

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE REPORT

OUR CONCRETE GARDEN PODCAST

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SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS



THE PROJECT



Our Concrete Garden is a 4-part audio podcast series exploring how public green and growing spaces can lead to improved community wellbeing and social connection, following the brutally isolating COVID-19 stay at home orders in Toronto. The objective was to educate, entertain, advocate for civic engagement, spark an interest with nature, and encourage others to participate in their own local community gardens or park events. This podcast was created with the average Torontonians in mind, or other urban dwellers who are interested in Toronto-based stories. Because of the variety of topics being covered, the podcast is suitable for anyone, ranging from people already familiar with the topics, local stakeholders, or for people just curious to learn.

Listeners can access Our Concrete Garden on multiple platforms and devices, making it easy to listen to while commuting, doing chores, working out, or just relaxing. Audio can also be easier to understand for those with difficulty in reading English. The format of an audio podcast was chosen to therefore appeal to a variety of audiences, especially since podcasts are currently a very popular form of entertainment overall.



EPISODE GUIDE

1: INCLUDE

(feat. a local community gardener)

Exploring the science behind our positive but strangely unclear relationship with plants

2: CONNECT

(feat. a community garden coordinator at a local non-profit)

History and overview of community gardens. Looking into the benefits and setbacks that come with community organizing

3: EXPAND

(feat. an urban planning assistant & inclusive communities intern)

Explaining the benefits of parks, Toronto's Parkland Strategy report, and the Rail Deck Park project

4: IMPROVE

(feat. Francisco (Director of Programs) and Hilda (Urban Agriculture Manager) of The Stop Community Food Centre)

Reflecting on the previous episodes, where do we go from here?

The idea was developed at the beginning of June, consent forms and guest outreach was conducted mid-June, and the recording process took place in early July. Editing occurred mid-July, and finally the series was released across platforms on July 30, 2021.

Gathering the research and developing an episode guide was a very fun experience. The scientific, city-published, or journalistic web articles could be long or dry in content, but the idea of trying to convey it in an entertaining narrative required strategy and curation. Developing a "mood" for the series and trying to make the episodes cohesive together was also a fun creative consideration. Each episode is named after one of the four core objectives in Toronto's Parkland Strategy (which is revealed in Episode 3). I made the artwork myself in Photoshop, and found all audio/music assets from royalty-free websites.



THE TITLE: OUR CONCRETE GARDEN

US, TOGETHER,
COMMUNITY



CITY, URBAN,
METROPOLITAN



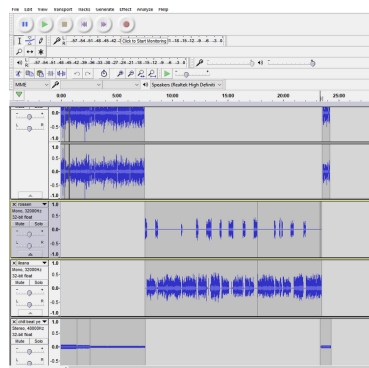
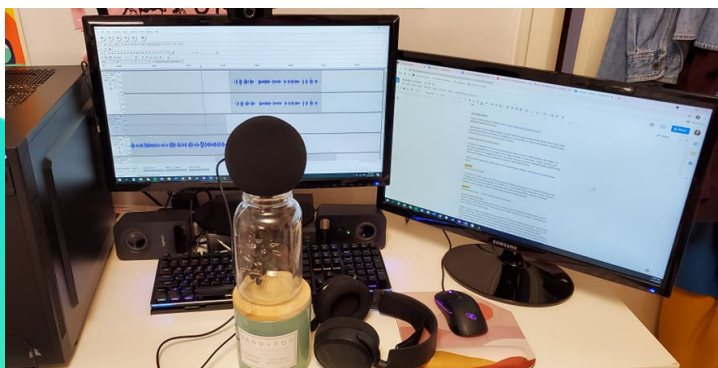
GROWING, PLANTS, NATURE,
CONTRAST WITH CONCRETE

Overall, I found this experience to be very rewarding. In choosing a very local focus of Toronto, I also felt more engaged with what is happening in my own city, which also emboldened me to want to share the same information to others as well. I felt that oral storytelling also helped to remove some of the barriers associated with academia, which is often full of jargon or behind journal paywalls.

IMPACT

88 total streams across 4 episodes | 22 streams per episode average | 20 unique listeners on Spotify

The audience analytics I used for the above figures are from Soundcloud and Spotify at the time of writing. The feedback that I received has been very positive, mostly highlighting the audio production of the series. I believe that while the series is centered in the ongoing status of the pandemic, the research and case studies being shared will still hold up in relevancy over time.



My recording set up (left) consisted of my desktop computer with two monitors, my headset, and the SCSC provided Snowball mic stacked on top of a large jar and a candle.

I used the program Audacity to edit the audio (right), many hours were spent editing out "like's", "um's", and "uh's"

LISTENER FEEDBACK

"I'm so impressed by your production/sound quality/music and how you put it all together overall!! Great work :) !!!"

"Your podcast voice is unmatched ! Love it, great job"

"You did a FABULOUS job, seriously sounded so natural for you."