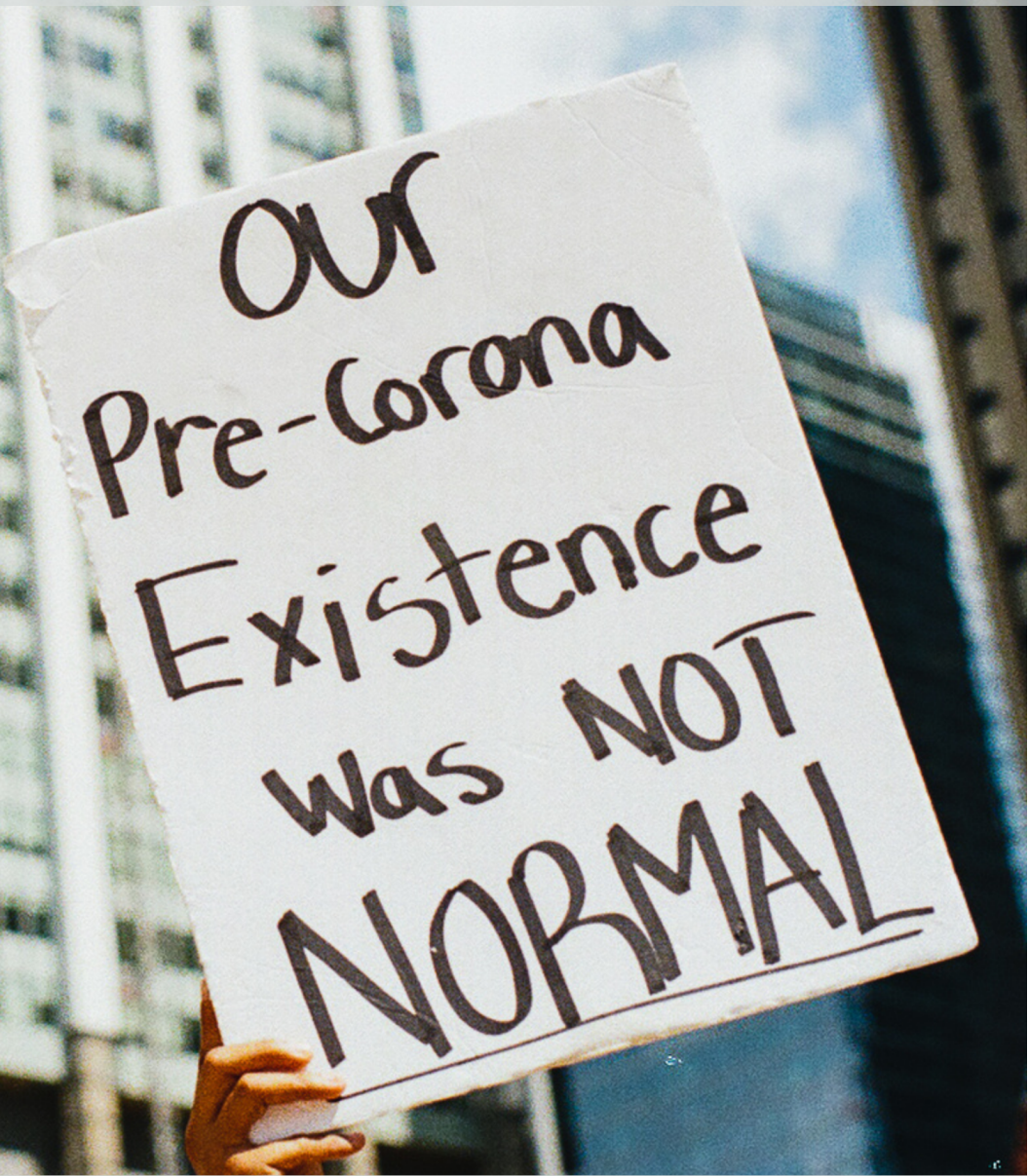


WE KEEP US SAFE!

COVID, COPS, AND COMMUNITY



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This zine's cover photo shows a sign that one community member brought to a No Pride in Policing coalition (NPIP) gathering at the Afro-Indigenous Rising mobilization. The sign states "Our Pre-Corona Existence was NOT NORMAL." Justice is the demand.

About this Zine



It has been over four years since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite considerable evidence of public health and safety measures to save lives, our governments and institutions have “returned to normal”, halted clear communications about the ongoing spread and impacts of COVID-19 and its long term impacts - particularly for those who are marginalized - and reversed life-saving public health measures.

As a result, the burden of advocating for safety measures has largely fallen on these very marginalized communities, particularly disability justice advocacy groups. Their recommendations for safety measures such as masking, vaccinating, and now even self-isolating, are increasingly being ignored.

In this zine, we hope to re-centre the voices of those most impacted by COVID. We want to interrogate our society’s abandonment of community care, and to look at how people have mobilized to care for each other in the face of government negligence.

About OPIRG Toronto & OPIRG York



OPIRG Toronto and OPIRG York are intersectional grassroots volunteer-based groups with a mandate for action, education, and research on environmental and social justice issues. We seek to empower and educate students and community members by building relationships and networks for student and community activism. We provide a forum for learning and skill-sharing, and give people the tools and opportunity to work collaboratively for liberation for all.

We are an independent student funded organizations. We are not funded by or beholden to any administrative or governmental body. We are a member of a provincial network of Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs), with nine others in Ontario.

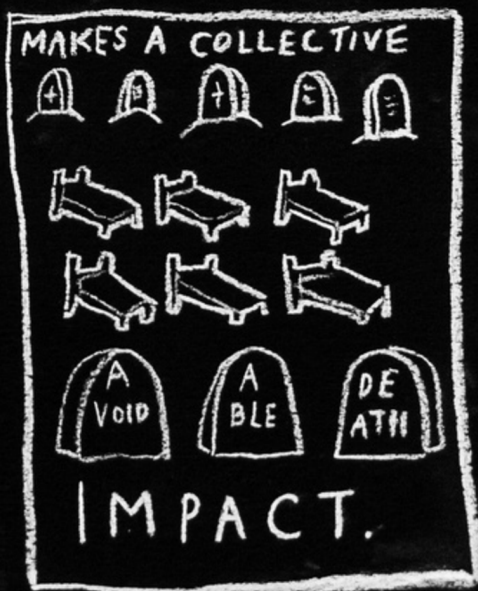
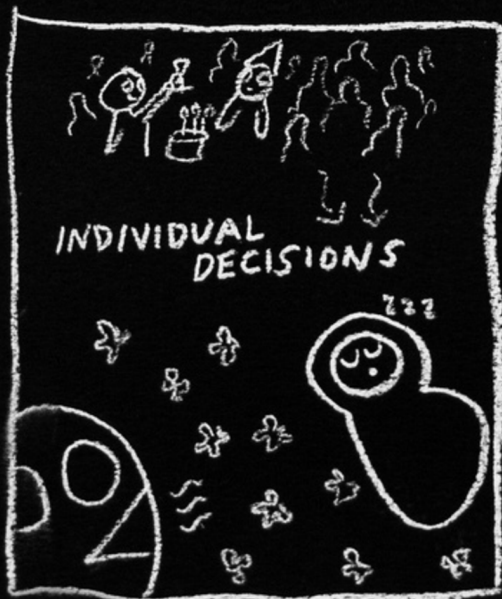
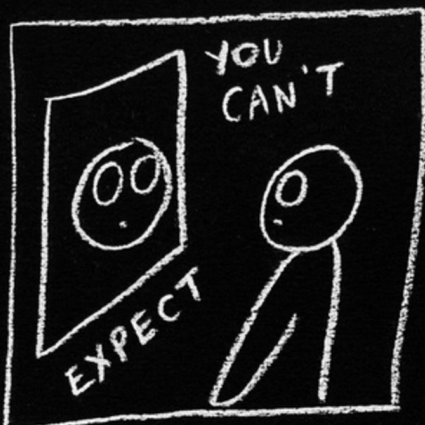


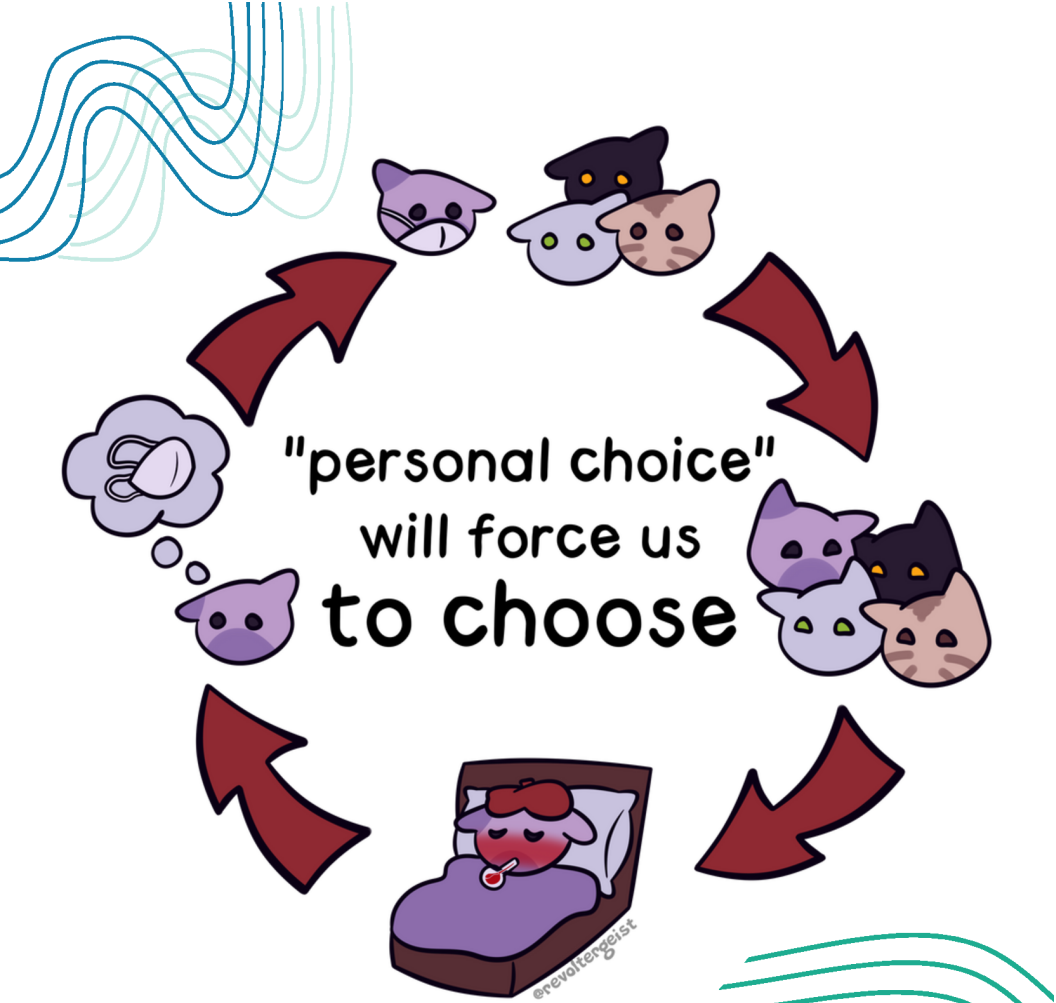
One of many examples of a company mining profit from human catastrophe.

Sev Taylor

This piece (right) was brought on by the desire to make more people aware of their participation in our current society. The desperate push to return to "normal" as well as the utter disregard for personal responsibility to the community has cemented a toxic culture built on ableism and individuality. (3) How have public health messaging/responses failed marginalized communities? Public Health has rarely ever prioritized the public's health. Nobody is willing to take accountability and ownership for the current situation we're living in. The lack of concern for our collective suffering does not slow down or erase Covid's damage, in fact it fuels it. Indifference, denial, refusal to learn and passing the blame does nothing to protect the quality of our lives. Unintentional harm is still harm. The more we realize our choices are connected to one another, the better.

Alyson Hardwick





The left drawing depicts a cycle of harm and isolation brought on by the abandonment of public health measures. A character who decides to wear a mask is treated like an outsider, and feels pressured to take off their mask to be included. Inevitably, they get sick, and end up suffering in bed. They decide to wear a mask again, and the cycle begins anew. The right drawing shows the same group of characters, all wearing masks. The text, spread across both images, reads: "personal choice" will force us to choose, but! collective care means we'll have nothing to lose!"

(continued)

but!



collective care
means we'll have
nothing to lose!

This art piece illustrates the violent result of our government's negligent individualist narrative and provides a simple, viable call to collective action: making covid precautions like wearing a mask normal in your community has immediate physical, social, and mental health benefits, creates accessible spaces, and contributes to far-reaching cultural change. It's the first step in building a world where we keep us safe!

revoltergeist

you sound so deeply
unserious when you
bring up pleasure as
a right without
acknowledging the
thousands of
disabled
folks
left
out of
your idea
of pleasure
like bffr



Pleasure Principal (digital collage, 2024) was a piece created stemming from community conversation about who is deserving of pleasure in the time of covid and how even people in the most liberated spheres were quick to abandon disabled and chronically ill people in pursuit of their own pleasure.

Aggie Panda

Planning Apart, Planning Together

Lee P

Right-wing movements are feeling empowered everywhere. The climate crisis is accelerating: storms will bring down parts of the power grid, or flood some neighbourhoods, wildfire smoke will be worse in some places than others, and we will all need the ability to leave our homes quickly and to have somewhere else to go. And, at any time, a romantic or roommate relationship can turn bad and make your home unsafe.

The conservative vision of preparedness tends, unsurprisingly, towards individualism: having a bunker to retreat to, having a stockpile of food for you and your family, having guns and the fantasy of using them to protect what's yours.

In addition to being unrealistic for the types of problems I am likely to face, guarding a mountain of MREs with a shotgun is not appealing to me. In most situations, it'd be a bigger help to have keys to friends' apartments in other neighbourhoods, and strong relationships with friends in other cities in case any of us needs to go sleep on each other's couches for a bit.

An exchange of spare keys and an openness to sleepovers can also be an entry point into larger conversations about preparing with your friends to weather life's uncertainties together.

Other ways to prepare together:

- Sharing resources like money, cars, tools, art supplies...
- Asset mapping: Think about what skills you can offer to your friends and their friends, and make sure people know. These might include navigating systems like trans health care, accessing ODSP, and immigration, or cooking, mending and fixing things...
- Get extra: If you can, pick up extra COVID tests, masks, non-perishable food, and emergency supplies, and make it known that you're happy to share.

- Planning for health emergencies and death care: Talk to your friends about their access needs, what they need when they're sick/er, about how you could help each other if one of you is hospitalized, and your wishes around death and end-of-life care.
- Strategize for emergencies: Whether it's fascist protests, wildfire smoke, flooding, or whatever is a risk in your area, make plans to keep each other safe! ◆



In responding to the question “How has public health messaging failed marginalized communities?” I found myself facing immense grief at the lost opportunities for framing masks as beautiful, concrete expressions of care for ourselves and others. Masks are such an important tool for mitigating the spread of Covid, and as we know are most effective when used collectively rather than individually. Because public health responses have been so lax around masking, this has allowed the rise of anti-mask fearmongering as well as general apathy and distaste towards masking.

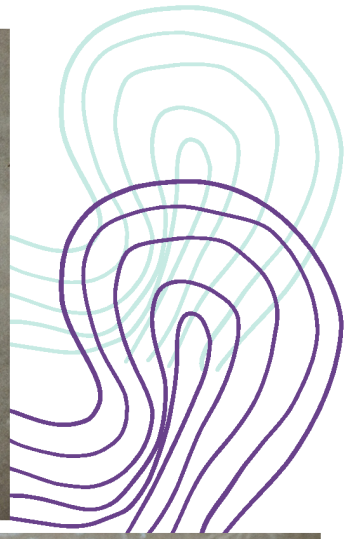
I created this piece of art as an antidote to all the negativity projected onto masks and those who wear them. I drew on the soft, graceful lines and colours of Art Nouveau, in particular Czech artist Alphonse Mucha, in order to romanticize the act of wearing a mask. The figure in the piece is unbothered, relaxed, and elegant, happy knowing they are protecting those around them.

Camille Rogers



SAVE LIVES

POLICE
ABOLITION
IS
HARM
REDUCTION



THE SAFEST
NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE
THE FEWEST
POLICE



NO MORE
ARMED
"WELLNESS
CHECKS"



The "chalkboard" photos are from a day in 2020 when the No Pride in Policing Coalition (NPPC) gathered at so-called Nathan Phillips Square. We were the guests of Afro-Indigenous Rising, also known as AIR, a Black- and Indigenous-led mobilization already holding space there. (From NPPC: "We initiated the Pride Day 2020 Defund and Abolish All Police rally and teach-in of close to 3,000 people held [on] June 28, 2020.") Someone brought a bucket of chalk. These photos show only three of the countless messages of resistance, rebuke, solidarity, and freedom-facing policy change that those gathered set down all over the square that day.

Sev Taylor



Words from Regis Korchinski-Paquet's Mother, Claudette Clayton-Korchinski



We have to stop the police from doing all this killing. They're not being held accountable for anything. It's very sad that I have to sit here today and say this. I lost my daughter in 2020, and it's been nothing but a nightmare. Because nobody's held accountable, the police are still out there killing people. They don't care. We're asking for change. I'm not seeing very much change.

We have to come together and stand up for our younger generation. We have a lot of kids out here, and we don't want them to be educated this way. We don't want them to be afraid. I don't want to educate my children to be afraid of the police.

“Do You Want Me to Wear a Mask, Too?” (And Other Frequently Asked Questions)

Calvin Prowse

Q: What is the mask for?

A: To keep us all safe.

Unfortunately, many people seem to have forgotten about the benefits of masking and the existence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic altogether. Pandemic denialism has emerged as a strategy to ease the cognitive dissonance associated with no longer taking precautions in the rush to return to “normal.”

Q: Are you sick? Is that why you’re wearing a mask?

A: Not that I know of – but I don’t want to get sick, or get other people sick accidentally.

Although high-quality respirators (e.g. N95s, KN95s) offer protection to both the wearer and those around them, some people seem to believe that wearing a mask is only something to do when you are sick. Going out in public while sick with airborne illnesses has once again been normalized, and mandated through the removal of COVID protections that enable isolation when sick (e.g. remote learning and work). This is the price to pay for the return to a pre-pandemic normal: a “normal” that was always ever “a lie meant to pacify us and discourage challenging a society built around racism, ableism and white supremacy” (Imani Barbarin, 2022, para. 5).

Q: Do you want me to wear a mask, too?

A: Yes – but not just for me, and not just this one time.

Masking should be a part of an ongoing commitment to community care, rather than a one-time accommodation for someone deemed “vulnerable.” Instead of viewing the pandemic through the lens of “individual choice,” it should be understood as a matter of collective access and liberation (Sins Invalid, 2015). I always wonder if this question is simply a misguided expression of solidarity; or rather, an attempt to alleviate the guilt that arises from being reminded about the reality of the pandemic.

(continued)

Q: Is it because you're high risk / disabled / vulnerable / have pre-existing conditions?

A: Yes – but not in the way that you think.

My experience of disability has been a politicizing experience that has drawn me toward a deeper commitment to community care. My masking praxis is grounded in an awareness of interdependence (Sins Invalid, 2015): an acknowledgement that “our survival is bound up together, that we are interconnected and what you do impacts others” (Mia Mingus, 2022).

References

Imani Barbarin (Feb. 11, 2022). You're never getting “normal” back. <https://crutchesandspice.com/2022/02/11/%EF%BF%BCyoure-never-getting-normal-back/>

Mia Mingus (Jan. 16, 2022). You are not entitled to our deaths: COVID, abled supremacy & interdependence.

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2022/01/16/you-are-not-entitled-to-our-deaths-covid-abled-supremacy-interdependence/>

Sins Invalid (Sept. 17, 2015). 10 principles of Disability Justice.

<https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice> ◆

Within the People's Circle for Palestine, communities worked together to keep each other safe. Thanks to community donations, we were able to keep a consistent medical tent going. The community inside the camp took a preventative measure against harm and ensured we were all taking care of each other. Teams would offer water bottles and sunscreen and food to everyone in the camp. Race, religion, economic stability: it didn't matter so long as you were here for the liberation of Palestine. Police and Zionists protested a peaceful camp non-stop, and we shouted back, masks on and hands clasped in community, thrice as loud.

The first time I experienced true community care was in the People's Circle for Palestine at UofT. Despite my fears, I attended because I knew masks weren't just mandatory, they were essential to avoid being identified by police.



'Stranger' is such a harsh word for neighbour.



When coming back from a march, an elder ran up to us with water bottles and fruit and insisted we sit to eat.



In the camp, children and dogs ran with glee as a small crowd of Zionists protested outside. Hate felt like a joke. A child fell, and three others helped them up.

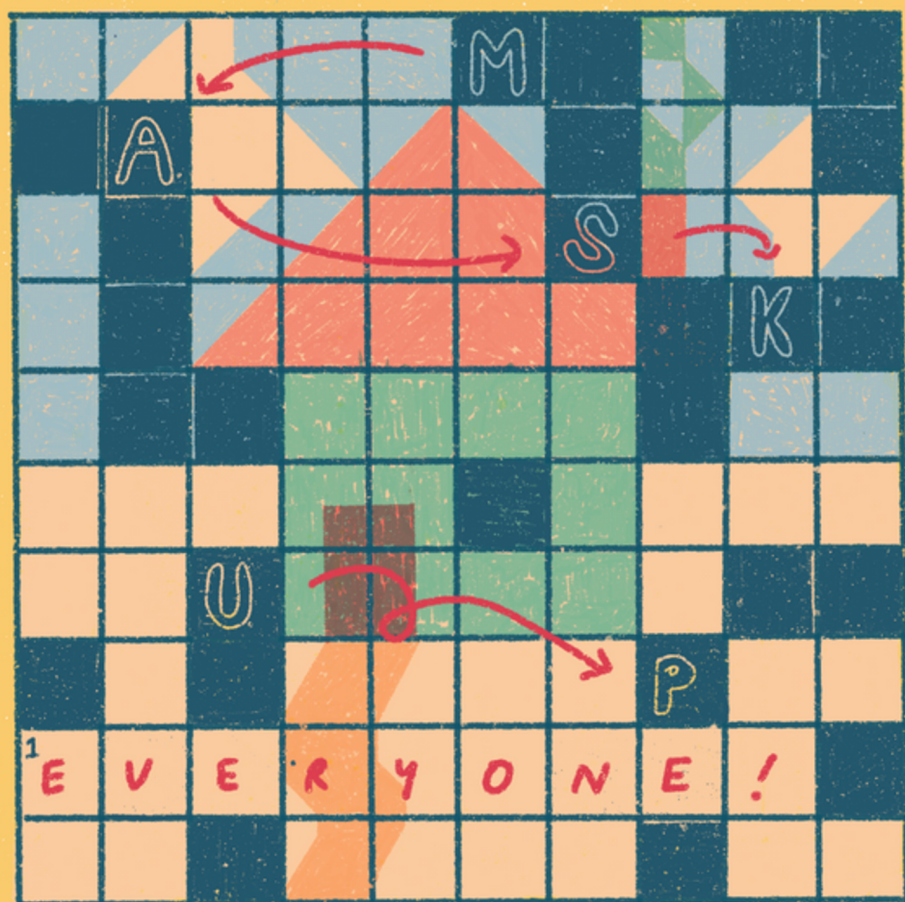
We taught each other dances and mourned the martyrs of genocide. We cried, we protested, we stood our ground against the police. We kept us safe.

(For the record, my job in the leftist commune is to pick up garbage and sing to kids.)



FOR MY OWN GOOD

CROSSWORD



2. WHO IS THE MASKED MAN?

It explores the lives of the elderly, in between all the safety precautions and lockdowns, it emphasizes the critical need to protect them. I want to highlight how they combat loneliness by engaging in activities that are solitary yet mentally stimulating, like crossword puzzles and this also becomes their source of companionship which is crucial during these times of isolation. In the backdrop of the puzzle, a subtle house symbolizes the profound significance of a home for the elderly, urging for continuous vigilance and care towards keeping their homes safe.

Rai Hamid

This digital self-portrait captures my experiences and frustrations as a minimum-wage worker during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, addressing how public health responses have failed marginalized communities and the stresses of working a high-exposure job.

Over the last 4 years, I've experienced a steep decline in the care that employers have for essential workers. At my current job, I've been penalized for calling in sick and discouraged from wearing an N95 mask for appearing "uninviting" to customers. Unpaid sick leave, lack of a mask mandate, and the inability to work from home have left workers incredibly vulnerable in jobs that we can't afford to lose. Large companies and government policies are increasingly prioritizing profits above the health and safety of workers.

This piece aims to raise awareness of the fact that COVID-19 remains a threat and our lack of safety precautions disproportionately targets the most vulnerable parts of the community. We need to start prioritizing the health and well-being of these communities by speaking about these issues, pushing for workers' rights, wearing a mask, and giving their safety the importance it deserves.

Alicia Udvari



SICK & TIRED



Aggie Panda

Disabled by MECFS for over 20 years prior to covid existing, Aggie Panda was prepared for a pandemic, and stoked for more people to start taking their health seriously. Unfortunately they ended up completely and severely cut off by multiple communities due to their diligence with regards to protecting themselves from this disabling virus. But armed with masks, personal hepa filters, and additional covid safety measures, Aggie has been able to create a new world and environment for themselves. One that helps others care for each other, fosters community care, and creates safety for immunocompromised people everywhere.

Alicia Udvari

Alicia Udvari is an interdisciplinary artist and art educator currently based in Katarokwi-Kingston. Working in a variety of mediums, including illustration, animation, and printmaking, Alicia processes their own life experiences through art, as a way to understand them and spread information to others, forming community through shared experiences. Surrounding themes of childhood, nature, and the human experience, their art asks us to examine how we can find understanding with each other through art. Alicia received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Queen's University (2023) and is currently working as a teaching artist at Kingston School of Art, working toward their aspiration to make art accessible to the community.



Alyson Hardwick

Alyson is a White Inuk Toronto-based photographer, writer, poet, and multi-disciplinary artist. Hardwick aims to question and dismantle colonial and capitalist ideology through truth-telling, science and a trauma-informed lens. You can find more of her work at www.alysonhardwick.com.

Bat Cities

bat cities is a hāfu illustrator and storyteller. xir mixed media artwork plays with energetic linework, found texture, and reportage-informed processes. xe is vested in community perspectives and centres togetherness and underrepresented voices in his work. outside of xir illustration practise, xe's passionate about scruffy dogs, virtual pet sites, and experimental storytelling.

Camille Rogers

I am a multi-disciplinary performer, voice teacher, and arts worker. I am Covid-conscious and mask with a respirator in every indoor public space. I mask to protect myself as well as my roommate, who is immunocompromised, and my wider community. I identify as trans, queer, mentally ill, and neurodivergent, all of which put me at a higher risk for Long Covid. I am passionate about making safer spaces, especially within the arts, where people can gather without fearing that they are risking their lives and wellbeing.

Calvin Prowse

I am a queer, Mad, disabled, and chronically ill white settler living in Hamilton. In 2022, as a student at McMaster University, I co-founded a group called “Push Back on Mac” that advocated against an unsafe and inaccessible mandatory return to campus during the height of the Omicron wave. Although my primary strategy for staying safe from COVID-19 has been isolation, the removal of remote learning and work opportunities led me to leaving the house more regularly beginning in 2023. I have found that in many spaces, I am often the only one wearing a mask. I get a lot of questions about it.

Cas Marotta

Cas Marotta is an illustrator currently based in Ypsilanti, Michigan. From sleepless nights to exploring an unfamiliar city, he hopes to capture ordinary yet profoundly felt human experiences in a quiet, dreamlike manner. While his interest spans from comics to print-making to editorial, his work is rooted in a love for story-telling above all else. Cas received his BFA at Pacific Northwest College of Art in Spring 2020.

Lee P

Lee P is a trans white settler, and runs Sheer Spite Press (sheerspite.ca // [@sheerspite](https://twitter.com/sheerspite)), a small press and zine distro.)

revoltergeist

my artist name is revoltergeist. I'm a disabled creative that has worked with the guelph and waterloo region mask blocs. i've been prioritizing COVID safety since 2020, and i've lived the heartbreak of being left behind by community, as well as the hopefulness of finding new communities, united by our commitment to care.

Rai Hamid

This subject remains highly sensitive to me as an artist for several personal reasons. I lost family members to COVID-19, which has had a lasting emotional impact on me. This has made me hyper aware of the virus's effects and the importance of taking precautions for ourselves and our loved ones. With this, I decided to work as a caregiver, with an intention of helping the elderly, who are among the most vulnerable to the virus. I witnessed firsthand the risks that the elderly face, and I think as an artist, our work is not just about creativity but also about connection and empathy. The pandemic mad me realize the importance of caring.

Sev Taylor

Soeren Taylor, known to friends as Sev, is an artist and researcher who has organized with Climate Justice Toronto and the Movement Defence Committee.



Cas Marotta

Safer Event Planning: Keeping it Fun & Healthy!

Hey there! If you're planning an event and want to keep your attendees and community safe, check out these easy guidelines.

Your Main Goals:

- **Safety First:** Protect everyone – staff, volunteers, attendees, and their households.
- **Continue Programming:** Safely maintain in-person activities, and build community.
- **Be Transparent:** Clearly communicate and follow thoughtful health guidelines.

Staying Safe Together:

- **Provide Masks:** Offer KN95 or higher-grade masks to attendees who don't have one.
- **Ensure Good Ventilation:** Use well-ventilated spaces; outdoors is best, when possible
- **Use HEPA Filters:** Place mobile HEPA filters in event spaces, and open windows if you can.
- **Hand Sanitizers:** Supply hand sanitizers (at least 70% alcohol).

Assign a Health & Safety Rep:

- Have a designated person to oversee health and safety measures at each event.

Managing Events:

- Hybrid Options: Offer both in-person and online options if possible. If not, provide recordings when appropriate.
- Limit Capacity: Set attendee limits based on your understanding of COVID-19 risk levels in your community (e.g., high levels consider a 50% capacity and spaced seating).
- Physical Distancing: Maintain distance at non-seated events.
- Masks & Screening: Require masks for attendees over 5 years old and ask quick COVID-19 exposure questions during registration, ideally outside the event space.

Event Essentials:

- Registration Table: Have masks, sanitizers, and information available.
- Opening Statement: Remind everyone about mask-wearing and safety protocols at the start.
- Food Safety: Offer pre-prepared food; for buffet-style, ensure attendees wear masks, sanitize hands, and maintain distancing. Provide food stipends for virtual attendees.

Future Considerations:

- Testing and Monitoring: Plan to offer COVID-19 tests and monitor air quality at indoor events.
- Training: Provide regular health and safety training for staff and volunteers (first aid, naloxone, food safety, COVID-19).



OPIRG at YORK



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