

Transcript

The logo for 'Group Chat' features the word 'Group' in white text on a black rectangular background, with the word 'Chat' in black text on a white speech bubble background to its right. A hand is shown holding the top of the black rectangle, and another hand is holding the bottom of the white speech bubble.The logo for 'Group Chat' features the word 'Group' in white text on a black rectangular background, with the word 'Chat' in black text on a white speech bubble background to its right. A hand is shown holding the top of the black rectangle, and another hand is holding the bottom of the white speech bubble.

Bonus Episode: Behind the Mic

[00:00:00] **Sabreena Delhon:** Hi everyone. I'm Sabreena Delhon, CEO of the Samara Centre for Democracy and host of the podcast Group Chat. We released the show a few months ago and have been thrilled with its reception. We've also been delighted to receive feedback from teachers, librarians, students, and other citizens. About how the show is helping to make sense of this moment of political uncertainty.

[00:00:31] It can be hard to know where to start. To help, we've put together a guide to host a Group Chat Listening Party. Think book club, but with a podcast. We've put together some questions in the guide that are just a jumping off point. You can use them to explore what's happening in Canadian politics and what you want to see next in our democracy.

[00:00:55] You can find the Group Chat Listening Party Guide at samaracentre.ca, and don't forget your snacks. To help launch the guide. We thought it would be fun to take you behind the scenes for the making of Group Chat, a podcast about topics that so many Canadians care about, but are struggling to talk about.

[00:01:16] Joining me today is Executive Producer of Group Chat, Debbie Pacheco. Debbie is a seasoned journalist, podcast and radio producer who has worked with major clients such as Audible, Lionsgate, and Universal. She's also a former producer on CBC Radio's flagship Entertainment Show Q, and she's got a new podcast out, one she's co-created.

[00:01:40] It's called Don't Listen to Us - a take it or leave it advice show hosted by award-winning actor Mandy Patinkin, Kathryn Grody and their son Gideon. The Samara Centre team was just thrilled that Debbie agreed to work with us on the Group Chat project, and now she's here and we're gonna chat about what that was like. Hey, Debbie!

[00:02:01] **Debbie Pacheco:** Hey Sabreena!

[00:02:04] **Sabreena Delhon:** So we started this project in the summer of 2024. You get a call from a nonpartisan charity saying that they wanna make a show about this moment, and that we don't want it to be about doom and gloom in terms of Canada's democracy. What was going through your mind when we came to you with that request?

[00:02:30] **Debbie Pacheco:** I guess two things in particular. I'll start with the more personal one. You know, a lot was happening in the world then as it is now. And truthfully I am a pessimist at heart, which is difficult to admit right now 'cause I know that's not what this world needs at the moment. But what was going through my mind was, wow, the task of meeting the moment without dwelling on doom and gloom felt really daunting.

[00:02:55] But you also caught me at a time when I wanted to counter my own pessimism, and it felt like a challenge to take on for myself. That was sort of like the personal journey. The second thing was, you know, when every journalist and podcaster thinks about this, what are we gonna concentrate on? Democracy is such a big topic that touches, as you know, every part of our lives, everyone's talking about it now. What topics are of particular concern to Canadians now and sort of thinking about all of those things melded into, you know, why we are having our conversation. What made you use podcasting as a medium, as a way to talk about some of these key and emerging issues in democracy today?

[00:03:37] **Sabreena Delhon:** I think you know your point about it being a period where people can feel pessimistic or overwhelmed. One thing we think about is relevance and what mediums can we use to get our message across, our evidence across, our research across. How can we profile other people that are doing great work? And a podcast just seemed highly relevant.

[00:04:00] Podcasts are definitely used for anti-democratic purposes to pretty expedient effect. What if we're able to take a tool like that and use it for pro-democracy purposes and address that pessimism and trepidation by providing a space that's inviting and informative at the same time? Of course, you know, democracy's about people, and I'm a podcast nerd.

[00:04:26] The best podcasts are about humans and their stories. And so I thought that was, you know, important for us to do. And we had a really great reaction to Humans of the House which really leaned into the human story side of things, the human side of politics. So for us it was about leaning into the human side.

[00:04:49] Being relevant in this moment. Podcasts are super accessible. They're also easy to use in classrooms. We work a lot with high school teachers and professors who use our shows with their students. So, you know, that was what was driving our motivation in terms of using podcasts.

[00:05:08] **Debbie Pacheco:** So the Samara Centre envisioned this podcast idea. What was your thinking at the time around how to make a podcast about political conversations make sense to people?

[00:05:19] **Sabreena Delhon:** Well, you know, the first episode of the show is a conversation with Annamie Paul and the genesis of this project comes from a coffee that I was able to have with her a couple of years ago, I think in 2022, where she shared with me that she had had a group chat appear on her phone, during a pretty intensive political moment in her life.

[00:05:45] And it was comprised of all sorts of different women from across the political spectrum, from different you know, professional spaces and places in her life, and they were just all cheering her on and supporting her through this chat. And it was during COVID that this was all going on. So being able to, you know, connect with people was harder than ever.

[00:06:08] And there was something about that group chat that really struck me as incredibly human. Sadly surprising, it had never occurred to me that something like that would be going on. And I thought, like I just kind of kept mulling it over in terms of what if there was just some other group chat that we could all kind of derive that feeling from, whether that's as a contributor or as someone who's receiving those messages.

[00:06:33] How can people feel invited and supported in terms of their political engagement and how can we lean into the fact that the people in the group chat might surprise you? Especially in a period where we're told over and over again how polarized and divided we are. When, maybe that's the case online where a minority is dominating the conversation, but day to day that doesn't really hold up with our human interactions, you know, with neighbors and with people in our communities.

[00:07:03] And you know, what the majority of Canadians want for the quality of life and future of democracy in this country. So that's just kind of like a micro example, but I thought, what can we kind of spin out of that that also leans into that human side. And then, that's also what's driving our interest in helping people host some group chat listening parties so they can get their own political group chats going.

[00:07:29] It doesn't have to be intimidating or boring. You don't have to pick a side. It's just about having some civic connection, which people are really hungry for. And having some support to get going with that. And, you know, that's a request people bring to us a lot. So with the show, with the listening party guide, it's about responding to people that are looking for a positive and productive way to be political.

[00:07:56] So, speaking of Annamie Paul, Debbie let me play an excerpt for you now from her interview. This is from Episode One: This Group Chat Will Surprise You.

[00:08:09] **Annamie Paul Clip:** I don't know if they saw the desperation, or the quiet screams in my eyes while I was doing interviews or whatnot and said, okay, we need a call, she clearly needs a call tonight. It's time. I never instigated any of those calls, but just the symbolism, just the power of that idea that there are still people that are not willing to forfeit their underlying humanity. You want to and need to understand how important it is to be a human being, reaching out to another human being. Politics, et cetera all these things are incredibly important, but they're not worth sacrificing your humanity for. And I think more and more we see people that seem to have forgotten that in a world that is increasingly polarized. It was just a really heartwarming thing for me to be a part of.

[00:09:07] **Debbie Pacheco:** So, Sabreena, that line, "the quiet screams in my eyes", I can remember being in studio when she said that, and my eyebrows totally went up. And you talked to a lot of politicians, including for Humans of the House. When you first heard Annamie Paul say that, how surprised were you about that level of vulnerability?

[00:09:30] **Sabreena Delhon:** I mean. She is just so open and forthright, in conversation, which is just wonderful. But whenever someone shares that kind of detail and, you know, vulnerability with you, it's jarring. It also feels important that, you know, they felt comfortable sharing that with you. But sadly it is not surprising. It is something that. I've had the privilege of hearing a lot of politicians reflect on, and you know, when they're in the role, they really have to be armored up and careful and vigilant at all times.

[00:10:16] And I think when they have some distance from, you know, the most intensive part of their last political experience, 'cause there might be another political experience in the future, you never know. But when they've had some distance from it, you know, there's just a lot to unpack and maybe not as many spaces to do that, maybe not as many people asking, as there should be.

[00:10:42] And so we're really grateful that, you know, the politicians that we speak to understand where the Samara Centre is coming from in terms of really valuing and respecting that experience. And we take great care to make sure that the trust, um, is there, in terms of creating a space where people feel okay to talk about those kinds of experiences, it doesn't mean that we don't also talk about, you know, hardball, substantive political stuff, but that human side is so important and it is really what draws people in to feeling equipped and enabled to have political conversations.

[00:11:18] So, you know, I think with Annamie, she was responding to our human approach. But, it's also something that we understand that life and politics is really hard to just put it simply and kind of in a most basic way, but it has all of these tremendous rewards. And that, you know, none of the politicians we've talked to ever express any regrets about what they did as well.

[00:11:51] And they're, they're sharing their story to help improve the situation and to help support other people joining in as well.

[00:11:58] Okay, let's switch gears for a moment and have a listen to a clip from a different episode. This one we did on a not so easy to talk about topic: The Notwithstanding Clause.

[00:12:09] **Karin Galldin Clip:** It's just really hard to pay attention to such an anodyne term as the notwithstanding clause.

[00:12:16] You know? And all you hear are politicians talking about it. And you have governments kind of doing a lot of these deliberations behind, you know, the red curtains. And then they come out from behind their red curtains and they're like, "Ta da! Here's this thing and we're not really gonna be upfront with you about what it is and tell us what you think in five years."

[00:12:34] And like those curtains need to be pulled and exposed, and we need to see what happens like right from the beginning when government starts conceiving of using the notwithstanding clause.

[00:12:45] **Warda Shazadi Meighen Clip:** I think the notwithstanding clause has to be used appropriately, not the way it's being used at the moment. Let's make sure that it actually reflects what the, you know, the electorate wants. So let's ensure that there's greater public participation.

[00:13:01] **Sabreena Delhon:** So, Debbie, this episode has really gone the distance. It's been accredited by the Law Society of British Columbia. It's also connected to the Samara Centre intervening before the Supreme Court of Canada in the landmark case about Bill 21, also the chemistry between the guests was really good.

[00:13:20] But Debbie, please be honest, when we wanted you to do a full episode on the notwithstanding clause, what were you thinking?

[00:13:29] **Debbie Pacheco:** My first thought was, "The notwithstanding what?" if I'm going to be honest. And after diving into it more, my second thought was, oh boy, I get why it's very important to cover, but I was thinking this just might be the boring episode of the ones that we're going to do.

[00:13:50] There's so much political jargon and legal jargon surrounding this issue. But like you said, it ended up being the chattiest of them all.

[00:13:58] **Sabreena Delhon:** I remember you saying we need to talk about the notwithstanding clause in a way that people can relate to. What was your creative process to get to that point?

[00:14:08] **Debbie Pacheco:** I thought, okay, what if we personify the clause? What if we personify it as a figure in popular culture? And so in doing the pre-interviews, you know, where we sort of try to gauge, you know, are people good talkers? Can they speak about this thing that they know about? You know, where are their opinions on it?

[00:14:28] One of the things we were looking for is how much are they willing to play with a topic too. So when I asked everyone, you know, if you were to personify the notwithstanding clause, what figure in popular culture would it be? They all were willing to play and answer that question and they gave some really interesting answers.

[00:14:49] And, you know, for those of us joining us, you'll just have to listen to the podcast to find out what they said. Some superheroes and villains were named. But I know for me personally, it helped me understand the clause a bit more and the controversies around it and the different ways people view it.

[00:15:06] **Sabreena Delhon:** Well, I know what episode I found most challenging to produce. What was yours?

[00:15:13] **Debbie Pacheco:** I think we're probably both aligned on this. We spoke with Audrey Tang, who's a really big deal in the tech world, and Glen Weyl and the episode became so philosophical and out there. I remember at one point they were talking about the surly bonds of Earth and like touching the face of God.

[00:15:32] **Sabreena Delhon:** Touching the face of God. Yeah.

[00:15:34] **Debbie Pacheco:** And Sabreena, I was really trying to mask my bewilderment. I didn't because we were in the same room. I didn't want to show it on my face. I didn't want to freak you out. And I didn't want to throw you off, but you held it together. But that was certainly, I think, the most challenging for me.

[00:15:50] **Sabreena Delhon:** They took me with them, we were on a journey and I was, you know, just open to exploring where they wanted to go. And you know, for our listeners to understand that, you know, making this kind of show isn't just about a couple of interviews, boom, quick, done. Like, there's so much reflection and synthesis and how about this and what about that?

[00:16:12] And then, you know, just finding a way to take all of that rich expertise and put it into a format or a structure that listeners from like high school students and beyond can, you know, get something from, relate to or connect with. And, but yes, it was, it was quite esoteric. And just so our listeners also understand, Audrey Tang is this amazing trailblazer and thinker, Taiwan's first digital minister and this episode was looking at the ways we could use technology for good while also considering its limitations. Have a listen to a clip.

[00:16:52] **Audrey Tang Clip:** There are now a few applications on the internet that dominates people's attention, time, imagination. The rest of the internet that are experimenting a lot in terms of how to collaboratively fact check, to how to do collaborative journalism, how to make sure that you can always bridge common knowledge across people who hold very different political views. All these are part of the internet, and when we spend our time in there, we feel much more empowered and much more democratic also.

[00:17:27] **Bianca Wylie Clip:** When we think about technology, are we escaping the human piece? Because I really believe in all of democracy and all of our human relations. It's between people. If we haven't been able to use the technology of democracy to bring us together, where are we getting the confidence that a more technocratic vehicle is gonna do it?

[00:17:50] **Debbie Pacheco:** So that first voice, as you said, Sabreena, was Audrey Tang, and then that was followed by Bianca Wylie, a digital rights advocate. Sabreena, you were navigating this episode as the host. We just heard two very different clips and takes on technology. How did this episode influence how you think about the role of technology now? Did, did you come out of it thinking differently?

[00:18:14] **Sabreena Delhon:** I mean, I felt, you know, like it's really, we're so fortunate that such tremendous thinkers with such depth and nuance in their work want to talk to us. I think that's just amazing and that they're open to helping us learn from them and what different perspectives.

[00:18:34] But they're connected, right? They have different styles. There's different perspectives. Audrey's very big picture. Like it's compelling but destabilizing listening to her interview 'cause it's so kind of challenging to understand all the kind of like the weight of everything that Audrey's able to convey to us. And then Bianca's very pragmatic and matter of fact, in a way that is so precise that it's also kind of jarring, right? So, they were able to help us understand this is such a complex, massive picture. The timeframe is not just this moment, right? Helping us think longer term in terms of what, you know, where we wanna be as a society, as people, and how technology can help or hinder us in that regard. And just that, balancing those perspectives as well. So, you were so great about weaving that all together in a way that that kind of created a clear picture in that episode. But, that was not easy.

[00:19:50] **Debbie Pacheco:** It was not, but I'm glad with how it turned out. I think even I left with an understanding, more of an understanding about the role of technology and democracy and some of the challenges.

[00:20:02] **Sabreena Delhon:** So we're almost out of time, but before we go, Debbie, I want to ask, what was the big takeaway for you about democracy with this project?

[00:20:11] **Debbie Pacheco:** Wow, you leave the easy question for last. I think I'm gonna circle back to the beginning and the start of our conversation about the doom and gloom, especially now.

[00:20:21] There are people doing amazing things around democracy, experimenting, testing. We did an episode on citizens assemblies. People are trying to fix what's not working. And if I'm gonna sound a bit Pollyanna-ish, I have hope and I was inspired by the people we spoke with. I even joined a community advisory committee in my neighborhood to help plan a nearby park.

[00:20:45] Yeah, I was feeling very pessimistic and it's really nice to be surrounded by and inspired by people who are really trying to work in this field and really trying to fix it. And if I can also add, I love the idea of these listening parties and getting people together, and I think, you know, it is easier to have conversations about democracy than we think.

[00:21:05] **Sabreena Delhon:** Oh Debbie, you couldn't have scripted it any better. That's why we are helping Canadians have political conversations in their communities by hosting Group Chat Listening Parties across the country. Check out the guide at samaracentre.ca and keep us posted. We want to see your pictures, tell us about what you've been chatting about. Let us know what the snacks were. And don't forget to rate and review Group Chat wherever you listen to your podcasts. We can't wait to hear from you. Debbie, it was wonderful and an honor collaborating with you on this project. Thank you so much for chatting with me about it today.

[00:21:42] **Debbie Pacheco:** Thank you for letting me be here, and it was amazing to work with you guys at the Samara Centre.

[00:21:47] **Sabreena Delhon:** I'm Sabreena Delhon. Visit samaracentre.ca for Group Chat Listening Party material. Thanks so much.