

# 42 VOICES LISTENING PROJECT



## *Project Overview*

42 Voices is a non-partisan, resident-led community organization whose mission is to openly and inclusively engage residents in a dialogue around community issues. In September 2024, they hosted the Malvern Food Flavours Tour, which led residents on an interactive tour through neighbourhood groceries stores and the Malvern Urban Farm.

The goals of this event were to showcase independent food businesses in Malvern; generate awareness of where various cultural foods could be purchased in the neighbourhood and at what prices; enhance knowledge of local food security, affordability, and production; and celebrate community. Just Transitions in Action (JTIA) collaborated with 42 Voices on this event, with the aim to support with note taking and lead activities that highlight connections between food security and climate action.



## *Research methods and activities*

Participants were taken on a tour of three grocery stores in the Malvern neighbourhood: FreshLand Supermarket, Rubini West Indian Grocery Store, and Eraa Supermarket. At each store, they worked within a small group to purchase food using 90 CAD in cash—with the goal of spending 30 CAD per store within a time frame of 15–30 minutes. Participants were split into 5 groups of roughly 10 people, and each group was assigned a leader to facilitate discussions about purchasing decisions.

At Rubini's, the store owner spoke to community members about the history of the store, products they sold, and their local impact through their returning customers. Eraa's store owners also provided snacks and shared the story of its founding, challenges building the businesses, and that they were immigrants to Canada.

The second half of the event took place at the Malvern Urban Farm, where participants first enjoyed a meal, explored the farming plots, and listened to farmers share about their farming experiences. Next, we led a discussion with participants about their impressions of the farm and reflections from the food tour, followed by a game of trivia which had 10 questions related to food security and climate change.

JTIA Researchers took ethnographic notes throughout the event. Approximately 50 people participated. People were of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, with relations to Sri Lanka, West Indies, India, and Europe. Primarily elderly people participated, as well as some young children and their parents.



## *Findings*

Through this event, community members became more aware about what food is available in their community, where to find it, and for what price. Some shared that the grocery store tour showed them places they didn't know about or had never been to, and it engaged them to think through and practice budgeting. The event also helped people to learn about the process of food production, and how it relates to climate change and the environment.

During the grocery store activity, community members engaged in discussions about how to budget the \$30 and make their purchasing decisions. Some adults decided to let the children in their group manage 1/3 of the total budget. The children enjoyed the freedom to choose the food they were buying, were very engaged in thinking through how much money they had left, and decided to not spend too much on certain items so they wouldn't exceed the budget. Some groups decided to prioritize buying products they could share between them, such as a bag of oranges, and to avoid buying produce by the pound, because while the price is cheaper it could have caused the cost to sneak up on them. They also discussed which groceries might be cheaper, so they could figure out how to get more for their money.

Many groups aimed to buy fruits and vegetables over snacks for their nutritional value. In conversations about which produce to buy, community members expressed concerns about the limited availability of Ontario-grown produce at certain stores.

The grocery store activity led to discussions within groups about cultural preferences, traditional foods, and food preparation. For example, as a group considered the possibility of buying pork at the store, they transitioned into a conversation about their dietary restrictions and preferences. People also spoke about what traditional foods they enjoy and how to prepare them, as well as similarities in food between countries such as India and Sri Lanka. This led people to share their cultural roots and experiences as new migrants to Canada.

At the farm, community members asked farmers questions about the farm's history, the process of organic food production, and how to manage the risk of bugs and co-dwelling with animals. Many were not aware of the farm even though they live nearby. Some people were interested in getting a piece of land to work on at the Malvern Urban Farm, and one older lady asked to be connected with the Malvern Family Resource Centre so she can inquire about volunteering at the farm or farmers' market.

During trivia, some people did not want to participate and chose to opt out, whereas others got into the activity. Groups of kids were acting excited as they discussed the trivia questions with each other, and what they thought the correct answers might be. Overall, people shared that they found the entire event to be enjoyable, engaging, and socially fulfilling.