

## Episode 42 | Shareen Pasco Pt. 2

### **Announcement** 0:03

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](https://accessibletravelacf.eventbrite.ca)

### **Sarah Smith** 1:20

The other thing that I've heard that DIGA does is something called the home gardening project. I understand that this is a little bit different from the workshops. Could you maybe talk about what it is and what it does?

### **Shareen Pasco** 1:31

Of course, of course, I would love to. So the home gardening project actually came about during the pandemic. Many of our gardeners, you know, as well as other people, were concerned about going outside, and so we came up with this idea to have a self watering planter. Again, we partnered with Tetra Society. So we have these planters, and they can be, they were delivered to 10 of our clients, and they could grow their own produce on their balcony or in their backyard, and not, you know, have to take, you know, transportation, expose themselves to the virus. So, yeah, we just wanted to just empower people from home, and, you know, give them some food security as well.

### **Sarah Smith** 2:35

Yeah, I love that. That's really cool. It's kind of like a multi-faceted goals there. And so you said 10 clients had received those.

### **Shareen Pasco** 2:44

Yes, next year we're hoping to do another 10.

### **Sarah Smith** 2:48

Oh, very cool, awesome. And so I imagine those are still being built right now. Or how does that? What does that look like?

**Shareen Pasco 2:56**

Yes. So for next year, they're still being built. We already have a waiting list. So if you are interested in a home planter for yourself, again, you can go to our website and email us at [info@digabc.org](mailto:info@digabc.org).

**Sarah Smith 3:16**

Really cool. I love that DIGA is now offering sort of both sides of the gardening spectrum, like a bit at home, if folks you know either have more sort of accessibility issues, getting to community gardens in terms of transport stuff, having it like brought to them, I think is really cool, but still offering the community gardens for the connection piece in the community and getting to work with volunteers.

**Shareen Pasco 3:43**

Yeah, you know, a lot of our clients don't live near their community gardens that they're a part of, so having that at home just, I mean, it makes it really easy. Also just the self-watering aspect, you know, only needing to fill it up probably every two weeks.

**Sarah Smith 4:03**

Wow, that's really cool, yeah, because that's a big chunk of time to sustain, you know, veggies and whatever's growing in there, generally. I mean, in summer months, you'd have to be out there, from what I understand, watering like once a day almost.

**Shareen Pasco 4:17**

Yeah. So in our community gardens, because our clients can't get there on a daily basis, nor volunteers. We've been installed at all of our gardens that were involved in automatic irrigation systems so that we set a timer and have it water, you know, once or twice a day, and that's just the consistency is really important in growing, you know, we've seen a big difference after we've installed those in the amount of produce that is harvested. And it just, I think it takes the worry out of it as well. You're not worrying about, you know, your plants, or asking someone, Hey, can you. Can you water my plants?

**Sarah Smith 5:01**

Totally, yeah. You don't have to have that sort of layer of stress going on in the back of your mind of, What if I can't get there, what if they don't get watered? Is everything gonna sort of shrivel up and be wasted? But, yeah, that's really cool.

**Shareen Pasco 5:13**

Yeah, I think another cool part about just the home gardening project, is just being able to look out your like, balcony or your back door and see, you know, your plants growing on a daily basis is pretty cool.

**Sarah Smith 5:29**

Absolutely. I love that. And earlier, when we were talking about sort of that bi-directional nurturing that happens with growing things, the other thing that for me, at least, I've sort of experienced when I've grown things in the past is a bit like that sense of pride that you get when you've put in all of this work, and then you get something that you get to take home with you and turn into food. I think that's just such a cool transition, that you get to sort of literally bear the fruits of your labour.

**Shareen Pasco 5:55**

It's so true. And then also it's a great talking point too, because many people don't grow their own, you know, produce. So just to, you know, to have that sense of pride and just that confidence and like, "Hey, I grew this." It's pretty awesome, and seeing it grown from a seed to, you know, this zucchini that you're eating is pretty incredible.

**Sarah Smith 6:28**

Yeah, absolutely. And especially in a city like Vancouver, where, you know, we have all these other housing issues and people, just space in general, gardening takes a lot of space, and so having that, that opportunity to connect with gardening, I think, is really, really cool. So in terms, we've talked a little bit about this, sort of generally accessibility barriers to gardening, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about what barriers are, sort of generally that clients might be facing before coming to DIGA.

**Shareen Pasco 7:01**

Sure. So, you know, in most community gardens in Vancouver, they're not accessible for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, just entering the garden, a lot of times, there's not cut curbs. There's not like a gradual grade, it's just too steep to get up like the ground itself is not suitable to move around in, you know, wheelchairs or different mobility devices, scooters. And, you know, I mean, there's many other things as well. But like, for example, just the hoses being able to, you know, move a hose to your plot, it might be, you know, across the garden. What else? Just like, just the height of the beds can be an issue as well. Most that I've seen in the gardens, they're just they're too low, so our beds are raised and so they can there's a couple different styles. One is a tabletop style, so wheelchairs can

actually go underneath it, and you're just able to garden comfortably. That's kind of our most popular design. And then there are others that you can wheel beside, and they're an appropriate height, so you can reach over and garden.

**Sarah Smith 8:41**

Very cool. Yeah. No, that that sounds like a such a simple solution, too. And that's one of the things that that I think can be really frustrating within the disability community is instances like this, where it's not difficult to make things accessible, and it's just overlooked and there's no, there's no real reason that it couldn't be done in an accessible way, but just without that intentionality in design, you end up missing accessibility for tons of folks, and it just doesn't really make sense. So I think that it's really cool that DIGA is out there doing this.

**Shareen Pasco 9:16**

And going forward, I know that any new community garden built, they are making accessible.

**Sarah Smith 9:24**

Oh, good.

**Shareen Pasco 9:25**

Which is fantastic. Yeah. And as an able bodied person, I see so much around us that that we can change just yeah, not only in the gardens, but, you know, in our community just, yeah.

**Sarah Smith 9:42**

Yeah, in the day to day for sure. One of the other things that I was thinking of specific to community gardens, because I've wandered through a few of them myself, is sometimes just the plots, or if they are, you know, structures of some kind, supports for the plants just being too close together. So if you're using a wheelchair or other mobility aid you can't fit between the different garden plots, and that's something too that, again, such a simple fix, but just being overlooked.

**Shareen Pasco 10:11**

Yeah, the distance between the beds, a lot of them are close together, and you need to have, you know, at least three to four feet to turn around. So we make sure that all of our garden beds that we build there's at least, you know, four feet in between the beds.

**Sarah Smith 10:33**

Awesome, awesome, very cool. So we talked a bit about some of the gardens that DIGA works with, and you mentioned specifically the GF Strong garden. I'm wondering if that one is different in any way, if you want to talk a little bit about that one specifically.

**Shareen Pasco** 10:50

So it's at the GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre in their courtyard, and it's an accessible garden. It was a garden before, but it wasn't that accessible. It wasn't very friendly for clients and patients to get out there. So we started this project back in 2019 and it was completed in 2021. Unfortunately, our clients and patients couldn't get out there last year, but this year, they were able to get out there and just enjoy either, you know, gardening and there's, we have 10 raised garden beds there of a variety of heights, so whatever mobility aid you use, you can get out there and garden. And if you don't want to garden, that's okay. You can enjoy the space. It's a very calm and healing space.

**Sarah Smith** 10:50

Very cool. I love that. I love that you mentioned that as well, that you don't have to garden. If you're not into gardening, you can still just go around, check it out, and enjoy it.

**Shareen Pasco** 12:06

And enjoy just the beauty that surrounds you. You're still connecting, you know, with nature. So our goal there is just to introduce people who didn't think that they could garden, to introduce them into gardening, show them that, yes, you can. So we have plots, not only for our clients there, but for the in and out patients that can use the space.

**Sarah Smith** 12:34

Cool. I love that. And I mean it kind of just makes sense, given that it's at GF Strong, that folks are going to be coming and going, it might be nice to stop in on their way at some point. And, yeah, that's really lovely.

**Shareen Pasco** 12:45

Next year we will be holding some workshops there as well.

**Sarah Smith** 12:50

Cool, in person in the garden?

**Shareen Pasco** 12:52

Mhm. Yup.

**Sarah Smith** 12:53

Lovely. That's exciting. That's very exciting. I think there's one more sort of bigger project that I don't know if we've mentioned yet, and I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about it. It's the greenhouse project.

**Shareen Pasco** 13:04

Yes, this is a very exciting project. Well, all of our projects are exciting, but this has been a big dream for us. We're wanting to just engage our clients all year round. And first and foremost, this greenhouse will be accessible for all people using mobility aids. You know, we want this to be a space for our community to grow produce all year round, to host workshops and again, you know, be together as community. So just an educational space, food security. And we're also hoping to have some employment out of it as well.

**Sarah Smith** 13:46

Very cool. I love that sort of a full circle approach.

**Shareen Pasco** 13:52

We also want to donate some of the produce as well.

**Sarah Smith** 13:57

Cool. That actually ties back I was going to ask a question earlier, when you were talking about the gardens generally across Vancouver, and clients, sort of bearing the fruits of their labor, I think was the term I used. Feels a bit antiquated, but, you know, taking home the veggies that they've grown from seed, I was wondering, sort of, how that works, in terms of the produce that is produced, does that all go to the clients? Is there leftovers? Sort of, how does that all work?

**Shareen Pasco** 14:25

The produce does all go to the clients. So whatever they choose to do with it, if they want to take it home, I have heard some clients donating to seniors' centres. You know, sharing with other gardeners as well. So I do know that some of our gardeners share with the volunteers too. So that's a little perk.

**Sarah Smith** 14:49

Yeah, I love that. That's awesome. Very cool. So it sort of, yeah, stays with where it's grown and gets shared around. That's really lovely as well. Yeah. Yeah, especially sharing food, I think, is just such a great thing to connect over. And then when you get that added, that sort of, like, deeper level of having grown it yourself, and that sense of pride and being able to share that, I think is really valuable.

**Shareen Pasco** 15:12

I agree. Yeah, the greenhouse, I think would just be, you know, the first accessible greenhouse, and again, growing DIGA, just introducing more people to gardening, is a fantastic thing.

**Sarah Smith** 15:35

Yeah, I love that. And so do you know when the greenhouse is going to be open? Or is it a little too early for that?

**Shareen Pasco** 15:39

Well, it's a little too early. You know, we are in the in the planning phase. Our goal is 2024.

**Sarah Smith** 15:55

Okay, lovely.

**Shareen Pasco** 15:56

And we're just like, how can we engage our clients all year round, because you see how much joy it brings. It's like, okay, we want to have this all year round.

**Sarah Smith** 16:11

Yeah, yeah, if you can extend that as much as possible, that five or six month season, might as well.

**Shareen Pasco** 16:17

And it's covered. So you know, should be warm in there. [Laughs]

**Sarah Smith** 16:21

Yeah, definitely warm and dry. I'm wondering, what are you looking forward to most for the upcoming 2023 spring or full year, I guess, gardening season?

**Shareen Pasco** 16:36

Yeah, what am I looking forward to? So I think I'm looking forward to just getting more people involved with DIGA. Gardening just invites us to drop the constant doing and just allows ourselves to just be. The garden is just an uplifting, you know, space that connects us to nature and ourselves. So just the gardening season, just being just around the corner, it just, I guess it just sparks joy and excitement about the program.

**Sarah Smith** 16:43

I love that, I love that. My last question was going to be, what is your favorite thing about being involved with DIGA? I'm guessing it might be similar, but if you have anything to add.

**Shareen Pasco** 17:22

My favourite thing, first and foremost, would be the connection to others. Community is really important, and making those personal connections. Having the social aspect of gardening is first, and then it's the gardening, being able to grow your own produce.

**Sarah Smith** 17:54

Yeah, totally. I love that connecting to others over a shared interest and like a shared joy, yeah, I love that. Cultivating that community.

**Shareen Pasco** 18:04

Yes, yeah, that's, you know, that's what we are all about. Is community first.

**Sarah Smith** 18:12

Lovely. Well, I think that pretty much wraps it up. Thank you so much for taking the time to join me today. Is there anything else that you want to mention about DIGA, or about any of the programs?

**Shareen Pasco** 18:24

I don't know if I mentioned it earlier, but the easiest way to get involved with DIGA is go to [digabc.org](http://digabc.org) and you can click participate. Again, registration is free, everything is free—to garden with us, to join our workshops—we would love to have you.

**Sarah Smith** 18:49

Amazing. Awesome, so folks can find that DIGA is D I G A just to clarify, awesome. Thank you so much for joining me. This has been really, really interesting. I've had a great time chatting with you and learning about DIGA and gardening. So thank you so much.

**Shareen Pasco** 19:06

Thank you so much, Sarah.

**Sarah Smith** 19:08

And to all of our listeners, thanks for tuning in today. We hope you join us next time on Discover Stories.