate crisis is a health crisis as well. So even that should be included as an

example. But there's so many areas of education in which the climate crisis and the climate justice movement can be educated on. For example, if you're studying business, talking about climate finance is essential. You know, what do banks do with your money? They invest in fossil fuels. And so I think there's so many areas of education that could include a component of climate education that don't. And I think when it comes to something as life-threatening as the climate crisis, as world changing as the climate crisis, that everyone should be educated on it and, should feel empowered to take action regardless of what they're studying or what career they're pursuing.

RESH: So it should really connect to every single corner of our lives. And every corner of our educational institutions.

ALIYA: Absolutely. You don't need to be studying politics or environmental science to care about the climate and to be able to do something about it. And I think that's one big barrier that a lot of people especially young people face when they wanna get involved in climate justice. They're like, oh, you know, I'm interested in engineering. So, I don't wanna get involved in climate justice organizing. I'll leave that to the people studying politics. I'm like, but engineering is quite critical; we need to build climate solutions. There's so many things that need to happen to address the climate crisis, that virtually every field of study, every career field can contribute to climate justice. And, I think that something that we're missing in education.

RESH: Absolutely. And going back to you, Marie, in terms of this very powerful idea that there is a connection between free and accessible postsecondary education and a just transition and climate justice. Could you elaborate on CFS position on that?

MARIE: Yes. Free and accessible education for all in Canada is possible and absolutely tied to climate justice. And this shows up in student communities in lots of different ways. In clear pathways to immigration, in healthcare and mental health coverage for students across Canada. In climate education, as Aliya has said.

But I'm going to veer away from that for a moment and just speak for myself and say that I think it's really important to acknowledge that the reality of the exorbitant cost of tuition in Canada right now, and the student debt crisis, which is in the billions of dollars just in federal debt, is very much tied to a form of classism. And when we are imagining and building a world's beyond capitalism we really need to take stock and evaluate and I would say democratize the access to knowledge and evaluate different forms of knowledges that have been subjugated; particularly Indigenous knowledges. I think a lot of folks are doing this work. A lot of scholars are doing this work. And there are lots of avenues or bridges to explore when thinking about how we evaluate our education system and how we can imagine a different, better, stronger one that is a pillar of a just and livable future.

RESH: So it would open those doors for everybody, right? In terms of this classism that intersects with racism, with colonization, etc.

MARIE: Absolutely.

RESH: The climate crisis is the most important issue of our times. And again, the defining issue of younger populations. Marie, what would be your advice for college and university students in terms of becoming involved in campus organizing around climate?

MARIE: I'm not sure I'm in a place to be giving advice, but I guess I'll say we started the interview talking about climate grief and grieving for something. But we know that you keep caring for something, even if it's sick or dying, and sometimes you care for it even more. You pour even more of your love and attention and hope into that thing. There are so many opportunities to pick a piece of whatever devastates you, or gives you grief or gives you hope and to engage with it and do something about it and connect with people, both on campus and in our communities. And you know, young people know that.

RESH: And what would you say to them about the importance of really taking part in your student union?

MARIE: Oh, absolutely. Get involved, get engaged. Pick up campaign material. Run for an elected position. You have an opportunity to engage with students and to make decisions that affect the direction of your student union, which is really, really powerful when we talk about collective action. That's exactly what we talk about as the power of collective organizing and the power of a student union. Join up with other student unions. Come chat with us at the Federation. Join our Day of Action. Find Aliya on Twitter. There are so many ways of plugging in. And I would just say, jump in and take the reins.

RESH: And these are huge populations, from coast to coast, to coast in Canada.

The climate crisis, again, can feel overwhelming and climate justice daunting as the, both of you have spoken of in this interview. Alia, what would be your advice for those who want to be involved in climate justice, but might not know where to start?

ALIYA: Well, the first thing I would say is do it , I think it's really hard to start, take that step, take that leap. It can be in an area that you're not familiar with, but the first thing to do is just try something new. But I think my advice would be to figure out what you're good at, figure out what you're passionate about. And then how that can apply to climate justice. Because I can guarantee you, we need all the skills possible. You know, if you like coding, help us build websites and find ways to communicate. If you like making funny dance videos, you should use TikTok and social media to reach and educate other young people.

There are so many ways that your skills can be used to fight for climate justice. And I think it just takes a bit of reflection to figure out what you're good at, what you're passionate about and, find a local community organization and, just get involved!

RESH: So there's a place for everyone.

ALIYA: Absolutely. There is always going to be a place for everyone in this movement. If you keep justice and intersectionality in your heart, then you're welcome.

RESH: Lovely. Thank you so much, Aliya. Thank you so much, Marie. It's been a pleasure.

ALIYA: Thank you.

MARIE: Thank you so much.

RESH: That was climate justice activist and organizer Aliya Hirji and National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, Marie Dolcetti-Koros.

And this brings us to the end of this summer's Courage My Friends podcast. Please join us again in September when we return. In the meantime, I'm your host, Resh Budhu. Thank you so much for listening.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to the Courage My Friends Podcast, a co-production between rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College and with the support of the Douglas Coldwell Layton Foundation.

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