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Gladys ([00:05](#)):

Tansi. Greetings, and welcome to Indigenous Insights. I'm your host, Gladys Rowe, and I'm so grateful you are here. Each episode I sit in conversation with Indigenous evaluation practitioners, leaders, researchers, and scholars who are working in, thinking about, and supporting Indigenous evaluation to share the learning they've experienced along the way. My hope is that these episodes allow you to reflect on how to design, implement, learn from, and support evaluation by with and for Indigenous families, communities, organizations, and nations. Join me and my guests as we open up our evaluation bundles to share what we've gathered in our journeys and bring them together into this space. I hope in these stories you'll come to understand how we can collectively contribute to decolonial futures and strengthen Indigenous resurgence.

So, I'm here today with Abigail Echo-Hawk, who holds a master of arts and is an enrolled citizen of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma.

She was born in the heart of Alaska where she was raised in the traditional values of giving respect for all and love. Abigail is an auntie, sister, mother, daughter, granddaughter, and a community member who works towards building a great future for the next generations. She serves her community as the director of Urban Indian Health Institute and executive vice president of Seattle Indian Health Board, where she works locally to provide public health services to the Seattle urban Native community and nationally to engage community partners, conduct research and evaluation, and build capacity for Native organizations. Welcome, Abigail.

Abigail ([01:47](#)):

Thanks for having me.

Gladys ([01:49](#)):

Thank you so much for being here. I'm wondering if you wanted to bring yourself into the space in any other way. Do you have any other introduction that you would like to share as we step into the space of this podcast episode?

Abigail ([02:03](#)):

Yeah, thank you so much. I really appreciate the bringing of my ancestors into the room and today I really have been sitting with the strength of my grandmothers: one who I was never able



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to meet because she died before I was born. But my father used to sit me on his knee and sing her songs to me and tell me her story. So I know her, I see her, I feel her, and I bring her with me every single day. And then my other grandmother from the heart of Alaska, where, when I would walk into her home, the first thing that I would smell is wood smoke from the big wood stove in the middle of the room and the smell of moosehead soup or moose soup that would be boiling on the stove, because the very first thing she would do is offer food. And when I'd walk in the room, she'd say, Abigail! And when we'd run over there and she would grab my face and she would say, I'm your grandmother, I am your grandmother, I am your grandmother. So today I want to remember all of those who claim me as family, as community members and know my accountability and responsibility to them is what I've been reflecting on today and how I'd like to bring myself into this space. So again, thank you for having me.

Gladys ([03:12](#)):

So beautiful. And as you were sharing that, I just closed my eyes and felt all of the immense beauty of bringing your grandmothers in with you. So thanks for starting us off in that way. So being that this is a podcast about Indigenous evaluation, I'm wondering if we can start off with how have you journeyed? Because I know that you bring a lot of different experiences and wisdom and background into the work that you do. But tell me a little bit about how you came to work specifically within Indigenous evaluation and how you ended up in the roles that you're in today.

Abigail ([03:51](#)):

That's a really good question because I think about how did I end up in these roles all the time? <laugh> I'm a storyteller and I see evaluation and our stories, both verbal stories, our written stories, our qualitative and quantitative stories is what the beauty of the strength of our community is since time immemorial. And that's what Indigenous evaluation is based on: that ancestral practice. But when I went to college, I was, you know, a young native woman going to college. I learned all the nice Western ways of conducting evaluation, I took all the right classes, I learned from all of the right teachers. And after college, after graduate school, found myself working at the University of Washington. After working for the university for a year, I stepped back into my own home community of Alaska where I was being asked to present a project that I had worked on for the University of Washington.

So I invited all my family. I was so excited to have everybody there. And of course when you come back home everybody comes to see you. And I presented my awesome project with my very University of Washington PowerPoint. I presented the information the way that I had been taught at the university and the standard that had been upheld by the department I now worked for at the University of Washington. And afterwards my family and I all went to a, you know, a fancy restaurant in Fairbanks, Alaska. It's a different kind of fancy, believe me, <laugh>, the kind we all love. And I was sitting next to one of my uncles who I was raised with. And as we were sitting there, I was like just wanting him to say something to me, say congratulations, say proud of you, say good job. And I just couldn't stop myself from asking him. And I said, uncle, how did I do? What did you think? And I remember to this day exactly what he was eating. I mean he was eating like a puff pastry, shaped like a fish, in some kind of weird bowl. And he's



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kind of picking at it, you know, what we call village Indian, he's looking at this kind of weird food, and he doesn't even look up to me, but he says, you don't speak Indian no more. I was like, wow. It just rocked me to my core, like...I don't speak Indian anymore. And I spent several years thinking about what that meant. And truthfully, I still think about it. I still reflect back on that.

What I realized is, is that I got up there and I stood and I talked about our community, not as a community member but as an observer of it. I talked about our deficits and none of the incredible strengths and culture and tradition that I was raised in. I talked about our culture as something to observe and maybe almost anecdotal than it was the strength of the nations that we were able to work in. And I realized I had let the university take part of who I was as a Native person out of me. They wanted me to look Native, they wanted me to talk, use the right words as a Native person, but they didn't want me to bring my full self. And so it took a lot of reflection, a lot of hard work, a lot of accountability and responsibility to my community. But I stepped back into my culture and tradition and what I was raised in, what I knew to be right and pushed aside the Western ideals of coming in to observe.

But rather than recognize myself as an Indigenous person and an Indigenous community with a responsibility to be engaged, fully engaged with them as a community member. And that was where my journey for Indigenous evaluation really started at. And I reflected back on a story – actually the same uncle, this was a story I had learned from him and a practice I had learned from him. And our community in Alaska used to go up to this lake and they would count the number of beavers, you know, cute little animals roaming around the lake making beaver dams. They would count the number of beavers in the spring. So we knew how many we could hunt in the winter. And we hunted them both to take care of the land, to take care of the water. And then they also took care of us. You know, we used every part of the animal. We used the bones for hairsticks, for other things. We used the fur for moccasins, for gloves. We used the skin for leather, and we ate beaver. It's a traditional food and a delicacy within our community. And all of those things were important to our community. And we also knew that we couldn't overhunt them. And so our older people could go out and look at the moss and look at the birch tree and say, this winter was this cold, it's going to be negative 50 below zero. We're going to have to hunt this many. And the knowledge that came from that iterative gathering of data meant for one reason only, for the good and the wellbeing of the people and the land, for the love of Native people, for the love of our land, our water, our air, our animals, all of those things were gathered for the sustainability of the community.

And it was done iteratively, over and over and over again. And we learned from it each single time, so that we could find the areas of improvement and recognize where we were doing well. So when I went back to what Indigenous evaluation and where my journey started for me, it went back to that story. It's the core story for me of how I've shaped my work in Indigenous evaluation, of what it means to do the work for the good and the wellbeing of the people. To know that we didn't just practice evaluation, we lived it, we incorporated it into every part of who we were. And we had responsibility and accountability to each other and to the land to conduct that.

We also counted. I think a lot of people think about Native people and are like, oh, you're oral storytellers, but you didn't know how to do math. I challenge that every single time: we counted in order to ensure that we weren't overhunting in this instance. But you can look at the Lakota



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people who had their winter hunt counts, my father's tribe – the Pawnee tribe – did the same. We gathered these numbers and that reclamation of that Indigenous knowledge, and to know that I follow in these ancestral footsteps is really what not only changed my practice, but it changed me. It brought me back to who I was always meant to be, who I had been raised to be. The blood memory that my grandmothers have instilled in me, the ones that I never met, the ones that I was raised with. And it pulled me back out of Western practice – and I'm not saying there aren't good things in Western practices, but we should only supplement with them. Our Indigenous evaluation has to be grounded in the land, in the people, in our responsibility and accountability to others. And for me it always starts with the story.

Gladys ([10:40](#)):

Amazing. Thank you for sharing that aha moment that you had when you went back to community. I resonate so deeply with that, that awareness of needing to go back to the teachings about how we need to be in relationship with one another and the responsibilities that we carry. And so learning about Western evaluation practices and then recognizing the shift that needed to happen in order to actually be able to show up as your whole self. I'm so...I can't wait for the rest of our conversation <laugh>, if this is how you're opening. That's just like a mic drop, Abigail <laugh>.

Abigail ([11:23](#)):

One of the things though that will reflect back on that conversation with my uncle, and I know that we've all in this world of Indigenous evaluation been – you know, the Western world wants us to not be who we're meant to be. And so we have to actively fight against that. And sometimes it takes our community, like my uncle calling me back into good practice. He didn't call me out, he called me in. He did it with kindness, he did it with love, he did it with storytelling, he did it with good food, <laugh>. Calling each other in, that's a good thing. But we also have to make sure that we're doing it in a good way, that it isn't angry, it isn't mean, it isn't meant to harm or hurt, but rather done in that good, kind, loving way. And I always think about myself and the opportunities I have to mentor, to spend time in relationship with Indigenous scholars, Indigenous evaluators and researchers. And I want to be known as that good auntie, that kind auntie, the loving auntie, the one who does call back into good practice when needed, but in that loving way. So I'm really appreciative that my uncle did that for me in that instance. And it again changed the way that my entire career forward in working with native communities doing Indigenous evaluation was because he did it in that good way.

Gladys ([12:45](#)):

Amazing. So, you kind of dropped a few seeds there for us around what it means to be an Indigenous evaluator. And I'm wondering if you could draw forward some of those connections around what does it mean to do this work? What does that look like, as a practitioner?

Abigail ([13:05](#)):

I recently brought in my evaluators – I have a team of evaluators here at the Urban Indian Health Institute who work both locally and nationally with tribal communities, urban Indian



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communities. And one of the things that I started with is, I want to know how you feel when you come into the community. How do you feel? Are you feeling that you are integrated? Are you feeling that you have connection? Because if you don't, stop asking your questions, put down your survey, and connect. Build relationship. The Pawnee people on my father's side, every year we have a visitation with the Wichita tribe and it's three days long, and it's about continuous relationship. And one year we're in Pawnee, another year we go to the Wichita tribe. Building relationship is key to Indigenous evaluation. And if we aren't building our relationships and being in kinship with the communities, then how are we ever going to feel the accountability and the responsibility and ensure that what we're doing is truly guided by the community?

So we see evaluations happen all the time that pull together meaningless reports that don't do anything except for tell people how bad off we are. And I challenge that. You know, we definitely have colonial disparities that continue to be built. We are oppressed and suppressed in our economic and social wellbeing, but we thrive despite that. We have strong, vibrant, beautiful communities who are sharing, building, rebuilding, rediscovering, reclaiming culture, community and technology. So, for me, Indigenous evaluation, the way that my practice and the way that I have been able to train and be in relationship with my Indigenous evaluator team is that it has to be built on relationship. We have to know our accountability to the community and our responsibility to do this work, not because we're just interested in something. I don't wanna do things because we're just interested. We need to be doing it because it is building forward the vitality and the brilliance of the community. And we're doing it for one reason only: for the love of Native people.

Gladys ([15:24](#)):

I read a report recently on love as the indicator of success. It's called "Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice of Brown Paper" by Cheri Tang and Sammy Nunez. But looking at love as a necessity to be sovereign and free. So talking about decolonizing self-love, love as healthy boundaries, love as breaking binaries, love as interconnectedness but love as the measure that we're looking to assess when we think about the strengths of our community – like what are we working towards, right? So anyway, that's just a little side thing to your comment there about we do this for the love, or you do this for the love of native communities. And that is such a central purpose that drives so much – and I think so many of the listeners are going to really resonate with this as well – drives why we do this work, how we show up and why we do this work. It's grounded in love.

Abigail ([16:32](#)):

Absolutely. And again, I think we all have these people that we draw inspiration and mentorship from. And some years ago – at the time she was the director of policy and research for the National Congress of American Indians in the United States. Her name is Malia Villegas. She's now an elected tribal leader at her village of Afognak in Alaska where she works at her tribal corporation. But Malia at the time in the policy and research group, she changed what they were doing and she started this movement that she called Love More. And believe me, there had been no policy work <laugh> that was happening where it was focused on [how] we should just love more. And leading with that example, she really gave the ability for us to have this conversation



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in the US about what it means to shape our work based in love, which is what our ancestors always did. And I again recognize the colonial forces that don't want us to love each other but would rather we fight with each other. And they do that by the scarce resources, when we know the resources aren't actually scarce. And so Malia really led that movement in the United States around shaping this around love. She also was one of the co-authors on a report, I believe it was in 2013, that talked about Indigenous evaluation. And in it what they said is that we're always talking about being scientifically rigorous but what should be held above that is cultural rigor. Cultural rigor, the standards of protocols of accountability and responsibility and Indigenous evaluation. That is the standard that I hold myself and my teams. That's what I'm talking about when I talk about for the love of native people. We're accountable, responsible, we answer to our ancestors, to our relatives now and to the ones in the future: that is a culturally rigorous approach. Scientific rigor falls under that – again, supplementing with Western science – but it's actually a low standard <laugh> when I think about what cultural rigor is. So again, Malia Villegas and the work that's happened before you, before me, really has shaped a path forward for us and taught me so much in understanding and continuing to build hopefully a good practice of Indigenous evaluation.

Gladys ([18:51](#)):

Excellent. Well I will definitely be including that in the show notes <laugh> for everyone to dig into. I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about the Building the Sacred: An Indigenous Evaluation Framework. It's on your website and we'll share the link as well. But thinking about how this is a really amazing example of all of the different principles that you're talking about in acting in Indigenous evaluation, how it showed up in this framework. So can you tell us a little bit about that work, how it came about and what you've learned as a result?

Abigail ([19:28](#)):

Absolutely, and I do just want listeners to have a warning that that particular Indigenous evaluation framework is meant to be one that is applied to programs that work with survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, other types of violence, and missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, people and relatives [later referred to as MMIW and MMIWP]. So some of what I'm going to talk about is going to be talking about these very difficult subjects, but they are necessary conversations we need to have amongst indigenous people. So protect your heart, people. People who pray as we have these conversations, pray as we do this, because I want you to be in a good place as we have these conversations. And so I always like to pause to give people a second to fast forward or something if they'd like.

But that evaluation framework was to me at this point in my life – I would say life not career, because what I get to do isn't a career, it's in service to my community – it is one of the most important things I think I've ever done. And I am a survivor of sexual assault myself, have participated in a lot of programming and actually direct programs now that serve sexual assault, domestic violence and MMIW families programs. In addition to that, I have worked in the United States and have published and co-authored multiple reports specifically on data relating to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. And so in this work across the nation, about 15 years ago I was working at the University of Washington and one of the things I was



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noticing in the evaluation frameworks that were being used in these programs that were predominantly funded by government entities, by foundations, is that the things that they were evaluating did not reflect the experiences at all of the individuals who had suffered these atrocities.

It didn't talk about the colonial oppression that created these systems of violence where a woman who is experiencing rape comes in, gets treatment and then is back out on the streets with no home because there is no home in a gentrified area that she could even afford. Years ago – I have this on my whiteboard in all my offices no matter where I am, I have a little dream section – and I wrote down on a post-it note, “Evaluation framework for sexual assault, domestic violence, violence, MMIW, MMIWP.” And I waited for the right time and the right place, because I am a believer in the cultural values and the spiritual practices that I work in. And I knew at the time where I was at the university, it was not the right place or the right time to do this work.

I talked to other people and shared the idea because I didn't mind anybody taking it, and we just never saw it come to fruition. So two years ago after a lot of work that we had done, all of a sudden these resources came, and I knew – again, talking to my leadership team, so the elders who advised us – that now was the time, particularly within the United States, the awareness that had been raised around MMIW and MMIWP. And so we set out to engage our partners who had been built through the Urban Indian Health Institute's work across the nation. We worked with providers who were providing direct resources and support. We worked with people who were providing counseling services, we worked with individuals who were changing policy, all of whom had been forced into evaluation frameworks that never fit the needs of the relatives that they were serving.

And so out of that came this evaluation framework that is the very first of its kind, and to this point in the United States the only one that is specific for tribal programs, urban Indian programs, Native-directed organizations who are serving survivors of domestic violence, sexual assaults and families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. And it is a framework – you know, if folks get a chance to read it – that is built in the love that we've been talking about. It is meant to recognize their strengths, their footsteps forward, and also the resources that are needed for healing. And we have seen in these programs that have used it – we also partnered with the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center in the US to share this amongst all of the programs across the United States, and we have seen people implement this – and they have seen incredible success because what they've been able to do is to then take the let's say our state government or our county government's evaluation and go to them and say, hey, this isn't appropriate, but here is a framework that we could be using and it gets you all of the counts you want. We're going to talk about the number of people we serve. We're going to tell you this amount of money went to resources, this amount of money went to counseling, this amount went to housing, but we're going to actually go in and spend time in a good way that protects the safety of these individuals, that builds forward their safety and also brings in the healing in a culturally-based way that needs to happen and evaluates us as organizations on how we could do that better. And so I was taught that all things happen for a reason, the right time with the right reason. You also need to be aware and share resources and our evaluation framework is free of charge. It's for anybody and everybody to take a look at, to see, to recognize it shouldn't be the only one <laugh>. I hate saying we're the only one. I want there to be a whole



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bunch of them. I want there to be one for Anishinaabe specifically or the city of New York specifically, or Pawnee Nation specifically. But it can take those core components that were done in relationship with the community and begin to build forward these stronger evaluation resources, again in service to healing. And because everybody who has been affected by this kind of violence deserves at some point in their lives to experience this kind of love. And I actually imagine this; like in my head, I imagine our evaluation frameworks, if they were alive – well, they are alive – but if I could see them, and this would be a blanket wrapping them in protection, in love, in security, in prayer, and in knowledge that they matter. And for many of our survivors, that isn't something we get a lot. And so not only do we believe them, we know that they matter, and we know that our programs have a responsibility to them, and we are accountable to them to ensure that we provide them the resources they need for them and their families to move into healing. So if I never did anything else again, this is one of the things I am the most proud of being able to be a part of.

Gladys ([26:25](#)):

Such a profound contribution and a gift. And like you said, that is grounded and comes from the deep love of community. Thank you for sharing how you carried that forward. And I love that you also shared that you carried it forward until it was time and until it felt like there was a space for this to happen in a good way. That's such an important thing that I'm carrying from this story that you just shared, around not trying to force something to happen when it's not time for it to happen yet. You know, the people, the resources, the places, the momentum: there's kind of a coming together of all of those things to be able to carry work forward in a good way. And I really appreciate how that came through in this story you shared of this work. And I know that it's going to be like a stone that drops in a pool of water that just continues to ripple outwards and have impacts beyond what you and I will see in our lifetimes, I'm sure.

Abigail ([27:33](#)):

I hope so. That's the goal, because that's exactly what was done for us. We're part of those ripples and we need to continue. You know, I always think the ripples keep getting bigger and I cannot wait for the next generations who are the tsunami <laugh>. We're just going to bring it, you know, we're going to build on all of these things and come with a tsunami. I cannot wait to be that ancestor and the stars cheering from above. Bring the tsunami. That's what our people deserve.

Gladys ([28:04](#)):

Oh yes, <laugh>. So for me too, in so much of the work that I do, it's because I know that the stories that we tell matter, the stories that we hear, the stories that are carried forward, who tells the stories, how those stories are resources: all of this, it all matters so deeply. And so when I think about Indigenous evaluation, for me it's connected to that. But I'm wondering about the importance of Indigenous evaluation: what does it offer us? Why is it important? Why is it important to you?

Abigail ([28:41](#)):





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It's important to me because it offers the real stories. And I'll just use myself as an example. My real life isn't: I got in my car this morning and drove to work and walked into my office and got a cup of tea and sat down at a table. My real life is: I woke up in the morning and I greeted the sun and I felt myself in connectedness to the land, to the people, to my children, to my tribe and to my community. And I got in my car to drive to my office because I love my community so much that I am in service to them now. And I wanna say that in service to our communities, being a good mom is in service to communities, being a good father, being somebody who takes care of your families and feeds your elders, those are good community members, and we do that all in our own way.

And what happens in Western evaluation is that the unique cultural context of our stories individually, community tribes, reservations, reserves, urban Indian communities and cities, that that is often lost. And the cultural context of why; for example, I was recently talking to some folks and they were talking about, well, you know, I can't believe that you guys have so many intergenerational homes and there's so many people living in here and this elder has dementia, why haven't they moved that person into an assisted living facility? I was like, well there's a reason in the United States Native people have some of the lowest rates of putting our elders into assisted living facilities. It's because we take care of them, because that's our responsibility and we need the resources to help take care of them in our homes.

And the reason we have multi-generational homes is because of course I want my mother to live with me. You know, if I have that opportunity, I want my elders to be there, I want my siblings to be there. One of my siblings, she was just saying, over the past 25 years she's only had three years in her entire life where another sibling hasn't been living with her, her husband and their children, because that is our value system. And so if we don't know these unique cultural contexts, the way that Western evaluation and data could look at the number of people in a home would use a value system that says, oh, it's just overcrowded. These people aren't making sure their elders are getting the correct resources. Why are they taking care of this person instead of, you know, having a living facility take care of them? and so the values of our community are also lost and then the correct story isn't being told.

And when the story isn't being told, then the resources that we have a right to aren't being allocated. And what we also find is our communities feel devalued; they don't see their value systems reflected in the way that evaluation creates a report and talks about the community. It's almost unrecognizable to them that they're even the people that are being talked about in that report. And so that's to me the key thing about Indigenous evaluation, and that is also reflective of other communities, you know; is the right story of immigrant and refugee communities being told if the evaluation framework isn't based on their unique cultural context? And so I think that we are leading forward in our Indigenous evaluation frameworks in this reclamation of holding onto and pulling in these unique cultural contexts and blazing a path forward for other communities to be able to do the same.

Gladys ([32:20](#)):

Thank you for that. And it makes me think about in our initial conversation thinking about what we wanted to talk about today, one of the things that you drew forward was this idea of allyship. And I think a lot about it, in terms of we have the Canadian Evaluation Society, American



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Evaluation Association and these are structures that have been created that that don't necessarily reflect Indigenous evaluation but there's a lot of discussion around decolonizing evaluation or culturally competent evaluation or cultural safety and evaluation, all of these kinds of things. And so people want to know, how can we show up? – and I want to say and call out, there's a little bit of fear there as well I think about like, well, what does it mean for me who might be a non-Indigenous evaluator, if Indigenous evaluation is only done by Indigenous evaluators? Like there's things percolating there. So I want to ask about like allies and what that looks like in this work and what are some responsibilities that they might actually be able to pick up and carry in a good way when we think about Indigenous evaluation and what's needed?

Abigail ([33:34](#)):

Allies are key to this and again, as I think back to the story that I told about the Pawnee people and the Wichita people coming together once a year to just spend time, spend stories, meet people, build relationship – is that the Pawnee were an ally to the Wichita and the Wichita were allies to the Pawnee. And so building up allies has always been part of our community practices regardless of race or ethnicity, and when we think about even settler colonialism, there's a reason we didn't turn everybody away at the shores. It wasn't that we didn't have the military strength; it's that we were a loving people who of course were going to help people that were dying, because that's how we found them. And so that has maintained within our strength of our communities is that building of allyship. But I give that example of the initial settler colonialism in that it has not been echoed back to us.

And so for Indigenous evaluation and other evaluators, there is a key opportunity for you right now to challenge your implicit bias systems, to recognize where you should be making strategic changes, where you should be investing resources and mentorship, and also recognizing where you should step back because the systems of white privilege have put forward and generally have those folks in those organizations being the ones speaking and leading, and instead step back. Not because you're empowering me, not because you're empowering Gladys, not because you're empowering, because we have the power; you have just been as a result of structural racism keeping us from being able to exert that power and that strength and that brilliance that every single one of you could learn from. And so, I've been out giving a lot of keynote presentations and afterwards I have people who come up and are like, I was so impressed; or I'll be sitting in rooms where I challenge systems and afterwards somebody comes up and says, you know, thank you for doing that.

And I always think, what if in that moment you walked up to me and you said thank you for sharing that, I see this part of my practice that I need to change: this is what I'm going to do moving forward to be a good ally, to be a good accomplice for Indigenous peoples. I've had that happen to me maybe in the last two years, maybe like three times. I'd like to have it happen once a month at least <laugh>. And there are resources that you can learn and glean information from, and we talk about and people are always saying the word decolonize. I think back to my work and the reason that I didn't do that evaluation framework when I was at the universities is that I knew I needed to be in a place-centered and culture community where it could be done from the beginning in a culturally-based way and I would've had to fight for that at the university. Because I can't decolonize the university. In the United States, the universities where you know



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they are colonial systems. I can't decolonize a colonial system that was meant to oppress me. I can do it from a cultural community place, but that colonial system can work towards equity, can work towards social justice, can identify places of structural racism that have inhibited the voices of indigenous peoples being present and leading in these conversations. And the other is that there's so much in Indigenous evaluation practice that can be utilized in other communities. There's some aspects that are cultural and spiritual components. That's not for anybody else but us. But are there lessons you can learn from it? Yes. And you can work in partnership, you don't need to be leading it but you can be there in support of it. So these opportunities are there and we as Indigenous evaluators are really challenging folks to stand up with us, be brave, take a chance, identify where in your practice you could make key strategic differences.

You know, look at your mentees. Are they predominantly white? Are they predominantly non-Indigenous <laugh>? Look for opportunities for redistribution of resources, privilege, and power, because that's what equity looks like. Equity isn't inviting a Native person to come give a talk. Equity is making sure that person gets paid appropriately and also ensuring that you have hired, that you are putting in places of power, privilege, individuals who are decision makers, to reallocate resources to ensure that Indigenous communities and Indigenous evaluation have the ability to move forward. And it's really not that hard. So I suggest next time somebody spends time listening to an Indigenous person, whether we're talking about evaluation or research or our community, that you look at yourself from a culturally humble perspective. And cultural humility is an everyday look, introspective look at your power and privilege and how you're working in actual partnership with your peers, with your family and doing that every single day. Come with a culturally humble perspective. And if you want to walk up to that Indigenous person, tell them thank you for sharing your knowledge, your community, your family with me; as a result of this I am going to be making these changes. And I promise you, you will not only build allies; you will build friends, you'll build connections, you'll build resources. And I believe that every person internationally deserves and should have the knowledge and the strength of Indigenous people somewhere in their lives. You all deserve us. You just haven't had the opportunity because these systems of structural racism have been upheld and unfortunately you've been part of it but this is your opportunity to break it down, because you deserve it. You should have the strengths of Indigenous peoples leading in these areas also.

Gladys ([39:39](#)):

Ohhhh, yes, <laugh>. You know, it's amazing because I can just imagine in all of the different spaces that you've been in, the amazing wisdom and calls to action that you share. And so if that could be translated into this is what I'm committed to doing when I leave this room today. The immense kind of vibrations or reverberations that will happen if people actually do something instead of just consuming and gathering and like holding within themselves all of these insights that are being shared but actually like do something, get up and act.

Abigail ([40:21](#)):

It's all about the action.

Gladys ([40:23](#)):



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<laugh>. Yes, yes, yes. I want to turn back to thinking about, in all of the experience that you've had doing this work and the why of the work for you, what are you hoping for Indigenous evaluation and Indigenous evaluators, where do you hope this goes in the next five, 10 years? What does that dream look like for you?

Abigail ([40:50](#)):

That is the most exciting thing to me, is what it could look like in the future and what I'm seeing it start to look like in the future. I want folks to be able to go to university and have Indigenous evaluation taught to them by Indigenous peoples who hold tenured positions at the universities where representation is there. Here in the United States, I am pushing so hard for these programs that work with survivors of violence to actually incorporate and work towards their healing through evaluation that is done iteratively. And I know that's only going to happen when we have true representation. So representation matters. I am invested in and I know so many other folks are invested in really building up this next cohort of Indigenous evaluators who don't have to fight the fights we did. They don't have to go in and explain what Indigenous evaluation is because we've already established it as a standard and that is the path that we are blazing forward and insisting on.

And again, allyship is a key component of that. I want Indigenous evaluation so when somebody says evaluation, that immediately they come to mind: oh, I know an Indigenous evaluator, I know of this Indigenous evaluation that was conducted for this tribe, for this community, that shows the strengths of this nation, of this urban Indian community. And I want to see it directly impact the allocation of resources that are treaty rights as Indigenous peoples in North America. We have a right to resources through our treaties, and Indigenous evaluation is a key component to identifying where those resources should be going. And I want to see it result in those resources being appropriately allocated. And not only do I have hope; I am seeing it begin to happen. I am ecstatic about it <laugh>. Also, my hope is that some of us who've been doing this for a while, I want to step back because there are so many new brilliant ideas and I want those young people to be the ones who are leading this with the support anytime I can give it to them. But I'm also excited about the opportunity to step back to see that brilliance begin to rise. And I know that that's a struggle within Western ideals, that your career is based on how much prestige you get as you get older in your careers. I mean I challenge people to stop looking at it as a career but rather look at it as an accountability and responsibility to your communities, which includes ensuring that next generation, who's going to have ideas we never thought of, but are going to be able to continue to blaze this path forward. So I'm looking forward to the opportunity of stepping back so others can step forward. I want them to walk in front of me because they were born to lead.

Gladys ([43:51](#)):

What an amazing metric of success, Abigail <laugh>. So, you know, fostering, nurturing, supporting that future generation. You talked at the beginning of our conversation about how you just brought together this gathering, this cohort of Indigenous evaluators that you're working with and I'm wondering if you can share a little bit with us more about what has that looked like? How long have you been doing this kind of cohort model and what would you encourage others



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to do in thinking about building – like others in Indigenous evaluation spaces – in building a similar model so that five years, 10 years from now you can step back that every person knows of an Indigenous evaluator when work needs to be done.

Abigail ([44:40](#)):

Yeah, you know, my evaluation team right now, all but one are Indigenous peoples and I get that all the time where people are like, oh, it's so hard to find Indigenous evaluators. And I was like, well actually, we have to be very strategic and clear about who we're looking for and who we're going to invest and train in. And so we spend a lot of time in university systems going out and talking about our work, engaging young people, particularly we're getting a really incredible group of young people because of the work that our elders did and our ancestors did and they're being raised in their culture in ways that, you know, my grandmother wasn't able to, my grandmother had to whisper songs because they were outlawed, you know, but now these young people can sing them out loud in their communities and learn them when they're in elementary school. So there's a shift that we're able to catalyze and use and begin to build up these cohorts.

And the other thing is, is that the good auntie part is also really important. So I will say recently I brought together my evaluators, we're working on a big project where I have 19 grantees across the United States and I wanted them to propose to me the most innovative ideas that they could; you know, really think about from using our Indigenous evaluation framework. And they brought me some really great stuff and they also brought me some things that I could see were deeply reflective of their Western training that they got in the university. And so I asked a lot of very hard questions. So for example, <laugh> I'll talk about one where the participants would write, they're on a sandy, less green area and then they're putting in like the imagery had stepping stones across the river to where a green lush area was, with beautiful greenery. It was like, okay we're in this area where we don't have all this greenery, we're trying to get over here, what are the stepping stones to get there? I told him, I'm going to ask you some questions, because first of all, why is the grass not as green on the other side? Like we don't want to start from a deficit-based model. And why are we seeing a river as a barrier when in fact water is life, water is gifts? And why is the other side always so far out of reach? So one of the things I do with this team is challenge that and do that in a good way that helps them. Like the same kind of thing my uncle did for me when he said you don't speak Indian no more. That is to shift them out of that and reground them in a cultural way to think about what they intended with that exercise – which the intent was really great – about what are the steps we need to do to take the beauty we learned from this program and bridge it into even a stronger program.

That's a great intention and we have to challenge the way that we're doing it and allow individuals to act these critical questions and recognize that it's not anything personal but it is rather communal. And so I think that we need to open those spaces of critical communication, recognizing that it isn't personal. I get feedback from people all the time. I don't take it personally. I recognize my accountability, responsibility, means I have to grow in my practice and create safe spaces for that to happen in a kind and loving way and be intentional. Right now my organization – people are always like, how are you guys doing university equity and inclusion? I was like, well, you know we're 85% people of color in my organization and that directly reflects the people that we serve here locally and we are reflective of the community



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because we're intentional about where we recruit, where we hire, who we mentor, and what our internship programs look like. A majority of my evaluators right now were interns for us when they were at the university because we want to provide that support for them. So all of these things together are aspects and I know we can do much better and I'm always working towards finding ways for us to do that alongside this incredible leadership team that I get to work with. But we have to be critical, but we need to do it in a good way to really build up these next generations so we can step back so they can step forward.

Gladys ([49:13](#)):

That's some amazing auntie energy, Abigail <laugh>. What an amazing opportunity to be a part of your team and to be nurtured in such a loving way that draws forward the strengths but also asks us to really, really unpack what we carry forward from the indoctrination from those Western spaces that we've gone through. So thank you for sharing those examples of how you show up to mentor the future generations.

Abigail ([49:42](#)):

I learn more from them than they do from me, I'm sure.

Gladys ([49:45](#)):

<laugh> It's such an amazing process. The collective space of learning from one another. I think that's such a critical difference than this expert standing at the front of the room pedagogy that Western institutions model for us. And so what an amazing space that you all collectively create in that cohort. We're getting kind of to the end of our time together, I recognize. And so I wanted to ask if there's anything else? As we booked and prepared for our time together, is there anything else that you wanted to make sure to leave in this space as we think about closing off our conversation together?

Abigail ([50:28](#)):

You know, this is something we talked about when you and I met to talk about this podcast and it's something that I've experienced and it actually goes back to that allyship community conversation that we had, is that making these challenges to colonial systems isn't safe. It is difficult. People will challenge you, they may try to come after your careers. In my work related to MMIW and MMIWP I receive a lot of death threats. I know that seems extreme, but it's something I've just gotten used to being present in my life. And there are times when I recognize that the strength that I am given to move forward is that of the community who hold me. And so as we build up this Indigenous evaluation framework, we are building up cohorts of individuals who are going to make challenges in rooms that were not built for them to be there. How does an ally stand with them and find a way to support them, whether it be resources, financial resources, rest resources? Give us the time to rest because this is not easy work and it is very tiring and give us an opportunity to rest. And also making sure that we're not having to stand alone, that is really important. And creating these collective security blankets I'll call them, support systems. So when somebody comes up or I've had to move offices and things like that – you know, people can't know when I'm in a building because it could be a potential security risk. I'm not the only



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person who experiences this; in fact, I know way too many women of color specifically, but also men of color who experience this, and when we say Indigenous evaluation, I think people like to think about how good that makes them feel. And it does and we are so blessed by that. But we also have to recognize that when you challenge colonial systems, it scares people. And it can often result in not only the violence of trying to keep people from moving forward in their careers and job opportunities, but it can also at times result in physical violence. And so we just need to think about, as we build these systems of Indigenous evaluation, that we also need to be building the cohorts of support systems and that is both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people so that we can hold each other in safety and security so that we can do this work in a strength-based safe environment. Because as we challenge these systems, we are making cracks that are going to turn into walls that break down, that eventually in my metaphor go back into the dust of the earth and are reclaimed so that we can be in a true Indigenous environment in which we can all thrive.

And non-Indigenous people also thrive in strong Indigenous environments. When we are whole, so will the rest of the world be whole. Until the Indigenous people and our land is healed, you're not going to be healing the other communities. It really needs to start from where the root of the trauma began. And that is in the healing of land of Indigenous peoples and we can do it together and we have to build rooms and universities and organizations and nonprofits and government entities that are safe for us to make these challenges. And that is going to take allies, accomplices, and it's going to take all of us being together in a place of bravery.

Gladys ([54:19](#)):

Well, those certainly are some calls to action and some accountabilities that we can measure the progress that we want to make as we move towards the dream and the vision that you were talking about earlier. Thank you so much for reminding us that even though Indigenous evaluation might sound like a safe space <laugh> for deconstructing systems, it actually has real life ramifications like you shared about personal safety as power starts to be shifted. So thanks, Abigail.

Abigail ([54:59](#)):

Well, it's such an honor and a privilege to spend time in community with you and with everybody who's listening, and for everybody out there, just know: I want to be the auntie who's got your back.

Gladys ([55:10](#)):

Yes. And with that, thank you so much for spending time with me today. This has been an amazing opportunity and I'm so grateful for sharing this space with you. Until next time.

I'm so glad you spent time with us today. I have a few notes to wrap up this episode. If you're enjoying the podcast, please subscribe on your favourite streaming service, including Podbean, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts so that you don't miss an episode. Also, this podcast is self-supported and I'm hoping to make the work more sustainable. So if you're finding the content



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interesting and valuable, please consider supporting Indigenous insights through Buy Me a Coffee. You can find the link in the show notes. Finally, I would like to extend an invitation. If you are someone who has an interest in Indigenous evaluation and would like to have a conversation on this podcast, I would love to hear from you. Please send me a note and we can connect about your work, what you're learning, and the questions you're thinking about. That's it for this week. I look forward to sharing the space with you again soon. Ekosi.