

# In My Backyard

## *A Three-Part Docu-Series on Climate, Community, and Collective Power*

***In My Backyard** is a three-part documentary series that highlights frontline, community-driven solutions to climate change rooted in joy, resilience, and collective action. The series journeys across the United States, with each episode anchored by a narrative thread that begins in Chicago, the hometown of the host.*

Each episode explores a central theme such as biodiversity preservation, green job creation and grassroots activism, and spotlights how frontline communities are transforming climate challenges into opportunities to build stronger, more vibrant backyards (vs. neighborhoods).

*At its heart, **In My Backyard** is about climate defenders and the land that shaped them. In neighborhoods long overlooked, communities are planting seeds of justice through acts of restoration, resilience, and renewal, sparking a movement for lasting change.*

*The mission of the series is to elevate local, actionable solutions that foster collective well-being and environmental resilience, while empowering the next generation of climate advocates ready to lead from within their own communities.*

Supported by



Production Partners: Rishi Productions & Lindsay Blatt



# Concept

*In My Backyard* is a celebration of community-driven solutions that tackle climate change and cultivate thriving environments.

Highlighting frontline communities, the series follows activists and community leaders as they confront environmental challenges at the community level.

Each episode features a diverse cast of individuals working to create spaces where people and nature can flourish together.

Told in three 20–25 minute episodes, *In My Backyard* journeys across the country to highlight powerful personal narratives around three central themes; preventing biodiversity loss, creating green jobs and grassroots mobilization.

# Director's Statement

My connection to nature began under a single tree on my block in Chicago's South Shore. It was the only green space I had growing up, and it shaped both my love for nature and my understanding of how joy can persist through hardship.

While children across the city explored forest preserves and lakefronts, my community carried inhalers, traveled miles for groceries, and lived alongside polluting industries. We faced environmental injustices that made our neighborhoods especially vulnerable to climate change. I saw firsthand how decisions made far from our communities shaped our health and futures.

**In My Backyard** draws from my journey as a youth climate and environmental justice activist. Learning about climate change helped me connect public health, infrastructure inequities, and environmental harm. Our asthma was not bad luck. It was the result of where polluting industries were placed.

This series is a story of joy, resilience, and leadership. It celebrates frontline communities protecting ecosystems, creating green jobs, and organizing for change, inviting audiences to see these communities not as victims, but as leaders of a more just and sustainable future.



*Tonyisha Harris,  
TNC Climate and Energy  
Program Manager in Illinois*

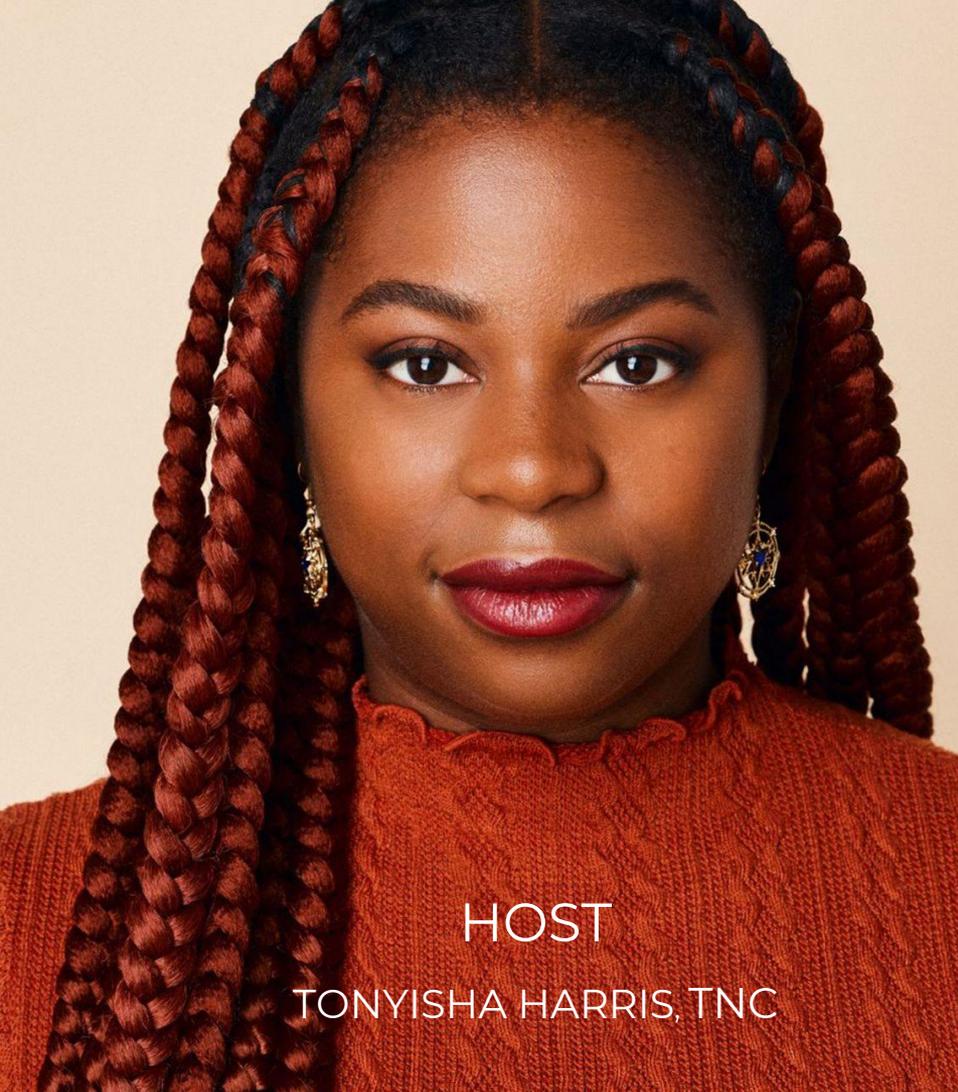
# Tone & Mood

**In My Backyard** centers the voices of activists, educators, and organizers, guiding viewers through deeply human stories that show how communities reclaim agency and shape their futures.

The series balances the focused urgency of grassroots climate work with moments of joy, pride, and possibility. Thoughtful humor and wit make complex climate and environmental justice topics approachable without diminishing their importance. Hip hop music underscores this energy, bringing rhythm, confidence, and cultural grounding to the storytelling.

Visually, the tone moves between polished, in-studio interviews that highlight each subject's knowledge and personality, and more grounded, place-based moments that reflect everyday life, community, and connection to nature. Through warm, immersive visuals and personal storytelling, *In My Backyard* emphasizes inclusion, collective power, and the belief that a sustainable future is built from the ground up.





HOST  
TONYISHA HARRIS, TNC

# Host Color Palette



# Inspiration

In My Backyard is driven by the creator-host's lived experience and draws inspiration from digital storytellers who use personal voice, cultural awareness, and thoughtful humor to engage audiences around complex issues. By centering the creator as the guide, the series offers a consistent, relatable perspective that invites viewers to stay with the story as it unfolds.

The series blends professional, in-studio interviews that highlight credibility and personality with more grounded, place-based storytelling rooted in everyday life and the natural world. This approach allows the work to feel both polished and accessible.

At its core, In My Backyard is inspired by stories made by and for frontline communities. It values authenticity over spectacle, clarity over jargon, and connection over distance, ensuring the series resonates with both the communities represented and a broader public audience.

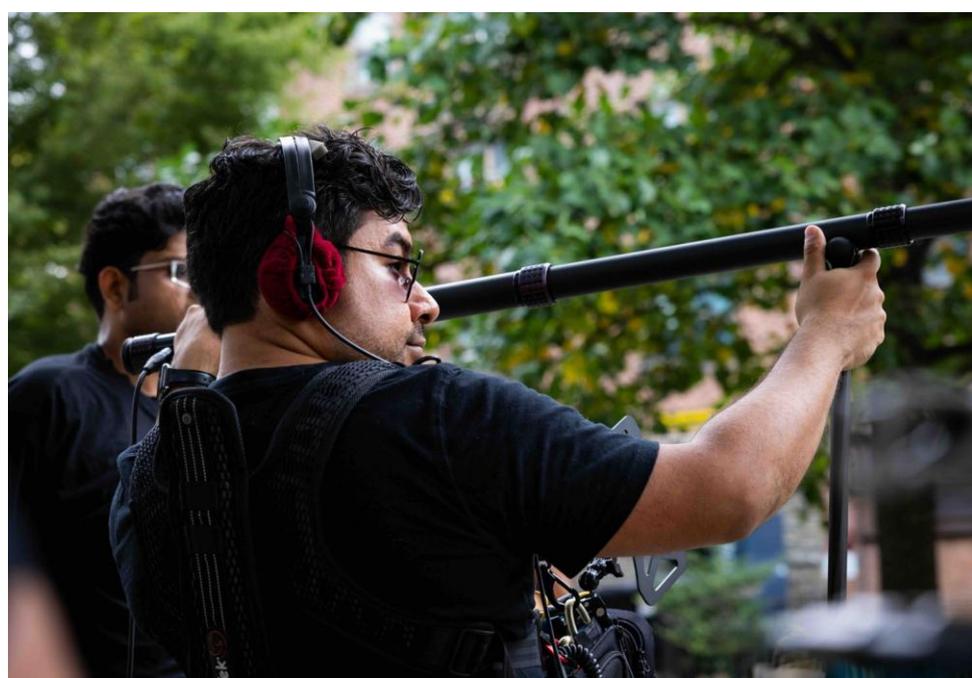


# Music & Sound Design

The soundscape of **In My Backyard** is driven primarily by hip-hop and R&B, using rhythm, bass, and melody to reflect movement, resilience, and collective power. The score will be developed in collaboration with a Chicago-based local producer, grounding the music in the cultural and geographic roots of the series.

The musical direction draws from soulful basslines, layered percussion, and textured beats to support the emotional arc of each episode. The music reinforces moments of urgency, reflection, and joy, while allowing the stories and voices of the community to remain at the center.

Natural soundscapes are woven throughout to anchor each scene in place. Ambient environmental sounds deepen immersion and authenticity, ensuring the series feels both grounded and alive within the communities it highlights.





All photos © Gosia Matuszewska

# Episode Themes

*In My Backyard* features stories about climate action from across the U.S., with each of its three episodes anchored by a narrative thread that connects back to Tonyisha's hometown in Chicago.

The series highlights how community-led efforts are creating more resilient and thriving communities. Each episode will center on one of four core themes:

- Episode 1: Grassroots Activism
- Episode 2: Green Job Creation
- Episode 3: Preventing Biodiversity Loss



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# Episode 1

## Grassroots Activism

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## Dr Lynne Mohammad, Chicago, IL

In Beverly, Chicago, The STREAM Labs provides science- and reasoning-based programming to youth across the city, with a focus on students most impacted by systemic inequities. Founded by Dr. Lynne Muhammad, a former Chicago Public Schools teacher affectionately known as “Dr. Grandma,” the program emphasizes critical thinking, culturally relevant education, and meeting students where they are by bringing learning directly into their neighborhoods.

Dr. Muhammad served as a high school mentor to Tonyisha, encouraging her to pursue environmental science and climate activism beyond the classroom. Today, she continues that legacy by nurturing the next generation of leaders through hands-on, joyful experiences that connect students to nature in their own backyards. As one student proudly notes, she is helping raise future activists and filmmakers alike.

This segment highlights education as the foundation of grassroots climate action, showing how early access, mentorship, and culturally rooted learning can spark lifelong engagement and leadership.



## Melina Pakey-Rodriguez, Ann Arbor, MI

Michigan is known for its expansive waterways and abundant green spaces. That deep connection to nature is what drew Melina Pakey-Rodriguez from Central Illinois to Ann Arbor, seeking closer access to the outdoors and the communities working to protect it.

Through her work with the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC), Melina helps bring community-driven freshwater management solutions to life. Water is central to the region's identity and livelihoods, and that shared love for local waterways fuels collective action and optimism in the face of climate change.

From introducing young people to snorkeling in local rivers to conducting road-stream crossing inventories with interns, HRWC advances climate solutions through education, engagement, and science. Tonyisha, a former HRWC intern, reflects on her time in Ann Arbor as a formative experience that deepened her commitment to protecting freshwater ecosystems and strengthened her path as a climate advocate.

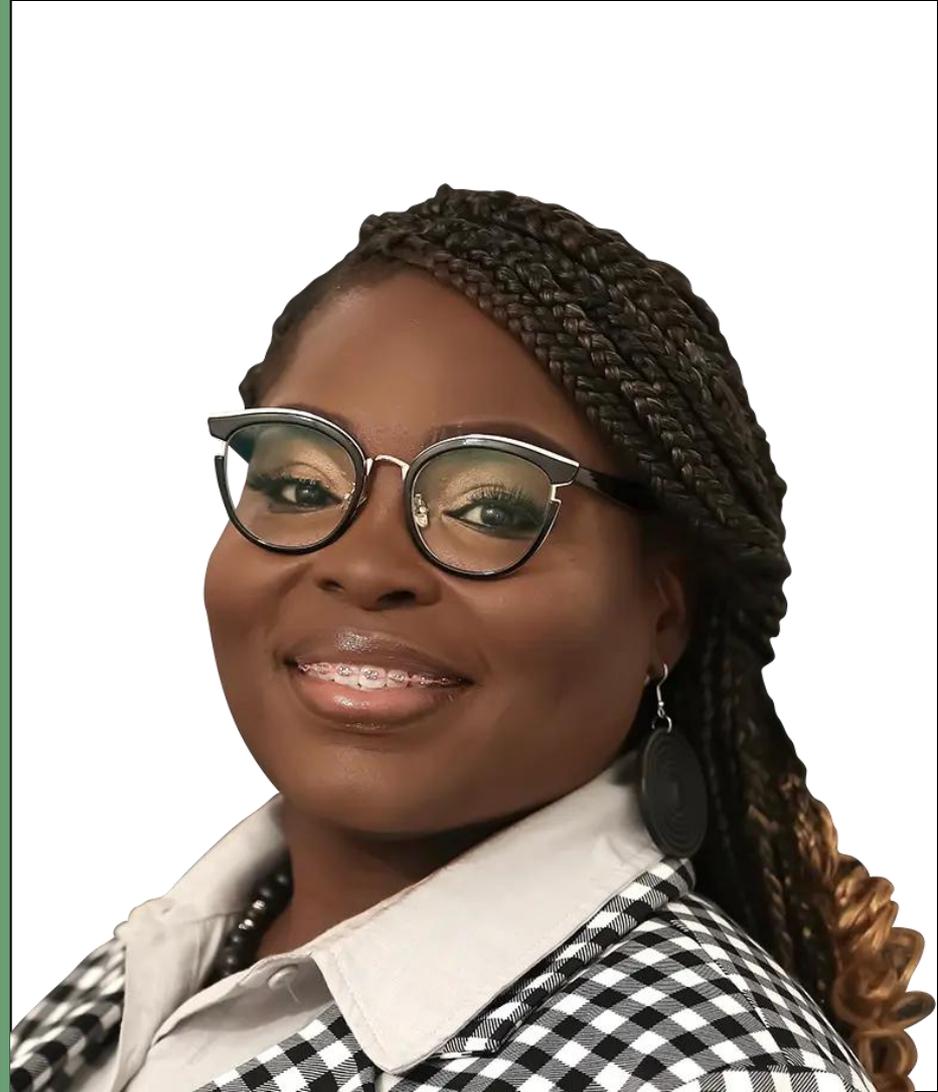


## Roishetta Ozane, Lake Charles, LA

In Lake Charles, Louisiana, Roishetta Ozane is organizing her community at the intersection of climate justice, racial equity, and disaster response. A lifelong resident of Southwest Louisiana, Roishetta founded The Vessel Project in response to repeated climate disasters that left working-class and frontline communities without adequate support or representation.

As a mother, organizer, and advocate, Roishetta works directly with residents impacted by hurricanes, flooding, and industrial pollution, building systems of care rooted in mutual aid, policy advocacy, and community power. Her leadership reflects a broader movement driven by people who experience climate impacts firsthand and refuse to be excluded from decision-making.

This segment highlights grassroots organizing as a critical climate solution, showing how lived experience, collective care, and local leadership are reshaping what resilience looks like on the frontlines.



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# Episode 2

## Create Green Jobs

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## Jalynn Webb, Chicago, IL

Jalynn Webb is building pathways for young people to lead at the intersection of climate justice, healing, and community care through her work at Imani Village. Rooted in Chicago's South Side, her leadership reflects the belief that climate solutions must address both environmental harm and the social conditions shaping young people's lives.

Through Imani Village, Jalynn supports youth working on food access, green space, mental health, and environmental justice, equipping them with the confidence and tools to advocate for change in their own neighborhoods. Her approach emphasizes relationship-building and cultural grounding, recognizing that resilience grows when young people feel supported and connected to place.

This segment underscores the role of youth-led organizing in long-term climate resilience, showing how investing in young leaders helps build community power from the ground up.



## Marlow Ray, Paola Casillas, Solwazi Allah, Richmond, CA

In Richmond, California, community members are restoring their neighborhood creeks and streams and strengthening local resilience to climate change. While Urban Tilth's gardens and farms are well known, it is the locally hired watershed technicians doing the day-to-day work that is bringing these waterways back to health.

Marlow Ray, Paola Casillas, and Solwazi Allah protect their community through invasive species removal, native plant restoration, and hands-on watershed management. Their work has reduced flooding risk, helped minimize wildfire impacts, and earned the trust and support of West County residents.

This segment shows how climate solutions are rooted in people. By restoring the land they live alongside, these technicians demonstrate that community-led stewardship can also create meaningful, dignified employment, reinforcing the idea that those most impacted by climate change are also best positioned to lead the response.



## Israel Cuevas, and Jade Diaz, Staten Island, NY

Staten Island may not immediately be associated with green space, but residents know a different story. Native New Yorkers Israel Cuevas and Jade Diaz manage several Eco-Hubs, or community gardens, bringing fresh produce directly to public housing residents in partnership with the New York City Housing Authority.

As recipients of these services themselves, Israel and Jade understand the impact of food access and community investment firsthand. Through their work with Green City Force, they found purpose, stability, and a pathway to leadership, transforming personal experience into service for their neighbors.

This segment highlights how lived experience, access to opportunity, and community-rooted leadership can turn food justice into both climate action and economic empowerment.



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# Episode 3

## Prevent Biodiversity Loss

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## Claudia Galeno-Sanchez, Chicago, IL

In Pilsen, Chicago, a group of mothers is transforming their neighborhood by advocating for safe, accessible green spaces for their children and community. Through Women for Green Spaces, also known as Mujeres por Espacios Verdes, parents at Pilsen Community Academy are organizing to reclaim outdoor space as a matter of health, dignity, and environmental justice.

Led by Claudia Galeno-Sanchez, these mothers are pushing for greener schoolyards and neighborhood spaces that support learning, play, and well-being. Their work reflects a deeply personal motivation rooted in motherhood, cultural pride, and a desire to create healthier futures for their children.

This segment highlights how grassroots leadership often begins at home, showing how women-led organizing turns everyday concerns into collective action and climate resilience.

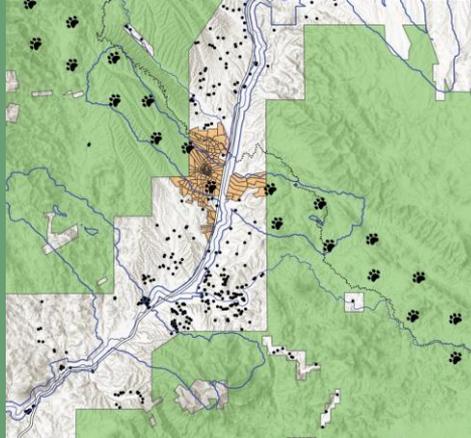


## Dr. Rodrigo Sierra-Corona, US-Mexico Borderlands

The Sonoran Field Course immerses students from rural border communities in hands-on efforts to protect biodiversity across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Guided by Dr. Rodrigo Sierra-Corona, students learn to restore wildlife corridors, propagate native plants, and repair ecosystems damaged by development, extractive industries, and climate change.

Camping near the Coronado National Forest, participants work alongside restoration crews to control erosion, return water to desert systems, collect wild seed for pollinators and quail habitat, and remove invasive species. Along the way, they come to see land stewardship as deeply connected to culture, equity, and long-term resilience.

Many graduates continue on as seasonal staff or pursue careers in conservation, turning biodiversity protection into a personal mission. With new border wall construction looming, this work feels especially urgent, modeling a future where conservation is led by the communities who call the borderlands home.



## DeCora Hawk, Lakota Land, SD

On Lakota land in South Dakota, DeCora Hawk is leading a vision of climate resilience rooted in culture, sovereignty, and self-determination. As a founder of Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, DeCora works alongside community members to rebuild systems that were disrupted by generations of displacement and environmental harm.

Her work centers on creating regenerative housing, food systems, and youth programs that reflect Lakota values and relationships to land. Rather than imposing outside solutions, DeCora and her community are restoring traditional knowledge while addressing modern challenges such as housing insecurity, food access, and climate vulnerability.

This segment highlights how Indigenous leadership offers a powerful model for climate action. By grounding solutions in culture, land stewardship, and community care, DeCora Hawk demonstrates that long-term resilience is built when communities have the power to shape their own futures on their own terms.



# Marketing & Distribution

In My Backyard will be distributed through The Nature Conservancy-owned media channels, including nature.org, YouTube, and email newsletters. A dedicated landing page will host the full series, along with action toolkits, screening guides, and resources that support deeper audience engagement.

The series will launch alongside a coordinated social media campaign, community “green carpet” screenings in featured locations, virtual events, and a curated film festival run. An impact toolkit will support community-led screenings and discussions, providing posters, conversation guides, and digital engagement tools.

This distribution strategy is designed to prioritize broad reach, free access, and meaningful participation, ensuring the series is accessible to audiences and communities nationwide.





## The Production Team

**Tonyisha Harris** - Host, Director, TNC

**Lindsay Blatt** - Lead Writer, Story Producer



## Rishi Productions Staff

**Gosia Matuszewska** - Producer, BTS Photographer

**Gabriel Garavaglia** - Director of Photography

**Sandeep Pamulapati** - Post-Production Manager, Editor

**Alan Contreras** - Production Sound Mixer, Re-Recording Mixer

