

Cooperative Journal Podcast

“Solidarity Economy Shorts” in collaboration with New Economy Coalition
Solidarity Economy Shorts #7: **Feedback is a Gift with Cooperate Western NC**

Featuring:

Zev Friedman: Founder of Cooperate Western NC

Ebony Joy: Host

[Music - Solidarity Economy (Riddim) by MADlines]

Ebony: Welcome to Solidarity Economy Shorts, a collaboration between New Economy Coalition and Cooperative Journal Media. Solidarity Economy Shorts are conversations with frontline organizations and individuals that are putting solidarity economy principles into practice. They're using different strategies to build an economic system where communities are meeting their own needs outside of capitalism.

New Economy Coalition is a member based coalition representing the solidarity economy ecosystem in the United States. Their members are actively working across economic sectors to shift from individuality and capitalism, to cooperation and solidarity.

Some of the New Economy members will be featured on this podcast to explore land rematriation, cooperation, worker ownership, arts and culture, resource mobilization, and more. We'll share lessons learned, practices, and how you can engage in this liberatory vision.

As you listen you're invited to feel into your body. When do you sense constriction? When do you feel light and expansive? We hope these shorts can be a reminder that we don't have to wait for the future we dream of, it is here now waiting for us to participate.

Ebony: Welcome and thank you so much for being open to sharing about the work of Cooperate Western North Carolina. I'm looking forward to sharing with the listeners the amazing mutual aid work that you're doing. I would love for you to start by sharing what is Cooperate Western North Carolina.

Zev: Yes. Well it is of course many things, different layers, but one is that it's a non-profit. It's a 501c3, tax exempt non-profit. More fundamentally and deeply, it is an

attempt to grow a regional mutual aid network in 22 counties of Western North Carolina, which is almost a quarter of the state of North Carolina. It's an area about the size of the state of Massachusetts, so it's a substantial area. It's like a Mondragon scale kind of project, so it's the long game. We think of it as like connective tissue or the mycorrhizal network in the forest floor that is invisibly tying together the different trees and shrubs, which are like the local communities and farms and different projects and cooperative businesses into a coherent network and whole that shares information, resources, creates trust and topsoil like mycorrhizae do over time. Topsoil, in this case, is trust and relationship. So that's what it is, a long term regional mutual aid network and cooperative organism.

Ebony: I love that metaphor of nature, and permaculture was definitely an introduction of that for me. Where it was less about the agriculture, and it was more of like, okay, how do we actually create human systems that are a reflection of nature. I know that your work is also grounded in regional mutual aid for a regenerative future and we see that nature is inherently regenerative. So can you explain what that means for you all, and what were some of the gaps in your community that informed the development of Cooperate WNC?

Zev: I was working as a permaculture and agroecology educator and consultant for 12 years before starting Cooperate WNC. I had a lot of mentors in that field, and traveled to different parts of the world to meet other people doing that kind of agroecological organizing in their regions. I came to believe, through working with hundreds of landowners and many students in different class settings and at conferences and stuff, I came to believe that there is this rampant unacknowledged reality of individualism in especially the white dominated agroecology, permaculture, organic farming movements. It's a little bit less individualistic in some communities of color, and especially Latin American communities that I've worked with and gotten to witness. But the U.S. organic farming movement, permaculture movement, can easily be traced, in its flavor, to the homesteading act kind of approach and the nuclear family, we're going to be self-reliant on our land or in our urban backyard.

Then I did a survey, this is 2016, of all of my past clients and students, I sent out an email and reached out to a bunch of people individually, saying, hey, how's it going with your projects, and over half the people who had paid me 1,000s of dollars to come do consulting on their projects didn't even live at the land anymore.

The commonality that I drew from that, after some deep retrospection on that, it really challenged my sense of purpose, because I was like, well, I've been spending years of my life on this theory of change that permaculture and agroecology are going to save

the world, and if we can just get ourselves reconnected with the land, then all the rest is going to naturally follow, and economic, cultural, and racial healing will follow from that. I was like, oh, I need to seriously reconsider that theory of change, I don't think I believe it anymore. I came to believe that actually there's a lot of more fundamental relational and cultural work to heal individualism and the fear and distrust that underlies individualism before we can even have successful agroecology and permaculture systems.

Forest ecologists in southern Appalachia describe our mature forests as usually having a 125 year cycle. So I think about mimicking it at that time scale. It's like, how do you have multi generational, intergenerational transfer of knowledge? How do you have community systems that are resilient enough so that if one person gets sick and dies or decides they need to go do something else for their purpose work that the whole land system doesn't collapse? What I was hearing is that all these people's land systems were collapsing because it was a very fragile, individualistic approach with nothing built in for supporting people in their own complexities of their lives and their life cycles, and for passing that knowledge down and having the diversity of skill sets, talents, and interests - the human ecosystem that's required to really manage a system like that.

At the same time, I was studying the history of cooperatives and mutual aid in the U.S., and I got to visit some indigenous folks in the northern part of Oaxaca who had this ancient mutual aid culture network of 12 villages which we can speak to more if it's the right thing and we have time. That gave me a vision for what kind of regional scale cooperative culture can look and feel like, and the power it can have. The people I visited in Oaxaca, they had this network of 12 villages, and they were planting 700,000 trees a year just in this network of 12 villages to reforest their desertified landscape, and as part of a 75 year agricultural rotational cycle that they managed for their subsistence and ritual and cultural lifeway. They were financing the whole thing through cooperative financing, they were building greenhouses with pooled money from their villages, organizing collective labor to plan and maintain these trees while they got established, and reforesting their desertified landscape that was destroyed by the Spanish conquistadors in the 1500s logging all of their trees to build ships and to make charcoal for blacksmithing. So now they stayed put and their cooperative culture is what is allowing them to have this sophistication of financial and work coordination and everything it takes to actually renew damaged landscapes and make a human ecosystem that works and creates topsoil. I'll stop there for the moment.

Ebony: That's incredible, I would love to see that in action and it seems like they have the perfect balance of being connected to their ecology and human relationships and weaving them together. I think that is the gap of permaculture that's like the white washed version of really these ancestral ways, and it's built on this idea of self-reliance,

whereas indigeneity knows that inherently we need this collective resilience and cooperation in order to function sustainably and to have longevity. So I'm curious how all of this has informed putting the vision of a regenerative future into practice, maybe you can highlight some of your current initiatives.

Zev: We started the organization in 2019 and from the beginning, there was a huge emphasis on trust creation, relationship making as the basis for everything, and I feel like we've done a lot of learning about what that actually means. How do humans go about creating trust? I think that one of the most actionable insights from that is that there's an interplay between getting practical shit done and doing more soft relational stuff.

Part of the ways we trust each other have to do with trusting each other for competency and knowing that we're going to be able to get functional, practical needs met by working with each other. That's not all of trust though. There's also trusting each other to be relationally and somatically attuned, trusting each other that we're going to do repair if conflict comes up, trusting each other to be transparent and honest with each other. Trusting each other to be self aware of when we're triggered or need support or don't, are out of capacity. So there's all these different layers and dimensions to trust making.

So we started off working on these community savings pools, which folks can read about on our website. It's a model that started in New Zealand, but it's something that many of our ancestors and current people, especially immigrants, do these a lot, or things like this, where it tends to be a scale of like 15 to 25 people in one of these pools. By the way, I'll mention is a whole big part of the work we've done is studying scale and what types of cooperation and resource sharing and trust making makes sense at different scales. It's not that there's any one scale that's the right scale. It's that different things are appropriate at different scales, and it's really important to figure out what the right scale is for a certain function. So we call a crew four to seven adults. A crew is like your tight crew, who you're seeing every day and maybe sharing meals and childcare with and like immediate response to emergencies. The next thing up is a pod, which is like 15 to 25 people, and a lot of things around the world get organized at pod scale, because that's enough people to do more things than you can in a small group, to have a pooling of resources and labor to get shit done in a way that can't be done with four to seven people. But it's not so big that it gets super administratively complicated and it's not so big that you can't know every person in the pod. So savings pools happen at the pod scale.

Actually my Earth Haven savings pool, we're meeting today after this call, we get together and we pool savings so each of us can put in however much money we want to

save. It's all tracked in a fancy spreadsheet, and then we have a shared bank account, and then anyone in the group can put in a proposal to the group for a 0% interest loan. So it's a grassroots financing method. We've saved about \$85,000 in our pool in the last four years, and lent out that money repeatedly to people beginning to build houses, starting businesses, and improving their farming projects. So it's a way of creating access to financing without banks and without any interest. There's a lot of details to how that works. They got like, 130 of these going on in New Zealand, and we learned from them, they kind of mentored us. Then we worked with attorneys here to make sure that it was all legal in the U.S. finance laws. So, by the way, that's a skill set and a coaching thing we can do. So what we do, we help groups to start savings pools in our network, and our idea was that that would be one of those tangible things that would give people a sense of immediate benefit and put them in an environment where they could create trust and get to know each other, to lead to all kinds of other things.

For anyone who's listening to this and wanting to get started, work from where you're at work from where your existing relationships are at and it's kind of like the asset based community development approach. Where it's like, I do some relationship mapping, and say who are the 20 people who I trust the most and want to collaborate with the most, and then go talk to those 20 people and ask them lots of good questions about what they think needs to happen, what they see happening that's working well in the community, where the gaps are, where the resources are, and also ask them for feedback about me. Where do they see my strengths as a community organizer? Where do they say they see my weaknesses? So much insight can be gotten from that about what to start and what's next and then move on from there. So I did a lot of that gathering feedback and input in those early days and we're still doing that. We're actually organizing another round of community listening projects right now, after the storm, to get a new set of collective sensemaking around what needs to happen.

So we were working in collaborative agriculture and getting farmers together and growers to share farm equipment, to do bulk purchasing of farm supplies, to figure out quality of life stuff like, how do farmers get child care? How do farmers get care for their animals so they can go away on a vacation every once in a while? How do farmers gain access to grant money through non-profit fiscal sponsorship? We're still working with that, we're part of a project called the WNC collaborative agriculture network, which is itself a thing of the WNC food systems coalition. People can check those out online if they want to learn more about them. That's working a lot with the bulk purchasing of agricultural supplies that we're doing now.

We did these mutual aid road shows where we would go to different locations around our region and we had this local donut shop making acorn flour donuts for all of our

events. We were saying it's the official donut of Cooperate Western North Carolina, the agroforestry acorn and chestnut flour donuts from a really cool organization locally called the Asheville Nuttery, which is a bunch of folks who are processing acorns and walnuts and hickory nuts and stuff for commercial sale and making oil from acorns and all kinds of cool stuff. They're members of our network. So we're doing these road shows and all kinds of teaching about different cooperative topics, and a lot of getting the knowledge base up. There's not a great union history in Western North Carolina, there's some unions, but it hasn't been as formally organized cooperatively as like, around more urban areas in the U.S., where there's been more union activity and manufacturing and stuff driving that over time.

I came to believe that actually, because of the level of the way that consumerism and capitalism and individualism are shaping people's lives, that kind of fun, trust making gathering stuff wasn't really adding up to actual transformational organizing. People would come to these events and then just go home to their individual houses, and there wasn't any traction. There wasn't any skin in the game. So we had to refine our theories of change yet again. By the way, this is a huge theme for me, is refining theories of change, being willing to take the feedback, even if it's painful, like the thing we put a bunch of energy into didn't work, or it partially worked.

Actually, I think conflict is maybe our best clue as to where there are people who are really ready to do deep trust making work when there are people who are collaborating, get into conflict and stay put in the conflict, rather than run away. That's a sign of people who are ripe and committed for deeper, transformational work.

Ever since connecting with the Community Purchasing Alliance out of Washington D.C., I did a big training with them, I guess it was four years ago now. Felipe Witchker was one of the founders of that and a mentor I would say of mine, on this. I haven't checked in on the in in a couple years, I'm curious where they're at but they were then funding a cooperative staff of their organization through the surplus revenue from the purchasing and that was subsidizing essentially other types of community work and cooperative development work, the bulk purchasing. We were like, oh, light bulb again. Bulk purchasing is this huge leverage point for cooperative community making. Because if you can get organized around purchasing, then we can direct a lot of money to producers who are value aligned, whether they're regenerative or like BIPOC owned, women-owned businesses, locally owned businesses. We can direct a lot of money towards them and actually help support enterprises that way, and then we can get better prices for the purchasers and make, for example, farm inputs cheaper for farmers, which helps them to make their operations and lives work. We can gain access to things that you can't even get without bulk purchasing. We're organizing a bulk purchase of

this amazing olive oil from a co-op that we made a relationship with in Greece, in Lesvos, and we're going to get a shipping container of olive oil from them this Spring, which, by the way, everybody talked to me about that, because we're trying to do a regional purchase and get it to different people throughout the Southeast. So if you are interested in this amazing olive oil, get in touch with us. So we're able to get that oil over here, whereas they're not even retailing it, there's no way to get it without a bulk purchase. So you can use bulk purchasing to actually get the attention of suppliers and make the economics of transport work, and get stuff here that we can't get otherwise. Bulk purchasing of solar panels we're looking at now. stuff like that, you know.

Ebony: Wow, there's so many things y'all are working on, so many different connections between them all and at the foundation is this trust building. I know that it can be difficult to strike the balance between building trust and working on internal dynamics and actually doing something practical. Because I've even been in settings where I'm like, we're just talking a lot like can we get shit done? So through the doing, you all are using that as the catalyst to build the trust. I think that that's also maybe where one of the gaps was in the roadshow. It's like people get to intellectualize it and see that other people are doing it, but actually being in the practice of it is different, and some people can't move from the theory to the practice on their own, they need the structure for themselves in order to do that.

I love this idea of the savings pool, and I'm so interested in the format that y'all are doing it in, because I come from a Caribbean background where there was Susu but it's different from what you're saying, because this is like people are putting in different amounts. There's also a trust that maybe you're not necessarily going to get your money back, but that this is feeding this larger ecosystem, whereas a Susu, you're just getting back what you put in. So I'm so interested in what you all are doing.

At the basis of this, everything you're doing is informed by the community listening, which is so important, it's not like y'all are just like, imposing these structures on the community because it's what you want or what you think they need, but it's really informed by what the actual needs are.

So I know you started to get into conflict, but I would love for you to go a little bit deeper. This is really the demise of so many cooperative structures, and generally we're not equipped with the skills to navigate it, like there's not enough energy put into it and there's not enough tools that people know about. So I'm really curious what processes you all use to current conflict into opportunities for transformation.

Zev: Yeah. Oh, this is the good stuff, I love this stuff. I really feel like this is such a powerful crux. I could feel it in my body. You know, with the conflict work, it's like, so primal, so primarily powerful. I've had some really powerful experiences in my own life and community with transformational conflict navigation that have given me a real, tangible sense of how this stuff works. It's feels not like theory. I'll tell a little story, it was also in 2017. I live at a place called Earth Haven Ecovillage. It's an intentional community where I get to practice a lot of this cooperative stuff in my own life, and kind of feel an integrity in bringing it out to the larger world through Cooperate WNC.

I went on a trip in 2017, and while I was on the trip, I got this email from a bunch of the people in my crew who are like, hey, we need to talk with you when you get back. Can we have a facilitated conversation? I was like, ah, that was scary but I was like, okay, then I got back and we had this conversation. They were like, we really, we all love you. We really want to work closely with you and there's this thing that's making it hard to work closely with you, which is that when we try to give you feedback, you get defensive and and there are all these important things that we feel like we really need to give you feedback about, but everyone's scared to give you feedback.

Over the year, and two years after that, I went and talked with everybody, got more understanding about what was happening, got support, and that turned out to be this incredible, transformational experience for me in my life where it totally changed my relationship to feedback, and now I literally perceive feedback as a gift.

Now, if you give me feedback, I now know how to take better care of you and to make our system more functional, to do the thing we're trying to do together better. So I literally perceive it as power, whereas before, I perceived it as a threat. That was a really primal example for me of conflict transformation at a really close to home level.

I was fortunate to have this group of friends that were pretty emotionally skilled and communication skilled, to approach me in a really skillful way and to give it to me in a way that I could not be over my red line, I could hear them and digest it and stuff. Not everybody has that. So I think that's what we're talking about with conflict system creation. I really like these words conflict system and conflict transformation, as opposed to conflict resolution, because conflict resolution is how the corporate world talks about it. That's because in the corporate world, and the mainstream culture and government and stuff, people just want conflict to go away. They want it to go away so we can get back to business as usual. And because if they were to look at the underlying sources of the conflict, then there would have to be the need to acknowledge all of these reasons the conflict exists.

You know, a given conflict, is just a fruit on the tree of the underlying whole system that it came out of that have identifiable root causes. Those root causes usually have to do with trauma, and they usually have to do with capitalism, and they usually have to do with racial and gender violence and oppression and power structures. So we're like, how do we recognize that and set up conflict transformation rather than conflict resolution? We don't want to just resolve conflicts and brush them under the rug. We want to see each one as a doorway and a window into the underlying causes, so that we can transform the underlying causes and create deeper trust and more profound collective power through the understandings that come about from that conflict.

A big mentor for me in this has been Jonathan McRay, who's up at a place called Silver Run Forest Farm in Virginia. He and his wife Kristen run that, and they are some really beautiful organizers. A conflict system is not just saying, hey, we're gonna start a worker co-op and then have some things written down in our bylaws about what happens when we do a conflict. We're going to a mediator or something like that and just essentially treat conflict as a little sideshow that as you mentioned a few minutes ago, actually comes back to haunt us big time. Which, by the way, in our last community listening project, that's the input we got. People were like the biggest impediment to the success of our collective projects is conflict, even more than money. That says something to be even more than money. That was a big part of our decision to focus heavily programmatically on conflict systems.

It's going through a lot of self awareness practices and then revealing to other people in the group like understanding what are my triggers? What is my power positionality and privilege positionality? What have I done in the past when I've experienced conflict or feedback? What are times that I've been hurt by people misusing power on me or around me? How do I know what kinds of support I need when I'm triggered? How can people know when I'm triggered and how can they relate with me so that it helps me to de-escalate? What types of privilege am I willing to consider sacrificing to create more trust and shared power in this group? What types of privilege am I not willing to consider sacrificing and being honest about that? So there's a deep level of self awareness and honesty that a conflict systems creation process asks for the people to do. It even then gets to the point of hard questions like, do I actually have the capacity to participate in a group that's asking for this kind of vulnerability right now? Maybe the question for some of the people is no which doesn't mean they're bad people or couldn't be involved in the future, or there's not some way for them to be involved now, but it's actually a way of understanding who has the capacity to be part of a core group that's committed to this culture of and this way of being. Then what that ultimately leads to is a set of practices and agreements in a group that are customized.

So it's not just about conflict, it's about capacity creation and collective power making, and then it's driven by the awareness of conflict and setting ourselves up for using conflict in a regenerative way in the future. Our approach is to get a regional cohort of representatives from different local areas of Western North Carolina in these conflict trainings, trying to get two people from each hub area to come be part of the training. Then people will be able to peer mentor each other as they get experience with it, and be able to peer mentor other little kinds of pod scale groups, 15 to 25 people, into developing their own conflict systems as kind of our theory of organizing around this.

Ebony: I really want to learn more about this conflict systems work. I want to go to a workshop, because I've definitely been in spaces where there is this defensiveness from feedback. I think starting with this individual evaluation allows you to see the parts of yourself that can be triggered and the parts of yourself that maybe can create conflict in relational dynamics. So maybe you're less likely to be defensive when someone brings that up, because you're already aware of it and also aware of the power dynamics that, like you were saying, can lead to the conflict within a group setting.

I have found that when we think of it in the framework of conflict resolution, and it's not resolved, that people tend to disassociate and just avoid the conflict, or try to avoid being in spaces with each other. So I think, like you said, maybe there's another role for them that's less involved. Because if we are dissociating, then are we not just creating the same traditional business model dynamics, where we're just working together towards this purpose, this overarching purpose, but we're not really cooperating with each other. With cooperation comes a lot of vulnerability, and we unearth these really, maybe not so pretty parts of ourselves within creating and maintaining those structures. It is definitely a structure where we start to see all parts of ourselves, the ones that we would rather hide, the ones that if you just go into a typical nine to five job where you can step away from that, where people don't have to see that, they just see you as your role within the business. But with cooperative models we're really showing up as our whole selves, and sometimes that creates conflict, and the traumas that we've dealt with in our past start to show up. If we have not dealt with that individually, then it can be hard to navigate that relationally.

Zev: That's one of the tools of capitalism is isolation, because when we're isolated, we are at low capacity. We're kept at low capacity because we're inherently collective organisms, collective creatures, and we don't then have the capacity to think and risk more transformational actions and projects, because we're just in survival mode. So that's a big question for me. I think a driver of the way that we're working is how do we make that intersection between institutional cooperativism and enterprise cooperativism

with daily mutual aid and real human relationship and support. I think that's a really fertile intersection.

I really saw that in this co-op that I visited in Greece that we're doing the olive oil purchase from the Medusa Oil Cooperative in Lesbos. They have 65 olive farmers in their co-op and this production facility where they press oil, and they have their own little lab where they're doing all this cool stuff with all the compounds from olive trees, other than the olives and stuff. Then they market oil, and they have a needs based economic approach in their co-op. They don't get paid per hours worked or per technical expertise or something. They get together, I think it's twice a year, and they say all right, this is our income that we made. Everybody talks about their financial needs transparently, and then they decide how to distribute the money based on their financial needs. They've got this deep accountability, because if someone slacked off or took advantage of the system, they'd hear about it from dozens of their relatives. It's business that's deeply embedded in the culture, so it's definitely different there. Similarly, with Mondragon or Emilia-Romagna in Italy, or like Central America Via Campesina. A lot of the cooperative systems that a lot of us are referring to for examples, have more intact cultural fabrics that their work is coming out of than in the U.S., which is just this melting pot of fragmented immigrants and cultures and communities who have been right at the center point of capitalism. So it's a different thing where it's in its way an even more daunting project, because when we get born into this culture of isolated individualism, we just grow up thinking that that's what it's like to be human.

The primary people who study romantic relationships, the Gottman Institute, say the way that couples come to trust each other the most is not by not having conflict. It's by having conflict and then repairing and seeing, oh, you matter to me enough that you're worth repairing with, and I'm going to do the work to repair, and then that is what creates the trust. I think it's the same thing in our cooperative and mutual aid work that it's being willing to risk that and have ruptures, but then show up for repair. Now it's like, oh, you really did have my back when it mattered you really were willing to receive feedback. That's what really creates the trust.

Ebony: Definitely, yeah, and like you said, it's this unlearning of how we grew up, a lot of us, and then going through this process of remembering, through having these ruptures and opportunities to build trust. I also find that in the cooperative space, when you're working virtually, it can be really hard to build trust, because then you're really in more isolation. It's so important for us to be grounded in, if we are working remotely, to be grounded in some sort of mutual aid collective project close to us, where we have these tangible projects and relationships that we are in person with, where we are gathering with each other, because that's when we really start to have the depth that we

need in order to build trust. So before we go, we were talking a lot about individualism and in one of our past conversations, you mentioned that our society is traumatized by individualism, so share some practical ways to shift away from that and cultivate a more collective way of living.

Zev: This term of relationship mapping I got from the Transformative Justice Collective out in Oakland, really cool organization, if anybody listening hasn't gotten to check them out. They're working especially with transformative justice around communities of color and who are really trying to avoid police contact, even with really intense things like sexual violence or other kinds of violence, and they're trying to do internal conflict management and restorative work without the police. So it's coming from that context, but we're applying it to like a broader context of relationship mapping. Like taking a piece of paper and writing myself in the middle and writing the names of the 25 people around me on the paper who I feel the most connected to, and then drawing lines to each of them and describing that relationship in a couple words, what the core essence of that relationship is with each of those people. Then I might journal and say okay, when I look at this list of people, what kinds of trust do I have really strong in this group? What kinds of needs are being met really well, and what kinds of trust am I missing? What needs don't I have being met really well from this group? Then that starts to give me some insights about the strengths, and then these are the places where I maybe need to develop more relationships.

This other thing is community trust self assessment, which is going through and thinking about who trusts me in my community, how do different people trust me, and how do different people not trust me. We have a series of questions that guides people through journaling about this, thinking about the ways that people trust me. Are there any conflicts that I've been part of that I haven't addressed that are kind of swept under the rug or being avoided? Are there things that have been really scary for me to acknowledge about ways that people don't trust me, that I could write down in this paper here and doesn't have to be seen by anyone else right now, but it could give me some insights as to why people might not be showing up to things that I'm offering, for example, or stuff like that. It turns out that trust equals power, if we're talking about collective power.

Then the last step of the trust self assessment is going and talking to a few people who I feel safe with, and asking their feedback on and perspective on how trusted I am in the community, who trust me in different ways, and getting some really useful, targeted feedback that way. Then that gives me a sense of where my life is at with relationships, with trust, and how I can invite in deeper connection and collaborators and start getting out of that bubble of isolation. The key is vulnerability.

Ebony: If you do this relational mapping, and you're like, actually, there are, there's a lot of relationships that are missing, there's not that many people in my relational sphere. Then I think that's also where there's an opportunity for things like mutual aid that's happening locally to you, to be an opportunity for you to start to build those relationships that you may be lacking

Thank you so much Zev, this was a very rich conversation.

Zev: I really appreciate the opportunity to get to know you a little bit and to trade thoughts on this ahead of time, and then have this conversation. Love everything you're up to and also to get to share this with any of you NEC folks who are listening. Be in touch with us cooperatewnc.org.

[Music - Solidarity Economy (Riddim) by MADlines]

Ebony: There are many ways you can be in reciprocity with us. If you are or know of a collective model that aligns, let's connect so we can spotlight the story. Share episodes, especially with your friends and family who aren't aware of collective models but are unfulfilled with this economy. With your support, we can continue archiving the stories that aren't being elevated but are necessary for our collective elevation.