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Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast
Season 1 Episode 1: Making Introductions: Gladys Rowe
<https://gladysrowe.com/s01e01-indigenous-insights-making-introductions/>
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Gladys (00:02):

Tansi, Greetings. Welcome to Indigenous Insights and Evaluation podcast. I'm so grateful you are here. I'm Gladys Rowe, your host. What is Indigenous Evaluation? Who is doing this work? How are we doing this work, and what have we learned so far? Each episode, I will sit in conversation with Indigenous evaluation practitioners, leaders, researchers, and scholars who are working in thinking about and supporting Indigenous evaluation to share how they're doing their work and the challenges and insights they've experienced along the way. It is my hope that this podcast will feel like a deep breath, will feel like a space that you can come and you can listen and learn, where I invite you to grab a cozy beverage and to settle in, join me and my guests as we open up our evaluation bundles to share the gifts, knowledges, and hopes that we've gathered in our journeys and bring them together in this space.

Gladys (01:02):

I hope in these stories, you will find resonance in the critical contributions that Indigenous evaluation can make as we work towards decolonial futures and strengthening Indigenous resurgence. In this first episode, I'd like to spend some time laying out the foundation for this series and making introductions. I will share a bit about who I am, where I come from, and why this podcast is an important, exciting adventure that I decided to jump into. So I will begin from the beginning. Tansi, my name is Gladys Roe. I'm a Muskego Inninew, Swampy Cree, and my pronouns are she/her. I'm a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in northern Manitoba, near the Nelson and Kettle Rivers, and I also hold relations with ancestors from Ireland, England, Norway, and the Ukraine. As well, I have lived in the Lands of Nations in Treaties 5, 1, 6 and 7 throughout my lifetime in Gillam, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Calgary.

Gladys (02:00):

I'm currently living on the lands of the Squamish and Duwamish Nations just outside of Seattle, Washington. My family and I have been here for just over four years, and I'm learning every day what it means to be in good relations in these territories. For many Indigenous researchers and evaluators, this work is personal. The projects, questions, methods, and meaning making are relational, iterative, and lived deeply within our hearts and spirits. We feel called to this kind of work for various reasons,



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community responsibilities, to support personal and structural transformations and to make contributions to decolonization and resurgence, and as we show up to do the work, we bring more than the methodologies or the tools to get the work done. We bring our whole selves. We bring all of our experiences and our relations into research and evaluation into the generation of knowledge. What I share with you comes from my experiences, my perspectives, and my learnings, some of which I'll share with you during this episode.

Gladys ([03:00](#)):

Other people have different experiences, perspectives, and learnings, and when we do show up, we come with an understanding that we are as much a part of the question, and when we do show up, we come with the understanding that we are as much of a part of this work as the question, the participants and the settings. The act of locating myself makes me visible. My location provides a path to demonstrate accountability, reliability, and validity. When I state who I am and the relations and geography that roots my knowledge, you can make your own assumptions and assertions about my credibility and ability to search and to share about the topics and priorities that I support and that I contribute to. My background is in social work. I have a BSW with an Indigenous specialization from the University of Victoria and in MSW and PhD from the University of Manitoba.

Gladys ([03:52](#)):

When I was a new university student, no one could've made me believe that I would end up holding a PhD or doing the work that I love and am passionate about it as an independent consultant, artist, and scholar. In fact, I failed out of my first year of university something that I like to tell people because sometimes it takes a little bit longer than we expect or a few detours to get to where we are supposed to be working, and that is definitely my story. When I was finishing my BSW degree, after many bumps in the road and reassessments about whether social work was a good fit for me and whether was a good field for me to even be in, I had the opportunity to work on a community driven research project, the Strengthening Families Maternal Child Health program evaluation.

Gladys ([04:40](#)):

This project was led by Dr. Rachel Eni, someone who I can say really changed the trajectory of my career. I was so bitter about working in programs that were not meeting the needs of the people who I'd been working with over the past several years in Calgary organizations, I was feeling like a gatekeeper to meager resources that would never meet the significant need that the inequitable systems perpetuated. I was invited and jumped into this evaluation and research work that was really led by Manitoba First Nations, driven by the premise that in order to design a program that is meaningful for the families, that it was being adapted to support we must first talk to parents and caregivers of young children. It was an eye-opening and exciting premise for me back in 2007. From that experience onwards, when I was invited into different community-driven and Indigenous research and evaluation spaces, I could see the potential to shift the way that organizations were structured, what programs are being offered and what was being funded, and how we learned about the success and challenges of all of this in a way that was grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing - in the wisdom of those who held lived experience and by the priorities of people and communities who were directly impacted.

Gladys ([05:53](#)):



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I saw a way forward, and instead of abandoning the profession altogether, I doubled down and with the support of Dr. Michael Hart, who I will speak to in one of the first episodes I began my graduate school experience in so many of the courses I took, it was a stark contrast to what I was experiencing in my community work. The theories and ways of practice in the classroom were rooted in western ways, and I began to see the importance of who was in the decision-making spaces and that I could ensure that through research evaluation, course program and policy development, that the voices of Indigenous peoples and community members would be central. I could do this work. In fact, in 2014, just as I had begun my PhD program, I had the opportunity to put all of my learning and passion into action as the research and evaluation manager at the Winnipeg Boldness Project.

Gladys ([06:45](#)):

It was a new innovation project grounded in the North End of Winnipeg, with the intent of ensuring that families with children ages zero to six had the resources and access that they needed for their families to thrive. The development of that project really put into place the principles that I had been talking about and the ways of working that would ensure that what was being designed, how it was being evaluated, and the stories that were being shared as a result were rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Through the deep community engagement processes. In the first year of knowledge gathering and the structures that were created, including the guide groups and the ceremonies that supported the project, it allowed us to ensure that community priorities and voices were always at the center, and in fact, they continue to be at the center. As the Winnipeg Boldness Project thrives in supporting innovation in the North End as a part of the team of staff, families, and community leaders.

Gladys ([07:39](#)):

It was an exciting time in my career. Although my family moved away from Winnipeg, I continued to stay connected, and as a part of that work, I was also able to support the development of the Indigenous evaluation bundle with the Indigenous Learning Circle. This is where I came to understand the ways that working in and with community, I was able to support healing, growth, and Indigenous resurgence. I was gathering my own knowledge and research bundle in this process. This bundle holds the interconnected and interdependent methodologies used in knowledge gathering processes, in making visible the connection that I have to this work. It's important that I really honor the places and the people that have provided the roots of my knowledges and have supported the development of my own bundle, and so I'm grateful for Elders and knowledge keepers, including Don Robinson, Thelma Morrisseau, Leslie Spillet, Margaret Lavalley, Thelma Orvis, Mary Wilson, Ann Callahan, Greg Murdock, Ruth Murdock, Vern Dano, and Mae Louise Campbell.

Gladys ([08:43](#)):

I'm also grateful and humbled by Indigenous researchers such as Drs. Michael Hart, Jacquie Green, and Yvonne Pompana, Drs. Kathy Absolon, Billie Allan, Jeannine Carriere, and Maggie Kovach, Drs. Leanne Simpson, Raven Sinclair, and Linda Tuwhai Smith. Each of these scholars have created and held spaces and openings within institutions so that I could be here. I'm grateful for the community embedded learning and to those who have shared their journey so generously in the time it has taken for me to build my knowledge gathering bundle people involved in groups, projects, and organizations such as the Indigenous Learning Circle, Ka Ni Kanichihk, CEDA Pathways, the Winnipeg Boldness Project, and all of the guide groups within that project, Inner City Social Work program at the University of Manitoba and



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the Indigenous Caucus within the Faculty of Social Work. There are so many people in organizations who have contributed to my growth and my work.

Gladys ([09:36](#)):

Please know that even if I haven't named you here, you are in my heart, and I'm forever honored by your support, guidance, and mentorship. For all of those who have come and gone before me, I'm grateful. And as I do at the start of any of the work I do, I lay down tobacco and I give thanks for all of these relations. I ask for guidance to have courage, humility, respect, love, kindness, and generosity of spirit with the energy that my mentors devoted to my own journey. The roots of this work and of this podcast comes from this place of gratitude. So that's a little bit about who I am and how I got to this space today. It's really the Cole's Notes. That introduction to me and how I've come to this space has offered a few clues about why Indigenous evaluation is important, and I want to spend the next few minutes really talking about this in a more explicit way.

Gladys ([10:32](#)):

Much of the work that I've done and hope to continue to do is about creating space spaces to show up, be seen, and to be heard, because I know whose voices are in the conversation matter, whose priorities are driving the work matters and how we agree to do this work matters. These principles are true, whether you're talking about evaluation, social work, research, education systems or systems change. I remember when the words decolonization and reconciliation began to be more widely acknowledged and used, gathered up and spoken within institutions, and I felt a sense of hope that there would be shifts and priorities in how the work of health and wellness of social work and of education was done. But my hope was quickly dashed because even though there was beginning to be more awareness that there was a disconnect in the application of the spirit of decolonization and reconciliation, and one of those disconnects is at the same ways of doing things, the same ways of thinking about the problems and of designing the initiatives, those same ways were being upheld the same worldviews, values and ethics that got us into this colonial, inequitable and racist mess were the ones that were offering the solutions.

Gladys ([11:43](#)):

Those were the solutions that were being supported through funds and resources to do this work, and I knew that if I contributed to the way that things had always been done without disrupting this pipeline of complacency in some way, I wouldn't be happy doing this work any longer. I knew that Indigenous evaluation rooted in worldviews that are local and grounded in ways of knowing, being and doing that are place-based and are in relationship to the land, that are grounded in Indigenous languages, that are rooted to those lands, and I knew that if they were driven by priorities that are decided by Indigenous peoples, these are one of the ways that disruption could happen. What is Indigenous evaluation? Indigenous evaluation is about learning about transformation, learning about success, learning about shifts to support healing, wellness, and thriving at individual organizational and community levels in a way that is rooted in Indigenous knowledges, protocols, ways of gathering, insights, making sense of, and then telling the learning stories.

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



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And even further Indigenous evaluation is ensuring that what is working for Indigenous peoples organizations and communities is well resourced in a way that ensures long-term sustainability that is baked into the way that we do things now and each and every day moving forward. Just as the terms decolonization and reconciliation we're new and shiny, as many organizations and funders reflect on their work in relation to the truth and reconciliation calls to action and the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples Indigenous evaluation is becoming a new and exciting phenomenon, and I'm excited too. I'm excited that these conversations are happening, that more spaces are being opened up to have these conversations about how to evaluate and learn in a way that is rooted upon Indigenous worldviews, and at the same time, I also ask for a tempering of that excitement so that what is created, what can be created actually comes from a different foundation, is actually built by for and with Indigenous peoples and communities without being a co-opted window dressing process.

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

I know that sounds a little ominous, but the caution is real and we need to pay attention to this. Indigenous evaluation requires time, time to build relationships, to build capacity, to build new foundations, to support inquiries into success, meaning making and sharing stories. Indigenous evaluation takes intention to start and maintain the work in a good way, in a way that is rooted in protocols and ceremony that takes care of the spirit of the work in alignment with local knowledges. Indigenous evaluation is subjective. It understands that there are multiple ways of knowing that need to inform the design. Knowledge gathering, sense making and sharing Indigenous evaluation requires forethought about relational accountability, shared decision making, and data sovereignty and ownership. Indigenous evaluation requires Indigenous peoples supported by knowledge keepers supported by community and supported by other Indigenous evaluation practitioners to be leading this work. Indigenous evaluation requires a space for us to learn together, to share insights and challenges and to support one another, to take up this work for our communities and for the generations to come.

Gladys ([14:59](#)):

As we build the foundations of doing this work in a way that is grounded in place space, time, and language, we must also think about how we will leave a trail for those who come after us, how we will ensure that young and emerging Indigenous evaluators who see themselves picking up their own evaluation bundles can be supported to show up as their whole selves in these spaces, fully supported by organizations and funders that know how to support the work of Indigenous evaluation in a good way, and so this podcast is one of my commitments to ensure that support. The intention and vision of this podcast is to be a space for sharing for Indigenous researchers and evaluators to come together and to learn from one another, learn about our journeys that we've taken in our work to learn about new tools and new ways of gathering insights as we think about how to root evaluation and learning in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Gladys ([15:53](#)):

This is a space to dream, a new way of learning, gathering and sharing stories that can have an impact. In the upcoming episodes, I will sit in conversation with people who've been doing this work for decades and those who are new to this work in the last few years. I will ask each of them to reflect on what aha moments or insights they've come to in their own time during the episodes and over the series. We will come together into the circle and gather our evaluation bundles together to share collective wisdom in



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order to support this crucial work of transforming how knowledge is produced, what practices are held as valuable for our communities, and how we measure and talk about success in order to ensure health and wellness for generations to come. In closing, 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 that you're thinking about ego say, thank you for sitting with me today. I invite you to reflect on the bits that intrigued you, resonated for you, or were a catalyst for questions. Take those bits and sit with them. I would love to hear what comes up for you. That's all for today. Until the next episode, take care, everyone.