

## Show Notes

The Raw Carrot <https://therawcarrot.com/>

How to Buy Soup <https://therawcarrot.com/where-to-buy/>

Raw Carrot Volunteer <https://therawcarrot.com/get-involved/volunteer-with-raw-carrot/>

Open Letter: Premiere Ford, Double Social Assistance Rates Now! [Open Letter: Premier Ford, Double Social Assistance Rates Now!](#)

**Total Time: 22 Minutes**

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## Undercurrents Episode 19: Raw Carrot

**Suzi:** You can't find this type of employer or the way the Raw Carrot is set up to help people with disabilities, it's like family. I don't know how to describe it, but that way, I guess. Family, forgiving and understanding and accepting of your disabilities. I believe. I think that's about sums up the Raw Carrot.

**VO:** You're listening to Undercurrents. My name is Ken Ogasawara and I'm part of the Community Engagement team at Mennonite Central Committee in Ontario. Undercurrents is one way to tell the rich stories coming from our community of partners, program participants, staff, and others. Undercurrents is brought to you by Kindred Credit Union. Kindred's purpose is cooperative banking that connects values and faith with finances, inspiring peaceful, just, and prosperous communities. Kindred encourages and celebrates the uniqueness of people by creating spaces that values and respects each person for their talents, experiences, and abilities. This episode is about soup.

**VO:** I do a lot of the cooking in our house. Generally speaking, I'm not big on following recipes - my style is more like grabbing a bunch of available ingredients, throwing them into a pan with various seasonings and see what happens. It's a metaphor for my life. This generally has yielded pretty good results both in life and in the kitchen - but there's one dish that I have consistently failed at over the years - a dish that for most, is simple, delicious, nutritious, and is generally very compatible with my casual and inclusive cooking style and that dish is soup.

[Ken cooking with his daughters in the kitchen sounds]

**VO:** Time after time, I've botched the broth and it's gotten to the point where the very idea of making soup leaves me with - dare I say it - a bad taste in my mouth.

**VO:** In this episode we meet with some folks who DO know how to make great soup and we learn about The Raw Carrot, a social enterprise that produces more than just delicious soup.

Suzi: Hi, my name's Suzi Gursoy. I've been working for the Raw Carrot four years now. I was one of the first employees. There's two other employees that had been here same time as me.

Ken: Awesome.

Suzi: Since the beginning.

VO: The Raw Carrot is not Suzi's first connection with MCC. She had been a participant of Circle of Friends which supports folks transitioning out of homelessness, and then was a part of the People's Action Group which advises and advocates to municipal and regional governments on matters of homelessness and poverty, here in the Waterloo region. Suzi recalls a meeting with Greg deGroot-Maggetti, who was then the coordinator of the Walking with People in Poverty program.

Suzi: I guess Greg asked what I wanted and I said, "I want to work. I'm able to work, but I can't work full time hours, but I want a job, but no one seems to hire me because I'm on disability." And then this opportunity came at the Raw Carrot.

### **Founding of the Raw Carrot**

Rebecca: The Raw Carrot really started because I got to know a member of our congregation, somebody named Amanda, and I watched Amanda grow up through her teenage years.

VO: This is Rebecca Sherbino who co-founded The Raw Carrot with her friend Colleen Graham in Paris, Ontario in 2014 in partnership with the Presbyterian church they attended.

Rebecca: What I really appreciated about Amanda was that she had a desire to work, and she had a desire to be involved. She had graduated from high school, we were really excited that she made it to the end of high school, she went to this employment training agency, they'd promised her opportunities towards a job, and she interviewed at the end of that period of time and wasn't successful in any of those three jobs that she had applied to. It really was that moment that really had a huge level of frustration for me, for one, I'd built up her expectations that I was going to be able to help her into the next stage of life, and that left her then with this sense of, again, really defeat, and a feeling that there was nothing for her. She had some disabilities and in competing with others, she just couldn't make it.

Rebecca: Colleen and I had said for a long time, how can we tangibly get involved? We see this gap with people in our congregation that are coming for social support, they're not making ends meet each month, they really seem to be craving some socialization and wanting to be involved, and yet unable to get or hold a job for various reasons, and so it was just at that period of time

that I thought, you know what? Somebody has to do something. It's crazy that we've got people that want to work and there is no job.

**Rebecca:** And so that's when Colleen and I just decided to take a bit of a step of faith, we approached our church congregation, or the session, to see if they would allow us to use the commercial kitchen that was here, and so we, with the church's blessing, we went ahead and started cooking soup. We invited four members of our congregation, including Amanda, to join us in that venture, who had mentioned to us that they were looking for work, and out of that we literally worked on a few recipes and started cooking soup with them and paying them a wage. So that was the very humble beginnings of how we started.

**Ken:** At that point were you paying your staff out of pocket? Cause hadn't had any revenue at that point.

**Rebecca:** Nope, we had no revenue initially. So the four staff that we had agreed to hire, we had told them we had this plan and we really wanted to pay them, we didn't really have a way until we started selling soup. So in the beginning stages they volunteered with us, all of us were volunteer, Colleen and I were doing it just off the sides of our desks. So it wasn't a wage initially, it was just we're going to make soup together, we're going to sell it to our church congregation and others if we can, and then we'll see where it goes.

**VO:** All of The Raw Carrot franchises of which there are now 4 including MCC's Kitchener site, only hire people receiving support from Ontario Disability Support Program, otherwise known as ODSP.

**VO:** I'm going to do a quick side bar on ODSP because it helps to know what financial situation folks on ODSP are in. Firstly, you can qualify for ODSP payments if you can show that you have a disability, whether mental or physical, that restricts your ability to work, care for yourself, or take part in community life. At the moment of this writing in September of 2022, single people on ODSP receive a maximum of \$1,169/month. If you can find work, which as Rebecca has pointed out, is very difficult for those with disabilities, you can earn up to \$300 per month before the government starts to claw back 50% of your earnings. This supplementary income is essential because, as our own Greg deGroot Maggetti and many other advocates have said in a recent open letter to the Ontario government, \$1200 per month is not enough to live on no matter where you live. This makes social enterprises like The Raw Carrot, and Living Wage employers like MCC, a much-needed lifeline to bring folks out of poverty. We could do an entire episode on this piece of policy, but we won't here. Let's get back to Suzi.

## Suzi's Story

**Suzi:** I struggled with addiction and stuff. So I got introduced to drugs and lived on and off the streets for 20 years. I cried and I begged. I prayed on the streets and at night asking God to help me because I knew it wasn't what I wanted. But I thank God that I accepted help from somebody through the shelter at Mary's place and got to have a voice, got to speak up, not that mouse anymore. Got into counseling for addiction, counseling for myself for childhood trauma. Just accepted help from people. I knew I couldn't do it on my own anymore. I became a homeless advocate.

**VO:** Suzi has come a long way through those challenges and her work at The Raw Carrot helps to keep her motivated and positive.

**Suzi:** Raw Carrot is less than part-time, but it's still, I know it's less hours, but it still gives me purpose to get up and do something, even though it's two days a week. I was offered a full time job at Google making 19 bucks an hour full time. I had to say no because I can't stand on my feet all day. I had to say no and another place, "Well, what hours can you work?" And I said, "I can't work Mondays or Wednesdays. I'm keeping my job. Even though it's only two days a week, I'm committed to my job." At the raw carrot.

**VO:** What kind of work were you doing previously?

**Suzi:** All my experience has been kitchen food prep. Since I was 15 years old, I've been working. It's my life. It's nothing to me. So when I'm in the kitchen, it's natural. So I wanted a job that I know I'm experienced at and it was an awesome fit. Yeah, you're getting paid, then you're slaving and you're sweating. And I appreciate the fact that they see that people can't survive on minimum wage and the living wage is perfect. Sure, we only get one paycheck a month, but when you're making living wage, that \$400 at the end of the month is sweet.

**Ken:** Right.

## Lucas' Story

**Lucas:** My name is Lucas Feenhoven. I work here at The Raw Carrot. I've been here since May of 2019.

**Lucas:** I'd say about nine years or so ago, I started to do some food, or like food service, volunteering. I just, I found it to be fairly therapeutic. I like making something like stir fry, and frying it up and just the whole, Like the colors of it, and just making it and stuff. There was something about that I enjoyed. I share it with whoever wants it, and it's like. My dad usually

has some after I make it. And it's sort of a bonding experience to do that. And maybe watch something together.

**Lucas:** The main reason I've gone ODSP, or have been on it and still am, is I've had some anxiety and depression issues for most of my life. Kind of off and on since I was about, I would say, 12. And yeah, my teenage years were pretty rough with that. And then after that, I started to look into getting paid employment, and I was working with some professionals on that. And I would say even with the professional's help, it was pretty hard to get work. I was there, I was, It took me about a year to get this job. And I had a bad interview in my first job interview and the feedback I got was pretty hurtful to be honest. They tried to keep it professional with me, but it didn't go well and that was kinda tough.

### **Raw Carrot a Community of Support**

**Suzi:** You can't find this type of employer or the way the Raw Carrot is set up to help people with disabilities and how they're forgiving and understanding and it's like family you know, I don't know how to describe it, but that way, I guess. Family, forgiving and understanding and accepting of your disabilities. I believe, I think that's about sums up the Raw Carrot.

**Suzi:** There's days where I don't want to get up and come into work because I let other life stuff control me. You know what I mean? Or pain could be one of them too, chronic pain. Yeah, I've had to walk away from here because I was in so much pain. Yeah. Not from the job, just from being, living with chronic pain from my disabilities, right?

**Suzi:** I remember working at Wendy's, seven hour days. At the end of the shift and while you're working, you're sweating. No time. You can't sit down. You can't take a break. If you need a breather, you can't do that because you got to go, go, go, go because you're in a fast-paced environment, where this is not fast-paced. This, they let you sit down if you need a minute. "Sure. Go ahead. Take your time. Recoup, whatever, get back," right? You can't do that in a fast-paced restaurant environment.

**Lucas:** Yeah. Before, it was okay, where I was working initially, but it wasn't as nice as it is here. There's more people, and the atmosphere is more cheerful. And it's like everyone wants to work, and it's a very positive environment here. Yeah. You get good vibes working here. Yeah.

**VO:** I asked Lucas and Suzi if they had any goals or milestones they are working towards?

**Lucas:** I would say a general goal would be to keep making progress towards becoming more independent. It's sometimes not always clear what the next step is, but I'm trying to figure that

out for myself. That I keep learning, and I keep moving forward. And I might be with them for a while yet, but I want to learn. I need to learn how to live without them. And even if I'm not doing that just yet, that's stuff I do think about. Like what I would need to do, and am I able to do that? And if not, how do I get better at those kind of skills?

**Suzi:** Well, I do want more hours. I'm hoping that we could work more hours for the Raw Carrot, but probably looking for another part-time job to supplement. 20 more hours, maybe.

**Ken:** What needs to happen for you to get more work, more hours at the Raw Carrot?

**Suzi:** People buy more soup, sell it so we gotta make way more. Yeah. Just people buying our soup because if you buy our soup, it gives us more hours to work.

### **How can we support The Raw Carrot?**

**VO:** I asked Rebecca what she and Colleen advocate for, if they had to choose... do we need existing businesses to be more inclusive and accommodating of people with disabilities? Or do we need more social enterprises like The Raw Carrot that are geared specifically for those with disabilities?

**Rebecca:** It's an interesting question, and one that we've definitely wrestled with over the last eight years, but I would say where we've probably landed with that is that we need to be looking to create different types of work forces, because for a traditional profit-driven employer to navigate these pieces of people's lives, it's really almost more than they can manage, for many of them. They're really unprepared, ill-equipped, and to be honest, not necessarily very kind in how they're dealing with folks because their entire bottom line is profit. And so what typically happens is that these folks end up just feeling very devalued. So, from our perspective I would suggest we need more environments that are not entirely focused on profit.

**Rebecca:** One of the things that our staff mention every year when we do the evaluations, and I'm always amazed to hear this, is that they appreciate that at the Raw Carrot they are not the only one who struggles with something. It's not like they feel that they're below the bar trying to get up to something that they really can't reach, they know that everybody in this workforce has something that they're trying to work around, and so I think from that perspective they feel very accepted. And so I would propose that we need more workforces like the Raw Carrot, that are a little bit more specifically positioned to be, not that profit's not important, or not that trying to create revenue and make ends meet isn't important, but the bottom line of the whole business is people.

VO: If you were to visit therawcarrot.com you'd see a bold question posed to you: "Can one bowl of soup help change the world?"

VO: It has certainly changed my relationship with soup. Although I will continue to try and improve my own soup creations, I will not hesitate to treat my family to a bowl of Spicy-ish Italian Sausage, or Hearty Lentil & Barley, my daughter's favourite, Veggie Mania or frankly any of their seven delicious varieties.

VO: And yes, it is about great-tasting, healthy soup made by hand from whole foods, but it's also about the dignity of meaningful work, of supportive workplaces and community, and creating space for all to belong. You can get all of that goodness in every bowl of soup and far from leaving a bad taste in my mouth, I'll go back for seconds every time.

VO: If you want to support The Raw Carrot, the easiest and most literally self-serving thing to do is buy their soup! The soup made by Suzi, Lucas and the rest of the Kitchener Raw Carrot crew can be bought at MCC Thrift Shops as well as in a number of local grocery stores in Waterloo Region and beyond. Check the show notes for an updated list. You could also volunteer in the kitchen or as delivery drivers. If you want to volunteer your business expertise, please connect! If you have access to an industrial kitchen feel inspired to by the mission of The Raw Carrot, you can start your own site!

VO: I'd like to thank Suzi, Lucas, and Colleen for sharing their stories with us. I want to thank Leah Brown the kitchen manager at the MCC site and her tireless crew of volunteers who help make The Raw Carrot such a special place to work.

VO: Big thanks as always to our sponsors Kindred Credit Union for helping to make this episode possible. This episode was edited by Christen Kong, sound mix by Francois Goudreault, Original and theme music by Brian MacMillan and art work by Jesse Bergen.

VO: I want to thank YOU for listening to Undercurrents. Tell your friends! Listen to an episode together over a bowl of soup. Stay tuned for the next episode on Restorative Justice coming out in December. I'm Ken Ogasawara, thanks for listening, have a great rest of your day.