

Episode 41 | Shareen Pasco Pt. 1

Announcement 0:00

Do you feel you have equitable access to travel in British Columbia? British Columbia is defined by its Pacific coastline and beautiful mountain ranges. There is no shortage of travel opportunities, from Whistler to Tofino to the Okanagan and beyond. With one in five Canadians and approximately 15% of British Columbians living with one or more disabilities. These opportunities must be accessible to all presented by the Disability Foundation and hosted by the ConnecTra Society, this next accessible community forum aims to cultivate a conversation between our panel of experts and our community. Join us in person on Friday, March 10, 2023, from 1 pm to 3 pm Pacific time at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre for this inclusive and informative event on accessible travel. Doors open at 12:30 pm. Register to claim your spot for free at accessibletravelacf.eventbrite.ca

Sarah Smith 1:17

Hello and welcome back to Discover Stories on Re-Imagine Radio. I'm Sarah Smith, a student intern at the Vancouver Adapted Music Society and your host of Discover Stories. Today I'll be having a conversation with Shareen Pasco. She is the program coordinator at the Disabled Independent Gardeners Association, or DIGA, and just before we jump into our conversation, it's important that I take a moment to acknowledge the land on which we're fortunate to host this podcast. This is the unceded and ancestral territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, and it has been stewarded by them since time immemorial. Vancouver is located on territory that was never ceded or given up to the crown by these peoples. The term unceded acknowledges the dispossession of the land and the inherent rights that the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh hold to the territory. The term also serves as a reminder that these Peoples have never left their territories and will always retain their jurisdiction and relationships with the land. Shareen, welcome to the podcast, and thank you so much for joining us today.

Shareen Pasco 2:28

Thank you so much. It's great to be here.

Sarah Smith 2:30

Yeah, awesome. Um, just to start off, why don't you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about you?

Shareen Pasco 2:37

Okay, well, um, my name is Shareen Pasco, and I have been involved with Digga Since 2019 I actually started volunteering for Disability Foundation, some of the other societies, and was introduced to DIGA in the spring of 2019 and, you know, I love gardening and I love helping people and just bringing those two worlds together is, is just a delight.

Sarah Smith 3:15

Very cool. Yeah, it sounds like a really great like intersection of two things that you enjoy.

Shareen Pasco 3:23

Not only. I think, the social aspect, but just getting people involved in, you know, growing their own herbs and produce and flowers just kind of that joy.

Sarah Smith 3:39

Yeah, absolutely. So sort of on this note about your passion for gardening that's clearly coming through. How did you get involved in gardening in the first place? And when did that passion begin for you?

Shareen Pasco 3:51

So, it started actually as a really young child. Gardening has always just fascinated me. I grew up on a family farm. A lot of our produce was from our garden. And my mother just got all the children involved in pretty much all aspects of gardening, the planting, the weeding, harvesting, and yes, like picking these gross horn caterpillars off of tomato plants. So yeah, just growing and preserving your own food just brings just a sense of pride and happiness, you're constantly learning, and just the simplicity of getting your hands just in the dirt, just connecting with nature that way just brings, yeah, a lot of just joy.

Sarah Smith 3:53

Yeah, totally. And I love that you mentioned too, like growing your own food, because I think that in a lot of a lot of people nowadays, sort of just, you know, they go to the grocery store, they buy their stuff, and you don't necessarily think about where that's coming from or how it's being produced. And so having that connection there, I think, is really valuable as well.

Shareen Pasco 5:09

Yeah, it's so true. You know, we go to the store, we don't even think about where it comes from, whose hands have been on it, you know, in terms of, like, the amount of work that has gone into it, because it is a lot of work, and just nurturing your plants, and just paying attention to them, caring for them, yeah, it's a really cool process.

Sarah Smith 5:35

I love the way that you say nurturing your plants as well, because I think that that's like a bi-directional relationship, because we nurture them, and then they, in turn, nurture us by giving us nutrients and fueling us.

Shareen Pasco 5:48

Yes, yes, they nourish our bodies and I think when you personally care for your plants, whatever you grow, there's that love that you put into it, yes, that you say returns to you, so.

Sarah Smith 6:07

Totally, I love that. I love that sentiment.

Shareen Pasco 6:09

Yes, me too.

Sarah Smith 6:11

Yeah. So you mentioned a bit about how you started, initially volunteering for the Disability Foundation, and then you made your way over to dig a I also, I don't know if we've said this yet, but DIGA stands for the Disabled Independent Gardeners Association, and I also love that the name has the word dig in it, and it's gardening like I just that works so nicely together. So can you tell us a little bit more about DIGA, and what DIGA is and what it offers?

Shareen Pasco 6:39

Sure, of course. So as you said, biggest stands for Disabled Independent Gardeners Association. We're an inclusive, warm community and volunteer-driven organization. We were established in Vancouver in 2003 to help people overcome barriers to gardening, just faced by people with disabilities, particularly physical disabilities. So we hold educational workshops related to gardening just online and in person. We also work with Tetra Society of North America, and they will build gardening tools for our clients, and so volunteers will come out, meet with the gardener, one on one to assess their needs, and they'll come up with a solution together to help our clients garden.

Sarah Smith 7:39

Oh, very cool. So it's like a sort of a personalized, adapted tool or structure or something related to gardening.

Shareen Pasco 7:47

Exactly, exactly. So it's an adapted gardening tool for them. So, yeah, we're involved in seven community gardens with 19 plots, and we're just growing more and more each year. When I started back in 2019, DIGA was only active in two community gardens, so it's just been a delight to see, you know, our community grow and expand.

Sarah Smith 8:14

Yeah, that's amazing. And are those, those seven community gardens, you said, 19 plots? Are those all sort of scattered across the Lower Mainland, or what's sort of the geographical reach or area there?

Shareen Pasco 8:25

They're all in Vancouver, you know, east and west side. We also have an accessible garden at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre.

Sarah Smith 8:26

Cool.

Shareen Pasco 8:36

Yeah.

Sarah Smith 8:38

Awesome. And a moment ago, you also mentioned Tetra Society providing sort of personalized, adapted gardening tools. Could you give us maybe an example of what that might look like for your clients? Oh

Shareen Pasco 8:52

Sure, so if there's not a lot of arm strength to dig or to use a trowel, a strap can be added to a tool to help just with the leverage and the strength to the forearm.

Sarah Smith 8:53

Okay, cool, yeah, so like a bit of extra support there.

Shareen Pasco 9:01

Exactly.

Sarah Smith 9:01

Awesome.

Shareen Pasco 9:03

Well, that can be another barrier as well. If people think, you know, I don't have the arm strength to be able to lift this tool. Yeah, so Tetra has been a big help with that.

Sarah Smith 9:38

Sounds like it's a good sort of partnership with them there as well, having that relationship.

Shareen Pasco 9:42

Very good partnership. Yeah.

Sarah Smith 9:45

So what exactly do you do with DIGA as the program coordinator?

Shareen Pasco 9:51

Okay, so I coordinate all of our volunteers, which, you know we couldn't do it without our volunteers. You know, we're volunteer driven organization, and we couldn't do it without them. So our volunteers, you know, will weed, and will plant, will harvest for our clients. And then there's also that social interaction as well, just building those relationships, which is really important too.

Sarah Smith 10:25

Yeah, I love that a bit of a sense of community, like through gardening.

Shareen Pasco 10:29

Exactly, and, you know, sharing tips and hacks and, you know, recipes and just, you know, chatting about what they're going to make with their zucchini.

Sarah Smith 10:41

I love that. I love that.

Shareen Pasco 10:43

Yeah, and just sharing stories.

Sarah Smith 10:45

Yeah, connecting over food.

Shareen Pasco 10:49

Yeah. So I'm in charge of the volunteer just coordinating volunteers with with our members. Sometimes they meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. I'm also in charge of

content for workshops and for social media, also just creating new partnerships, reaching out to people that may not be aware of DIGA and what we do, and meeting people that way, and creating, you know, different ideas potentially, like, you know, workshops around workshops, or what we can do, how we can partner in in the future.

Sarah Smith 11:41

Awesome. So a bit of connection and networking as well. Sounds like you wear a lot of hats over there.

Shareen Pasco 11:47

Yes, yes.

Sarah Smith 11:49

That's good. That's awesome. Speaking of the workshops, could you talk a little bit about the workshops that DIGA has offered in the past, and maybe, if you have any coming up in the new year, any that you hope to offer?

Shareen Pasco 12:01

Yes, so in the past, just some of the different ones that we've put on, companion planting, seed saving, worm composting. One of our clients actually put that on. He has a worm composting unit, which was pretty cool, yeah, just beginner gardening tips. You know, a lot of times people feel overwhelmed, you know, they're like, I haven't gardened before, and so, yeah, we put on every year just kind of beginner gardening tips, or just 101, introduction to gardening. We've also had, like, nutrition workshops. And then we do have in-person workshops where we get to make and take home something, so hands on. And then we also have some lined up with GARDENWORKS, one of our partners around tomato, potato, cruciferous vegetable hacks, mason bee care and just the importance in the garden. We'll also have a series around nutrition with Renee Chan, she's a dietitian, chef and owner of True NOSH in Vancouver, and that will be going on from April to November, and a couple of them will be online, but the others will be in person. So again, just bringing community together, just that social aspect, and then food.

Sarah Smith 13:38

Yeah, I love that. And I love that there's such a range of topics for those workshop as well, like kind of something for everyone, and different things that are interesting and new being explored.

Shareen Pasco 13:47

Yeah, yeah.

Sarah Smith 13:49

That's amazing. And just a note about the workshops. Are those? How do folks register or sign up for those? And is there a charge to attend? Or how does that all work, sort of logistically?

Shareen Pasco 13:59

So to become a DIGA member, there is no charge. So being involved in the community gardens or workshops, there's never a charge, which is pretty awesome, because that can be a barrier as well.

Sarah Smith 14:14

Totally.

Shareen Pasco 14:15

And then, how to join in on the workshops, if you go to our website, digabc.org, there is a calendar of events, and you can click on whatever workshop and register that way.

Sarah Smith 14:30

Very exciting.