

Transcript of Interview with Nancy Parker

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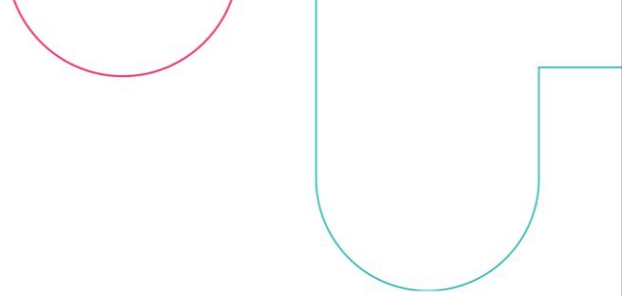
Well, good afternoon. My name is Nancy Parker, and I guess some of my relevant background initially was that I was on the board of the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention and currently now serve as the executive director of an organization called Marymount in Winnipeg, which is on Treaty One. So I had done decades of clinical work, often involved in working with individuals who were thinking about suicide and such down in the United States. And then in 2011, I returned back to Treaty One territory, and I was quite shocked. It was a really tough, tough reckoning to see the situation of mainstream and health care in relation to Indigenous peoples. And it just felt like the mainstream health care system that I was working in when I first came back to Winnipeg was so out of sync, and not necessarily about not caring, but just a real lack of understanding how to perhaps be with and be different with and think differently about health care with Indigenous peoples.

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So when I got the call to potentially join Ed as a co-coach up in Thompson, Manitoba, which is in Treaty Five, Manitoba, I was quite swamped with work, so I was sent some of the initial work, and that included the guiding principles. And when I read the guiding principles, it was, I don't know, I just, maybe I heard angels singing. It was just like, yes, this really finally gets it because it is all about Indigenous voice. It is all about the primacy of Indigenous voice and that Indigenous knowledge is evidence. We don't need to go through, you know, the Western ways of determining what's effective or not. And really that notion that it would be Indigenous-led, and that often for, I think, a Western approach to things is really difficult, because there's sort of that leadership "jump in and do it," and "my idea is probably right and good," and so to take a step back, I just wanted to really be part of this. So that really was my engagement was those guiding principles. So as part of joining as coaches, as others have mentioned, that also allowed me to be on the guidance group, which was an incredibly rich experience. And I just echo Denise, that ability to do the work and then be within a guidance context, I think, really enriched this collaborative. So when I think about the team and the work we did as coaches, I want to acknowledge that I am not Indigenous to Turtle Island. So Ed, and then when Kelly Brownbill joined us, they really were the ones that were able to bring that to the team, and that was critical to be able to honour and talk about ceremony, and as we mentioned, open up the conversation for the team to feel safe enough to start to ask questions.

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And I think the fact that this was a learning collaborative was really key, and CFHI, just can't compliment them enough because they supported constantly a very strength-based approach



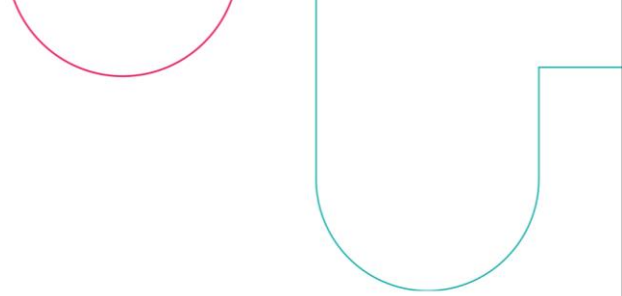
and acknowledged that every team's journey is unique and of equal value. And, you know, again, in a Western perspective, we would maybe otherwise judge a team to say, oh, they got to these targets and other teams didn't, so therefore, they were better. But that, in fact, wasn't the case. We realized that a team maybe that had a whole different rhythm to their moving forward in their learning and understanding was perhaps maybe really, really, deeply transformational for them. And so I certainly saw on the team individual transformation of people's worldviews starting to shift. And I think, as others have mentioned, at times, it did mean some really kind but gentle pushing and questioning against bias or ways of doing, because there was that natural impulse to just go back to doing business as usual in thinking about moving a project forward. But that notion that you need to step back, you need to listen, you need to walk alongside, it doesn't mean your view isn't important. But in this particular process, in this particular collaborative, we are going to keep emphasizing the Indigenous voice and the Indigenous worldview. And so within that common ethical space that we've shared between these two worldviews, it was weighted more towards that voice. And I think that was essential in order to start some of that decolonization work with our Northern Health Authority team.

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And I think there was significant unlearning for the health teams, where they assumed all these different ways of how you go about this work. And again, the guiding principles just continued to be a really helpful touchstone to keep going back, to really emphasize what was unique, what was different, what we're trying to achieve, so that there was this tacit acknowledgment that we weren't saying the Western way was wrong, but we were really asking teams to open themselves to a very different way of doing and being. And I felt as a coach, really, such a privilege because I was walking the same journey at the same time as the team was. And, so, you know, I would often try to step out of that and really, I guess, get a very objective view on what I was seeing in front of me or see how I could use my voice in my own growth and experience to help, you know, share and propel those very natural feelings of being afraid, worrying you're going to do it wrong, you know, insult somebody or all of those pieces that I think certainly the team we coached were very gracious in allowing the relationship to develop so they had that safe space, they could do that kind of exploration.

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So I think ultimately, this was a really incredible way to help move a group of people in the transformation of their own worldview. And my hope is that that continues for each individual, that they're able to continue to challenge their biases, the way they approach their work when they are working with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous communities, and that that use of relationship, and the other key piece I think of is time. We didn't rush things. If it was a conversation that needed five hours, it took five hours. It needed the time that it needed, and we honoured that in the work, and honoured the team's own pace. So I think, again, this made this



collaborative very different because a Western more-led collaborative would have been really rigid about, you know, timelines and agendas and all of those things. But this very different way of working relationally and really allowing the work to unfold in its own time and space was just a beautiful thing to be part of.

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This was such a deep, enriched journey, and it was a journey of, you know, ceremony and relationship and connecting spirit through land and deeply living that. So my life has been tremendously enriched through this experience of being a coach. But I think what was taught to me was another lesson again in humility and being non-judgmental, to just really be attuned to the team and their journeys and how to support their journey through the reflections that we had, and as Ed just mentioned, it's a two-way street. They gave me so much in what I learned from them. And the work does continue. I was, you know, continue to be very grateful to the board where I work at Marymount because they gave me the freedom of time and space to do this work within my work, if you will. But bringing it back to the organization, helping support continued actions around reconciliation, cultural reclamation, I've been able to see more and more things happen in that area, and I know it's because of the influence of this collaborative and in particular, I will say, my co-coach, Dr. Ed Connors, that just was, it goes into that place of your emotions and your spirit.