**04 : Tori transcript**

**Tori Tsui** [00:00:00] I have come to navigate the relationship between mental health and climate change—it's very much one that's underpinned by systemic inequality. I think, as someone who has spent a lot of time in what I would argue are carceral systems of "care", the way in which mental health "illness" is pathologized really needs further understanding and dissection.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:00:28] Welcome to Enabling Commons, a place for conversations with activists, experts and scholars at the intersections of disability and climate change. The podcast is produced by the Disability Inclusive Climate Action Research Program based at McGill University. I'm your host, Áine Kelly-Costello. Today I talk to Tori Tsui, a mad-identified, Bristol-based climate activist from Hong Kong. Her book, It's Not Just You, exploring the intersections of mental health and the climate crisis, comes out this summer. This is a deep conversation which interrogates the concept of eco-anxiety. We talk about connecting to place as disabled people and finding sustenance through diverse forms of community.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:01:11] Let's dive in.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:01:15] I'm talking to Tori Tsui. It's so great to have you on Enabling Commons. Can I hand over to you to introduce yourself?

**Tori Tsui** [00:01:23] Thank you so much for having me. My name is Tori Tsui. I am a climate justice activist, organizer and writer based in the UK. Born in Auckland, actually, but then moved to Hong Kong and then moved to the UK. So yeah, I guess, citizen of the world, maybe? But it's always very exciting to connect with fellow climate advocates who are also confused, culture kids.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:01:52] Yes. Yes. Really lovely to connect. From what I've read in Hong Kong, you kind of grew up bearing witness to—and maybe experiencing—some of the effects of, you know, environmental injustice. And I wondered when you first started kind of, noticing and articulating the relationship between that, on the one hand, and the mental health impacts?

**Tori Tsui** [00:02:13] You know, it's really interesting because I think when I was a young person—younger than I am now—I never really thought I was afforded the language or the opportunity to speak about mental health and its relation to the environment, so to speak, whether that's the climate crisis, the ecological crisis, the impacts of social injustice that were happening in my hometown specifically. I grew up in a small fishing town just northeast of the main part of the city. And, you know, I was no stranger to witnessing the effects of environmental degradation from the way in which that companies would reclaim land and completely dredge the seafloor and build them up so that you could, you know, build new buildings. Because unfortunately, it's one of the most densely populated places on the planet. And so there's always this kind of push and pull between, you know, making it more accessible for its citizens versus the fact that it's such a small city. And so, you're encroaching onto natural habitats. And then as well as typhoons and the huge disparity—socioeconomic disparity—that exists in Hong Kong is so obvious when you actually look for it. And that's because, you know, it's one of those places that has a reputation for being hyper neoliberal capitalist. And also, with that comes huge disparities in the way in which people are treated and how the city is so expensive, again, due to its dense population. And so witnessing all of these things growing up, yeah, I definitely noticed the way in which it impacted my mental health, but then also the mental health of my community, specifically those who were from fishing communities—people who lived in this town. And I just thought to myself, by the time that I actually moved to the UK, "Why is it that mental health conversations largely fixate on the future effects of climate breakdown, specifically centering those from the global North, but they don't talk about the experience, to the same extent, as environmental loss and the grief that comes with that and the ways in which that people of the global majority tend to interpret those mental health effects?".

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:04:37] Mmm hmm.

**Tori Tsui** [00:04:37] And for me, that's kind of what led me to really trying to expand this discussion in my work day-to-day and in my writing, is trying to get this more nuanced understanding and picture of what the mental health experience is in relation to the climate crisis through an intersectional lens and one that's, you know, inclusive of all sorts of experiences. And the other aspect of that as well, you know, is it even worth talking about mental health as a construct as a whole? Like how does that interact with physical health, with environmental health, with spiritual health—all of these things that we've neatly siloed by virtue of a lot of Western logics, like how can we break those barriers down to realize that everything is hinged on one other? So yeah, I would say that's kind of how that's informed a lot of my advocacy these days.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:05:30] Yeah, Thank you so much for exploring those themes that around, you know, in the global North, the anxiety or eco anxiety people feel is, you know, it's still to a real thing. But on the other hand, it's a much more talked about and future-focused phenomenon than what people in the global South have often been experiencing, but maybe not had the language around or felt like it was possible to talk about.

**Tori Tsui** [00:06:01] Yeah.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:06:01] Sometimes I wonder as well—I mean, I'm interested in your opinion on this—whether because the effects of climate breakdown and environmental injustices which, kind of mushed together right, have been there for so long, like, to what extent living in these really precarious and unstable and difficult conditions just is kind of, normalized?

**Tori Tsui** [00:06:23] I just kind of want to quickly comment on that: Like one thing, if we're going to talk about the likes of eco anxiety, which tend to be framed as like this overwhelming sense of fear and anxiety about what the climate crisis holds often and not always relating to speculative projections for the future, one thing that professionals, specifically eco psychologists, in this realm, stress is that eco anxiety is very natural response to unnatural circumstances. And what that kind of tells us about, to kind of paraphrase what one anthropologist said is "an outbreak of sanity, so to speak," is really, really telling of how, you know, this is a normal response. Like the way that we're reacting right now is entirely justified, compared to, I guess, not always, but a lot of the ways in which that some mental health experience are are pathologized as a fault of the self, as opposed to a very real reaction to the society and the world that we live in. And I argue that, you know, they kind of intertwine and it's hard to pry apart, so to speak. But I tend to look at mental health from a very systemic perspective, and look at the way in which society impacts those who are predisposed to different mental health struggles, but also other different forms of oppression that act on them. And kind of akin to actually how the social model of disability interprets these things— that it's actually society that disables people—is kind of similar in a way for me when I explore things like eco anxiety and actually quite similar to a lot of eco psychologists; that this is an environment which is having a profound effect on people's wellbeing as a whole.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:08:10] 100%. And so important for people to be able to learn about that and understand that as well in terms of shifting though processes around like, what then can create a sense of agency, right, or a sense of being able to do something about this.

**Tori Tsui** [00:08:26] Yeah.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:08:27] So that leads really nicely into your book, It's Not Just You, reframing eco anxiety as a mental health crisis rooted in racism, sexism ableism and capitalism. It's Not Just You comes out on July 6th, and the link to preorder it in paperback, Hardcover, e-book and audio book is available in the show notes. And you started talking about kind of what drew you to to writing this, but I wonder if you want to explore that a little bit more, and tell us a bit more about the book?

**Tori Tsui** [00:09:00] Yeah, for sure. So there are experiences that I've had in my life which, I think, have really shaped the way in which I've navigated this conversation. And you know, with time, I've gotten more and more voracious about this topic. And in one interview that I did, I was like, I'm I'm actually certifiably a "mad person", as a way in which to reclaim the term. And for a very long time, through all of my experiences being in and out of different institutions and hospitals and all of these different things, I have come to navigate the relationship between mental health and climate change—it's very much one that's underpinned by systemic inequality. I think as someone who has spent a lot of time in what I would argue are almost, kind of, carceral systems of "care", there's this way in which the individuals are pathologized for the experiences that they've gone through—highly dependent on which practitioners you're working with, there are some amazing people in those realms who are doing awesome work—but for me, generally speaking, the way in which mental health "illness" is pathologized really needs further, yeah, further understanding and dissection. And when I was writing the book, so much of this was very deeply informed by my own experiences, but also those who are also on the frontlines, whether or not they are part of Mad Advocacy, whether they are part of the climate movement and care about climate injustice. A lot of it is, yeah, a deeply personal but also a systemic conversation It's really interesting because the book subtitle has the word eco anxiety in it, but it's actually so much more than eco anxiety. And, you know, you were kind of right in saying that I do argue how a lot of this is underpinned by systems of oppression, but it requires a deeper sort of understanding as to whether eco anxiety can even encapsulate what it means to live in an ableist, racist, capitalist, sexist system and whether that actually speaks to those of the global majority. And actually, when I was writing the book, I came to realize that pretty much every single person that I interviewed said, well, eco anxiety doesn't really speak to the entirety of my experiences. It speaks to perhaps that very surface-level, you know, anxiety that we have about the climate crisis. But for instance, one of my friends, Laura, who's from Colombia, she's like, "You know, the way in which it's portrayed in the West, really fixates on the future." And I kind of mentioned the elements of loss that need to come into this. But she also said, "My fear isn't so much about the physical manifestations of the dying planet, as it is the fear of the police as an environmental defender in Colombia." But I don't feel like those discussions can be neatly packaged into something called eco anxiety. I mean, it is a Western term, after all, and it is predominantly depicted and explained in the English language. But, you know, every single environmental defender that I spoke to was like, yeah, there's a bit more to it than just that. And so for me, writing this book very much came from a place of wanting to shed light and uplift those narratives that often get disregarded in lieu of ones where they're like, "I'm just fearful of the future." And a friend of mine who's from the Fulani native group in Africa, was talking about how his community is being displaced by the climate crisis, how, you know, no new set of words is ever going to encapsulate the sheer terror and utter pain of having to go through that and seeing his community go through that. And so I feel yeah, I feel like this is a place to unpack those nuances as well as give credence to those who do struggle with eco anxiety. You know, it'd be reductive of me to assume that none of the people I interviewed experienced it; they experienced it, but with other caveats that just don't get discussed as often.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:13:19] Thank you for unpacking so much of that. I think it's really important to critique the ways that language falls short and how so much of the language around eco anxiety, but also around like the pathology of mental illness—and I mean, if we're going to go this far also the construction of of disability and the models and like all of all of what's become really dominant worldwide—has been Western. So, yeah, it's so important to look at the ways that, I mean, hopefully, communities that are affected will start to develop the, you know, language around what it means to, to experience such hurt, these forms of oppression that does better encapsulate that over time. But it's amazing that your book is opening up those conversations. And I hope that in the process of like, talking to the activists and working through that yourself, that that could also be like a chance to slow down a bit maybe? And like, do do you think it was, I wonder if it was healing a little bit in itself to be going through that process of actually like, naming the hurt and like having those conversations?

**Tori Tsui** [00:14:35] Yes, 100%. I love that question so much, because I often describe the act of writing as a bit of a salve, and like almost a bit of a meditative process for you to kind of unpack—whether it be traumas or systemic oppression—in this sort of way that feels concise, but also gives that space for nuance to really tap into the things that are making people feel so profoundly unwell. And it was actually writing one particular chapter that I think brought me an overwhelming sense of peace more than others. And, you know, you kind of mentioned the framing of mental health through this sort of Western lens. And I actually wrote about the sort of dualism that exists in my question, science and the world view, which essentially sees nature as separate from humans. And, you know, there's a saying in the climate movement that "We are not defending nature; we are nature defending itself." And that's incredibly poignant, because so much of this lack of wellness, so to speak, in society. It is through these delineations that try and separate people from what they are. And I feel like for me, understanding that the system that has been cultivated is one that has systematically tried to erase people of their, you know, connections to the natural world or connections to themselves or their spiritual, physical, emotional, so to speak. And that was a really, really special moment for me, writing that chapter, because it felt like I was almost giving myself permission, and other people permission as well, to explore what it means to rekindle those relationships with nature. And I actually wrote about not just legal frameworks, but I wrote about certain territories of New Zealand and how they basically were able to get legal protection for the river by virtue of talking about how it was their ancestor, and how it is like a person. And personhood shouldn't strictly be just reserved for Homo Sapiens. I feel like Indigenous wisdom has a lot to teach us about these things and you know, writing that was really powerful. And I spoke to my friend Lina, who's native to Morocco for the book, and she said these, you know, instances remind us that that our relationship with nature doesn't have to be a certain kind of way. It's not static. And she kind of says in the book that she has a really profound connection with water. So whether that's the ocean, whether that's a lake or a river. And she actually recounts this really beautiful moment where she was swimming in a lake. And she's just like, "What's to say that as a human, I'm just this human entity? I'm also the water. I'm also changing shape. And these, you know, vast bodies that exist on this planet." And I thought that was really beautiful. And and so I kind of make a case to argue like, you can find your own connections with nature that don't necessarily have to be hinged on your personal relationship to indigeneity. But, in doing so, we have to also champion Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous rights as part of that, because they have had to prevail against all odds in this world.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:18:00] Yeah, I'm really looking forward to reading it. And yeah, I'm so glad that you made those connections with Indigenous sovereignty and respecting and being grounded by Indigenous knowledge systems as well, because that's so critical to understanding humanity as part of nature and not as kind of separate or above or in these hierarchies. Another element of that I think is that I've only recently started to like explore for myself, and sometimes I'm like really hesitant about putting myself too much into these conversations because I want it to be about, I want to hear from you, but I'm interested in your reflections on this—so I've had long COVID for a few years, and in that time, I got long COVID at the same time as I moved to Norway, because my parents had moved to Norway. And so we were living above the Arctic Circle and this really lovely part of Norway, nature-wise, right, but I was also sick, so I could not go on hikes, with my parents, or like really get out that much. And I'm also blind. So I also, you know, I didn't have super immediate ways. My parents did describe the birdwatching. They did; they named a lot of the birds. They got really into it. That was really cool. And so I didn't feel completely separated, but I felt pretty separated from nature, if I'm honest. And so, I think it's taken me a long time to be like, you know, "It's okay to to think about just being and being in a house, being in a place and exploring that from a really literal like, where am I and where are my where are my roots? Where is my community attached to?", as a more holistic way of being part of nature and also thinking about, right, you know, COVID coming from, you know, wherever, whether it was natural causes or not, but like coming from our interactions with, with nature in some form and that leading to the chronic illness that has put me in this position.

**Tori Tsui** [00:20:13] Yeah.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:20:13] So yeah, I wondered if you had any reflections on those kind of complex relationships that often, like maybe disabled people have; not being able to access nature and so readily?

**Tori Tsui** [00:20:26] Essentially like the way in which able-bodied access nature, I think is kind of portrayed as the archetype. And that is ableism in and of itself, right? That these are the experiences that define what it means to be with nature. And the reality is that it's so much more complex than that, and yeah, thank you for sharing that. For context, I also got COVID last year and I've had kind of, you know, some chronic health issues related to it. And oh, God, I mean, I was given COVID by someone who is a COVID-denier. And for me, that was like almost an act of violence because they denied that COVID existed. They denied the impacts that it had. And as someone who's had a long term chronic health conditions, you know, that was one of the most sick I'd ever been, and the fatigue associated with it and the knock-on effects. So it's something I feel very strongly about. But kind of to your point about, you know, being away from community and also talking about community, I feel like this concept of nature doesn't need to be static and it can be so personal to the to the person in question. I think part of it for me, also wants to invite folks to be like, okay, as human beings with different connections and we live in a digital world as well, where I think it's so important because there's accessibility with having digital networks as well. For me, there's a lot of synergy there and seeing that as part of nature, so to speak. There's there's part in my book where I talk about the Wood Wide Web, which more specifically relates to the ways in which microbes and little fungi interact with the roots of trees beneath the ground, and send messages and connect and, you know, transmit resources and all of these different things. And I draw a parallel between that Wood Wide Web and the World Wide Web, and how you can create community and ways of belonging through digital means. And as I mentioned, that's really important for people who are marginalized—especially disabled folks. Lots of people that I know in the disabled community often talk about how the Internet is like a home to them, a lot of the time. And it's where some of their most loved ones kind of interact. And I think with that, we need to re-imagine, like how essential that is also to our wellbeing, and how that's also natural and part of our nature as human beings, to have community to be in community, whatever form that takes. And I also just feel like, the way in which this sort of like "Go outside and spend time with nature" is kind of seen as this like catchall cure for any mental health problem related to like the climate crisis is also quite individualistic and reductive at best. And so for me, when I think about this concept of nature as a whole, I'm also just like, how do we make that collective and available for everyone, in a way that speaks to them? And it's not prescriptive. Of course, there's a lot to learn from Indigenous wisdom, but again, this kind of goes back to that chapter where I was like, you need to find your connections; the ones that make sense for you, the ones that speak to you in your community.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:23:46] Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing that. I'm also reflecting on how, like in the beginning when I was in Norway, I was thinking, like, are. I didn't quite articulate it to myself, but it almost felt like some kind of cheating to be like listening to nature sounds that I could very easily access, like on my phone or whatever. Right? Like quite easy to do nowadays and to not be listening to the "real thing", like, outside, where I could hear a lot of seagulls from where I was living was the predominant sound, which of course I listened to from time to time. But yeah, I realized like, actually, like that's a bit ableist, isn't it? Like, why would I be cutting off my own access that I do have to digital soundscapes and landscapes, including ones of New Zealand where I grew up? Like, why would I do that to myself? So, right now, we're having like this super honest and quite deep conversation, I think, about like some of the relationships between being disabled and like health in many forms, including mental health and spiritual and physical and all the things. But I think making these sorts of spaces where like marginalized people are actually feeling safe and comfortable to talk about mental health and all of the complexities that you brought up around the fact that, like eco anxiety is not an all-encompassing term, is like really difficult. And I am sure that your book is going to help open up some of these conversations. But I also wondered if you had any advice for people who are maybe sort of thinking about these things, but are like, "I don't know if I would ever feel okay about raising any of this."—how to talk about it.

**Tori Tsui** [00:25:29] Yeah. Thank you for that. I feel like, you know, mental health is a very deeply personal aspect of who we are as humans and all the ways in which it interacts with other holistic forms of health as well. Something that has really helped me over the years is finding a community of people that kind of feel aligned and in the work that we do, but also in the things that we care about. And I talk a lot about community in the book. I mean, by virtue of it being called It's Not Just You, there's a direct, sort of, call to arms, as it were, to be like, okay, "Find your community", like, this is how we create infrastructures of care, of, you know, liberation in a world that once, well, I will say, wants us to suffer. But whether directly or indirectly, there are folks by virtue of capitalism who are being marginalized and therefore, you know, we have the hierarchies that we do. And so for me, anyone who's really struggling with their mental health, especially in regards to the climate crisis, see if there are communities in your area that specifically tackle that. For me, seeing over the last couple of years, the ways in which specifically the youth movement, though not exclusively, has created spaces of care, specifically about this issue, is really reaffirming and every single space that I've been to dedicated to this particular topic is incredibly nurturing, incredibly inclusive and also not prescriptive and actually goes beyond the language of climate activism, so to speak. And what I mean by that is, you know, my friend Casey, who founded the Climate Resilience Project, she talks about how in some of the first few sessions, they don't talk about anything to do with climate change. They talk about who you are as a person. And it's an invitation to bring your whole self. It's not to say that the organizing that we do isn't part of ourselves, but it's a real invitation for people to be like, I love to do this. These are my interests, These are the things that I enjoy doing. These are the people in my life who I care about. And that fullness is a way to show up unapologetically as well. And so, yeah, I think for people who are struggling, a problem shared is a problem halved. And I really feel like this is an opportunity to lean on community members in times of need. And I should also say that my concept of community is not static; it's very much informed actually by the work of marginalized people. And this idea of chosen family sometimes, I mean, some folks aren't always blessed to have so-called biological, nuclear families that are nourishing and supportive of themselves. And so I talk a lot about like, queer liberation, and the work of a lot of organizing groups that sort of organized during the the AIDS epidemic and how they provide a community care for one another. And with that, this idea that I mentioned of the chosen family—I mean, I love drag, I'm queer myself and I love drag culture. And there's a lot of discussion around like sisterhood and motherhood and just challenging heteronormative family, nuclear archetypes. And I think to move into a world in which we are caring more than we are sort of destroying the planet, so to speak, we need to really kind of challenge those archetypes of family structure beyond that, which is a monogamous, heteronormative nuclear family structures. And I think that also kind of goes back to what we were talking about with, like accessibility and the Internet. Like in particular in the book, I talk about how trans people, and specifically those who existed in the realms of like, the Tumblr era, were really like using these platforms as a lifeline because there is the ability to be anonymous and also connect with fellow trans people in a world that is deeply transphobic and violent, and that also speaks to the power of community and friendship and innaccessible spaces. So yeah, I think that's the sort of—the latter half of what I just said is more of a broad interrogation of the word community. And then the former is like, more tangible, like see if there's an organizing group in your area that is tackling these issues. When I, when I say find a group, literally for me, when I first started organizing, I went on to Google and I typed in "Climate Group" where I was, and the rest of it kind of snowballed. So like, never underestimate Google—it's very useful.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:30:28] I love that—I want to pick up on a couple of those threads; one is around, yeah, like the diversity of what community can be and look like, right? And I think I mean, if I think about my last few years of basically being in a bedroom in a random spot in Norway, random to me as someone who never plans to, to live there. Yeah, you know, being I had so many like voice message conversations with friends on WhatsApp, and some of them were preexisting friends and some of them were your friends as well. And like, I don't think I would have thought that I could get to know people really, really well over voice messages on WhatsApp, whether I would feel like safe or comfortable to do that. But so many people, like a lot of disabled people in particular, I got to know through that period. And yeah, realizing more and more how many of my friends are disabled and like realizing that I need to like lean into that space. And the other thing I wanted to pick up on is this threat of going into, you know, the Climate Resilience Project—which I'm going to ask you more about in a sec—but, you know, in a place where you are asking people just like to bring their whole selves and not necessarily talk about climate activism, because I think there can be a lot of like I don't know, stories that we have in our own heads about like what being the right type of activist is. Yeah. So I think it's powerful to make a space that we try to like get away from. But yeah, tell me, tell me a bit more about the Climate Resilience Project.

**Tori Tsui** [00:32:04] Yeah, for sure. I, you know, kind of like to further what you just said about the idea of what it means to be a climate activist. Talking about perfectionism is I mean, perfectionism is kind of a euphemism for what I would say is like kind of an ablelist, sexist, like homophobic depiction of what climate activism entails by virtue of being portrayed by the, like, able-bodied white man in the way in which they're spearheaded to be like environmentalists and conservationists by default and all of this kind of stuff. I feel like this idea of perfectionism is also very pervasive in our movements. And, you know, there are so many caveats to it, which, as I mentioned, are deeply informed by systemic oppression. But to me, like and I wrote a thing about this, that activism is low-hanging fruit, to paraphrase the words of my friend Julia Getner, the way they describe activism as low-hanging fruit, what that means is that it's actually not a difficult thing to do because essentially, it means enacting social or political change—whatever that looks like to you, whether that means engaging online or like podcasting or writing or like going to a protest, all of these different things are activism. Every single form of it is valid, and all it requires is the sort of agency to be like, okay, I care about this thing. I'm going to speak about it or say something about or do something about it. The real nuances here for me with this perfectionism argument are actually about whether people want to work towards a future grounded in community as opposed to acting individualistically. So, I feel like this idea of perfectionism and people not feeling good enough is deeply embedded in like, capitalist systems of worth, and the systems of oppression that interact with that. And as activists, it's like deeply important for us to interrogate that and go like, okay, why do I feel like I'm not good enough? What is imposter syndrome? Is it actually imposter syndrome or is it systemic oppression telling us that we're not good enough? The Climate Resilience Project, is a project that allows people to show up as they are unapologetically. It was started by my friend Katie Hodgetts, who, you know, I interviewed for the book as well, and she was really frustrated, I think, with the work that she's doing, the burnout that she was experiencing. She even used the words that she had to "forfeit her youth" for climate at certain points in her life. And so she was like, which young person person should ever have to forfeit that? Like nobody should have to do. So what would it look like to create more loving, more communal spaces of care in which your activism also means being your full self also means thriving, being happy, being in community. And so she essentially runs these projects where she trains up young people around the UK, but also it's expanding globally as well. And there are digital forms of the Climate Resilience Project as well for accessibility reasons. And she trains up people to learn how to run these circles, which are essentially, you know, groups of people who are trying to talk about issues like eco anxiety, burnout, perfectionism, everything—climate injustice. And I am part of the Board of Youth, and one of the things that was so wonderful, actually, in our last meeting, our friend Bobby did some breathwork with us. And, you know, I've always been mindful of the ways in which that certain things like yoga and meditation, breathwork, CBT and all of these things have historically been used as weapons against marginalized people to be like, "Oh, well, the reason you're suffering is because you're not doing a lot of that." But the way that Bobby framed it was he was like, "These are essentially tools to help us be in community and to like, understand our nervous system and to create and carve space for our wellbeing. They're not things that should ever be used to discount the systemic, oppressive forces that are acting on our bodies. If anything, this is an opportunity to like really take stock of where you are right now." And that was really beautiful. There's a real complement to doing what I would consider somatic work alongside, you know, the activism that I kind of do in my day to day. I do even argue that somatic healing is a form of activism, because it's what helps me continue the work that I'm doing in a way that feels sustainable.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:37:05] Mmmm.

**Tori Tsui** [00:37:06] Then I argue that sustainability is as much of a mindset as it is like, you know, the stereotypical ways of like doing this, that and the other. And, you know, my friend Daphne Frias, who is a disabled climate activist, also talks about like, the ableism attached to so-called sustainable things, like, "Don't use a plastic straw" and all of these things. So for me, sustainability is beyond that; it's like, it's the way you take care of yourself; it's the way that you work with other people; it's about making this work long-term and making sure that you're not harming yourself in the process.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:37:40] Thank you for articulating all of that. I recognize so much of that for myself as well. But I like the ways that I've internalized kind of perfectionism narratives and how that is very individualist. And yeah, taking a step back and realizing that like the forms of work that we do and their diversity, like when we're engaging with the topics and especially if we can engage with them, with other people and be in community in some way like that is really valid and important and can give a sense of agency and like through the ways that I've mostly engaged with climate stuff over the past year, that's been through writing and, and now through this podcast as well. And, you know, so that hasn't been "traditional" forms of activism, and I certainly wouldn't be up to like standing for hours physically being at protests or stuff like that, but this is what's working for me, and I think, yeah, that's the like that's the thing, right? Is like to find something that that speaks to you.

**Tori Tsui** [00:38:48] By saying that people have to do things a certain kind of way, it really does a disservice to the ways in which we need everybody to do different things that they have capacity to do. And whether that is like going to a protest, whether that is writing, podcasting, speaking engagements, creating art—there's so many ways to do this work. And I think the second we start to show people that there are many ways to take action, then the more likely we are to have like, a really strong community and also like this is a really important opportunity to talk about the fact that traditional organizing spaces—or rather traditional protesting—is very ableist. Like, you know, a lot of my friends who are neurodivergent find being in large crowds with lots of noise incredibly overwhelming, and they've been lambasted for not being able to turn up to these spaces. And people say, "Oh, well, that's not you know, that's not really an excuse in the climate crisis." And it's like, well, this is so like disrespectful to said person and also, who's to say that we can't make these spaces more accommodating or that people can't participate in other ways? And, you know, one of my friends I went to, it was one of my first protests I actually went to in the U.K., and this friend of mine, her mom is deaf, so she's professor proficient in signing. And all of the speeches that were being held were just spoken—there was nobody signing. And so she just got up in the middle of one of the speeches and started signing, and so many people came forward afterwards and they were like, "Thank you so much. Like, I'm hard of hearing—I'm deaf. Like, I just came here to acompany like, my friend or, you know, so on and so forth." And you realize tha disabled people are everywhere. Like this is something that's so important. And I think since then, like it was Extinction Rebellion protests that we went to—they started like championing more people to sign a protest. She she even pioneered this like initiative with XR, which was like signing for when people are in like particular circumstances where they're doing actions, where they're, you know, where it's harder to communicate or what someone is like on another side of like a blockade that they're doing. And she made all of these, like really cool diagrams to show people how to sign. And yeah, I just feel like there's a lot to interrogate as well with the ways in which that our movements, or some of our movements are ableist.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:41:30] Yes. Yeah, that's definitely an area that I started thinking about quite a bit myself a few years ago, having kind of started with an kind of activism that didn't have sort of any explicit disability intersections and where I was sort of the only openly disabled person within. Um, yeah, I guess the immediate circles that I was in and yeah, getting braver over time about sharing more of that. But I think the only reason I was also comfortable to do that is because we had really good relationships within that group and people weren't perfect, right? Like, it takes time to build habits, but like, they were really trying their best, I think. And that made it feel okay to be raising stuff. Just to finish off—and I know we've touched on a lot of different aspects of disability justice, sort of in indirect ways—but I want to sort of bring this back, because I really love that in your work you explicitly point to disability justice as like an orientation that can help point a way forward among heaviness of all of these interconnected oppressive systems. So I wondered if you could explore a little bit more of what disability justice means to you within this line of work?

**Tori Tsui** [00:42:42] Yeah, for sure—thank you. I think as I kind of mentioned earlier, you know, I identify as being mad and it's a reclamation of the term. And I do talk about being disabled myself sometimes, but I also feel like there are elements to my disability which are very much hinged on like madness, so to speak. And so I speak more to kind of the realms of justice within that capacity, like what it means to be institutionalized. And they don't exist in silos like a lot of disabled people who experience, like not being able-bodied, are also folks who experience like the harms of these carceral systems as well. I think that, you know, when we were discussing those elements of what it meant to have community, there is so much that disabled folks have actually paved the way for, especially with valuing the ways in which we can have community online. Like, I think that's something that's so important. And actually, you know, if we're going to talk about that "perfectionism" narrative, there were times where I was like, "Oh, I don't feel like a real activist because I'm doing all my organizing online. And I haven't been to a single protest in a really long time, despite the fact that I'm not doing so well, and I physically and mentally cannot will myself to get somewhere." And it was actually through listening to a lot of disability advocates where there's that real sense of like, belonging and safety, which reminded me actually, yeah, like what I'm doing is real. In fact, I kind of, I kind of ascribe to like being a spoon in myself. And I talk about how like some of my friends who are also seniors and also talk about like having chronic illness or being disabled are just like, "I'm doing a lot, given the resources that I have. We're doing so much, but we're never going to get flowers for that because this world is incredibly aimless and expects people to just do activism in a certain kind of way." And so the disability justice aspect of that has really reminded me like to appreciate the multifarious ways that people organize and also speaks to the power of, like, diverse communities and what it actually means to harness people power. There's quotes that have been uttered across the years by people who are social justice advocates, who talk about how no one is free until everyone's free. And I really believe that, like, whether it is like trans folks or Black folks or disabled folks all around the world—when they thrive, everyone thrives. I really love the work that people who talk about radical imagination do because, when one author that I quoted said, "What would it look like to succeed? What would it look like to have all the best things in the world kind of happen? Anything less is not worth our time." And it's very much a feeling for me, like this is the world that I want to imagine and I want to create. And it's showing up in little pockets everywhere, all around the world. So, yeah, the power of radical imagination is like a little guiding stick that kind of keeps this work grounded and keeps it hopeful and keeps me invested and keeps my community invested. Anything less than disability justice, racial justice, social justice, gender justice, all of these things. Anything less than that now is not worth my time.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:46:09] Tori, thank you so much for such a rich conversation and insights. I really, really appreciate your time.

**Tori Tsui** [00:46:17] Thank you for such thought provoking questions and questions that I feel like should be part of every podcast or conversation that's about the climate crisis.

**Áine Kelly-Costello** [00:46:33] Please help us spread the word about Enabling Commons, share it with a friend or link to it in your organization's newsletter. With thanks to Rose Paquet for producing transcripts and podcast promotion. The music is composed and produced by Sam Morgan. Audio production and hosting is by me, Áine Kelly-Costello. To find out more about the intersections of disability and climate change, visit disabilityinclusiveclimate.org.