

Getting Free Together Ep. 5

Why We Are Not a Nonprofit with Shannon Perez-Darby

Shannon Perez-Darby (00:00)

nothing I can think about is more fun of being able to talk about mandatory reporting, nonprofit infrastructure and Pluribus in one conversation.

Spring Up (00:23)

You're listening to Getting Free Together. We are so excited to be sitting down with iconic abolitionist and podcast host Shannon Perez-Darby. Thanks for joining us, Shannon.

Shannon Perez-Darby (00:33)

Thank you so much, I'm really excited to be here with you all.

Spring Up (00:36)

~ same. Well, we like to start our podcasts by talking about how we met each other, or first were introduced to each other's work. So how do we want to start it off? Do you want to share first? Does that feel okay?

Shannon Perez-Darby (00:42)

Yeah.

Sure, I'd be happy to share. So this is actually also a slight horror of mine because I'm like, I know where I first met you. Is it the same that you think? We'll find out. Let's find out right now. I have a bad habit of forgetting people's names or of just like being, I just have a bad habit of that. And then it gets like horrifying to me. So what I remember meeting you all both was in New York in 2019 at the Building Accountable Communities.

Spring Up (01:02)

for sure. It's a fun trade. ~

Shannon Perez-Darby (01:21)

convening, which had both a public facing and like an internal facing conversation. And so the three of us and many other people got to be part of the internal conversation. And I just really remember connecting deeply with both of you all. I mean, I've shared this with you all not when we're not recording, but a lot of how when it was time to form Accountable Communities Consortium was formed by conversations that we had. And so that is how I remember meeting you both.

Spring Up (01:49)

love it. Yes, that not to say correct. Maybe there are some other things that I don't remember. But

that's also my first memory of us actually officially meeting. I think I remember specifically and it's so many years ago. So I've been like, what story am I telling myself versus what actually happened? But I think I remember there was like a lunch or something that had different like topics for each table. And one of the tables was like folks who have done like

Shannon Perez-Darby (01:53)

No, great. I love it. Yay.

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

Spring Up (02:17)

youth work or like sexual violence direct response and we got into a really good conversation around the community work that we had been doing and like domestic violence intervention and intimate partner violence intervention in queer community. ~ That that was like a real click for me. I think we've been in different spaces together but I was like I really like Shannon. That was like we have a lot in common. That was a really cool conversation.

Shannon Perez-Darby (02:37)

Yeah. Yep.

Yeah, we have a shared story because that is also my experience. And I remember eating lunch and being like, I feel like really locked in on this. So same place.

Spring Up (02:53)

Yeah, it's interesting too. I think you had a blog or some blog posts about relationship dynamics in the queer community that we had cited. yeah, I think that, you we've done work around healthy relationships and relationship violence in especially queer and trans relationships for so long now that it just is great to find accessible abolitionist resources that

situate that in such a conversational and approachable way. I remember your blog too about the domestic violence dynamics in the queer ultimatum was something that we were definitely sending around to lots of group chats when that came out and that people really appreciated. Yeah, giving voice to some of those dynamics.

Shannon Perez-Darby (03:42)

Thank you. You know, my goal in life is to wed my abolitionist commitments with my love of pop culture. And so whenever I can be like, people are talking about this wrong in pop culture and I have an opinion. I want to talk to people about it. So I was grateful. It's maybe a weird word for the opportunity to wed two things that are important to me.

Spring Up (04:03)

Well, and of course that's why we have continued to deepen our relationship. There's plenty of reasons, but we are real media watchers. And so that's a big space of overlap. And a focus of your podcast as well, which is so exciting. And I feel like how have we kept in touch a bit over the years is I think following each other's work. And I really appreciate the other publications of multimedia information around

Shannon Perez-Darby (04:06)

Yay.

Spring Up (04:31)

pop culture and particularly around mandatory reporting. And then I think there's an interesting overlap in the Denver connection or Colorado connection, which we got to dig into a little bit more a few months ago when we met up in Seattle as well.

Shannon Perez-Darby (04:41)

Yay!

Spring Up (04:47)

Well, I think there would be some good overlap between our listeners and Popaganda. What has it been like hosting your podcast over these last few years?

Shannon Perez-Darby (04:58)

Yeah, so I have a podcast called the Popaganda podcast with my co host Tashmica Torok And really our vision was one, it started that Tashmica and I both love pop culture. So actually a previous guest of your all's Mia Mingus really match made us so part of the that I was I'm friends with Mia, Tashmica is friends with Mia. I had been talking to me about my dreams of like, I want to talk about abolition and pop culture. And Mia was like,

you need to meet Tashmica. And we did, and actually before we even had a friendship, before we had like one Zoom call, we were like, let's do it, let's do this podcast. And so since then, Tashmica has become a dear friend of mine. think we're about to, this summer will be the fourth year since we started the podcast. the really, vision and the dream behind it was thinking about pop culture as an entry point. Like pop culture is pop culture because it's popular, because it has

know, millions, tens of millions, hundreds of millions of eyes and ears on what's happening in pop culture. And, you know, I see more and more, especially through the podcast, that plenty of abolitionists, plenty of organizers, plenty of activists also love pop culture. But sometimes in organizing spaces, there can be a little bit of like, ooh, is that like, aren't you like too cool for that? you watch The Bachelor? I'm like, yes, I have watched every episode of The Bachelor.

Spring Up (06:16)

You

Shannon Perez-Darby (06:18)

I wanna talk about it. And so the vision is really thinking about an entry point, like many, many doors in and wide doors in and that, you know, also two cents of mine is that I think in the left, have ~ under invested in base building and in consciousness raising work and in some of the eyes and ears, right? And like creating media that is both entertaining and values aligned and really thinking about like,

How is it gonna be interesting? How are we gonna be compelling? How is it gonna be funny? How is it gonna be engaging? How is it gonna be like so compelling and exciting because you want to be drawn to it. You're not like sitting down for your lecture. You're like, this is so lovely. I really wanna think about that too. my gosh, I love hearing about this. Ooh, it gets me really activated and excited. And so that's the vision of Popaganda. Our tag is come for the pop culture, stay for the abolition. ~ Although our joke is it's actually, it seems like more and more it's come for the abolition.

stay for the pop culture because we have a lot of abolitionist people who are like, I don't want to watch that media, but I want to listen to you talk about it. And I'm like, okay, great. So it turns out it's both directions. Turns out we have many, many people who are wary of pop culture, but want to hear us talk about the theme. So that's Popaganda. And what I hope is, is we hit a balance between, we talk a lot about questions of domestic and sexual violence, because that's both Tejmika and I's work. So regardless of the media, we sort of always find our way back there.

~ And because those themes are so prevalent and so many things that are in pop culture. And so we hopefully hit a balance of like funny, we laugh a lot of entertaining of like deep dives in of being able to engage with things that bring us deep joy and also matter to us.

Spring Up (07:55)

Yeah, I love that focus on accessibility and radical inclusion. And I think, it's something that we've pushed back on and that, you know, many abolitionists have is that abolition is absolutely not like what you're learning in your graduate studies program. It's actual practices and things that in conversations that happen between people in day to day life. And so watching and talking about media and especially reality TV is where a lot of those conversations happen.

Shannon Perez-Darby (08:23)

Absolutely. Absolutely. Like my mom listens to the podcast. She listens to every episode. And it's actually been amazing the ways that it has grown our conversations around like politics or other things that are happening. And she's like, yeah, like that totally aligns with my values. I just hadn't thought about it that way. yeah, that's so interesting. yeah, I also watched that movie. I want to hear you talk about it. And it's been really nice to have this platform to be able to like dive deeper in things that otherwise we may not have totally known how to talk about with each other.

Spring Up (08:51)

love that. And I think it's very aligned with the other segments of our podcast as well, which, you

know, the next one that we'll get into is about everyday practices. And then I hope we save a decent amount of time for our final segment where we get into what you're watching and talking about media, because I'm very intrigued. So I'd love to kind of move us into the next segment, which is what everyday practices of liberation are supportive to you personally?

Shannon Perez-Darby (09:07)

Yes, please.

Spring Up (09:18)

or which movements are inspiring you in your everyday life right now.

Shannon Perez-Darby (09:21)

Yeah.

You know, I would say the most supportive thing to me is I have a dance practice inside a community of other dancers and that movement practice is probably the thing that buoys me the most. Like just like somatically, it's a, I pole dance and then I do a very much like a freestyle contemporary, like I call it like roll around on the ground in the dark is a lot of like what are the, how I do it. And so I like, you know, put on some like soft clothes and roll around in the dark.

Spring Up (09:43)

Yes.

Shannon Perez-Darby (09:51)

And that so much just like as a from a physical perspective, like is an organic place where I get to move my body however it needs to move. And so that really builds me up that really like just like gives me a place to release the stress, the anxiety, the tensions of just living in the world, especially under fascism, like it is extremely physically stressful to hold and see all of that. And so that dance space is a place that I can feel that release.

and then also I do it in community, right? So I'm in a dance community with many folks I've been dancing with over 10 years, who I know, who I'm close friends with. Also, there's plenty of people whose like last names I don't know, who I've been dancing with for 10 years, right? And so we like, we go, we get to be in the space together. I'm like, I'm so familiar with their dance and I couldn't even tell you like what their partner's name is, right? And so there's actually something really special about a place where we're building community,

like through like literally like co-regulating in a room together, but we don't have to be like sitting down and dialectically like processing an intense thing. And so that is fun. It's lighthearted. It can be anything I need it to be. And so the community that gets a practice there that sometimes overlaps with my organizing and the rest of my life. And sometimes it's just like a place totally separate where I just, it's like a little haven I get to carve out or I just get to like go and be with other.

like, aligned people doing, like, moving our bodies, and that is the thing that's really booing me these days.

Spring Up (11:13)

I love that. One thing that's really sticking with me, you said a lot of great things, but that like rolling around in the dark piece, I'm like, I love it. That's, you own it. I'm so into just like moving and not focusing so much on what category it fits into or like how it looks in a particular way, but just like actually choosing to be in your body feels...

Shannon Perez-Darby (11:35)

Yeah.

Spring Up (11:37)

I don't know, I think we talked about this a little bit when shaïna was on the podcast, who's the third co-founder of Spring Up, has been my friend since we were in Montessori school, we were like three years old. And we're both in this moment of re-engaging our dance movement practices because we used to be on a dance team together when we were like six years old. Roll the tapes. Yeah. And we were in this really intense...

Shannon Perez-Darby (12:00)

Hahaha.

Spring Up (12:04)

South Florida dance world that was so about body control and connected to just feeling terrible about your body and such a focus on what it looks like more than what it feels like. And I think that has such a big impact on the way that we're socialized into relationship with our body. And I think I moved from competitive dance to sports, which again has a very similar type of dynamic.

and then ultimately ended up getting injured and being like, all of this is so terrible and not knowing how to be in right relationship with my body. And a lot of what shaïna and I have talked about more recently as we've been re-engaging these practices, me through drag, which I'm really excited. I have a performance next week that I'm thinking about, is what does it mean to shift the relationship to this performance?

to be about me, about how I feel about my relationship to my body and not as much about what other people are seeing, even though it's a performance, you know? And I think there's an ongoing joke with one of my co-performers here that we always overcomplicate everything. Any performance that we do has like five layers to it, is relatively intranslatable to the audience, if I'm being honest. Lea is always like,

Shannon Perez-Darby (13:21)

you

Spring Up (13:31)

What if you edited back? And what we're always saying is it's not for them, it's for us. The audience I was like, and what's the narrative? What are the three beats that you're gonna hit? Like, what is someone gonna take from this? But stop giving feedback, because I understand that that's not what it's about. I'm like, no, I can edit down for clarity in my work, in my organizing, in other spaces. In this, it's gonna be as convoluted.

Shannon Perez-Darby (13:37)

Totally.

Hehehehehe

Spring Up (13:57)

and ridiculous as I want it to be and people will enjoy it or they will not, but I don't need them to understand it in order for it to be worth my time. Like one of the things we want to do this summer is going to be a magic bike ride, my pony, which is meant to be a drag bike ride where we kind of de-layer or and perform at each location. And of course, Lea is like, and so is this like a group ride where everyone's in drag?

Shannon Perez-Darby (14:21)

Yeah.

Spring Up (14:27)

And we're like, no, it's not that. Everyone will watch us bike and they will meet us at the different locations where we will take off layers, but like they can't bike with us unless they're pre-approved as drag performance bikers, which I understand is less, you know, for the community. And yet that's not the goal. It's for me and for me to bike to my different friend's houses and then play strange songs about biking.

Shannon Perez-Darby (14:31)

You

Spring Up (14:55)

and perform. And I think that there's just something really nice about that. think as an organizer, as someone with a background in debate, and as a founder, there's so much that you have to do to make yourself translatable and to make it make sense to the audience that you're trying to convince of something or to shape some sort of action. And I think I've done so much work to learn how to mold myself.

Shannon Perez-Darby (15:08)

Yeah.

Spring Up (15:19)

into becoming what my audience needs to hear in order to get the like strategic outcome that I'm looking for. And this is such a cool way to really be like, I'm just doing it for me. I'm just doing what feels healing and intuitive and connective. And it's a reason for me to take these silly, masc, sexy dance classes and like just do what I feel like. And that's incredibly healing from a history of

Shannon Perez-Darby (15:44)

Yeah.

Spring Up (15:48)

control over my body and performing what needs to be performed for a specific outcome as an organizer.

Shannon Perez-Darby (15:54)

Yep, exactly. And I will say, people ask me sometimes, like, do I ever want to be a pole instructor? Do I ever want to be a teacher? I'm like, no, it's my literal only hobby that I haven't monetized, I haven't like professionalized, that I haven't been like, I'll be a leader there. Like, I actually love that I roll into class. I have no job except to be there doing my own thing in my own body. I'm not like the boss of anything. I'm not the leader of anything. I'm not in any, like.

leadership programs, I'm just socializing and moving how I want. And it's been so important for me to protect a space that isn't doing what every other thing I have done, which is then suddenly like, you know, talking about pop culture is now my best friend, expensive friendship hobby. And that, just like having a place that's organic, that's for me, that similarly, like I don't really perform. I used to perform when I started dancing and I was like, yeah, it just made it me.

think too much about what was happening outside me. And I really, my whole goal is actually like the introspection of being like, okay, like I start everything with like my breath. I start everything with like, okay, how does my body want to move? And actually, and really working hard to protect that as its own thing.

Spring Up (17:04)

Yeah, well, I'm going to take this in a really different direction. I think this is like the opposite of what a lot of people would feel. So give me, you know, give me that feedback if that's a, if you would definitely not include this as an everyday practice of liberation. But I think that this month I'm going to say scrolling and I know we're all like, ~ don't scroll. It's so bad. You're, And I just,

Shannon Perez-Darby (17:07)

Yeah, do it.

Listen.

I will not tell you that. just want you to know that's not I.

Spring Up (17:32)

I feel so much like witnessing what's happening right now, especially as like so much is unfolding in the world and, you know, the United States, like just building a coherent narrative of like, what's going on? What are people doing about it? What's possible? What's happening? feels really important. And I do, you know, every once in a while take like

week long breaks away from social media. I haven't, you know, I kind of like rotate which ones I'm paying attention to. But I have been feeling like my scrolling is very supportive in the last month of, yeah, I think especially, you know, I'm from Minnesota, so watching this unfolding situation in an environment that I am very familiar with, but.

pretty disconnected from culturally at this point, ~ just does feel really grounding. And I'll say, you know, obviously that can lead to not being in your body or that can lead to like not connecting with other people. And yeah, I think that like, I'm not feeling right now in this moment, like getting together and talking about what's happening with other people.

is supportive to my processing of things. However, we had a really beautiful team space and we've been having some really nice friend to get together where it's just like, what's going on with you? Not like, let's talk about this thing that's happening. Obviously people are personally affected by it and that might be what they want to talk about. But yeah, I think.

both zooming in on literally what is happening and how am I making sense of it, and then how am I relationally connecting with people and how am I doing as a person. And yeah, there's just like, there's a lot happening right now. And the other part of this question was which movements are inspiring you? And I think that like, I know that this is playing out in so many other.

cities and also rural environments, but I feel like the way that Minneapolis-St. Paul has just come together and mobilized and set up all of these like radically accessible ways for people to get involved on a neighborhood level is just like, it's beautiful, you know, it's really like exciting and powerful to be able to witness that in real time.

including on live streams as it's happened.

Shannon Perez-Darby (20:19)

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I am a chronically online person. And so I'm just never a person who's going to be like, you shouldn't do that. You know, I don't actually have any opinions about what other people should do. I'm like, do what works for you. Don't be online if you don't want to be online. Be online if it's self-soothing. Like any coping strategy is a good coping strategy, especially if you get to choose it, right? So it's like if I'm just doing things automatically that are harming me or impacting me with no like thoughtfulness. Yeah, I might want to look at that. Or there might be times like I do and times I'm like...

I'm just gonna let that happen. But I always say dissociation is my favorite coping strategy. It's great, I love it. I understand it comes at a, yeah, I understand it comes at a consequence. So it's like, if I spend too much time checked out for myself, I can't turn down just one bad feeling, I have to turn everything down. But sometimes really consciously being like, oh, I actually can't be present for this. And so I'm gonna do the things that help me check out so that then I can let my system relax and then.

Spring Up (20:55)

Amen.

Shannon Perez-Darby (21:16)

consciously choose to like turn back on and step back in actually is a really helpful strategy. And so I'm just like never a person that's gonna shame any of things. Also, I am historically a lover of TikTok. I'm having a complicated feelings about TikTok right now since our American overlords took over. It's bad, it's been bad since they've taken over. So we will see how it evolves, but you I spend.

at least an hour a day scrolling on TikTok and regularly in the last number of years, it has brought me great joy to do that, where I get to see people like in their hobbies, in like corners of the world I didn't know about. You get to watch what people are building or people are interested in. And I love that. It brings me deep joy, actually.

Spring Up (21:57)

yeah it's so interesting how these can shift seasonally too, and i feel like if i got into tiktok i don't know how i would balance it with the rest of my life. i just feel like i would just become subsumed with the watching of the tiktok, and so i'll watch a video that someone sends me but like i can't let like i just i can't do it. i don't have control or choice in the matter. something that i've been really enjoying recently is libby.

Shannon Perez-Darby (22:00)

Yeah.

Yeah.

It's a real threat, for sure.

Spring Up (22:26)

I am so excited by the modernization of the usage of library cards. know we're gonna get off Audible, we're gonna get off Kindle, it's happening this month. But Libby, I feel like I have a hard time completing a fiction book unless it will expire. And I find that so much of the time that was spent scrolling, I'm actually...

reading on my phone, which I'm really grateful for. I've been reading a lot of kind of like horror

abstract, weird things and queer romance. And that's been very fun for me. And I think, yeah, just a big fan of Libby over here. I love that you can get multiple library cards and kind of be on the market for the best. Yeah. And for those of you who aren't familiar, Libby is a really amazing

Shannon Perez-Darby (23:13)

Yeah.

Spring Up (23:22)

library connected app. And so you download it, you put in whatever your local library branches. if you don't know what it is, it's great to look it up for our branch. I didn't even need to physically go into the branch to say where I lived, log in through that branch and then be able to get, you know, because it's a library free books. And you can also, download those books on your Kindle app. do like that app, but I do want to stop spending so much on Amazon.

But so you can get those ebooks on your Kindle or you can listen to full audiobooks. so that's something that we're doing this month and has definitely- to the audiobooks for sure. Has definitely increased our reading time.

Shannon Perez-Darby (24:09)

I love an audiobook.

Spring Up (24:39)

So I-

feel like it's a little bit of a pivot, but something that you shared when you were talking about us meeting and something that I really wanted to talk to you about is this piece around nonprofits versus non-nonprofit formations. It's something that I really am curious to chat about, hear your reflections on, and especially, you know, thank you for gassing me up around the fact that we were part of the Influence in Your Choice.

Shannon Perez-Darby (24:53)

Yeah.

You really are. I think about you like every couple of months because

our conversation genuinely influenced that.

Spring Up (25:11)

But I'd love to bring that conversation to our audience. And I'm curious to hear a little bit about why you made the choice that you did or what organization are we talking about here? What structure are you in? And then we can kind of see where the conversation goes from there.

Shannon Perez-Darby (25:14)

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely. So I have worked either in nonprofits or what I've been calling like nonprofit adjacent for basically my entire adult life, like since I was 20. So like 22 years. And, you know, for 10 years, I worked at a nonprofit that I have a complex relationship with. There were many things that were that set me on the path that I'm on now. There were many things that were really loving and great about that.

And there were many things that kind of fucked up my life about it too. And so it was just a lot of things layered together. And then when I left that organization, I went to work for local government, which is like a whole side quest that was a very interesting journey. But one of the things that I did was worked for a short period of time as a funder. And so then I got to see hundreds of nonprofits from this sort of like next scale about.

just like the kind of challenges people are running into, the funding infrastructure that just like fundamentally the tax code that governs nonprofits means that it's almost nearly impossible for nonprofits to save money. ~ And so it really impacts a bunch of different things.

And so we have this idea, think, like, I just actually had a new dance friend who we like went out for lunch and she works in tech and she makes a lot of money working in tech. And she was like, I'm trying to think about what to do with this excess money I get from my tech job. She was like, maybe I should start a nonprofit. And I came on a little too hard. I do see that. And I was like, don't do that. Don't start. Don't. She was like, OK, calm down. Like she was like, thought I was being like too intense. And I was like, mutual aid, just like take out cash and give it to people. And she was like.

I overwhelmed her. It was not my most strategic way to talk to people about nonprofits. But I think when you are inside them for a while, you start to see that there's a bit of a racket that structurally how the tax code is set up means that it's actually nearly impossible for nonprofits to ever have what they need just structurally because it becomes very hard to pay people competitive wages. It artificially suppresses the wages of people for

some very particular reasons about how the tax is structured and just culturally how nonprofits are set up, who runs them, the practices of funders. So how funders control and micromanage the funds they give out to nonprofits, how they can almost, everybody wants to fund direct services or fund these certain things that look good in your newsletter that you send out. Nobody wants to fund your admin team, right? That are actually an essential part. Like any organizer knows that being on top of your emails,

knowing where the list of people are, who's setting up the space, that that kind of stuff makes or breaks your ability to do your work. And nonprofits like every nonprofit is struggling to fund that because many grants won't fund that part of the work. So you have to go and fundraise on top of

that. You know, I've had many executive directors of nonprofits tell me that they cannot raise the wages of their workers because their grants won't allow them.

I think that's a lie. I ~ I've told them to their face that's a lie. Because what they're like, well, this over here, already have.

preset in our deliverables, what we pay people. So if we have ~ staff who are very like 100 % on one grant, they are locked in to a specific rate. have told the government or whoever our funder is. And so we can't, it's just impossible. And of course it's not impossible, but it is difficult and it takes flexibility, creativity, a lot of things for nonprofits to do that. And so the barriers are high. And so what happens is that you lock.

disproportionately, folks of color, women, queer and trans people into suppressed wages. And nonprofits were designed to really have women who had husbands who made family wages, work they did on top of. weren't, historically was not meant to be family wage jobs where people were being able to support themselves, their families, like kids. And so.

they're just the wages are garbage. And so you end up taking a lot of folks who are then drawn to nonprofits who are making like suppressed wages under garbage conditions, like they're under unionized, the workers rights and nonprofits are garbage. So there's just like a lot of structural problems. So all of that is to say that then when I started Accountable Communities Consortium, you know, the base vision was that I saw that there was a deep bench.

of brilliance in my community, that I knew many, many really brilliant people who were doing brilliant work. And the things that those people said to me over and over again was like, don't want to deal with the money. I don't know how to deal with the contract. I don't really know what I should get paid. I don't want to manage any of the money admin part of that. And I was like, oh, well, that I can do. That doesn't stress me out. I actually totally understand how to write a contract, figure out the payments, do all of that stuff. So what if we created a hub?

where that could help manage the, like, we will sign the contract, we will hold the money, we have an accountant, we will, like, pay the taxes, but then be able to, like, have people's work, have projects, and have things that are housed underneath there. And so that is why it's Accountable Communities Consortium. The consortium idea is that, you know, it's a group of independent, like, semi-autonomous folks who then come together for certain projects with the infrastructure of

you know, who's gonna hold the money, who's gonna pay bills, who's gonna pay the taxes. And when I was thinking about that vision and that idea, a conversation with you Stas about like, what should I do? I'm trying to think about it. you were, basically you were like, don't become a nonprofit. This is why we're an LLC. Let me tell you about that. And that is literally what I did. So I was like, okay. And then we became, and so we, when we did our incorporation, we incorporated as a, initially as a sole proprietor LLC.

In the future, we will probably move to an S-corp ~ because that just makes more sense as we're going to need to start to pay ourselves, have insurance underneath it. I probably would have started as an S-corp if I knew what I knew now, but I just needed the simplicity of an LLC. Also, just allowed us to pivot. Then the last thing I'll say about that is one of the great things about LLCs are that, especially a small LLC like that, is that we can pivot really quickly.

into a board structure with a long term with, you know, that is that is set on a path that can't move that, you know, I have many people I'm accountable to who I'm in conversation with who I'm in relationship with around the directions of our work. But if we need to close up shop on a whole project tomorrow and pivot to something new, we can do that very, very quickly. We are extremely agile. And the thing that always suits me is like seeing how many like

non, like how many LLCs like are just like what billionaires use to like hide their money and like they can just close them tomorrow and they just open up another one. Like it's just like on a Tuesday, they're just like pop up another LLC. It was very soothing to me to just be like, like people with money use this as a tool all the time to move how they need to move. Like, why are we not doing that? So that's a little like, that's some of the why and the how. And I think it has served us really well. Like, I don't think there have really been significant barriers.

Like the only barrier that we've faced is for funders that genuinely want a 501c3, it's really hard to find fiscal sponsors. Like nobody wants to fiscally sponsor. It's a pain in the ass. I understand it's expensive to do the fiscal sponsorship. It's a lot of administrative barriers, like barriers for not a lot of money. And so, but we have been able to find like nonprofit partners who are able, willing to hold money.

But it is the only barrier that there are some funders who will only work with nonprofits and then that takes a dance that we have to do.

Spring Up (33:06)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Wow. So much in what you just said. So much that I want to expand on. So much I want to highlight. Really such a juicy conversation that I feel like we could honestly rant about for probably a decade of constant conversation. I think some of the things that you shared that I want to highlight is that agility piece. I think that's a really, really big component that doesn't get highlighted enough is that like,

Shannon Perez-Darby (33:19)

Absolutely.

Spring Up (33:33)

I do think that we all talk about emergence, right? And like the ability to really fundamentally shift and adapt is harder in a nonprofit structure. You're really like, this is what we're doing. This is what we have funding to do. We're gonna follow through on it. There's a big negotiation that has to happen to shift and to adapt. Whereas in an LLC, you do what you're gonna do. I mean, you might

have a contract or something and there's usually a component of the contract where you can make changes or what that looks like.

There's so much more agency and control. And I think the reason is because of the accountability structures, which I think is what's interesting also about it being Accountable Communities Consortium, right? Is that- Well, and people think like, if you don't have a board, who holds you accountable? But the community and clients and partners that we're talking to literally every day, we are accountable to because we make agreements together. We give each other feedback. We follow through on them. It's a very neat loop.

of direct accountability and feedback. Right, whereas in a nonprofit structure, the accountability is so convoluted and it's largely a way for people who are doing community work to be accountable to wealth rather than the recipients of the work that they're meant to be doing. There's so much more structural requirement to report, to be in dialogue with the power of funders and of a board.

Shannon Perez-Darby (34:33)

Yeah.

Spring Up (35:02)

than with the people that you're directly working with. And I mean, talk about the design working. Like it's not that there's something we're not doing nonprofits correctly. They're meant to function this way. Like it is on purpose that like, it's so hard to have a functional board for a nonprofit. Yes, because the purpose of the board is to have people with wealth and extra time.

Shannon Perez-Darby (35:13)

Yeah. Exactly.

Spring Up (35:26)

who are overseers of what the nonprofit can and cannot do. It is incredibly difficult to have a board that is made up of community members who have like extra time to be doing legal and fiduciary oversight without it being a paid role. Like, yeah, that's really structurally difficult to fill. And it leads to a lot of conflict and tensions around capacity because it is designed for a very different type of person to be overseeing the community work.

Shannon Perez-Darby (35:39)

Yeah. All right.

Spring Up (35:53)

that is like filling the gap of the social safety net. And like we know that the biggest nonprofits, the most funding in nonprofits is going towards things that are not actually meeting a social safety net. It's schools, it's, ~ you know, arts, ~ you know, it's things that are not actually about addressing direct community. Not that arts aren't important, but when we think about like, when I think of movement nonprofits, I think of things that are really meeting needs in our community.

Shannon Perez-Darby (35:56)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Spring Up (36:24)

actually a really small portion of what nonprofits look like.

Shannon Perez-Darby (36:27)

Well, and they almost nearly can't. So when I was as a funder, we worked really hard to basically have direct client dollars to be able to be like, OK, I had a grant where I was setting aside just literally giving money directly to survivors. And it was nearly impossible structurally because of tax infrastructure mostly, because then it was a gift. And if you could give a gift around a certain amount, then you have to collect it.

you know, you have to collect it as income that that person's receiving. And then if you have confidential services, you can't do that. And then government funders, you know, can't give away government money, basically. And so the, that it actually like the way they are literally designed makes it nearly impossible to actually just give people money, which is a lot of what people actually need.

Spring Up (37:10)

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. And we're fortunate. Last year, we've been looking for a long time. We did have a relationship with a local nonprofit for a while that could receive grants for specific programs ~ on our behalf. But now we have a really good Model C fiscal sponsorship through Start Co-op. And so we're still completely autonomous financially and in our infrastructure.

but we can receive grant donations as a pass through from Start Co-op because they recognize that co-ops are big secret, not very profitable, you know, maybe someday right? But that co-ops are a, you know, anti-capitalist structure that means that the workers are the ones that benefit from their own labor and that that

is a structure, you know, if we pay labor appropriately, then there's not usually a lot left over. And so I appreciate that Start Co-op, one of their programs is to make it so that co-ops can receive grant funding, including so that we can provide maximum program accessibility, because that's the other big challenge with being an LLC is, you know, many of the people that you would want to work with or provide programming to.

can't pay a sustainable rate. And so then you can have, you know, some people that are paying at a sustainable rate, including some funders that sponsor programs for people who are not able to pay. But it's a bit of a juggling act, but it has worked for 10 years. And I think that it will, you know, continue to work. Well, and I think that connects to something that you shared that I think is really

important, which is the artificially decreasing the pay rates, right? Like making it seem like you can do things for a lower cost.

There's a trickiness in providing services that are often provided by nonprofits because they're able to provide it for free or very low cost that gives a skewed perception of how much it costs to provide those services that makes it hard to charge for those services as well, because it's like, well, why are you charging so much more than everyone else? And it's because we're trying to pay people a competitive rate and it's only covered by nonprofit funding. And I think that's like a hard thing

that I think we need to talk about more is how do we move as an ecosystem? How do we like make strategic choices together that shift the norms in the economy rather than undermining each other in each of our strategies? And I think that's a hard thing to know how to talk about because we're all trying to survive. We're all trying to meet our needs. And we're also all trying to do good work in a way that is accessible to community. And

Shannon Perez-Darby (39:50)

Yeah.

Spring Up (40:02)

Like I do think that that's what's underneath a lot of these and there's a ton of different strategies to do that. But again, to me, it keeps coming back to this idea that the design is working. Like the economy is making us compete with each other in a way that we don't need to be or making us undercut each other in a way that we don't need to be because there's so much need. There's so much money moving through society. There's so many people who want to give away money too. And like,

Shannon Perez-Darby (40:15)

Exactly. Yep.

Spring Up (40:28)

the loophole, like the structures that we have to move through to be able to do this are so complicated that they intentionally kind of pit us against each other and it takes a ton of work and study and like initiative to understand them enough to be able to come up with a strategy that finds the loopholes, let alone to share that with one another. It's a tricky thing to know how to navigate.

Shannon Perez-Darby (40:45)

Yeah.

Yeah, you know, that makes me think of two things. One is, you know, in grant structures for nonprofits, one of the things that it does is that it's ~ some funders will start to functionally like bid out services to the cheapest person, right? And so it makes nonprofits actually start to undercut

the cost of their own services and say, well, in order to get this grant, are going to

We are gonna do it the most efficiently by having the cheapest labor costs, by supporting the most people for the least amount of money. And then what happens is that you get, you use a of capitalist infrastructure for the cheapest direct services are the best. And we know like, no, actually probably the best direct services are robust, are multi-layered. You don't just have like one scrappy direct service worker with a 50 person caseload. You might actually have someone who has like a 10 person caseload.

and a backup if they go out of town, like there's people who can help them, support them, like, and that costs more money and it is actually better care and support. And so you need funders who are actually sharp enough to say, we're not gonna just give it to whoever kind of bids the lowest for this, what we're asking for, but we're actually who's gonna do the best supports. And the other thing that I think is really relevant to Spring Up's work and Accountable Community Consortium's work,

Spring Up (42:04)

Thank

Shannon Perez-Darby (42:10)

around the nonprofit board structure is that exactly that thing that you were saying about who is on boards is that, you know, it's really designed to have rich people who have time to do unpaid work. And that even people who then are trying to do thoughtful things around like, okay, we're gonna bring on people like community members who are really interested. You end up with a structural problem where you actually have people who want a different role. Like they actually wanna be like working there. They wanna be doing like programming work.

Spring Up (42:36)

Yes.

Shannon Perez-Darby (42:36)

because

their expertise and then that's actually not the role of the board, right? And so then you have board members who feel like come and start to like micromanage staff because the structural design is actually in tension with like what the community needs are. And that leads to a lot of conflict. And so the amount of conflict work I have done because either boards are misaligned with the organization or you have aligned folks but are not clear about the role of.

what it is to be a board member, which is like actually mostly to like set up some infrastructure and stay out of the way, like set up your staff to do well and then leave them alone is actually the best way to be a board member. But people don't want to join boards to just like, that's not as fun, right? It's not as sexy to like make sure you have good bylaws and then leave everybody alone. Like that's

not as fun, but that actually would be a great part of a board is to actually create infrastructure and then let the staff actually do their work of being staff.

Spring Up (43:14)

Thank

Such a good point. I would put that on the loop. I feel like the number of mediations with boards that I've been doing recently, and it's exactly that. It's that we have to be honest about what the role of the board is. And then when people fill that role, do you really want to be in that role? Is there a different role that you're seeing this as a metaphor for? how do we... Because it's not cool to ask people to volunteer for a role that is...

really integral to the functioning of the organization when they would be qualified to be an employee or a partner or a contractor or a consultant or something and then be like, well, just do it for free because we need an aligned board. That's also a tricky thing to ask someone to do. And I think like right sizing the role of the board. And I do think that there's also a role for oversight of like, if the board is a representative.

a representation of the public around accountability. I also think that it's important to recognize the board's responsibility to help the staff be accountable to their mission as another really important kind of component. But that's not quite the same thing as just being like really embedded in the workflows of the organization. Yeah. And I want to circle back to what you were saying of like people who want to facilitate, people who want to mediate, people who want to, you know,

organize people and support communities are often not interested in doing all of this legal, technical and high risk specialized, very sometimes boring, boring and risky labor. And that was definitely something that we found in expanding our co-op is people were very interested in facilitating and training and coaching. And then it...

Shannon Perez-Darby (45:05)

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Spring Up (45:20)

took a lot to, we were like, and because like, so that we can make good decisions together and have shared power, you actually do need to be pretty fluent with these financials and legal documents. And we're not into it. And then now I think people are more into it. People realize how it's connected to power that like you make better decisions and you can share power effectively. There isn't someone who's like,

Shannon Perez-Darby (45:38)

Yeah, exactly.

Spring Up (45:44)

well, your opinion doesn't really make sense because you don't get how it connects to the money. Like if you get the money, then you have the ability to say, like, this is what I think we should do with this. Well, and if you get the law too, you understand how you can be creative within it. And I think that's something that we emphasize in our organizational support and Getting Free Together program is when we say like, ~ that's just an HR requirement, but that's not what we do in practice.

that just needs to be in the handbook, but in reality, we're cool. That actually doesn't serve anyone and that it is okay, especially if you have time and make time for it and include people in that conversation to have conversations about what do we want accountability infrastructure and harm response and community care and personal leave and sabbaticals and safety support with each other and benefits and risk management.

Shannon Perez-Darby (46:19)

Yeah.

Spring Up (46:42)

Like how do we want that to look in our organization? Those are such important conversations and not just to delegate that to like one person that everyone goes. I think it's a lot of like the role of the conflict worker in community is it's like one isolated person and everyone just like discloses stuff to. No, and like I see people shifting away from that norm in community a bit.

Shannon Perez-Darby (46:58)

Yep. Yep.

Spring Up (47:09)

but I think that people still feel very comfortable siloing that in a lot of our organizations. And yeah, we've seen, you know, small groups, large teams, like able to really align their policies and infrastructure with their values and also including community members and staff in that process. And I think that like, if these organizations that are some of the most

resourced spaces to do this work, model that. Then those are models that then smaller organizations can work from or that people can adapt in different ways. But I find that to be very valuable. we have another episode with Bre from Joy As Resistance, a local organization that closed, unfortunately, but about how much time and effort they put into creating their organizational infrastructure.

as a liberatory practice.

Yeah, so speaking of kind of looking at what the law says and how you can interpret it in ways that align with your values and the value of having those conversations, you in collaboration with several people, including our cooperator, Brianna, just put out this toolkit, which we call Mr. Brat.

You can describe it more.

But it's a toolkit about navigating risk and values around mandatory reporting. Yeah, what led to that toolkit? What are you excited about with it?

Shannon Perez-Darby (49:23)

Yeah. So one of the projects that I'm a part of that I love dearly is the mandatory reporting is not neutral project. And so we function really as an informal collective. So what I say is like, we don't have a bank account. You know, we're not a nonprofit. We don't have a bank account. We are a group of people who've been working together since 2019, really organizing around the harms of mandatory reporting and family policing. And so we came together, Anjali Bhatt, who works at API Chaya.

really brought us together initially with this idea of the first kind of iteration of this group were anti-violence workers who had all worked in some kind of direct service or in anti-violence organizations, know, amongst us. had decades and decades of experience. Most of us, many actually had decades by themselves. So folks who've been doing this work for a long time. And what we saw was that there was a tension between how we knew to show up for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, which was really about

honoring their self-determination, really these like grounding values of confidentiality of that people get to be in charge of their own stories, people get to be, should get to be in charge of what happens with their own information and their own experiences. And then the realities of mandatory reporting, which is that it requires mandated reporters to make reports even when it is not wanted, even when it is not needed, even when it will cause active harm to the person, additional harm to the person who's experienced harm.

And so we sat with those tensions and were like, we do better than nothing? We had gotten no support. We'd all been like for about 10 years had already been in conversation and had just seen no movement around like even shining a light on that harm and then doing anything structurally to make a different condition. So that's how we came together. And actually really beautifully, it's one of my favorite organizing.

configurations because we really keep our infrastructure light. So we have conversations probably like once a year. Now we had a lot in the beginning around like how are we gonna make decisions? What was it gonna look like? We are very flat, we are very informal. We have a website, we actually like amongst us, we don't have like governing documents. We have like practices that we return to and honestly a lot of relationship. Like I'm friends with many of the people there, not everybody, but like and have known folks for a long time. And so.

we just tried a bunch of stuff, Somewhere in the kind of one million experiments vision, we were like, I don't know, no one's doing anything. So I think if we started anywhere, that would be better. And so we started practicing making infographics. We started doing trainings with people around

mandatory reporting harm reduction. And so we had been doing that regularly in that configuration for the last seven years.

And one of the things that we saw over and over again when we're talking to people about the harms of mandatory reporting and we're talking to mandated reporters that one of the things that drives what is like massive over-reporting when it comes to mandatory reporting was this feeling that like I'm gonna get in trouble, that something bad is gonna happen if I don't do the law right. And what we saw was that pretty much every mandatory reporter like down to the one received no training.

So they were just told, you're a mandated reporter. You please sign this thing in your file, follow the law, good day. And so no nuance, no, what are the limits of mandatory reporting, nothing about like even what the law actually says and any kind of nuance or detail. And then people had this feeling of like, I will get in trouble and there's going to be particularly this drive of a criminal legal consequence. And so people were really driven by these like liability based decision-making. So not decision-making that was like,

here is a person who's experienced harm. What do they want? What do they need? What is my role? How do I care for them? That that is how we should be turning towards and centering people experiencing harm. But instead it was, will I get in trouble? Will I get fired? Are we going to get sued? Am I going to get criminalized? That is driving much of the decision making about mandatory reporting. And so this tool is really a goal to actually peel back that feeling that something bad will happen and say, well, let's look at it.

What are the potential bad things? And based on what we know now, how likely are they to actually happen? And I would summarize it by saying that most people are afraid of a criminal legal consequence. And from the data we have, that's actually extremely, extremely rare. So in Washington state, where I am based, we did get the data for all the people who had been charged with failure to report, which is what the statute is in Washington state. And in the course of 22 years,

Only 16 people have been charged with failure to report in Washington state, and only four people have ultimately been convicted in the course of 22 years. And so that is really good information, right? That that's extremely rare that people are being criminalized for failure to report. But we know the fear of it is massively overdriving the sense of reporting. And where we know people are experiencing actually real challenges that do need attention is often in their workplaces.

So people are experiencing high level of consequence from either being from like formal reprimands to even just being like seen as a problem employee who just keeps asking a bunch of questions and questioning all our policies and being a pain in the ass and people feeling the consequences that come when people start to challenge long held beliefs inside organizations. And we're actually anecdotally and we're trying to build more evidence base for this seeing a lot of people experience like the impact there.

And the great news about that is we have tools to organize workers, right? So if you're a worker who is working hard to have your values and your practices aligned, and you have a clearly outline saying, like, here's how we know to show up for people in community, which is honor their confidentiality, not share information they don't want to be shared, honor their self-determination, like, then we should do that. And we should look closely at anything that asks us to not be in alignment with that value, and then actually to organize and tools for

fellow workers to straight up unionize, as we talked about earlier, nonprofits are under unionized as a field. And then all the other ways you can organize outside of a formal union to protect yourself, to work with your coworkers, to make plans and infrastructure. And so this mandatory reporting, what's its full name? Its full name is mandatory reporting balancing risk assessment tool. So mandatory reporting, BRAT, to really help people

be right-sized. And as we say in the tool, sometimes we do the right thing, even when it comes at a consequence to us. And so the tool is not designed to say like, to just be like a risk mitigation tool. It's actually to like help you understand and turn and face. there are consequences I am like some people and I'm willing to take on because it is my moral commitment and value and centered. And we can better turn and face those consequences when we're actually right-sized about them. When we're like, okay.

The meaningful risk I'm facing right now is I might get fired. Great, I can make plans for that. I can think about that. I can make infrastructure. I can get care from other people. my hope is that that right size assessment actually helps people be brave, be more in alignment with their values. And that is the vision for this tool that I'm really excited to finally be in the world.

Spring Up (56:45)

~ I really enjoyed reading it. And I think some things that I really appreciate about what you're sharing is it also brings back the power of design within our organizations and that we have the ability in our organizations to decide what we want our norms to be. ~ And I think that that's something that's really powerful. And I appreciate that this is engaging with this question of what is the risk? And I think the other layer is

sometimes people just don't know what to do. They're like, well, this is the action that I've been trained to take when I see harm happening. And yet, like you were saying, so often getting the state involved, especially through the lens of mandatory reporting, can compound and exacerbate harm. And that's part of what I really appreciate about your book, *How to End Family Policing*, is it's really showing that the goal is not to say, well, just don't mandatory report. It's saying, well, what can we do?

this desire to move away from mandatory reporting is really coming from a place of actually centering the needs of those who are impacted by harm and wanting to do the steps that will actually support, that will actually reduce harm, that will actually address the underlying root

causes of why people are experiencing these issues in the first place, which is very rarely what the state is going to do when there's a more formal involvement. So just like a big, you know.

Shannon Perez-Darby (58:04)
exactly.

Spring Up (58:08)

series of plugs for that book will include it in the notes as well, recently released, very exciting. I know it's been kind of a process of development. Yeah, there it is, incredible. But also just wanted to open it up if there's anything else you want to share about the process of writing that book or kind of what else can people do outside of turning to mandatory reporting?

Shannon Perez-Darby (58:31)

Yeah, so thank you so much for that and exactly what you shared, which is, you know, what I will say to people when I bring up the concerns about mandatory reporting and family policing, I will have people who are otherwise aligned with me and are either like abolitionists or even like abolitionist curious, who will then be like, but this is what we do to keep children safe. And they will like really feel a sense of panic that I'm taking away a tool of safety for children. And one of the things that we have to really like slow down is be like,

Great. Absolutely. I hear you. I'm doing this work deeply because I care about the safety of children. And this, it's a ruse. It's a red herring that says that we believe that by making a call to Child Protective Services, you're bringing a resource to somebody. And we're not, and we're gonna have to change our thinking about that because what a call to Child Protective Services is, is it's an investigation by the state. That is its primary task. It is not a resource.

And we know that the vast majority of reports that are made are unsubstantiated. So nationally, between 80 to 90 % of reports that are made, the system says, actually, we can't even do anything about this. And so we know that there's plenty of unsubstantiated reports, like by the state's measurements, where there were people who needed resource, who needed care, who needed community connection. And so we can activate those things regardless of what the state says. And so.

But we have been really told, and I think it's a human feeling, right? We see this in transformative justice a lot. It's like the call somebody to help. Being like, OK, well, we're going to call the experts, and they're going to come in and solve it. And just like in transformative justice work and our family policing abolition work, the solution is actually like, we are all collectively the ones who solve it. It's not going to be outsourced by these people that we call over there, that community safety, the safety of family and children and survivors is all of our responsibility. And that that is actually the solution. And so I do this work.

deeply because I care about the safety of young people. And so that's what I, so the how to end family policing from Outrage to Action, it just has been like so joyful to write this project, write this

book. And so my co-editors, Erica Meiners Erin Miles Cloud and Charity Hope Tolliver, this, we all have been saying this a lot, which is it's like the most balanced project I've ever done. So like writing a book, especially an anthology is just a massive group project.

right? And so, especially with like, you know, there's over 20 contributors. And so there's like a lot of administrative stuff of just trying to get like, the Google Docs into a Word document to send to the editor or like send to the publisher, right? Like, there's actually a lot of that, right? Like, no, really does need to be locked in at that time, because we really have to send that. And the my co editors on in this book, like we truly everybody brought like significant balanced work. And it was so refreshing to

collaborate with people where everyone was carrying their weight, everyone was playing a role, and we played really complimentary roles, right? And so, Erica is such a brilliant writer, such an experienced writer, and so she brought so much of like, hey, here's how we actually do this. like, my god, thank god. Thank god I didn't have to write my first book with out somebody who was very, a deep expert on that. And she's a skillful editor, and she's a skillful writer. And I think Erin brought, she titled the book.

She has a hand in almost probably more than half of the pieces. She literally wrote and thought. She has deep relationships with people who have been deeply impacted by family policing that trust her so much because she's on the ground doing the work, showing up with people. So all she had to do was ask. And everybody was like, yes, yes, yes. Anything for Erin. And so the decades of work that she did and the relationships she had, we could see here. then Charity was so much like the heart of the book, which is just a deep brilliance.

in a really like felt emotional way to really ground us in the like that we are talking about many people's lives like who are deeply impacted by this work. And so it truly has been like one of the joys of my life to get to collaborate with so many brilliant people and then, you know, put this thing out in the world that I'm so proud of and I just love so much.

Spring Up (1:02:41)

Yeah, that's really exciting. Definitely encourage people to read that book if, know, what Shannon was sharing brought up some questions of you, like what does that look like? What would community-based response to, you know, family violence look like? And yeah, that's a great resource. another resource we've shared is Shira Hassan's *Saving Our Own Lives* is another book we really recommend.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:03:08)

And Shira

has a piece in the book about the transformative justice help desk.

Spring Up (1:03:12)

Amazing. Love it. Yeah. A framework that we use to talk about that idea in our Harm Systems design content is that the norm, like what it kind of looks like to like internalize a cop in your head or say like, I'm not the person who can do anything about this. I don't have any power. That's not my responsibility. And the fear that goes along with it often looks like avoidance, avoidance, avoidance escalation. Right. And so we talk a lot about that of like

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:03:37)

Yep. Exactly.

Spring Up (1:03:41)

A lot of the times we can all see that there's something going on with our neighbor, with our cousin, with our colleague. and you're like, that's not my business. I don't know about that. You know, see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Right? Like I'm, I'm, that's not my, yeah, I'm an individual and that's not my responsibility. and then at one point it like goes too far. And then you immediately jumped to like, I'm going to call the police. I'm going to like go no contact.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:04:06)

Exactly.

Spring Up (1:04:10)

I'm going to report them. And that's something that we like to do with people and in coaching and stuff is brainstorm what's in between that. Because avoiding it is also carceral. Because it's saying that's someone else's problem. Someone else will step in, and you know that that's likely to be the state or someone that maybe doesn't have that person's.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:04:21)

Yeah, exactly.

Spring Up (1:04:39)

holistic wellness in mind. Yeah, so appreciate that and really excited about this toolkit. I know a lot of our community really grapples with that question of like, how do I navigate mandatory reporting in my job as an educator or therapist or you know, some other form of caring for community?

And speaking of brat, I think that brings us to the final segment of the podcast.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:05:37)

Yay!

Spring Up (1:05:38)

is about what are you listening to? What are you watching? I know we're gonna go watch the moment Charlie XCX's film this weekend. haven't seen it yet, so I don't have strong feelings about it yet. Although we did go to the concert and I have thoughts about Brat in general. But I'm

curious, what have you been engaging in when it comes to pop culture and media recently that you're curious to talk to us about on this podcast?

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:05:54)

You

~ I mean, the thing I have been most obsessed with maybe the last two months is Pluribus. I love Pluribus. We did an episode of Popaganda on Pluribus. It'll be coming out in late February. And what I said in that episode, and I'll repeat here, is that the people online who don't like Pluribus, so I like watched it. I was like in love with it. And then I went on TikTok and a bunch of people were like, that lesbian's really angry. And I was like,

I was like, my God, am I gonna have to fight people? thought everyone was just like so clear that this show is so brilliant. And then like a bunch of people, mostly men on the internet were like, why is she so angry? And I'm like, cause her wife just died. What the fuck are you guys talking about? And so I'm like all ready to fight people about Pluribus. I'm like, listen, if you don't like Pluribus, I'm gonna have to fight you, which I don't totally mean you can like or not like what you want. But if you have feelings about the Carol's anger and Pluribus, then I might actually have to fight you.

~ And so Pluribus is the thing I'm currently like kind of obsessed with.

Spring Up (1:07:06)

~ love it. I am very interested in talking about Pluribus. I also think that it's such an interesting moment where like two of the biggest shows are queer in such different ways with Heated Rivalry as well. The like Heated Rivalry Pluribus gender binary is a very fascinating dynamic in queer culture in this moment. And I love both of them. So I'm here for either. But I think that with Pluribus, there's so many

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:07:09)

Yeah.

Yeah. ~

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Spring Up (1:07:34)

interesting questions around it. Like, I'm curious, why is Carol one of the people who is immune to this? Like, in the, I remember when the the show first came on, the description was basically, I don't remember exactly what it said, but it was something about how, like, the most unhappy person, like, is unwilling to become happy, like, through the merging of people. And, like, that's a really interesting

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:07:36)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Spring Up (1:08:02)

statement that i don't know is how i interpreted the show of like is the reason why she's not able to join the you know one mind because of her unhappiness or like what's underneath the people who are not making that that bond or that that connection and like are those people who are in the one mind happy like how are we defining happiness i think that's like a lot of what i'm curious about in this situation

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:08:05)

That's absolutely.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I mean, from a transformative justice perspective, I think there's such interesting questions in Pluribus. So there's this tension between self-determination and collectivism. And while I don't think we have to pit those against each other, that is sort of the tensions we experience there, where Carol is just like, I think her orientation is a little bit as like, will not be controlled. I will not be manipulated. And that is actually such an important instinct, right?

And we see, and I do think it's interesting that of the non-joined people, right? So the like immune people, only see, she's the only white person that we see who is not joined. And so we see like a light touch and you get to know some folks more than others who are not joined, who are folks of color from across the globe. ~ And many of them are like, yeah, no, I wanna be with my people. Like I don't have any concern about like being collectively joined with my fellows. And I think that is such an important like tension, right?

not like full spoilers, but light spoilers. And as it evolves, we see like, is that true? Is that not true? Is the story that the kind of collective hive mind has true? Because we have that really powerful scene where the Ketchewin woman ~ decides to join, right? And we see that like in the moment of her joining, her culture ends. So they're like, they are chanting, they are speaking to her. And the second she becomes part of the hive,

Spring Up (1:09:45)

Good?

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:09:53)

like all the things that are kind of the cultural markers of her tribe, just like they pack up, they leave the culture, the blankets, the language. And that was a very sobering where I'm like, uh-oh, I mean, I definitely want people to have their culture. So I don't love the like flattening of suddenly like that there is no culture, there's no art, there's no everyone has to be sort of like the same in the collectiveness. And so those I think are interesting dynamics and interesting like questions it brings up.

Spring Up (1:10:17)

Thank you.

Absolutely. think this is such a like people say this about the future of gender too where they're like do I not get to have my gender anymore if we're all genderless beings? I'm like no we have like an infinite number of genders if we're not forced to be men or women and like I think that that's an interesting dynamic around the collectivism as well is this idea that like because of their collectivism they're unwilling to harm any thing

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:10:29)

You

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:10:50)

which means they also won't feed themselves, but they're willing to, I mean, again, yes, they're willing to eat the dead. It's a very interesting interpretation of collective ethics that I'm very intrigued where that comes from, what's underneath this idea of we're willing to die out as a people because of our unwillingness to even be vegan, even eat plants.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:10:53)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:11:20)

Where is this collectivism as do no harm? In what way are we supposed to interpret what is good and bad about the collective mindset that is being presented here? Because this is a unique moment where this ethos of collectivism, which we know is a metaphor for a lot of things, it feels connected to socialism, it feels connected to a lot of different movements, particularly.

that are invested in this idea that my freedom is tied to yours, my well-being is tied to yours, right?

And of course, we're positioned with Carol as the primary agent that we're supposed to empathize with, who's shocked and disturbed by this idea of putting the collective over the self. And then there's so many things that are happening in the hive mind that would be really disturbing, of like, we don't talk to each other anymore.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:12:01)

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:12:14)

and we don't have art anymore. don't like eat food anymore. You know, like, you know, like there's a lot.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:12:19)

Yeah. You don't have

pets. don't, like, they just abandon all the dogs. I'm like, I was like, that's my most, my hardest moral center. I'm like, you abandon the dogs? How could that possibly be? How could I align with anything that abandons all the

Spring Up (1:12:32)

And yet they're gleeful, but obviously we don't like feel that they are. We don't see them laughing. We don't understand. And then of course, like they're experiencing each other's deaths, but like not really impacted by it and barely remember their own personal histories. Like I think that there's this like myth that is set up socially that in order to have a collective mindset, you have to lose yourself and that there's no way to maintain a sense of self and self determination and

agency and like meeting your own needs while also prioritizing the needs of the collective. That feels like what's underneath this kind of myth of Pluribus. And then it's pitted against this idea that, you know, and if you've gotten to the end of the show, that like, well, if we have to destroy them all, if we have to end humanity, because they're so passionate about this, like, one hive mind solution that they want to continue to extend it,

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:13:07)

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:13:30)

past, you know, our planet as well. The only way we can protect self-determination across the universe is by potentially killing everyone on Earth. It's just like these really extremes, like these extremes of like the collective, these extremes of how we protect the universe. Or like, is it more important to be an individual than to be together if you're the last woman on Earth? Right?

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:13:56)

Yeah,

yep. mean, think there's all yes to all of that, which is why I love this show so much. And I think the other very like transformative justice thing in the show that I haven't really seen anywhere else portrayed so well in pop culture is so there's a situation where Carol like functionally keeps harming people in the hive like the individual like harming the hive. And so she, you know, in her drive to learn more, to try to see if like it's possible to kind of extract people, individuals from the hive.

she goes on this process and she ends up hurting Zosia, her primary representative of the hive. And what happens, the way that they deal with the harm of her hurting Zosia is they leave. And both were to great comedy and I think to great reflection, right? So they leave a message for her that's like, Carol, we're not mad at you, we still love you, we haven't changed how we feel about you, we just need some space.

And there's actually, think, like really brilliant thing about that where they're like, we're still going to meet your needs. We're still going to care for you. ~ But we actually can't like keep being here. Like, we're not going to hurt you, but we can't keep being here to let you hurt us. And I actually think like I loved that. I just loved the exploration of that. And we actually saw that it like it did hurt her, right? In the sense that like the isolation was deeply hurtful for her that as humans, we are social beings, we need each other, but that they were like, you know, meeting her bodily needs. They were and like willing to repair, right? Like willing to come back.

Spring Up (1:15:09)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:15:19)

to her.

And I was like, that feels very TJ to me, right? Just be like, I'm not going to just like sit around while you're hurting me, but I'm also not going to like come for you. And I loved the exploration and the modeling of different ways that was possible there.

Spring Up (1:15:31)

I totally agree. And it forced her to face herself, right? It forced her to like actually grapple with the implications of what she had done and deal with the consequences of her behavior. And then she could just ask for them to come back to like, she just needed to ask and say, like, I'm ready to shift this dynamic. And they were willing to return. And I think there's this interesting dynamic that is comedic.

in that every time she asks for something, she has to sit through this extremely long voicemail message.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:16:03)

I know the voice. They played it in

full every single time. And I'm just like, it's so funny. Cracks me up.

Spring Up (1:16:09)

It's hilarious

and it's not punishing. Like it's not like some outsized like messed up thing that she has to deal with and it's incredibly irritating. It's so irritating and it makes me think about in our friend group we're designing a role playing game that we've been playing for almost a year now like a tabletop RPG that's called Righteous Consequences and that is all about like you solve a mystery the systems of justice that exist aren't really able to address the situation.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:16:14)

No. Yeah.

Spring Up (1:16:38)

And so ultimately you need to design pranks that will bring consequence to the person who's responsible for harm. So we've spent a year being merry pranksters, designing ridiculous pranks to try to get people to like, or fictional characters, to like realize the consequences of their actions and shift their behavior through the design of pranks. And that feels kind of like what's happening in that situation with the long voice note is it's.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:16:54)

Yeah, yeah,

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:17:06)

It's an annoying kind of ridiculous, almost prank-like thing, but that does cause her to really think about how dependent on them she is, what it means that she harmed them. She has to keep facing the reality that they're like, still aren't over it. Like, I still feel unsafe around you. I still care about you, but this doesn't feel good. She has to keep hearing that over and over again and grappling with what she did until she's finally able to say like, I'm sorry and I want to move forward together.

which I think is really powerful. Yeah, I think there's also, if we think about Manousos, the character that is coming from, is it Colombia I think?

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:17:46)

He's Colombian,

but he is coming from Paraguay.

Spring Up (1:17:49)

Okay, yes. The was such an amazing actor. And the way that he really treats the hive or the pluribus as a like alien invasion that is like his total enemy, right? And I think Carol because of her loneliness, whatever else. Because of how Zosia looks like her ideal. She, she does humanize them.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:18:04)

Yeah.

Hahaha!

Spring Up (1:18:19)

And she, you know, is like, maybe makes more attempts to try to, I think that when you think about Carol and Manusos sort of recognizing that there's this sort of hive mind of group think of propaganda is how I see it, is like people who are behaving in ways that you don't recognize.

as honoring humanity and that are doing things that you see as really violent, whether that's like obliterating entire cultures or getting rid of all their dogs or eating the dead or all these things. I think that there's something in that to me also about how we relate to people that are coming from dramatically different ideologies in this moment in which people that we...

share a city with, maybe share a family tree with, like look at things that some of us are just like, that is something that it's just hard to keep existing in this world when I see that people would treat other people like that. And then you're met with this sort of like, that's normal, that's fine. That's the level of violence we need to like maintain society. And so I think the way, the like kind of righteous rage and like direct...

Like the clarity that Menousos has in opposing that is different than any other character. And so I think there's also this powerful archetype in that. And then somewhat complicating it, the fact that he also would have died without their help and that his individualism is also a front and that he does also need other people, even if they represent this like evil hive mind that he totally opposes.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:20:05)

Right, exactly.

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:20:16)

Yeah, I think that that character also has a lot. And like Carol has this sort of deep seated cynicism

and distrust of humanity that seems.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:20:24)

Yeah. And loneliness. you know, we

only think information we get about Menusos is that, like, it's a relationship with his mother, right? So we, like, learn that the, like, the hive mind version of his mom, right, is bringing food. And he has this conversation with Carol later that is like, you know, your mom, and he's just like, yeah, well, my mom was a bitch. Like, fuck her. Like, this nice lady is not my mom. And that actually helps bring clarity because she's nothing like my mom.

Spring Up (1:20:33)

Bye.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:20:50)

Right? so, and that's the only relationship we hear anything about, right? We don't hear anything about any romantic or friends or any other family. And so like Carol, he's the only other sort of non-joined who is alone and who doesn't have folks. And I do think like the meaningful challenge of having like the embodiment of your loved ones there, even like performing that they're your loved ones, even if they are not the same. You know, we see Carol with, Lakshmi, where like Lakshmi has, as a child.

Spring Up (1:21:11)

Mm.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:21:18)

who is like joined and you see Carol kind of poking at that, just being like, that's not your kid, that's not your kid. And I do think that would be a very hard hook, right? Like I would feel very hooked if the body of my loved one was there like performing our relationship. It would be very hard to separate and to pull that apart, but Carol and Menusos both don't really have that. Like Carol's wife dies and we don't really see that Menusos has anyone else. And so their isolation in some ways like creates the conditions of their resistance and that would be much harder.

Spring Up (1:21:44)

Mm-hmm.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:21:47)

Again, if it was just like you were staring at a person you love's body, who was talking to you, who's there, who said they loved you, who said they care about you, that would be hard to navigate.

Spring Up (1:21:56)

Yeah, I think there's a reason though why this is like landing so hard for so many people in this time is that it does really push these like, kind of like severance, right? It like pushes these extreme sci-fi

examples of like what we are grappling with, you know, as people in this moment. And one of the audio books we listened to recently was A Wrinkle in Time. And I think there's some similarities to the Hivemind of Pluribus and The It, which is kind of this like negating force that

sort of creates peace and compliance, but through total conformity and kind of the negation of individuality. So there's definitely a connection there. And one of the themes that the characters of that book keep having to, they face this thing where their principal who they hate is taken over by this like version of this it that seems nicer. And they have to choose that they would rather that they would prefer the more authentic actual

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:22:47)

You

Spring Up (1:22:54)

person rather than the fake kind of possessed nice version, which is just a really interesting example of transformative justice and choosing to honor the reality and not wanting like, you don't want the fake apology, right? Like a lot of the way that we approach compliance or ~ kind of requests of people to just get in line.

and not actually wanting to grapple with the tension of having different opinions and different backgrounds and different needs is to sort of like, see that in a lot of, you know, mandated restorative justice processes, right? Is that the system, whether it's the school system or the courts are satisfied with a performative apology, but that there's something about that that doesn't feel satisfying in the human relationship. And I think that's navigated really well in the Wrinkle in Time series. Well, and you're highlighting something important, which is that we have other archetypes

hive minds, right? Like there's in narrative there are other hive mind references. I'm thinking about the Borg in Star Trek is like a big example of this. And what feels really interesting about Pluribus, which there's not really the same degree of consent in the conversion of most people, but like the people who are immune, the idea that you need their consent to convert them is a really interesting dynamic that I don't often see in these hive mind narratives. It's like

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:23:52)

Bye.

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:24:20)

There's this idea that the hive mind is like, it's obviously better to be unified and I'll do whatever I can to unify you because you don't actually know what you need and like, we're going to be better together and that's what's going to happen. And I think there's this interesting negotiation in Pluribus too, you know, we're just all up in the spoilers now, but I think this idea that they tell her they can't lie to her, right? And that they tell her like the only way that we can, you know, do this is

through this really intense invasive process, right?

which that other person does in Peru. But then she uncovers that because they have access to her frozen eggs, that they would be able to do it in another way as well. There's this really interesting negotiation of consent when the hive believes that they know better. Like the hive believes that it is ultimately better that they know better and that they want you to be with them because they think that you'll be happier then and yet

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:25:05)

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:25:17)

they still need your consent to be able to do it. It's just a really interesting negotiation of consent that I don't often see happening in narratives about hive minds.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:25:27)

Yeah, you know, Zosha uses the phrase biological imperative, which is what I think about a lot is when they're kind of talk to say like, we have a biological imperative to join everybody and to spread and that she's basically like, that is our primary commitment. And so and then there's like tiers of that, which is that we won't do intentional harm, we won't do these other things. But but the primary commitments to the biological imperative of joining and spreading and that we see that tension right there in Pluribus too, which is like, they're not going to like

take Carol's body against her will and hold her down and extract her, you know, like spinal fluid or whatever they need, you know, to do this process. ~ But they will, if there's a way where they're not gonna directly harm her, they're happy, like their biological imperative is to join. that, you know, and that all of the, you know, billions of people who joined didn't get, you know, consent, right? They weren't each individually asked if they wanted to join the hive. And I do think those tensions are interesting around like...

not making it so much of a moral question about like whether they're good or bad. It's like they have a biological imperative to join and it's not really a question of like whether that's right or wrong. That's just what they're driven to.

Spring Up (1:26:32)

Right. But I think that also begs this question that I keep asking myself when I'm watching it, which is like, why are these people immune? Like, what is it about them that is causing them to be immune? Because like, did the rest of the world implicitly consent in some way? Like, did they, was there an option to opt in or out and everyone else opted in and it was just below the surface and we didn't see it? Or is it more of like a genetic thing that has been.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:26:39)

Yeah.

Yeah.

I'm going with genetic diversity of just like,

you know, for any cold, anything, there's a small number of people who, you know, for whatever, you know, a miscopying of genetic code, you know, but I like the question of it. I'm curious as the future seasons go on, what we'll learn. Yeah.

Spring Up (1:27:12)

Yeah, what will we learn? Because to me,

it comes back to that initial description before it came out that was like, this unhappy woman is unwilling to be happy, which makes it seem like it's a choice. It's some sort of like thing related to the agency of whether you want to be in a hive mind or not, that shapes whether you end up opting in or not. Yeah, I think to me, it also like if we're thinking about inviting people into liberatory realities.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:27:18)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:27:39)

you know, both the immune people and the hive, right, think that their way is superior. And so you're sort of at a standstill then, right. And you need to then engage with each other, right, and say, well, this is what I value. you know, and I appreciated, adrienne maree brown talks about how, you know, you can only make invitations to people, right. And if you are

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:27:45)

Yeah. Yep.

Spring Up (1:28:07)

coercing compliance or manipulating people that's not consensual and that's not authentic. And I think a lot about how, you know, we've sort of seen this cultural swing back to the right that Gen Z and various people are, you know, reclaiming slurs that people haven't said for 20 years. And there's obviously something that people are like,

know, feeling validated in that in like sort of a more authentic way of expressing themselves. And I think about how, you know, so much of the corporate commitments to DEI, you know, obviously we knew they were performative at the time that they were happening, but just kind of are like, they're like, thank goodness. We don't have to like pretend to care about that anymore. And so I think about that as like the danger of pushing compliance, right?

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:28:47)

Yep. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

Spring Up (1:29:00)

is that people performatively go along with it, but you haven't actually had any changing of your values and heart and mind. And I think that as organizers, we need to be wary of pressuring people to say the right words and regurgitate the right beliefs, even if they haven't had the realizations to like get to those takeaways themselves. ~

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:29:06)

Exactly.

Spring Up (1:29:26)

And that's something that I also take from Pluribus and from my scrolling, right? Is, you know, I think that we felt like there were so many cultural wins between 2020 and 2025 in the popularization of abolition and transformative justice and people talking about bias and talking about, you know, culture and equity. And I know that so many people have had meaningful deep

transformations around those topics. And yet clearly there was something that was very performative and kind of just going along with ~ groupthink in that, that I think we need to be wary of replicating because I think we're about to have a resurgence of interest in abolition and what does it mean to not have ICE in our communities and what need do people think that ICE's meeting that we recognize either can be met by our communities or is not actually a need.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:30:11)

Yeah. Yep.

Spring Up (1:30:24)

And that's my invitation to us in this next cycle because we know we go through these five year swings and I hope we can, yeah, be more consensual this time around.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:30:36)

I love that so much. I think exactly right. It's like there are seasons for our work. And what I've learned from so many folks, I know you all at Spring Up talk about this all the time. I've really heard Mariame Kaba say this all the time of what it is to be prepared and to really think about the long arc of our work and that we're gonna have seasons of backlash and to be strategic about what we are doing in each season. And so there will be future seasons where millions of people are.

have a renewed interest in abolition. And so in the times like now where everyone's like, when that we have been in most recently, when that is not, there's a backlash against that, right? That like,

you know, all sorts of things that we saw, ~ that then there's a time for preparation, right? For relationship building, to get ready and be ready so that when there are other moments of mass attention, we are ready. We're not starting them. We're like, we have been waiting. are.

relationships are strong, our infrastructure is strong, our strategy is strong, like welcome in, we are ready for you. And that is like my call, like what I hope so much is like be ready and use like use the falls, use the winters, use the down the like quieter, external times in our organizing to get ready for the spring, the summer, the time when things are evolving and springing up.

Spring Up (1:31:52)

Yeah, yes, springing up, there you go. It's about being responsive to the moment, but it's also about doing the work of the underground building that mycelial work consistently, that you're ready to adapt with whatever's happening. You're not just pulled in every direction based on the whims of the funding ecosystem or the news cycle or the pop culture and the most popular TV show. Well, thank you so much. I was ready to talk about that.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:32:03)

Yeah, exactly.

You

Spring Up (1:32:20)

Well, we'll link, if you want to hear more of Shannon's thoughts on Pluribus, which I know I do, we'll link to that episode of Popaganda in the show notes. But thank you so much for joining us today, Shannon.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:32:30)

Thank you both. This was truly such a joy. adore you both. I love your all's work. I love them whenever we get to connect and truly is like

nothing I can think about is more fun of being able to talk about mandatory reporting, nonprofit infrastructure and Pluribus in one conversation.

I feel very seen. I feel like got my full humanity got to be present. And so I appreciate you both.

Spring Up (1:32:51)

literally ideal and dancing. I'm gonna use that framing of rolling around in the dark. It's something that I need to be doing more than I am, honestly.

Shannon Perez-Darby (1:32:59)

love that for both of us.