

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

All right. This is the Center of the Study of Religion in the City: Corona Virus Relief Efforts. It is August 15th, 2020, and we are doing interview two of the Sogorea Te Land Trust efforts. This is Abel Gomez with Ariel Mejia, interviewing Nazshonnii. So, on our previous call, we talked about the Sogorea Te Land Trust in general, where it came from, the work that it does in the community. And, we talked about the ways in which things have shifted as a results of the Coronavirus, to focusing attention on individuals directly, who are in need, and that has taken the form of this food distribution process.

Abel Gomez ([00:00:52](#)):

We also talked about some of the ways that folks in the organization navigated the uncertainty of what was going to come, and then this shifts to working with particular distributors and navigating ways in which this new initiative would go forward. I wanted to start today by talking and asking about what the biggest struggles have been for Sogorea Te as a result of social distancing requirements.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:01:30](#)):

As a whole or just specific to... Okay. I would say that we usually have our staff meetings in person, so we're used to getting together in a small room, and we go over a lot of the things that need to be done that week. But, then we also have chance to see each other, to share a meal together. We usually try to get food for that, once a week, in the staff meeting. Then, sometimes we celebrate birthdays, so we're missing a lot of that community gathering aspect.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:02:11](#)):

It's been hard, I think, on all of us as a group, and then individually just, also people being isolated from others. It's always nice when we were able to connect with each other, and it just seemed more special during these times. Then, with the food distribution, that's another thing I think I mentioned that to you like, being able to see people throughout the neighborhood. Even if it's like, "Hello," and you're driving by, and you drop stuff, then you walk away from their front door. It's still a nice exchange, so I'd say during this time, we're used to being able to gather together and have our staff meetings, do ceremonies.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:02:55](#)):

We've actually had a couple fires at the Arbor in East Oakland, where there was a board member that passed away for Sogorea Te. Also, a young person in our community that passed away, and yes, we had two fires, and we just said, "If anybody needs to come over and pray, we have an offering that's available to them." And, it was nice because it's all outside. So, we were able to do that safely. We definitely feel limited in being able to do our ceremonies and gatherings. We're used to inviting people out and working, bringing on volunteers and working with them at all the different sites. A big challenge is not being able to do those same in-person things that allow us to feel more connected to our community.

Ariel Mejia ([00:03:55](#)):

I have a question. You guys do like, Zoom calls?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:04:01](#)):

They're my favorite. Yeah, we do Zoom calls, we actually don't do that many, but for my position specifically, like I'm doing some admin stuff, and I'm also doing stuff on the land, so I'll have the staff meeting, then I'll have an admin meeting, then I'll have a farm meeting with the farm that we're at, conflict resolution for that farm, and then another organization where I'm representing Sogorea Te in that space. So, it's like, I feel like I get a lot of Zoom. But, that was a side note.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:04:40](#)):

But yeah, we do do Zoom meetings. Initially that was great, being able to see each other and to check in, because there was a huge break in not seeing each other, but then after a while we noticed that some people were getting burned out from being on the Zoom meetings. So, while technology is amazing and it's keeping us together, we also recognize in how we have to be very mindful of how it impacts our health. And, like what you were saying about, after that two hour meeting, it's like, "Ugh. Another Zoom meeting." That's what it's turning into for some of us, but we also appreciate the fact that we're able to see each other's faces and hear each other's voices.

Abel Gomez ([00:05:21](#)):

Ariel and I talked to someone from the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, and they were telling us about the ways in which, even though the differently with social distancing has made Zoom a thing that people do, one of the things for them is that it is allowing people, from very far away, who don't live within their tribal territory to communicate. But, it seems like maybe there's something a little bit different with Sogorea Te. I mean, from what I understand, there were online programs that Sogorea Te did, it was like, Seeds of hope, or-

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:06:01](#)):

The Speaker series?

Abel Gomez ([00:06:04](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about that, because that seems like kind of a new thing, right?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:06:08](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I think this has been in the works for a while. So, Fuiis leading that, and we're mostly focusing on local people. We've had some people, for example, [Kili Minali 00:06:26] that we had on there from the Navajo Nation, but mostly focusing on people here in The Bay. Each week, so far we've had topics on mutual aid, like radical mutual aid, or quote unquote "radical," in how we often need to take things into our own hands, because whether it's US government, or in other people's cases, tribal government, they don't necessarily have the on-the-ground knowledge, and the urgency, to get these things done.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:06:57](#)):

Then, we also had another conversation, one of them was called, I think "Women Warriors," and it was looking specifically at sacred sites and sacred spaces. So, internally, we've been talking about how can we get resources out there, and how can we do it in a way that isn't a lot of unappreciated work on our part. So, we're talking about having white folks, and though they're our relatives, like we're all relatives, sometimes people will come up and expect something without necessarily having a reciprocal relationship, without building a relationship.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:07:39](#)):

I think that's one way that we're doing that where it's like, accessible knowledge. It's very important for the native community, and for the local communities of color here, because it's allowing us to come together in this virtual space, and then it's also very educational for white folks and white presenting folks that may need to learn and do some work on their part.

Abel Gomez ([00:08:03](#)):

And, you said that this was something that was kind of talked about or in the works, but then, would you say that because of the situation with social distancing, that kind of became the thing that kind of emerged as a result of that? That because of social distancing it's like, "Okay, boom, we're going to be doing this thing?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:08:22](#)):

Yeah, I think that's what really pushed it, because it was kind of like, there was a break, and it was like, "Whoa. We have a lot of time without going out." So, I think that opened up some time for Pua and Corrina to get started and then brought it to the staff meeting and then like, "Hey, let's just do Zoom." Got a Pro Zoom account. But, definitely yeah, I think in that time where we had to shelter-in-place, it was kind of like, "Well, we need something to stay connected." So, that was our response.

Ariel Mejia ([00:09:06](#)):

So, you discussed something called Women Warriors? Can you elaborate on what that is?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:09:15](#)):

Yeah. I'm trying to recall the specific questions from that call. We had a couple of different guests, Pua Case, a leader from the... I don't know how to say it-

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:09:40](#)):

What is?

Abel Gomez ([00:09:41](#)):

Kanaka Maoli?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:09:43](#)):

Yes, Kanaka Maoli. I was like, "Something 'K,?'" So, we had a leader from there, and then we also had a leader from up North. Yeah-

Abel Gomez ([00:09:57](#)):

[crosstalk 00:09:57] Yeah. I listened to it, as well.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:10:02](#)):

Okay, well, maybe you can... I'm trying to figure out this thing, right now. I forget the other person we had. We also had Desirae sing a song, and then we had some of the singers from the Kanaka Maoli singers. Maybe I'm confusing two of these things. But, that was specifically about how these different

women, and also Corrina, being the third person. Even though Corrina's Sogorea Te, but we're interviewing Corrina, as one of these people.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:10:40](#)):

So, Mauna Kea, the Shellmounds in the Bay Area, and Run4Salmon, you know, protecting our water sources, protecting our sites and sacred land, things that are sacred in our life, such as the sea food and the animals on the land. That one was specifically about how women in a lot of indigenous societies all over the world, not just here, but a lot of them are matriarchal. We see how these matrilineal societies are doing a lot better than the US, as far as how they care for their people.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:11:25](#)):

Women Warriors because all of this work, even though it may not seem like anything. Like, when you think warrior, you think aggressive and manly and stuff, like, you know, it may not seem like, "Oh, we're going to war." But it's like, well, you think about it, a lot of these things that are inhibiting our ways of life, it's waging war on native communities, waging war on communities of color. So, things that are being taken from us violently, it's like, "Well, you have to be a warrior if you're going to fight that."

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:11:55](#)):

That part of the series was all about how these different leaders in their communities, how they work together doing events together, supporting each other, from different locations, and also supporting other women across the US, and Americas. And, how can we learn to protect our sacred sites, and yeah, basically that, yeah.

Abel Gomez ([00:12:22](#)):

Which then also connects to the whole concept of rematriation, which we talked about, last week.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:12:29](#)):

Yeah.

Abel Gomez ([00:12:33](#)):

You talked about these Zoom calls that people have been able to join, and I was able to listen to the one about the Warrior Women. But, are there other things that y'all have done to remain connected as an organization during all of this with the virus?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:12:52](#)):

I'd say that, a little bit with social media presence being engaged, so we now have a team of people that are specifically working on managing social media. Whether that's looking at how people have tagged us, specifically Instagram, or shared things on Facebook. It's like, being able to engage with people through that, answer questions. And, though we've had kind of a slow down on the amount of requests we get for speaking engagements and educational consultations, those are coming up a lot more.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:13:33](#)):

We see that's another way that we're engaging with others and be able to.... Whether that's being awarded something, or doing a presentation for something. Being able to answer questions and have that time for Q and A, so a lot of community members are on these calls, or they join other things, or

we're being awarded. They may join something that we're presenting to another group. Oftentimes there's this Q and A at the end. But, aside from that, I think our biggest thing is in-person stuff, so it's really hard on us that we can't really bring in volunteers.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:14:17](#)):

We're moving towards that, but we want to do that slowly, and we're also looking at how other organizations are doing that. For instance, at the farm specifically, we have a farm stand that just opened two months ago. To prepare for that, we have a bunch of different people in that community. To prepare for that, one person went out and just observed all the Farmer's Markets and just going around the Bay Area. Then, this person also had a lot of knowledge in being a nurse, in his profession. Then, being able to connect back to the community, and all of us having our different skills and knowledge. Then, we created this safety protocol for that farm stand specifically.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:15:01](#)):

Sogorea Te, from being involved in that process, we've been able to use a lot of those same protocols for our own food distribution and for the office, but we're still on hold about volunteers, because we want to make sure that we're protecting our community. And, just looking at how disproportionately certain communities are affected, looking at East Oakland. And, the families the families that we serve, we don't want to let... A lot of people are immunocompromised, or they're just vulnerable because they just already haven't had access to food or they're struggling in other ways. We don't want to add another thing by potentially being an exposure for them, so we're moving very slowly with the volunteering.

Ariel Mejia ([00:15:59](#)):

We were talking about volunteers. Have you guys maybe talked about any possible ways to have volunteers in the future with Coronavirus going on, or is it still up in the air?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:16:15](#)):

Yeah, up in the air. I'd say that it comes up every now and then because we're like, "It would be great if we could have people to help deliver food, that way it's not-" But, where we notice how we could bring in some new volunteers that could help us virtually or remotely, so specifically with the administration team. There are a few people that have reached out, and they're like, "Hey, I have X years experience," or, "I am a designer," or, "I do accounting." And, they're offering like, "Hey, I want to do some hours with you all."

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:17:00](#)):

Then, some people that maybe they're in high school or college, and they want to do some volunteer hours, as well. So, I think that's more likely to happen first, before the in-person things. But, now that I think, I realize, for the Albany, the Gill Tract Farm, we're still bringing in volunteers, because we have that whole thing set up for volunteer training. So there's a 20 minute video people can watch to see all the different steps.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:17:29](#)):

There's a 25 minute... It could be online or you can come to the farm, and then go through a slideshow, going through all the steps, then someone will be there to walk you through them. So, it's almost like

three hours of training in order to be okayed to be on the farm. We are accepting volunteers through the Gill Tract. Yeah, we're still holding off on it, but that's the exception because it's going to this other community space that we're in, and that we're a part of.

Abel Gomez ([00:18:09](#)):

You talked a little bit earlier about some socially distant ceremony that's happened, related to a loss. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how Sogorea Te, or to what extent Sogorea Te is observing cultural, or religious celebrations or ceremonies during this time?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:18:40](#)):

So far, I think we've just had those two gatherings. We did have a conversation, just with a few people in the staff, because we wanted to discuss something, and it just wasn't working, necessarily in the Zoom meetings. Because we had the larger staff, and then we had the admin meeting, but then we need a more intentional circle for these conversations. So, we got together at the Arbor and were able to sit distanced in that space.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:19:18](#)):

It was nice because it was an extremely hard conversation for us, and it was kind of like, being in this space that is spiritually important, and important to Corrina's tribe was definitely something that was grounding for us all...giveaway, and we scheduled time for people to come and pick up plants. Is my internet messing up?

Abel Gomez ([00:19:51](#)):

So, the last thing that we heard was that you were gathering at the Arbor, and that the Arbor is an important space for Corrina's tribe.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:19:59](#)):

Yeah, okay. For that conversation, which was not intense, but definitely we had to be very intentional about it. It was great to be in that space because it's very grounding for a lot of people, and it's spiritually important for the tribe and also other tribes in this area. Being that it's one of the few spaces, not just for Corrina's tribe, but other bands of the Ohlone people in other Bay Area tribes that haven't had those structures in over 200 years.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:20:39](#)):

We had that one meeting, we had the two fires for those people that have passed on. And, then we had the day where we gave away plants, and people were able to schedule a time. We specifically asked for elders and young kids, high school and younger to come pick up a plant. We had medicinal plants, we had tobacco and sage, and then we also had some starch, vegetables and greens. We didn't necessarily invite people in, but we had things set up so people could come in... Oh, there was also someone dropped of sage, so there was a older couple that dropped off sage. We were able to do that exchange, as well. But, yeah, that was it.

Ariel Mejia ([00:21:45](#)):

You said high schoolers or younger people pick up the plants. Is there a specific reason why high schoolers or younger people pick up the plants?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:22:00](#)):

Yeah. So, with the elders, we wanted to make sure that they had access to medicine. And, we tend to, in the community, at least here in the Bay Area, which I think is the largest urban native population in the US, we tend to see a lot of the culture barriers being the elders in the community. It's usually an elder cousin, or a grandparent, or uncle, older other relative or community member.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:22:33](#)):

There's definitely this generational gap where the grandkids are high school, grade school age kids aren't receiving a lot of this traditional knowledge and not having the same awareness and consciousness as a lot of older folks that may have lived through certain movements and actions, or grew up in a tribal area. We think that it's also, just as we engage with the elders, and we do things to protect them, we think it's very important to engage with the youth and make sure that we do protocol with the youth. So, we invited- ... We collaborate with our West Oakland Garden, so they've been coming out to some of our different sites, and we want to make sure that we keep that connection.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:23:41](#)):

Because, most of these kids... I was one of those kids, myself, and it's like, I didn't really learn about the Ohlone Tribe until high school, so we think it's very important in getting to know who you are and to know these things, and also that [inaudible 00:23:59] community, I think is what holds a lot of people. Yeah, because I think some people don't always have access to that language that they're from, or sometimes they don't know which tribe, or some things are lost, or just their parents or grandparents are afraid to pass it on, so a lot of kids have to search for it.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:24:26](#)):

And, oftentimes, the intertribal community that are teaching them, "Oh, this is how a lot of us in general pray. It's not specific to any tribe. This is how a lot of us dance, not specific to any tribe." So, we've had that focus on the youth because we want to make sure that there's not that gap anymore, and that they have the access to the knowledge if they want it.

Abel Gomez ([00:24:48](#)):

Part of what I'm hearing is that on the one hand, there is deep ties to Ohlone tribal people and community. And, on the other hand the organization also serves as a kind of hub for all of these urban native people to also connect to culture, and land, and tradition. Would you say that that's accurate?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:25:15](#)):

Yeah. And, I think the hub, not necessarily Sogorea Te but, just this area and just looking at the history for Oakland, and how a lot of the centers that are offering services to native people out there, they began in the '70s through federal funding. Then, you think about Alcatraz and when that was happening, other liberations happening at the same time. Now, a lot of these centers are where the kids are going to get this knowledge. So, I'd say that we're one part of that. We have the health centers, the Friendship houses, Oakland and San Francisco.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:26:01](#)):

Yeah, there's some different, and then CRC, American Indian Tribe Resource Center. I feel like there's another place. There used to be a school as well, so I feel like, the kids in these communities are usually

like, "My aunt works in the San Francisco Health Center. My mom works at this one, I go to IFH for dance practice. I've gone to Stronghold Conference." Or, "I've gone to GONA." I think they move it every year, but it happens more in Headlands. Well, when I went it was. So, I notice that a lot of these kids are in the same communities, and they'll maybe go to one center, or go to that one.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:26:38](#)):

Or, Corrina doing all the work that she's done in different organizations, including CRC, she has a lot of people that she's mentored. So, sometimes it's just like maybe a youth doesn't go to a certain center, but they're still in contact with Corrina, and they call her for advice and guidance.

Ariel Mejia ([00:27:05](#)):

I think it's really cool that these kids have a place to know their culture in a way. I think that's really cool.

Abel Gomez ([00:27:21](#)):

Ariel, do you want to ask a question, or do you want me to go?

Ariel Mejia ([00:27:27](#)):

You can go.

Abel Gomez ([00:27:28](#)):

Okay. You mentioned, Nazshonnii, the food distribution efforts, as a result of... Let me back up. As a result of Coronavirus, there are a number of things that Sogorea Te has done to respond. Those include: the food distribution, the Zoom programming that people can join and hear different perspective and get access to resources. You also mentioned a handful of gatherings. Are there other sorts of things that Sogorea Te has done?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:28:22](#)):

I can't think of anything else.

Abel Gomez ([00:28:28](#)):

Which of those do you think y'all will continue to do once the shelter-in-place is lifted?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:28:43](#)):

I think, for the gatherings that will always, especially that's going to be all the time. I'd say one thing that is new and that will continue, will definitely be the Seeding Hope series. Because, it has such a wide range of who we can access, and the fact that these will be recorded, and they'll be accessible online. If people are able to tune in, they can call in from everywhere. And, that we can also look at, even though we're focusing on local, but maybe it's local but it's still five hours from here. Being able to connect with others that may be a little far away transportation-wise.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:29:43](#)):

Then, for the food distribution, I'd want to say that we will continue this, but we are receiving our things through a grant that ends in December. So, I think that that will evolve into something else, and we

want to be able to make our own products, so the things that we've been doing for ourselves, we want to be able to offer that to others.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:30:09](#)):

So, we have Fire cider that we've learned to make, some canning, some different fruits and vegetables that we've been doing. Tinctures and salts that we've been learning from other organizations and individuals. Our goal is to be able to have the capacity, and also the packaging, to do a lot of these things and be able to package them. So, if we want to give a gift to someone, or we want to sell some of these things to others, we're able to do that. Yeah.

Ariel Mejia ([00:30:46](#)):

what did you say? Fire cider? what is that?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:30:56](#)):

That is, I think, let me go find the bottle, actually. This one was made with garlic, onion, ginger, turmeric, horseradish, jalapenos, cinnamon, grapefruit, orange, and raw apple cider vinegar. This is the little bottle, and I've just been, every now and then, sometimes when my throat feels scratchy, or even when I'm kind of like, "Let me take it because I feel like I'm going to get sick." Then I just put a little bit in. It burns a lot. Definitely, I'd say that vinegar smell is the strongest, and then you smell the garlic, and mostly the garlic, yeah. This smells kind of like garlic and orange juice with apple cider.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:31:56](#)):

But, it has all these other things in it that are great for you as well, that are... What's the word? Antibacterial or just great for you. Like garlic for instance, my grandma would, she would just eat whole garlic, just eat it. My mom, too. But then I tried it, and I was like, "Oh, this is actually really good for you." Turmeric, that's good for inflammation, so a lot of people put it in their face masks, their hair mask, or in their tea. Yeah, it's really good for the inflammation in your face and in other parts of your body. Yeah, this is Fire cider.

Ariel Mejia ([00:32:39](#)):

So, does it kind of help with your immune system in a way?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:32:44](#)):

Yeah. A lot of these are good natural immunity boosters. Instead of taking Emergen-C, which has a bunch of different ingredients, it's like, these are just straight to the point. How a lot of the fruits that we eat are good natural antioxidants, but this is just a way to have everything together, kind of.

Abel Gomez ([00:33:09](#)):

Friends of mine make Fire cider, and it's like, when I taste it, it feels like, just burns any of the stuff that's not good, just burns it and then you're good.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:33:21](#)):

Yeah. Another thing that I've been doing, one of my friends, she's from Brazil. Her dad usually brings back propolis. Ever heard of propolis? That's really good, too. And, then I have a friend that's learning a lot about traditional food for small ailments like cold and fever, like ways to heal that. She mixes honey

with propolis, and you spray that, and then it's really good for sore throat. Or, some people have problem with their tonsils, strep, I don't know. Tonsillitis, when it gets inflamed, it helps with your bacteria in your throat, too.

Ariel Mejia ([00:34:12](#)):

That's so cool. I've never heard of Fire cider. I'm like, wow, it's different.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:34:15](#)):

Me, too. I had never tried it, before. Yeah.

Ariel Mejia ([00:34:20](#)):

That's good. Do they sell this at the grocery stores?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:34:25](#)):

No.

Ariel Mejia ([00:34:27](#)):

So you guys just make it. What do you like...

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:34:32](#)):

I don't know how to make it, actually. I know that Johnella, one of the directors, co-directing with Corrina, she knows how to make it, and then like, two other people. I assume that it's... Am I freezing, again?

Abel Gomez ([00:34:48](#)):

No, you're good.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:34:50](#)):

Okay, I kind of still am. I assume that it's kind of, what's the word? Aging, like how wines? I'm thinking of plum wine for instance you put a fruit in alcohol and it turns into a wine-

Ariel Mejia ([00:35:05](#)):

Oh, like fermenting.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:35:07](#)):

Yeah, there we go. Yeah. You should try making some. Just get some apple cider vinegar, and then put in your own mix of stuff.

Ariel Mejia ([00:35:20](#)):

Maybe that'll be my next project. I could make Fire cider.

Abel Gomez ([00:35:26](#)):

And, then did y'all put it in the ground for like, a month?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:35:31](#)):

Oh, I don't know, honestly. I know it set for a while, but I don't know if it was put in the ground.

Abel Gomez ([00:35:36](#)):

I know sometimes when people make things like that, like Fire cider or vinegars, they'll bury it for a month, sometimes like, a moon cycle.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:35:44](#)):

Wow.

Abel Gomez ([00:35:44](#)):

I don't know what it does, but.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:35:52](#)):

[crosstalk 00:35:52]-

Abel Gomez ([00:35:52](#)):

Yeah. I was just taking a class on curanderismo with Ancestral Apothecary, and they made some medicinal vinegar. Like, while we were in our class, they're like, "We're going to bury it, and then we will distribute it later after a moon cycle," I think it was.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:36:17](#)):

You're like, "Excuse me? Why are you doing this?"

Abel Gomez ([00:36:21](#)):

There is a reason, but I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you would rate the local government's response to COVID?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:36:32](#)):

COVID?

Abel Gomez ([00:36:38](#)):

Yeah.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:36:42](#)):

Me, personally, personally, I feel like I've been following the news, a lot and I feel like I've been looking at different sources, but mostly just reading about any updates as far as reopening, and what the shelter-in-place entails. Certain things that state of California and the governor has advised, so I think that, maybe like, a 6. Wait, did you say rate like, 1 to 10, or no?

Abel Gomez ([00:37:22](#)):

That works, too.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:37:26](#)):

Maybe like, a 6, on a scale from 1 to 10. Because, maybe we're more well off in places like New York, but I'm just thinking, it's weird because I have some family on the reservation, and I'm thinking about that government as well. I'm kind of like, "Terrible." But, here, it's hard because so many different counties are doing differently. Some people are really struggling, like L.A., I had a cousin down there in L.A., and he's a single father. It was really hard on him because so many things are closed down. So, it's like childcare is a factor in that.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:38:11](#)):

Being able to work, with your kids, young, like one's infant and then a toddler. Just how the population, how some areas are very crowded and not safe, so I think, yeah, let me think of it county-wise. I think in general, the state of California, the governor's office has given some great advice, and maybe the only thing that would be different is just to address things earlier, or be more... Yeah, I guess earlier. Being able to say, "Hey, this is what we need to do," earlier.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:38:50](#)):

Then, I guess for the county and for Oakland, I think more information could have been shared, and then I was just talking about this with my boyfriend, today. I think it's 500 languages, maybe... But, in the Bay Area, and in Oakland, we have so many language groups, and we have people coming from countries where there are like, 50 languages in one region, and stuff like that. So, it's how diverse we are, do we actually have the right translation services and people that are communicating this information?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:39:27](#)):

One good thing that I've seen, is that on Facebook, some people have taken the time to translate one of those one-pagers of, "This is what you need to do to protect yourself during COVID." You see a lot of that work being done by community members, people on Facebook organizing mutual aid. A friend of mine in upstate New York, she's been sewing masks and sending them to the Navajo nation and the Seneca nation, sending them to me and my family, and all of her friends across the states. Because, it's like, some people don't have access to these masks, or maybe they get the disposable ones, but being able to have something that's sustainable.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:40:06](#)):

I've seen a lot of communities and organizations take up a lot of this work, so I feel like that's why my rating is a little bit low, or it's not high. It's like, above average, I guess because the community, and individuals shouldn't be having to do this much work, you know? So, the fact that we're having problems with unemployment, or we're having discussions over, "Can I pay my rent, this month? If I don't pay my rent this month, am I in danger of being evicted?"

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:40:39](#)):

Having to learn these things, and not having the information readily available, I think that local government and federal government have failed a lot, in not having that information accessible, and also not having a sense of urgency when it comes to, "Okay, we have this information. How do we respond to it?" Things are being done, just not with enough urgency, and they're not getting everyone. They're not making it accessible to everyone.

Abel Gomez ([00:41:18](#)):

I would imagine that, this is even more so the case with urban native communities, particularly if members of those communities are not recognized, or from non-recognized tribes, that then kind of the grassroots work that you were just mentioning, has to be done even more so because there aren't always direct avenues from state or federal governments.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:41:53](#)):

Yeah. I think is it 20 tribes that are recognized in California, or is it more than that? Maybe more. There about 200 tribes in California, but only a handful of them are recognized, like 15 or 20.

Abel Gomez ([00:42:12](#)):

The closest one to us, I'm in San Francisco, right now. The closest one to us, I think, is Graton Rancheria. But, then along the coast, no recognized tribes for like, 350 miles from Sonoma to Santa Barbara. The closest recognized tribe to us is Chumash in Santa Barbara, that whole stretch is non-recognized.

Ariel Mejia ([00:42:45](#)):

That's a big number, like 200? That's just crazy. Like, only a small handful are recognized?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:42:54](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative) and, it's like that in all over the states. Then, we have people that have been moved, and then there's land disputes. That's the older thing where it's like, you're putting all these people in different tribal loops together. Then, there's obviously some community that's formed there, but then when it comes to reclaiming and rematriating lands, and reclaiming these old traditional ways, it's like that's going to cause conflict. Where they're like, "Hey, this is my land."

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:43:26](#)):

But like, "Wait, a second." Just being constricted to one space, and like, "Oh. This is all you get." That's frustrating when you're trying to, "Where is my homeland, even, now?" You know? Yeah, it's like, "Hey, Google. How do you overthrow the government?"

Google ([00:43:55](#)):

I'm not sure, but I found something for: Do you overthrow the government?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:43:59](#)):

Google is talking to me.

Google ([00:43:59](#)):

Do you want to hear it?

Abel Gomez ([00:44:04](#)):

You talked about this, a little bit earlier, around the fires that were lit for people who have passed on. I'm wondering if you could maybe say a little bit more about if there are any other ways that the organization has held space for people, if there have been any loss of family members, or community members during this time.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:44:41](#)):

Yeah, I think in general, with that hub that we're talking about, and students being able to go to the different centers, it's also you may not necessarily know someone in another city or from another program, but you're all kind of connected. It could be easy as one of your mentors being like, "Hey, I think you should talk to this person about employment." Or, "You could be friends with this student." Or, "You could study with this student." I think it's like, having that happen is very easy, even though we may not all necessarily know each other.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:45:25](#)):

I think, it's just very, in the native community here, and in the Bay Area community as a whole, it's all about connecting people. Being able to, for educational purposes, or professional reasons, or just community gatherings, pow wows, dancing, having dance groups. There are a lot of traditional dance groups out here. I think that's a big way that we do that. I'm trying to think of how we honor, like if someone has experienced a loss, just being able to be there for them. And, then if there is some sort of ceremony in that particular way, the community comes together to support them.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:46:21](#)):

A friend of mine actually just called me, today saying that their relative passed away, their relative took their own life, actually. We talked a little bit about checking in on each other, and she was just kind of like, "Are you okay? How was your week?" And, it was nice because it was like, I was having a bad week, and then we just had a check-in, and then it was just great to be able to have someone to have those conversations with. This person, I actually met through Corrina, so Corrina connected the two of us.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:46:54](#)):

Then, we just talked about how we need to talk about these things, in a larger group because, there may be an elder, or maybe a youth, or just someone that's isolated right now, and they may be experiencing depression or other things. It's now magnified by COVID, so suicide already being a problem in native communities, and especially on reservations, how these conversations, we need to talk about them. And, we need to put it out there, in order to prevent these things from happening.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:47:31](#)):

Just like, we're putting the information out there, and the resources, to help with checking immunocompromised, and elders, so that way we don't have any losses. In general, when things are just out of our hands, or for natural causes, for instance, the board member, just dying of natural causes. Just like, having the space to honor someone in that way, it's a very important, and it's usually just people calling each other, checking in on each other, gathering if we can, and if we are able to.

Abel Gomez ([00:48:16](#)):

So, it sounds like, in the urban native network, in Oakland, there are ways in which, as communities people come together because of the ways that they're interconnected. That, one of the ways in which folks process loss, is around checking in with one another, and then perhaps as time and space allow, doing some kinds of gatherings to honor the life passage. But, that kind of outside of the two gatherings that you mentioned before, that's kind of been so far what Sogorea Te has done, as a response?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:49:09](#)):

Yes.

Ariel Mejia ([00:49:10](#)):

So, with wellness checking, you said that, you want to do a big group wellness check? Do you think it'll be a Zoom call?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:49:23](#)):

I don't know. My plan for that, my friend was saying that, "Please share this with others." And, they didn't have... Since they're dealing with the burial and being with their family, right now, they were actually asking if I could reach out to some people in the community, and then let them know about that. Then, have that same conversation of, "Are you taking care of yourself, this week?" And, you know, "How has the week gone?" And, just putting it out there, like, "Hey, if you need someone to talk to, I'm here to talk to you."

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:50:02](#)):

Being aware of this, being aware of traumas that have been passed down, and how it's, like, make sure you have those conversations. I feel like it's going to be I'll speak to someone, and I hope that carries on. But, it could be one of the Seeding Hope series, where we can talk about loss, or we can talk about things like alcoholism, or suicide, things that are taking people's lives too early.

Abel Gomez ([00:50:42](#)):

So, actually, believe it or not, we are down to our last question, which is kind of a broader question. What resources do your members need to help them cope with the effects of the Coronavirus?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:51:02](#)):

I need, no. We've been actually I don't know if I said this last time, but when it was declared, we all got together and, Corrina was like, "Okay, here's some money. Go buy things you need to buy. Go home. Take care of yourself." Then, there was another day where my coworker was just like- ...I'm back.

Abel Gomez ([00:51:25](#)):

Okay, the last thing that we heard was, "Corrina was like, 'Here's money.'" And, then you were talking about a friend.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:51:48](#)):

Yeah, and then one of my other coworkers, who, he's one of the older people, so he's kind of like this big brother or uncle figure. We were just like, the three of us working with him that day, and he was just like, pulled out a wad of cash, "Go get your survival tools." He was just kind of in his, "The apocalypse is happening." He was like, "Go get this. Go get your canned food." I'm like, "Okay, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative)" so, we were all looking out for each other in that moment.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:52:18](#)):

It's like, at one point, I brought toilet paper to the office because someone was like, "I can't toilet paper." So, I was like, "Let me bring some for you." Because, I went to Costco before all this crazy stuff happened, and I was just regular shopping. We were like, looking out for reach other in that way. So,

one of the things is like, having the things to continue with the needs in our life. So, our food and our toiletries, and basically essentials.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:52:51](#)):

Like, having those essentials was like, a need that we recognized because things were going out of stock, and we weren't necessarily thinking about hoarding a bunch of stuff. So, that's one thing that we immediately. Like, Corrina is one of our directors, and then also someone that's older in the organization was like, "Hey y'all need to get these things." So, supporting each other, and then if somebody has something that, "Hey, does anybody need this?" We reach out to- ...

Abel Gomez ([00:54:14](#)):

So, I'm just going to pause. All right.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:54:18](#)):

I was talking about transportation.

Abel Gomez ([00:54:26](#)):

I think the last thing that I heard was, you mentioned food, toiletries, essentials for members that are on staff. You talked about the work of supporting one another. Then, I think that that might have been the last thing I heard.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:54:43](#)):

Okay. I think that, transportation, though not for everyone, some people have their own cars. Then, for instance I share a vehicle, and there's another person that does not have access to a car, always. So, they rely a lot on ride-sharing, and then there are times when, sometimes I take Rideshare, or I take the bus. We've been asked not to do that, because just to keep each other safe. we've been trying to communicate that, like if two people living close together are able to carpool to work together and kind of keep in that same bubble and live together on most sites.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:55:26](#)):

And, I guess I'd say, transportation has been a challenge, and then I would say that with a lot of things being online and less chances to be in the community with others, and being in isolation, I think that one of our needs would be more resources on how to not burn out. Like, that self-care, and so not just for Sogorea Te things, but on the land as well. Making sure we're taking care of our health there. And, stuff like, "Don't lift things that are too heavy." Or, you know, "Don't get heat stroke," or just stuff like that. I'd say that, one of our needs would be resources on practicing things that will avoid burnout. Yeah.

Ariel Mejia ([00:56:23](#)):

Okay. Last question, last final question, is there anything else you would like people to know about Sogorea Te?

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:56:49](#)):

One thing that I think every time I talk about Sogorea Te, I always mention that the work that we're doing, when we talked about calling on everyone to do this work, we actually mean that. Corrina, actually talks about, "What does it mean to be a guest?" Describing, you don't just go through their

fridge and take what you want. So, it's like, translate that to natural food sources and water ways. Then, you don't just put up your feet wherever, and translate that to developing areas and kicking people out that have been there for generations, kicking out the native people that have been there since, well, they've been there.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:57:40](#)):

How like, because of the way that everyone has come to the Bay Area, and has now come to call this place home, those are some of the things that we should be learning about, individually. But, when we say we're calling everyone there, it's like, there are people that are historically settlers, and they can still be a part of this conversation. People that are considered settlers, but some people may call them gentrifiers, just moving here recently. It's like, "Well, okay, they can be a part of the conversation, and they can fellowship with me." Just like the people that, even if you're sixth generation.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:58:22](#)):

I've heard a white guy in a meeting go, "My family's been here for six..." It's like, "Nobody asked you." Then, recognizing places like San Francisco, and Oakland, and Berkeley and how, a lot of these places are historically black, or historically Mexican, or historically... Like, Japanese people for instance, a lot of different places before internment camps, and people that have been here, even through that, how diverse we are as a Bay Area community and how we're all invited to this conversation. So, whether you're white, or you feel like you have that white privilege, and you're a settler. Or, you're non-native but you're a person of color, a melanated person, or you're a native person, but you're not necessarily from here.

Nazshonnii Brown ([00:59:17](#)):

So, that's something I think about, too. Like, my family on either side, none of them are from here, so it's like, I'm not an Oakland native, but I'm native. And, maybe you're California native, but not from this area, we all have to think about this conversation and how we can engage in it and do right by the traditional people of this land. And, that's something that's reciprocal, like the work that Corrina has done for more of her life, and also Johnella, with their activism and the work that we do as a organization, is thinking about our community as a whole. Yeah.

Abel Gomez ([00:59:56](#)):

I actually had one last final follow-up question. Because we've been talking so much about the urban native community in Oakland, and this is the only community partner that is actually looking at those demographics. I just want to be really conscious of, the insight that you bring is going to be the only voice speaking about that, so I just wanted to also give you a chance to say anything about what you'd like people to know about urban native communities in the East Bay, and the way that they have been responding to the virus. Or, the particular needs that they might have to increase awareness around what's happening, there.

Nazshonnii Brown ([01:00:46](#)):

Yeah. So, the health center in Oakland, they have had, before COVID, they had a food pharmacy, so people were able to come as if you were patients. You were able to come and get like, a prescription for groceries, fresh greens, and produce. That's one way the community need, as far as food insecurity has been addressed. They're still continuing to do those things throughout the shelter-in-place. The Tribe

Resource Center, where I also work at, since the shelter-in-place, we have been sending out gardening kits and snacks to all the kids that are staying at home.

Nazshonnii Brown ([01:01:37](#)):

With those things, because we mainly are doing our programs for sixth grade through twelfth grade, but we recognize that a lot of students have younger siblings or older siblings that are still considered youth. So, for instance my nephews are in the program. One is a seventh grader, the other one is four-years-old. When they send home stuff, I'll go pick up their bags, sometimes. They'll have snacks in there for my nephew who is a middle schooler, and they'll have school supplies, plant stuff for him, but then they'll show in some extra things for the toddler.

Nazshonnii Brown ([01:02:10](#)):

And, make sure that the whole family is being taken care of, and they're also doing things like teaching the youth how to make their own deodorant. And, giving them re-usable teabags, that they can put in different types of teas that have been harvested from the Garden of Rammay, that's shared with Sogorea Te and another garden that is in East Oakland. So, yeah. A lot of these needs are the same before COVID, and I'd say the big ones are having educational tools, like access to tutoring, or homework help, and applications for college. That need has been in the community, and access to fresh and affordable food. Even if some people are near a grocery store and they're able to get there, sometimes that food isn't the best quality, or there are a lot of different things in there that aren't necessarily healthy for you.

Abel Gomez ([01:03:21](#)):

Okay. Thank you so much. We're going to end that interview, there with Nazshonnii of the Sogorea Te Land Trust.