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AWCS-101

4/30/2021

### What is your Dream Job Climate Community Role?

At some point in your life, you have probably been asked what your dream job is. Or maybe you've been asked what you plan to do with your life, what you want to do for a living, what you want to do with your degree, who you want to work for, or something along these lines. As a college student, I often feel bombarded by these questions from friends, peers, family members, and teachers. My formulated answer usually has something to do with redesigning cities to be more sustainable, but in all honesty, this is not my 'dream job.' I do not dream of jobs. I dream of having a place in a community. I dream of using my talents and passions to be a part of a community and to provide for others in that community so that they can provide for me in return.

The United States, along with many other Western countries, has a rather individualistically structured society. As a capitalist country, the US thrives off of and perpetrates individualism because it is a catalyst for competition. Capitalism encourages the accumulation of wealth and goods and has deemed this the ultimate indicator of success. The desire for the accumulation of wealth ends up creating extremely individualistic societies because the focus is on monetary capital at any expense, including compassion for others. This mindset ends up leading to the destruction of the environment and human relationships. We have been trained to only think and act for ourselves. I fear that any job which pays a livable salary or wage will resemble and promote the capitalist agenda. I also fear that any job which does not promote an individualistic capitalist society will not pay a livable wage or will not pay at all. In that case, I worry about how I will support myself while also standing firm in my values? I argue that the solution to this

is create a strong foundational community in which people can safely rely on others in times of need while also making small steps to dismantle capitalism.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a great deal of devastation and loss in our world. Many have lost their jobs, been evicted from their homes, gone hungry, struggled financially, been forced into isolation, or even lost loved ones. In March and April of 2020, when the United States was first beginning quarantine, I noticed a wave of community care enter our nation. People opened their eyes and saw the suffering and struggles that others were going through and chose to act with compassion. Free food boxes were being given out, GoFundMe pages were circulated, mutual aid organizations popped up, resources were being shared, and people were providing each other with hope. There was this empathy for our fellow human beings that I think we leave out of our normal day-to-day lives. During this stressful and uncertain time, I found comfort in seeing this compassion and solidarity suddenly emerge from a nation that tends to value individual power and economic growth. It was at this time that I realized we truly have the ability to change our society. This affection and care for the well-being of others that we saw during the early stages of Covid-19 quarantine is what we need **every single day**, especially in the climate movement.

In the summer and fall of 2020 I lived in my hometown, St. Louis and had the chance to see strong communities develop first hand. On June 26, 2020, St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson walked out of city hall to talk to protestors who stood in front of the building demanding the closure of the Workhouse, an old jail in North St. Louis. The protestors, who had been fighting for the jail's closure for years, gave the mayor a list of their demands which contained their names and addresses. The mayor later that day on facebook live proceeded to read off the names and addresses on the papers. This doxing happened the day before a planned KKK rally in the

city. Around this same time, Lyda Krewson put a mask mandate in effect and charged homeless and unhoused people a fee when found not wearing a mask. Additionally, Krewson refused to stop evictions as Covid-19 cases surged in St. Louis. These evictions included the tent encampments where many unhoused people lived and slept.

In response to Lyda Krewson's actions, a group called Occupy City Hall was formed that called for the mayor's resignation. The group sat in front of the St. Louis City Hall for numerous days in an attempt to force the mayor to resign. In front of city hall, people set up



couches and tables, tents, a basketball hoop, food tables, banners, art stands, and medic tables.

Those who could not join the protest/sit in physically, donated money for food and drink, went to the store, offered to drive people, or worked the jail support hotline. We also invited the unhoused folks living in the downtown city park to come and join and they ate and slept with the group. We talked with them and were able to figure out what many of them needed and worked to provide what we could for these people. Throughout those couple of days that the group occupied the front of city hall, we all shared our stories, knowledge, and talents. People sang, danced, and painted. Others shared their in-depth knowledge of former social movements and different radical activist's theories. We were able to go from a group of strangers to a close community.

At night, when the police came to kick the group off of the property, the community was ready to fight back. They had prepared for this. We had talked throughout the day about what might happen at night and what our plan of action was. When the time came, we all had each

other's backs and would not have been able to hold our ground like we did without the sense of unity we had built and strengthened all day. We were resilient. After the occupation at city hall, numerous protests, wheat pasting events, and citizen complaints, mayor Lyda Krewson announced that she would not be running for re-election in the Spring of 2021. Today, St. Louis has elected its first ever black female mayor, Tishaura Jones. We call that a victory for the group.



As I watched the live stream of Tishaura Jones' inauguration chills ran through my body and I began reflecting on the journey to that moment. The dedication and effort that we put in to the endeavor was truly paying off and I know that this victory was the result of a strong community. Everyone's dedication in the fight would not have been possible without the support and strength of others in the group. Knowing that someone else would be there to fill my spot at the occupation allowed me to rest and rejuvenate myself so that I could come back ready to fight again and I know many others felt the same. The group's success was also a result of its acceptance and inclusion of all people. There was a two-way street of communication. Occupy City Hall told the people what it needed, and in return asked what the people needed, specifically those pushed to the outskirts of our society. No person was left behind in the creation of this community.

There was not a single one of us among the group who could have done what we did alone. There was power in the sheer number of us and there was power in the sense of community we had built. This was key for the movement and I believe it is key for the climate movement as well.

Collectivism creates resilient, strong communities which are vital for present and future climate disasters. Collectivism is a characteristic of a society in which its members are integrated into a cohesive group where people support and protect each other in exchange for unwavering loyalty. Members of the collective society are interdependent on one another and often prioritize group relationships and well-being. This collectivity in a society can help to mitigate the impact of climate disasters. In close communities, people are able to share their knowledge and skills that may be useful for disaster precautionary planning. Mail carriers and trash collectors may know the town layout best. Clergymen and librarians have access to large public spaces. Restaurant workers and owners have knowledge about cooking. The elders of a town may have knowledge about previous disasters in the area and so on. Everyone has something they can bring to the table and by combining all of these resources, skills, and information, communities will be able to better plan and adapt to the changing climate.

After hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, a group of people chose to respond to the climate disaster with community building and it made a world to difference. One woman, Christine Nieves moved back to Puerto Rico just months before Hurricane Maria hit in 2017. After the hurricane she decided to open a community kitchen to help feed everyone without food after the hurricane. When she started, she had no food, water, or even a kitchen. With the help of some other community members they were able to start the community kitchen. She invited other community members to bring their talents and resources to help make the kitchen possible and they came. The group continued to grow and people brought what they could provide, but they also brought their needs. Many of the people said they needed wifi and medical help. In response, the group sought out individuals with medical backgrounds to help set up a medic table. They were also able to reach out to another organization and asked if they could bring wifi

to the town. The operation relied on the mutual exchange of skills, services, and resources. People provided what they could knowing in return the community would help them when they were in need.

Christine's story is one that shows the importance of community building in the presence of climate change disasters. It also shows that we as individuals have what it takes to resolve major problems when we connect with others.

A strong sense of collectivity is not only beneficial for mitigating the impact of climate change, but it is also a great tool for ensuring progress in the climate movement. Many people in the climate movement have heard that we need to provide local solutions to the global problems we face. Localizing consumption is one proposed solution to help reduce carbon emissions into the air. For example, buying your food from local farmers or buying jewelry and clothing from local artists and designers. This idea is great in theory, but in order for this to be successful, it is important to have a stable community that trusts and supports one another first. A unified community must first create a basis of loyalty and trust which allows for the exchange of goods and services to run smoothly and creates a space for people to be held accountable for their actions.

A stronger sense of collectivity within a society provides a community with the tools and behaviors to be more conscious of their impacts on the earth and its ecosystems, as well as the individuals in and outside of the community. Societies that value collectivity also tend to support the use of renewable energies more than individualist societies, such as the US. People who have built strong support systems have a higher concern for how their actions impact others in general. This includes actions that will harm the environment as well because ultimately, ecological destruction means human destruction. Collectivity also encourages the exchange of knowledge

among society members which allows members to develop a better understanding of their environment and their relationship to the natural world.

Creating a collectively focused society and strong network of relations for the climate movement requires us to start small. Your neighborhood, school, or workplace are some great places to begin. A great thing to do is begin sharing resources whether its money, food, information, time, or material items. For



example, instead of buying the item you feel you need for your home, ask a neighbor if you can borrow theirs. Another great community building effort is creating events that invite people to get to know one another and promotes sustainability such as potlucks or park clean-ups. One of my favorite community building efforts is the creation of community gardens. These gardens create a space for people to not only connect with nature and learn about growing their own food, but they challenge individualism and invite the idea of collectivity into people's minds. Simply put, to begin fostering community we should think about building up relationships, sharing resources, and re-imagining the present and future.

This notion of building strong foundational communities is not anything new. Many groups of people have valued collectivity and community building, yet Western culture has erased this history. Many indigenous peoples have relied on collective living for their entire history. Many Black and African American communities have developed strong interdependent relations in order to simply stay alive in the US. The Civil Rights Movement is a prime example of strong Black communities embracing collectivity in order to fight for justice. We owe recognition to

these groups, and many others, for their values and practices and reparations for the harms western culture and society has and continues to inflict upon them.

I do not have a dream job. However, I do dream that I will one day be able to use my knowledge, skills, and passions to help foster collectivity within the climate movement. Without resilient and reliable communities, I fear that coping with climate change and finding solutions will seem unattainable. Human beings are unique and powerful. I believe each and every person holds something special about them. Something that could help to create a better future. Just imagine if we all put these incredible talents together! We could make radically beautiful change.

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