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HOST: As the weather outside becomes snowier and the holidays approach, it gets easier to recognize privilege - right in front of our eyes. The warm home, family gatherings (no more than 10), the ability to give gifts. But, when it's not so easy to see, it's the full shelters, the nursing homes that can't have visitors, and long lines for the food bank. At a time when we're all suffering at different levels, do we have capacity to dig deeper for those that are suffering more? Welcome to The Conversation Piece. This is Valérie Plante.

VALERIE PLANT: I think that the first time I realised that things were not exactly the same depending of who you are, is when I realised that in my, where I'm from, which is - it was not the same. If you were an Aboriginal or a non-native person, um, white people were, I felt like we were all together and it was a, it was an easy access to certain things where I felt native communities were kind of on the side and we, we didn't talk to each other, but though I was young, I felt like it was, they were not the same and they were not treated the same, but it was, it took a long time before I actually bend down on, Oh, okay. This is what discrimination means. Or even colonisation means so quickly when I was young, I realised that it was quite sensitive and injustice, small injustice or big ones did hurt me a lot.

And so I felt, um, that I had two choices in life. One choice was to kind of feel, oppress by this, um, the feeling that there's nothing I could do and to kind of, you know, go in my bed and cry all day, or I could actually take action. So my way with, dealing with injustice and, and sometimes a feeling that, Oh my God, it is so huge. How are we going to deal with that or solve that? I decided to go with action. So I, I go out and I volunteer and I I'm, I'm outside marching. And now then I got involved in, in to a politic political party and now I'm mayor, but it's definitely into this kind of taking action in my own hands, dealing with what I find difficult and struggles that I find difficult to deal with. My first experience is when I was a teenager, I started to volunteer in a, in an elder home.

And I felt like it was such a rewarding place to be. And just, I didn't do much, to be honest. I was just there smiling, being nice, offering help. And, I, it, I really it felt useful. And, it was my first experience just saying hope, giving to others, being sensible to other people actually is, is a good feeling. And it seems like, people are feeling good about it as well. So, though I started to volunteer quite young. I have to say that once I got to college and then university that I felt like I could definitely contribute to different causes, and being surrounded with a lot of people before it was more, you know, solitary, volunteering where now it was being activists. And, the first, one of the cause that I supported was the, the fight for a very low or lower tuition fees for the university.

There was a things around climate about having clean water, about peace as well. So I was really involved, but I think for me, what was greatest to be with a group of people where not only would we March and, but we would also discuss and bring new ideas and see, how can we make this, this, this important cause being heard, which is always a challenge. My first success of one of the first success I've had as an activist, was when we decided to a group of women with decided to work together and to create a training, for, for women in women's shelters, women's organisation, that would be about how the globalisation of, of the economy impacts women differently. And it wasn't a big deal because, we had jobs and we were going to universities and having our life, but we decided to do, don't take them very serious subject and, and to create something that would be accessible for, for women, in shelters.



So yeah, we did that work and I'm really proud of that. Definitely. I think that when you have that type of successes of, being together, and put our forces together is definitely, I think it was probably one of the game changer or a place where I said, okay, I can actually have an impact on my community, in my society and there's different ways to do it. So activism has been the big part of how I l've. I used to see myself as a, or our activism as a way to change the world for sure. And now of course it has evolved now I'm mayor. I definitely want to want to fight, against climate change and how it is slowly effecting us slowly, but not that slowly actually, and more, even more strongly every year or the pace is, is quite, is getting more intense. So I'm definitely thinking about my kids and maybe my possible grandchildren and, and other people's, you know, children it's, this is what motivates me when I think about, everything that needs to be done for, for climate change. And it's not an easy one because at the municipal level, I'm quite limited. It's not like I have the tools and the power

To, you know, create,

The real changes that needs to be done. That being said, I'm definitely doing my part. Um, and we're being quite audacious about that, but, um, it is a subject that really, that I really care about. A lot of things matters to

Me. Um, but if there's

One motivation, one thing that kinda helps me to go through everything is the idea of, of leaving no one behind, even when I was volunteering was I was young. I was thinking about the elders being isolated. I didn't like that. Or even when I was thinking about those students that can not go to school because it was too expensive. I am not comfortable with that. I don't like injustice. And again is how, now that I Mer how do I make sure that I can create the right projects or programme policies that, will assure as much as I can that no one is left behind. And even in my strong belief, on, on climate change and the how important it is to act, I have to say most of the time, the first thing that I think of is how do we make sure that even the, despite against climate change and as the world is changing, how do we make sure that it's not the most vulnerable that are still behind, that it will still be the most effected. This is really what motivates me.

HOST: Valérie Plante spoke at The Walrus Talks at Home at the Broadbent Institute's 2020 Progress Gala in November. And she's just one of the over 800 fantastic Canadians who have walked, wheeled and web-cammed onto the stage at The Walrus Talks.

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