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COMMUNITY FOUNDATION CONFERENCE  
APRIL 24 • 26, 2026



# Our Stories, Our Strength: Harnessing Narrative for Community Impact

## Immersive Learning

April 26, 2026

9:00 – 10:15

Stevenson C



# Your Facilitators

## **Dr. Izzeddin Hawamda**

Founder, Public Speaker, Storyteller  
SADAA Echoes

## **Dr. Shelly Hopper**

Anti-Racism Education Coordinator  
Community Education Development  
Association



# Outcomes

Engage in guided storytelling and reflective dialogue to explore personal and collective narratives that foster empathy and deepen understanding across communities.

Build meaningful connections by listening to and sharing stories in a relational space, strengthening a sense of belonging and collective care.





# Brave Spaces Versus Comfortable Spaces

Brave Spaces: I feel that, in this space, I can ask questions without fear or judgement. I can voice my perspective and know that I will be validated for the fact that that is my truth. Others may challenge my ideas, but that challenge is in the spirit of greater shared understanding and growth.

Comfort: I feel that, in this space, my reality will be agreed with, validated, and unchallenged. I don't have to explain myself to be understood, and I don't have to justify my perspective, as everyone shares it.

*True dialogue happens in an environment where everyone is safe but not always comfortable so that we can learn and grow together.*

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# Name Story

- Names are deeply tied to cultural identity, history and power dynamics.
- In many cases, the way names are treated reflects broader societal attitudes toward race, privilege, and marginalization.
- For some groups of people, names may reflect their heritage, history and the struggles of their ancestors.
- When people are pressured to “Anglicize” or change their names to fit dominant cultural norms, it can erode their sense of identity and disconnect them from their roots
- With a partner, share a “Name Story” that is significant to you.
  - This could be the origin of a name, a place name, a street name, a pet’s name, a nickname, a child’s name



# Cooking from the Heart

**Cooking from the Heart – Cooking with “Nefas” : The heart and breath of the cook living inside the food.**

When I was a boy, winter meant going to the fields with my family to gather لوف (*Palestinian arum*), a wild plant that grows across Palestine during the cold months. Its leaves look a little like grape leaves, but larger, deep, vibrant green, almost defiant against the rain. Back home, my grandmother would already be waiting in the kitchen, wrapped in her embroidered **thobe**, its threads carrying stories older than time. With quiet patience, she layered the leaves one upon another before filling them with rice and meat. The kitchen slowly filled with the scent of garlic and onions. The stove hummed softly while rain tapped gently against the windows.


But what I remember most was not only the taste. It was her presence. Her voice humming old songs. The calm rhythm of her hands. The way warmth itself felt intentional. She used to say, **“Never cook when you are angry.”** Food carries what lives inside your heart. She believed that food was one of the greatest gifts you could offer another human being. She called it **nefas** (نفس), the breath of the cook, the spirit placed into the meal.

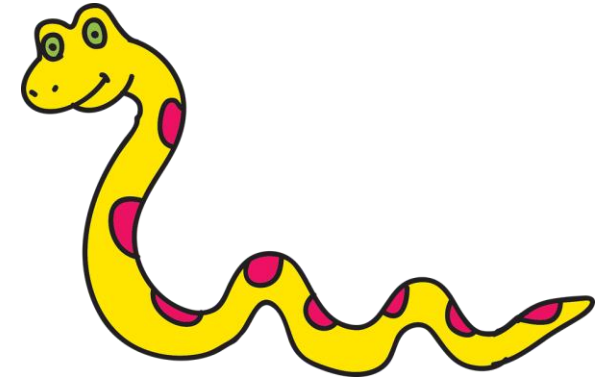
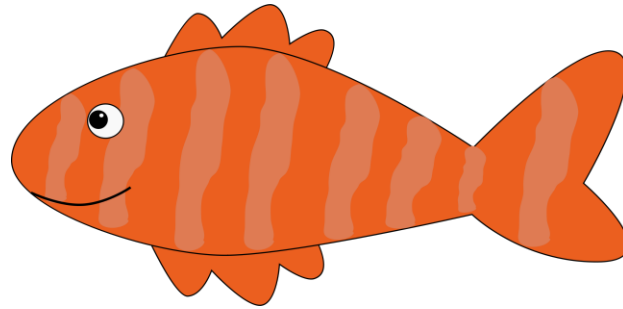
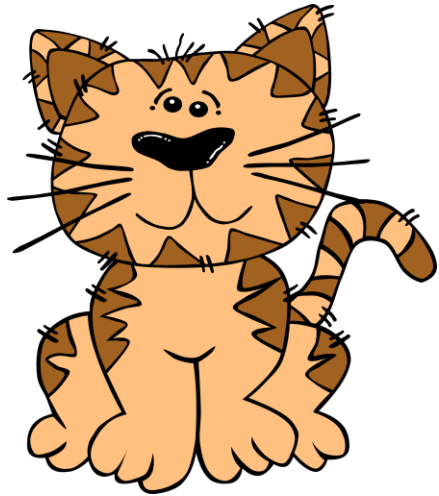
**Nefas** is what happens when you cook from the heart. When food becomes more than routine; it becomes care, dignity, even healing. Before we ever took a bite, we already felt full. *Here* in Canada, I sometimes find myself searching for that feeling. And I remind myself, and others, that cooking with **nefas** is not about abundance. My family had very little. Yet the meals made with intention, patience, and love remain some of the greatest gifts of my life.





# Questions to Consider

- How do you carry *nefas*, the breath of home, into the meals you cook today?
  - How can organizations use shared food practices (community meals, cooking together, food stories) not just as hospitality, but as a way to surface lived experiences, build relational trust, and foster deeper understanding across differences?
  - What responsibilities do organizations carry when using food to bring people together, and how can they honor the cultural, historical, and emotional meaning of food in ways that strengthen belonging rather than flatten or appropriate stories?
- 



Which animal is the best driver?



# Defining the 'Other'

Think about the perspective of the 'other'.

Highlight some of the strengths or experiences that they may hold that you may not.

Highlight some of their values/belief systems.

Is it possible to find common values? Values you can accept?

Who is the 'Other' for you?

Why do we create the 'Other'?

How have you 'Othered' them?



# Shared reflections

What's one key takeaway or "AHA" that you want to remember?  
What are you curious about now?

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## Individual Reflection

What tools & ideas can you take back to your community foundation board?



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