

Abel Gomez ([00:01](#)):

So this is interview for the Center for the Study of Religion in the City, COVID relief efforts. Abel Gomez and Ariel Mejia interviewing Nazshonnii of the Sogorea Te Land Trust. And so today, we're just going to have some just broad questions about organization, the work that y'all have been doing, and some of the initial ways that y'all have been responding to coronavirus.

Abel Gomez ([00:31](#)):

So to start, could you tell us a little bit about Sogorea Te Land Trust?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:39](#)):

Yeah. So we're an urban indigenous women-led, land trust-based in Oakland in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. We focus primarily on returning land to indigenous hand. That's a phrase that Corrina uses often in a lot of her speeches and conversations. And what that looks like is some people offering their homes in their written trust or willing it into their trust. That looks like collaborating with other community farms and land organizations to remunerate land. And remuneration for us is to work and develop a connection with the land, growing and harvesting and planting traditional medicines, traditional plants and foods, going back to old diets, not old but traditional diets.

Nazshonnii Brown ([01:27](#)):

So we have our cultural revitalization as a part of our organization. We have the land acquisition which is being done through modern means. And we also have a lot of our youth programming in community outreach that we're doing. So we've hosted a number of different cultural groups, artist groups, dance groups. There was a group of aboriginal youth that came after hours and hours of traveling. I think it was over a day and a half, just from their home to meeting us.

Nazshonnii Brown ([02:01](#)):

And we were just honored to be able to have ceremony with them and to invite them to our main site in East Oakland. And the site is very special to us because it's the home of the first arbor in over 250 years for California natives. So I think in this greater region, not just the Ohlone people, there aren't many tribes that have the ceremonial space. And in this space at our main site, we are hoping to open it. That way, we can have elders and youth focusing on elders and youth specifically to come together and do ceremony, to dance, to pray together, to have gatherings, to share food.

Nazshonnii Brown ([02:48](#)):

So our organization is working mostly on bringing back the culture that was lost and healing from these legacies of colonization. And also looking at how through modern means we have to acquire land, and how we can stay connected to our community and keep them engaged with culture. And a big part of those things, our operations are funded by Shuumi. So Shuumi is a voluntary land tax-exempt residence. And owners in the Bay Area are able to pay, and it's based off of if you're a homeowner, if you're a renter, or if you have a certain income so that there's a percentage that's calculated off of those factors.

Nazshonnii Brown ([03:33](#)):

And then, people that may identify as settler or non-Ohlone, but may be another tribe or communities would be able to voluntarily give this tax. And another thing is when it comes to the community, when it comes to the home and how many different people call the Bay Area home, that's very important for us

in recognizing that many people have been displaced. Different tribes have been relocated, different communities of color have been basically forced here in order to find better opportunities, or they're fleeing their homes from terror.

Nazshonnii Brown ([04:10](#)):

Then we look at settlers, and it's then and now, how people are still being settlers in this community. And our organization is really all about how we can all work together in this healing and continue to provide that space for Ohlone peoples to reclaim their culture.

Abel Gomez ([04:35](#)):

Beautiful. You mentioned a word at the beginning, rematriation. I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about what that means.

Nazshonnii Brown ([04:44](#)):

Yeah. So I don't know if there's an exact definition or one person that coined it, but it's just a word that has been going around the community, the inter-tribal community here in the Bay Area for a couple of years. I'm sure some literary authors have used it in their works as well. But to us, that meaning seems to change every day. It's part of us and the things that we do. So it's implanting and learning about these certain crops or certain medicines. So we have the word repatriation which is telling you you're bringing back something to its traditional homeland, and that's masculine.

Nazshonnii Brown ([05:28](#)):

But we moved towards matriation being [inaudible 00:05:31] organization and also recognizing that a lot of tribes and a lot of indigenous people around the world are matriarchal societies. So that's why we use rematriation instead of repatriation. But those terms have been used before when it comes to Corrina having conversations around ancestral remains and saying that these remains need to be repatriated.

Nazshonnii Brown ([05:54](#)):

But for the land itself and for our community and our relationships with each other, all of that is the practice of rematriation and listening to our elders, listening to the ancestral knowledge that's been passed down. Listening to the earth, just creating, fostering a bond with the earth and being out there and working on the land. You're learning in your own way what rematriation is. So there's no exact definition in my opinion, but I think that maybe each person will have a different idea of it.

Nazshonnii Brown ([06:27](#)):

But it's all about going back to what was once before and also bonding with the earth.

Abel Gomez ([06:37](#)):

So I'm hearing that the work of Sogorea Te Land Trust and particularly around this concept of rematriation is around healing from the generations of violence and loss and displacement through learning about traditional foods, medicine plants, listening to the elders, and following the lead of these indigenous women who are leading the charge around the return of land and various kinds of cultural revitalization efforts.

Nazshonnii Brown ([07:11](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

Abel Gomez (07:17):

Ariel, do you want to go?

Ariel Mejia (07:20):

Okay. So we're going to dive into these questions. So can you tell us what your organization focused on before coronavirus? Tell us a bit about that.

Nazshonnii Brown (07:37):

I missed the part about after corona. The main part, right now we're doing food distribution which is great and amazing because we're able to work together safely outside, and we come together and sort everything. And then, we go out and we go out into the community. And for a lot of us who have been isolated after the shelter-in-place was declared, and if there were any concerns around exposures, some of us had to isolate. Just being in certain hotspots, some of us decided to isolate. So it's always a good feeling to be around your community and then go out into the community and seeing people. Even if you're ringing their doorbell and leaving something, it's always a great feeling.

Nazshonnii Brown (08:21):

So we've been able to do that with food and produce that comes from the Farms-to-Families Grant as well as food directly from the Cultural Conservancy. And we've also just gotten a few things like rice and beans and food staples to add in to supplement a lot of these other food boxes. And we've also, for elders specifically in our community or family of our co-workers, we put in additional medicines and things. Or we've had people donate sage, and we let people know. "Come by the office or the main site and we'll have sage ready for you."

Nazshonnii Brown (09:01):

There was a big plant donation so we had people come by, youth and elders, sign up for a time to safely distance and get some plants so that way they can start up their community gardens or their home gardens. And then we're also communicating with the American Indian Child Resource Center by sharing a space with them where their students are able to come out and garden as well. And then, before that, we were doing a lot of the same things, but we weren't directly engaging with specific families in homes. So that's one thing that changed a lot for us. We host a lot of people on the land, and we go out to different farms.

Nazshonnii Brown (09:45):

And we'd have conversations about how we would acquire land, or how we would put on a certain event or do interviews. But I think since the shelter-in-place, a lot of our work has shifted towards the individual relationships with the community and seeing what they need, seeing what we need, and recognizing that when we're feeding everyone else, we've got to make sure to feed ourselves as well.

Nazshonnii Brown (10:11):

So just every week, I'm telling my coworker, "I put you on the list because I'm going to make you a bag and make sure you have food this week." So before that, I think it was mostly about the conversations. And now it's like, "Okay. What do people actually need and how do we get that to them?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([10:30](#)):

And before the shelter-in-place, we also started to learn how to process and create our own seed-saving practices. That way, we're more organized, and we're able to share that with others if they need them and to keep them organic and not modified. And also, just that great feeling of planting something and maybe it came from this [inaudible 00:11:00] or maybe it came from another territory. You plant that medicine, and then you see it grow, go through all these cycles.

Nazshonnii Brown ([11:07](#)):

Then you go through processing and harvesting, and you're able to use every part of that plant. And then you keep those seeds, and you plant again. And then, you give half of it to the community. I think that is also another thing that we really enjoy that we started before March. And then, making fire cider, making tinctures and salves, that's some things we're learning with other community members. Planting Justice Crew, I think they gifted us a bunch of salves, and then we just set up a time with an herbalist. And we're like, "We want to learn how to make these things." So that way, we have them on hand, and we can give them out to our staff and our families, immediate families.

Nazshonnii Brown ([11:50](#)):

And then eventually, when we have the resources, we want to be at a point where we can sell some of these things as well as give them away. Sell the things that are appropriate to sell. And then, other things that we would just gift to elders, or gift if someone comes and speaks at a panel with us, or they visit with us. We'd have a gift exchange with them.

Ariel Mejia ([12:10](#)):

All right. Thank you. So when you said seed-saving practices, is that growing your own stuff? What exactly is that? Is it that?

Nazshonnii Brown ([12:27](#)):

Yeah. So some of our seeds, we get them from seed banks. We get them from other farms, other tribes. We've reached out to a Southwestern seed bank. And they're giving out free seeds to Southwestern tribal people. And then, if you're not a Southwestern tribe, you're able to pay a discounted rate if you are in need. And you can just generally buy seeds from them. So we got a couple samples from them. So then we just plant them.

Nazshonnii Brown ([13:04](#)):

And now, we're in that process of figuring out how different seeds are processed. So that processing including when do we take them from the plant, how we do take them, how do we cut them? How would you harvest certain things? And then, how do you dry them, and how do you store them? So I think for different plants, it can vary. Tobacco seeds are very tiny. They're like the point of a ball pin almost.

Nazshonnii Brown ([13:33](#)):

And then, there are some seeds that come in pods. And they're a little harder to tell if the seed's actually in there. I think I had some basil seeds that I planted, and I planted in these trays. Every single tray that had six spots, a smaller one only, three of them would sprout and then the other three wouldn't sprout. And I was like, "What's going on?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([13:56](#)):

And then, I opened them up, and I realized some of the seeds weren't in there because they had already fallen out. Birds really like seeds. You really have to protect your... Not really protect, but if you want to have sunflower seeds, then you have to somehow cover it because the birds will get to it, and they'll eat. And that's another thing. That's why I don't want to say protect.

Nazshonnii Brown ([14:19](#)):

When we plant, we're planting because plants like each other. We're planting for the other plants. We're planting for the animals because they need to eat too. And then, the plants themselves, being good for the soil and the earth. So it's not just like, "Oh, we're planting so we can eat this, and we can give it to people." But we have to consider nature as well, and we have to consider animals as well.

Ariel Mejia ([14:43](#)):

All right. Thank you.

Abel Gomez ([14:50](#)):

So you talked a bit about the kind of work that Sogorea Te did before coronavirus hit. So you mentioned gatherings and hosting various indigenous groups that would come visit. So how has the coronavirus impacted the organization?

Nazshonnii Brown ([15:20](#)):

So we had a meeting, I think the day before the shelter-in-place was declared because we were all monitoring the news. And we recently just adapted to using signal which is even interesting because we've been chatting each other like, I don't know, really best buds. So we were always up to date on the news because somebody would be like, "Did you see this? Did you see that?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([15:45](#)):

And then, for some reason, we just kind of... We all had this feeling that something's going to change. And then, the day before, the governor was like, "Shelter..." Actually, no. The governor didn't decide that, it was six different counties in other cities. So Alameda County was like, "Stay home."

Nazshonnii Brown ([16:04](#)):

So the day before that, we had a conversation about how we were all feeling that day. And we lit a fire, we had the fire going for most of the day. We offered tobacco. We prayed together. And then, we just went around. And we were like, "Ah, I don't know how I feel about it. I don't know much information."

Nazshonnii Brown ([16:21](#)):

Or some people were like, "I'm very concerned for my health, and I'm also around immunocompromised people."

Nazshonnii Brown ([16:26](#)):

And then others were like, "Well, I was hanging out with my friends." And this and that and that.

Nazshonnii Brown ([16:31](#)):

And other people were like, "Well, maybe we shouldn't do that."

Nazshonnii Brown ([16:34](#)):

So it was interesting because we were all at different points. Some people were more concerned than others. Others seemed to be more prepared. We were making this joke that one of our coworkers had his own apocalypse show because he was, "Make sure you get this, this, and that, and have a go bag."

Nazshonnii Brown ([16:57](#)):

At one point, he just came by and gave me a bunch of supplies for any disaster. So we had a conversation about it because we weren't really sure what was going to happen, but we knew a change was coming. And for those first two weeks, or actually maybe more like a month, everyone was home. And that was hard because we're used to laughing together a lot in our staff meetings and being there in person.

Nazshonnii Brown ([17:30](#)):

And outside of staff meetings sometimes, we would also go to our different land sites and meet together, like we were doing that day. And that wasn't happening anymore. It took a minute for the administrative tasks to get back into the groove of doing our administrative tasks because everyone was kind of taking a break. And I think also at that time, everyone was just emotionally drained. Physically, just worrying about illness and worrying about other people.

Nazshonnii Brown ([18:01](#)):

Realizing that a change was going to happen, and then having a really hard adjustment period of getting back into the groove, even if it was stuff we could do from home and online. And then, for the people on the land, there was always a concern around some people not wanting to work around others because they were immunocompromised, or they were in a home of immunocompromised people.

Nazshonnii Brown ([18:23](#)):

So it was hard because some projects needed at least three people on them when it came to our construction. And then other ones, they were manageable where you could go in the water and weed and harvest on your own, but it still feels a little lonely in some ways just being out there by yourself.

Nazshonnii Brown ([18:45](#)):

Did that answer the question about how we changed? Okay.

Abel Gomez ([18:48](#)):

Yeah. So I guess a follow up, where did the food distribution... Let me rephrase that. Let me just take a step back. Does the food distribution connect to part of the response, or was that something that happened before, or how does that fit in?

Nazshonnii Brown ([19:13](#)):

Yeah, definitely in a response to the shelter-in-place and increasing amount of COVID precautions and policies changing in public places as well as farm areas that we share with other organizations, so we started that, I believe in April or May. I think it's only... Actually, I think at the end of May, we started

doing that. And the first day, we got almost 80 boxes. And then, there was only five people that could work that day. And then, we just started calling people. "Hey, do you need food?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([19:42](#)):

And then, just driving down the street, talking to random people. Be like, "Hey, you want a food box?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([19:44](#)):

So the first day was just like a free-for-all. And then, we realized, "Okay. We could get boxes every week from Bay Cities," which was one of the grants or suppliers that has been doing a lot more, I think, discounted and also free food boxes. So right now, they're just looking for people to distribute. But I believe before COVID, they were selling a lot of their products, whether it was whole produce.

Nazshonnii Brown ([20:37](#)):

Sometimes they'd have pre-packaged food and other things like that. But all of this came in response after, just having our discussions within our organization. And then, being in contact with our communities, and a lot of us also having families that are in other tribal communities in Oregon or Arizona. And then, as y'all may know, the Navajo nation having a really hard time with COVID. And it's just like here in the Bay Area where there are already a number of disparities related to health and food access that are now being magnified because of COVID.

Nazshonnii Brown ([21:19](#)):

So it came afterwards, after the shelter-in-place.

Abel Gomez ([21:26](#)):

So what I'm hearing is that there was this time of people really staying at home and maybe not knowing what was going to happen. And folks involved in the organization having discussions around what are our needs and what are the needs of our community. And out of that, partnerships being built with other organizations in the East Bay, perhaps. And then from there, creating this food distribution program for... Is it for Native people in particular, or is it for low-income people? What sort of demographic?

Nazshonnii Brown ([22:09](#)):

Yeah. So when we got more organized, I created this form that was a needs assessment. And I also did this for the Gill Tract farm because we have an area of land out there. And I'm also the person that represents Sogorea Te at the farm, and I sit in at a lot of their meetings. So they had a few distributions set up there on another day, and we'd get boxes from them. And then, we also had the Bay Cities' boxes.

Nazshonnii Brown ([22:45](#)):

Sorry, I just forgot what you asked.

Abel Gomez ([22:46](#)):

So I was asking-

Nazshonnii Brown ([22:51](#)):

Oh, demographics. Sorry. Okay, got it. So we made this form. And the reason why the form came about is because at the Gill Tract and in our meetings, we were having discussions around who has the highest need. And the Gill Tract being, although it is diverse in the farmers there and the communities that we serve, it's definitely more of a White presence at that farm.

Nazshonnii Brown ([23:23](#)):

So when we were having these conversations, oftentimes it was a lot of educating and a lot of labor on the communities of color at the farm. Because they were like, "Hey, racism has existed. Where have you been?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([23:39](#)):

So when we made the form, we made a focus on... Well first and foremost, it was like, "If you say you need food, we're going to trust that. And we're going to bring you food." We ask that people would pick up if they're willing and able, or if they could send a cousin or brother or sister, or somebody that could come and pick up the food. If you're not able to do any of that, then we would deliver to you.

Nazshonnii Brown ([24:04](#)):

And then, we also have instructions. "Would you want us to leave it on the porch?" And then, we had this section that was completely optional. That way people didn't feel pressured to fill it out, or maybe discouraged not to ask for food in case they had to fill it out. But it was asking if you were immunocompromised, if you were Black, Brown, or Indigenous, if you were a mother or pregnant.

Nazshonnii Brown ([24:31](#)):

I think it was if you were pregnant or you have a full house, or you're a multi-family unit so there's a lot of youth in the house. If you're formally incarcerated or on bail, unemployed due to COVID. There's another one. Former foster youth or current foster youth, recognizing that there's some youth that may be legally emancipated or just living on their own right now. If your house-less, or even if you don't put that on there, say you don't have an address, just be like, "Meet us at 14th and Broadway, and we'll bring you a box."

Nazshonnii Brown ([25:11](#)):

So we've had a couple people, meet them at their work, or we'd meet them out wherever they had a little set up shop. Because some people were house-less, but they were able to vend at the Bart Station. So we'd bring them a box that way. I had neighbors that I had got on the list. And I specifically would bring them the fruit because they didn't have access to a kitchen.

Nazshonnii Brown ([25:34](#)):

At one of our sites, there's an encampment just beyond the creek on the other side of the freeway, and they were able to set up a kitchen. So we put them on the list. And then some people that just word-of-mouth, we heard they were in need. So we had those boxes, if you were okay with checking them, and just understanding that all that would be confidential. And it was just to see on our end, where's the highest need.

Nazshonnii Brown ([26:06](#)):



And the most boxes that were checked were people identifying Black, Brown, Indigenous, being a big house or kids in the house, being pregnant, and immunocompromised. So maybe because you're working or you have to take care of your kids or you're not healthy enough to be outside, having that need to get something delivered.

Abel Gomez ([26:34](#)):

That's super helpful. Okay.

Ariel Mejia ([26:36](#)):

Okay. So I have a brief question. So from what I'm understanding for the food distribution, is there no specific location? It's kind of like, if they need it delivered, you guys deliver it? Or if they need it to be picked up at a certain place, that's what you guys do?

Nazshonnii Brown ([27:00](#)):

Yeah. We moved around a little bit. So the first day, we just had the boxes, and we just started driving around in our trucks and our personal vehicles. And then, the following few weeks, we were able to meet at the Gill Tract community where one of the box distributors dropped a bunch of boxes. So we'd go there.

Nazshonnii Brown ([27:19](#)):

And then, there'd be a crew preparing those boxes from the Farms-to-Family grant. And then, separately, we would have someone wake up earlier in the morning, go to Bay Cities and bring the other boxes. That way we could put a certain amount in each vehicle. And then from there, we would just go out and send it to people. And we started to make the pick-up list because some people were able to drive all the way to Albany.

Nazshonnii Brown ([27:47](#)):

But most of our families were in Oakland and surrounding cities, adjacent cities. So even for myself, having to drive to Albany for work days, it's a little bit of a hassle because there's traffic, and it's a longer distance. So we were thinking, "Oh, can we do it at a closer location or a central location?" That way, we could get boxes from both distributors and meet in the middle?

Nazshonnii Brown ([28:14](#)):

And we ended up deciding to go with our office which is near downtown. So from there, for the past month, we've been picking up produce from the distributors. And since then, we've also had the extra produce from the Cultural Conservancy. So then, we set up everything outside. There's a big parking lot outside. We set up everything, and we set aside the boxes that are going to bigger families.

Nazshonnii Brown ([28:46](#)):

And then, we start to make bags and smaller boxes for elders where there's probably only one or two people in the household or smaller household numbers. But now, it's probably five people picking up, and then, out of the whole list of maybe 110 or 120 people. And then the other thing that we did was we split up our list because we realized that there was too many people, and we wouldn't be able to pick up the stuff, pack it, and then deliver it within a reasonable amount of time.

Nazshonnii Brown ([29:23](#)):

So some people were just going overtime because there was a lot of stuff to do. And then, we had families all the way from Albany to San Lorenzo. And then a few scattered out further beyond that, like in Hayward. So yeah.

Ariel Mejia ([29:42](#)):

All right. Thank you.

Abel Gomez ([29:45](#)):

So thinking about all the work that y'all have done around the food distribution, can we say a little bit about what has worked really well and maybe things that have not worked as planned?

Nazshonnii Brown ([29:59](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). What has worked well? Having meetings beforehand and having a game plan. It definitely helps to calm nerves. Because I think after we had a certain plan in mind, after we had the plan initially, after those first few times when we'd start to go about our plan, we'd notice some things where miscommunication was happening. Sometimes, one of the distributors would try to give us 50 boxes instead of 75. And we'd have to go back inside, and be like, "Well, we signed up for 75."

Nazshonnii Brown ([30:39](#)):

They're very nice about it, but were just like that was an extra 10, 15 minutes where we could have been already on the road, having to go all the way across town. And having to go from San Leandro to Albany, so what is that? I don't know. 20 miles or something. I don't know exactly. But it takes 25 minutes in good traffic, and then if the traffic gets bad.

Nazshonnii Brown ([31:05](#)):

So planning helped a lot and having discussions about what it would look like. But when it came to actually executing that plan, we realized that because of miscommunication or maybe just one person doing a job that another person's doing, things were lost. So when it came to designating people to certain roles, I think another problem we ran into is that we were always stressed out on these days because it was just so many people on the list.

Nazshonnii Brown ([31:45](#)):

And we all were thinking about that one time where we got up early. Most people got up early at 8:00. And then, some people would be picking up stuff and getting gas. And we met at 10:00. And then, finally going out. And then, finishing the day at 7:30. So, not ideal. And a lot of us are like, "I don't want to do that again."

Nazshonnii Brown ([32:12](#)):

So the past month has been great because at the new location, it's central. We're able to have some people get there early and begin packing and redistributing the produce that comes separately. And then, we've also been messing around with spreadsheets so we can have a count of how many boxes are going out, how many bags are going out. And since the list has split, now I've been able to look at when people are getting food. And when we ask them how many people are in the household, that helps us to distribute the food.

Nazshonnii Brown ([32:51](#)):

So if we have five extra food boxes that could go to a smaller family, instead of doing that, we'll just break them into boxes, redistribute them, add in extra produce. And then from that, we could make another 15 bags or another 15 smaller boxes.

Abel Gomez ([33:15](#)):

So similar to what I'm hearing about the things that have worked really well that maybe you would continue on is things around having a centralized location, creating spreadsheets that help to document when people get food and the particular extent of the need, and the discussions and planning ahead of time, even though there have been instances where things have not gone as planned. And so those are some things that would be helpful to continue practicing into the future. Yeah?

Nazshonnii Brown ([33:57](#)):

Yes. I don't know if you heard me. I said, "Yes."

Abel Gomez ([34:00](#)):

Ariel, do you want to go?

Ariel Mejia ([34:04](#)):

So were some of the problems you guys faced long days from 8:00 in the morning to 7:00 at night?

Nazshonnii Brown ([34:13](#)):

Well actually, more like every day, I was... This is kind of me telling on the organization where I was just put in charge of it. And I was just kind of like, "Oh, okay. Sure." Because I was the first person that stepped up to do something to help us plan.

Nazshonnii Brown ([34:32](#)):

So then they're like, "Oh, Nazshonnii's in charge. Nazshonnii's in charge."

Nazshonnii Brown ([34:34](#)):

And I was like, "Huh?" And then, it took me a second. But then I realized, "Okay, I'm in charge. I'm going to set out a plan."

Nazshonnii Brown ([34:41](#)):

And then, I'm noticing, even just this past Tuesday, we just had it yesterday. I'd be like, "Okay. You go and do this. I'm going to start on this."

Nazshonnii Brown ([34:55](#)):

And then somebody would come in the office. "What's going on?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([34:58](#)):

And I'm like, "Okay, you go do this. I'm doing this. They're doing that."

Nazshonnii Brown ([35:01](#)):

Another person comes in the office, and it's like, "We just had a meeting about this." So again, I'm telling on some people because we'd have a separate meeting beforehand. And I've had another coworker come in and help me with the spreadsheets and also help me with leading these meetings.

Nazshonnii Brown ([35:16](#)):

And I guess, just because of being on Zoom so much, a lot of us are having a lot more screen time than usual. And it's also hard not being in person most of the time. So I noticed that we're in a meeting, and we plan something. And then the day of, some people would be like, "What time do I get the truck? What should I do?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([35:42](#)):

And we're like, "We just sent this out." So that's something that we've encountered that has definitely been time consuming. And I think it just happens every time. And I understand that some people have those days. Because I have a very bad short-term memory.

Nazshonnii Brown ([36:00](#)):

So for me, it helps to pull up the list on my phone, to print it out for people that want something in their hands. And then, even the day before to say, "Okay, I'm going to put your name here." And then, I'm going to put the task that you're doing." So that way, people can open their phones, look at the notes in that meeting.

Nazshonnii Brown ([36:20](#)):

But I'd say it's just really random stuff from coming in after one person had already explained what we're doing. Another thing, I think we're all very helpful, and we're very nice about lending and helping hands so everyone will have a job. And then, once one person finishes, we're like, "Oh, let me help you." But then, they start helping, and then it throws off the process because they're doing it a different way than the other person is.

Nazshonnii Brown ([36:50](#)):

So we haven't quite nailed the assembly line, but the good thing is that... I don't know. We're very helpful people, and we're very kind and nice to each other. But I think it's just the actual, this is what's being done, and this is how we do it. And then, streamlining all of that. I think that's what our problem is. But things get done at the end of the day, which is good.

Ariel Mejia ([37:16](#)):

That's good. Thanks.

Abel Gomez ([37:21](#)):

And I wonder too if... The organization is really a grass roots organization, and you're sort of starting... In some ways I'm thinking about there is a lot of success that's happened. And it's been by folks learning how to do it as the need has come. And so, it's sort of figuring how to do things because maybe this is not something that has ever been done before to this extent.

Abel Gomez ([37:49](#)):

And so in that regard, I'm wondering, looking back, what are some of the things that y'all might have done differently?

Nazshonnii Brown ([38:00](#)):

Looking back. Well, I would have paid attention more in school. I would have listened to... I'm kidding. Looking back, I guess one thing that we were doing, what you're mentioning about learning as we're going, I've been looking at how other organizations are doing food distribution, how they set up their intake forms. And then, something that an elder suggested to me was... Something that they're doing, actually. They're going to different farm stands and looking at how they do their safe practices.

Nazshonnii Brown ([38:43](#)):

And from that, that person is able to come back to the Gill Tract farm and set up all of our safety protocols during COVID when it comes to being on the farm and being a farmer. And then, specifically to our farm stand on Sundays, there's a whole other set of protocols. So through conversations with that person who's also a health professional, I've been able to put together our office protocols, our workplace protocols when it comes to the shelter in place and just overall, your health.

Nazshonnii Brown ([39:19](#)):

And then also, like I said, instructions for things that we do on the day of food distribution. So one thing for me is I would have hoped to have had these conversations earlier or begin to think about a lot of what they were saying and how I could apply it to this workplace. And then I guess, having meetings early on. Because we actually decided, probably a month into doing the food distribution, that we wanted to have meetings separate from our staff meetings. That way we give enough time and attention to how that day will go or certain needs.

Nazshonnii Brown ([40:02](#)):

So there was actually a coworker that stepped back recently because they would have to bring their kids along with them, and it was being concerned about the kids always hugging people. So it's hard to maintain the safe distance practices, but they're kids are so cute that they want to hug everyone and be helpful.

Nazshonnii Brown ([40:25](#)):

And we did a few days of the kids with us which is great because another thing that we're able to do is if there are parents there that bring their kids with them, some people have grandparents. I'm an aunt. I brought my nephews to the office with me. I bring them to land with me when it was before March. So it's been great to be able to do that, but we also are responding to her specific need of, "Okay, I need to step back because it's hard to make sure that my kids are following the practices."

Nazshonnii Brown ([41:00](#)):

And it would also just be safer for everyone else. So we make sure to accommodate each others' needs. But yeah, having the meetings earlier and also doing our research and how other people are operating food distributions and food stands and different produce give-outs.

Ariel Mejia ([41:33](#)):

Okay. So what do you think would help you with your new initiatives?

Nazshonnii Brown ([41:43](#)):

Hmm, more people. With different schedules changing, we've seen that... We've also changed our day, I think a couple of times, which might have caused some confusion. So just to go back, that was another thing, having a set day. And the reason for that was that one of our distributors changed their day. So I think one thing that would help us is... That was the question, right? What would help us to-

Ariel Mejia ([42:28](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nazshonnii Brown ([42:33](#)):

Okay. Having more people, and safely having them in the same place, we'd be able to have a crew come in early and begin to do the repackaging and receive the produce from the person that comes in the morning. And then, we'd have some people in the afternoon moving the boxes around and getting ready to go out. And then, we'd have the drivers separately going and distributing.

Nazshonnii Brown ([43:07](#)):

So we went from three vehicles the first day, and then the following weeks, we had two of our trucks and two personal vehicles. And then, now we're down to one truck, one personal vehicle. So only four people came last week, so if we had a pool of people to pick from. And we've had people reach out and say, "Hey, I want to help. I want to volunteer."

Nazshonnii Brown ([43:37](#)):

And we thought about the possibility of having volunteers drop off food or help us with the packing, but we're being very cautious about it because we've actually put a hold on all of our volunteering at every single site. And once it's safe, we want to be able to welcome in volunteers to help us with that. That way, we could split up our list more, and we'd have seven routes instead of at minimum, two. And on good days, having four different routes.

Ariel Mejia ([44:13](#)):

Okay. So do you think that the decrease in the trucks and the people coming in is because of the numbers of coronavirus going up? Why do you think that's happening?

Nazshonnii Brown ([44:31](#)):

I think it's related, but it's not a direct cause of it. I think just the way that things are now and how we have our public and workplace has definitely caused, I think, negative things like fear and paranoia. And then on the other end, it's maybe encouraged people to be more aware or to be safer about certain things or to be more hygienic. I hope they were hygienic before.

Nazshonnii Brown ([45:07](#)):

But I think a lot of our problems with that was it was just life happening. And even if it wasn't COVID, it still would have happened. One of the drivers, one of the only people other than Corrina who doesn't do the food distribution anymore, the only other driver that could drive stick. His car was broken, and it was in the shop. And he was all the way in... I think he lives in Hayward or something like that. So for him to come all the way over here and then figure out how to get home without his own transportation was something we were just like, "Okay. It's cool. We can do it without you."

Nazshonnii Brown ([45:47](#)):

And then, there's some people that communicated they weren't able to come that day just because they've been having a lot of personal things that they're going through. And they've been working in other sites, and being socially distant and doing that. So I think it's just the times in some way affecting a lot of our daily schedules and our emotions, but nothing too out of the ordinary like it wouldn't happen at any other time.

Ariel Mejia ([46:21](#)):

Okay. Thank you.

Abel Gomez ([46:24](#)):

So you mentioned distributors. And I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about that. So are the distributors organizations that y'all have partnered with before? Is that a new thing? Can you speak a little bit about that?

Nazshonnii Brown ([46:42](#)):

Yeah. So one of them is Bay Cities. This is a new, not exactly a partnership, I think we just signed up to be one of the organizations to receive free food boxes from them. So our interaction has just been once a week, getting boxes, and the initial conversation that Ariel had to set that up. And I believe they've been around for maybe a decade or so. I've just heard of them, but I think they mainly focus on organizations and companies because it's a huge warehouse.

Nazshonnii Brown ([47:24](#)):

And the other one is a Cultural Conservancy. And they have access to farming land, and they also do a number of other things. I've gone to some of their workshops where we learn about corn processing, the different types of corn. And we're learning directly from a... I think it's Oneida Tribal, two people of the Oneida Nation. So they have all kinds of cultural stuff as well as farming knowledge.

Nazshonnii Brown ([47:58](#)):

And that has just been being in the community. The contact person that reached out to Corrina had met me at a different organization in a different job, and I think has been in conversation with Corrina for the past couple of years. So that just came naturally, the community talking with each other. And then the other one was the Farms-to-Family grant which we actually stopped doing because we didn't want to split our distribution into two days. So we've told... There were three organizations that we were delivering to, in addition to our families. So I just reach out to them, have them sign up for the grant directly.

Nazshonnii Brown ([48:48](#)):

Alternatives in Actions is a high school and a non-profit organization. There's also an African Diaspora Center in North Oakland, so I signed up to contact there. And then, another one is Tuha, something like that. It's Trauma... It's like a trauma center that's based outside of or it's based inside one of the La Clinica offices. So we had 35 boxes, sometimes 40 boxes. It would always fluctuate. And we ended up just reshipping those boxes to other people and having them directly contact that grant.

Nazshonnii Brown ([49:31](#)):

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But yeah, that's it so far.

Abel Gomez (49:36):

So we want to be respectful of time. So I think we'll end there for today. And I forgot to mention in the recording that this is August 5th, 2020.