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**Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast
Season 1 Episode 15: Marissa Hill**

<https://gladysrowe.com/s01e15-Indigenous-insights-marissa-hill/>

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

Tansi. Greetings. 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 will come to understand how we can collectively contribute to decolonial futures and strengthen Indigenous resurgence.

Marissa Hill is a citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario. She was born and raised in the Georgian Bay Métis community and has been a guest in Tkaronto since 2010. Marissa is rooted in repatriation and the reclamation of ancestral ways of knowing and being, and everything she does flows from here. Marissa is dedicated to transforming the systems and infrastructure that shape our holistic wellbeing, using approaches that are rooted in community, equity, inclusion, love, dignity, and respect. Marissa has extensive experience in program, project and operations management. Most recently, she managed an innovation lab, the Indigenous Innovation Initiative hosted by Grand Challenges Canada, that supports First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, two-spirit, queer, trans, non-binary and gender diverse people to bring their solutions to life and was a community engagement and co-creation lead. Marissa joined Health Commons Solutions Lab in October 2022 as the director of operations and strategy, while also supporting the organization to create space for exploring innovation within the context of First Nations, Inuit, Métis people. Outside of Health Commons, Marissa is leading and supporting work in the areas of Indigenous evaluation, impact measurement and storytelling and data sovereignty. This includes being a



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partner in enabling inclusion and transforming practice within the British Columbia chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society, a member of the inaugural city of Toronto First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Data and Technology Advisory Circle, and a member of the Advisory Council for Common Approach, a leader in impact measurement. I am so happy to have Marissa Hill with me today on the podcast. Welcome, Marissa.

Marissa:

Aaniin, Waaciye, hello.

Gladys:

Wonderful, yes. I'm wondering if you'd like to introduce yourself into this space in any other way beyond the bio that I just shared.

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

For sure. Just quickly, Aaniin, Waaciye. My name is Marissa. I'm a citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario, and I come from a small Métis settlement community, now known as Penetanguishene and was born and raised there. And I've been a guest and a visitor here in Toronto or Ktaronto for the last 13 years. And I'm so grateful for the relationships and the gifts and opportunities that I've been gifted while I've been here, including coming in relationship with you, Gladys and all the other folks that I've done this great work with. Yeah, and other than that, I'm a human, I have a little kiddo, her name is Kaya, she's seven, she's finishing grade one this week. So it's a big week at our house and there's lots going on and it just feels like a really celebratory time and, yeah, I'm coming with a lot of gratitude today. So miigwetch.

Gladys ([03:58](#)):

Beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing and bringing yourself into the space in that way. What a beautiful celebration with your little kiddo this week as well. So this conversation, I've been really excited to share this space with you and I wanted to start off with asking you, because not everyone goes into adulthood or life thinking, I'm going to be an evaluator. So I wonder if you might share a little bit about the journey or the story of how you came into Indigenous evaluation work.

Marissa ([04:32](#)):

I'll start by saying I came into it by accident. I didn't mean to, maybe I was looking for it in ways that I didn't realize, but I feel like I came into this space really organically and just following different paths around what are the parts of this world that we live in that interest me and that capture my attention and my imagination in different ways. And there's something about – and I've never really been able to describe it – there's something about the evaluation, learning, impact, measurement, storytelling space that has captured me in ways that I can't describe, but I can definitely feel it. So I came into it by accident through those pathways, but most substantially or in practice through the Indigenous Innovation Initiative, which is a group I used to work for.



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And we were launching this new program into the world and we were sitting with the question of how are we going to know that this has been a success?

And so we were doing all this work to set the foundation for this program and on this journey of co-defining with the community how we might define success for that program and how we might know that we are progressing toward that and what would we see along the way to help us know that we were doing that. And at the same time, bumping up against these really colonial performance measurement evaluation frameworks that were being imposed onto us, as I know many of us have that shared journey of funders saying, and here's how you're going to measure the success of this program or this offering. And so I came into it within that context of trying to breathe life into this new program that was rooted in community, rooted in protocol and values and principles that meant something to the community and bumping up against this external model that we were grappling with on how to measure and evaluate the performance and the success of that offering. That was the entry point more or less for me getting my feet wet in this space. And, yeah, it started what has been a really beautiful journey.

Gladys ([06:52](#)):

Yes, by coming into this work by accident. I love that. And I also really resonate with what you shared about, there's just something about this space that also really connects to me and my heart. I love that. Thank you for sharing how you've come to this work. Can you share a little bit about that evaluation journey with the Indigenous Innovation Initiative in particular? Because I know that there's some great resources that were created as a result of that journey in thinking about what could success look like, what's important to measure and how might we do this?

Marissa ([07:29](#)):

I say it was beautiful, because we had community and we were sitting in this space of being really intentional and really thoughtful. Our ultimate commitment and responsibility is to one another and to community. And then holding beside that this simultaneous truth that we are also accountable to these funders who are giving us dollars to make these programs possible. And it was a slow journey. We spent about a year, just over a year, mapping out some foundational infrastructure to help us navigate learning. And for us, we called it inquiry and learning. We sat with what are we doing here? And we landed together on the terminology of inquiry and learning. But for us, that meant evaluation, it meant impact measurement, it meant performance measurement, all these things that came together to help us understand what are we doing and how are we doing it and what's happening as a result?

So we spent a long time working together on that foundational infrastructure. And out of that came two really important documents for the organization as a whole. One was the inquiry and learning bundle, which really outlined how are we approaching learning in this space based on who we are as an innovation platform and what we're trying to achieve? And the other was an Indigenous knowledges and data governance protocol document, because we knew that alongside all of these learning activities came a lot of information and data and stories that would be gifted to us and shared with us from community, and we had an obligation to take care of that information in a really good way. So we spent a year and a bit building out that infrastructure



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and brought it to life through ceremony: a naming ceremony and a birthing ceremony for those two really substantial tools that came into being to help us on that journey.

It was also this journey of bringing along the funder on that path with us. At the end of the day, we could dream up and co-create and build these really beautiful things and we could articulate a vision of what success and impact looked like, but without having that funder there along with us on that journey, we wouldn't have been able to bring it all to life in the way we did. And so it was a very intentional, thoughtful journey of walking the funder through what are we doing? Why is it so important? And why is it so important that we're doing it so differently than you've asked us to, than you might be used to, than you've maybe seen before. So it was a very collaborative, very intentional, very slow journey.

And I remember the day vividly where this funder who was a federal funder said to us, okay, you can do this the way you've described it. You don't have to use this performance measurement framework that we've asked you to use. And I remember that moment vividly and I remember thinking, wait, what? are you sure? Because I didn't expect – although I dreamt of that moment – I didn't fully expect it when we heard those words. It was just an overwhelming feeling of celebration and feeling of being able to honor the community in such a beautiful way. And there was one other story that we brought up together alongside community, and it was really tell us the story of this program. What does it want to do? What does it want to be? And how are we going to know that we're doing a good job here? How will we know we're being successful? And so that was a story that outlined the heart and the spirit of that program and acted as a really important guidepost for us to talk about what are we measuring, how are we measuring it, and how are we sharing back what we learn? So altogether, there were three really fundamental pieces of work that guided that journey in a really good way.

Gladys ([11:12](#)):

That is so amazing. And I will definitely share the links to those documents in the show notes. One of the things that stood out for me is – and you said it a couple times – it was a really slow process <laugh>, and I wonder if there's any learnings about that process being slow that you might be able to share as you're walking alongside and working with the funder. Are there any tidbits from that slowness that you might want to make visible here?

Marissa ([11:42](#)):

Yeah, I think there are so many layers and so many things that came together in that. Someone said to me once, focus on the strengths of your narrative and of your story, and use that as your tool and as your medicine to push back and push forward. Because it's a hard journey when you're saying, no, we need and we deserve for our inherent rights to be honored in this space and in this place in a way that not a lot of people are familiar with or used to seeing that happen. So there's this urgency while at the same time you're pushing against systems and structures that have been in place and were built to exclude us. When you're pushing back on that, it does not happen quickly, and there's so many opportunities to lose trust of community along the way, but also to lose trust of that system or that entity that you're working alongside and trying to bring on that journey.



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There's a lot of opportunity for things to be really difficult and you need a lot of time and space to sit in that complexity and to sit in what is a very challenging space for a lot of people because it challenges everything they know about evaluation or performance measurement or grant funding or running these kind of granting programs. Like it challenges everyone's status quo in many different ways. And so you can't move through that quickly. And there's these components of walking with love and compassion, and sharing that love and compassion even when people don't feel like they're super lovable. There are moments where things are hard and they're really tense and there's a lot of feeling; that slowness helps you to stay rooted in that love and then in that compassion, so those moments don't take you over.

And it's about continuously creating space to keep standing up, to keep telling your story, because you will have to tell your story numerous times before it is really heard and listened to, and before people start to unlearn, and I think a critical part of that slowness is there's so much unlearning that has to happen. In this example it was on the side of government and on the side of funders who are for many parts really eager to learn, but it's a really difficult process and it does not happen quickly. And sitting really intentionally in guiding a person through what are the things that I need to let go of? What are the things that I need to unlearn? How might I do that? There's a lot that goes into that, so being really slow. When I think of that process, I think of just really slow, gentle moving water and we'll come up against rocks every now and then. You'll hit tension points every now and then. There might be rapids, but that water is slow and it's thoughtful and it's moving and then it's gonna get to where it is trying to go. And it does that in a really slow and gentle way. It takes a long time for people to put down power and privilege and it takes a long time for people to sit in discomfort and to sit there and wait until you get to a point where they can sit there and listen and hear and feel it and dive into all that complexity. Yes, that slowness is needed so safety can be maintained and so people can be well during that journey, but also because there's so many complexities being unpackaged and reimaged and brought into the light for the first time for many folks.

Gladys ([15:09](#)):

I love the beautiful vision that you shared around a gentle moving stream or river. I'm feeling the power of that slowness and the unlearning and the beautiful space of compassion that you're describing. And I'm wondering – this is a big question but how did you do that <laugh>? What was important in that time and space to make sure that that unsettling could happen? I'm imagining some of the answer might be ceremony and medicines, but I could be assuming here; but what were some of those critical elements that allowed for that space to happen?

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

Yeah, I think the short answer is we did what we needed to do when and how we needed to do it, but we didn't actually always know what that was until we knew. And I know that's a bit confusing, but I know that's kind of a shared experience and I think a shared sentiment that a lot of folks resonate with. And it was very small and incremental steps, but it started and it continued and it ended, and it's continuing on now in ceremony and in community. We started with this realization of that's not going to work for us. That thing that you are imposing on us to



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measure impact and show performance and progress is harmful and could be violent and could really impact folks in the community who we are here to support and who we are committed to being accountable to. And so it was that immediate acknowledgement of this isn't going to work, so what will? what does that process forward look like?

And we started in ceremony, we called out to elders and knowledge keepers and folks in the community who could help us and could guide us. And we spent a lot of time just listening and learning how might we move through this? and what does that look like? And gathering and cultivating the story of community that wrapped around what it was that we were doing. Because when we went into that space with the funder, it wasn't our truth as a group of people who worked for that organization that we were honoring in that moment. It was the truth of community and the story of community. So we spent as much time as we could learning what that truth was and learning what that story was and how can we tell it and honor it in a good way. And that is what fed us and nourished us through that journey.

And that is the thing we kept anchoring back to. It wasn't about any one of us in that room; it was about all of the folks, all of creation, all our relations who we were honoring in that room both past, present and future, and always going back to doing the right thing in the right way based on what we knew and what we had been given in terms of guidance and teachings and wisdom and sitting in ceremony and all the learning that we had done in that space. And that's not to say we didn't take steps backwards, we really did. There were moments where we're like, okay, we're really getting there. And then the funder would say something and we were like, okay, we've just gone 15 steps backwards, that's okay. And we would go back with them and we would start where we went back to and we would keep moving forward in that good way.

So it was that constant honoring community the entire time. And if what community was telling us shifted and changed, we shifted and changed in how we approached those things; that was the thing that kept us moving and that was the thing that allowed us to speak the truth and the story that we had to tell during that process. That was what nourished the unlearning. And it's really beautiful when you watch people – and we've all experienced and are going through different forms of unlearning and relearning – and when you sit in that experience and you feel that with other people, you build really tremendous relationships because they're really raw, they're really honest, they're really transparent, and they're rooted in a feeling, and they're rooted in this collective commitment to do the right thing. So yeah, that was really what brought us through that and got us to the other side in a really beautiful way.

Gladys ([19:33](#)):

Amazing. I'm hearing so much there that really resonates in a project that I worked on when I was walking alongside the work of the Winnipeg Boldness Project, and it makes me think about some of the guidance from the knowledge keepers there about making sure to take care of the spirit of the work, and taking care of the spirit of the community stories. That leads me into the next question that I want to ask. I know you're doing some really exciting work in this area around data governance, data sovereignty and protocols in that area, like how to take care of the stories that are offered, in a good way that's in alignment with Indigenous protocols. And so I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about your work in that area?



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Marissa ([20:25](#)):

Yes, of course. It's funny: when you think about all of this work and I talked at the beginning about there's this thing that you gravitate toward and this thing that calls you. And I've always been called back to these places and data sovereignty is one of them. And I guess we'll start with some really exciting news. A couple of friends, we've come together as a trio and we are bringing to life a dream that we've had for a little while. We just honestly were scared. We were so scared: we're like, what are we doing? But we know we need to do this. We're being called to do this. And it was bringing to life an Indigenous data sovereignty collective. I remember when I started this work, I felt really lonely, and I felt, what is my medicine in this place? What is going to nourish me? What's going to sustain me outside of myself?

And who are the other people – I know there are people – who are they? I remember putting a call out and I found people all over the world, and we started to work. What we really quickly realized is there's so many people in disparate, disconnected ways who are doing this work; whether it's data sovereignty or evaluation or research or impact measurement, there's commonalities across all of them. But there are people that are dedicated and doing really great work in really disparate places. And so we had this vision of, can we find a way to bring us together in a place that's obviously strongly virtual in that we're all around the world, but how can we bring this wisdom? How can we bring together this abundance of love and spirit and medicine and ceremony and wisdom and really hard and intentional work that's happening? And so we're bringing to life this collective as we speak, and we're having our first gathering next week, and it is open to First Nation, Inuit, Métis folks from any place on our mother the earth and it's welcome for anybody and so we can share information about that as well.

And in that space, really trying to cultivate togetherness and the one thing I've learned, whether it's evaluation, impact, measurement, research, any of these areas, we cannot do this alone. There's so much work to be done and it's really powerful work. We have lots of teachings around this is not for you to do by yourself. Who are you to do this work on your own? And so bringing together that abundance and bringing together our tools, our protocol, our medicine, our wisdom, our intentions, and seeing what comes of that. We have no idea what it'll do or what will come of it or what that pathway's going to look like, and we're all okay not knowing that because it's going to become whatever it needs to be. But that is one really exciting piece that has been slowly coming together and we're really excited to see it come birth itself in this way.

And data sovereignty comes up a lot in all of these spaces because it is an underpinning feature of any sort of evaluation, research, impact measurement, et cetera, type of work. It underpins all of it. And data is so critical to our sovereignty and our wellbeing as nations and as communities. And I know there's so much violence that has happened around data and around how it's collected and used and weaponized, and there's so much healing to be done within the realm of data sovereignty and creating any space that we can for that to flourish in any number of places. It feels like a tremendous gift and opportunity. And so wherever I go, if someone's like, Hey Marissa, come talk to us about Indigenous research methodologies, I always make sure to bring data sovereignty into those conversations even if it doesn't feel like that's what I was expected to bring into that place or what people thought they might be talking about in that place. But making sure to bring those conversations into all those places because people start to connect



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with each other but they also start to connect this history of colonization and harm and violence and they start to realize; they're like, oh, I had no idea. I never looked at data as a weapon or I never looked at data as medicine. It's a really beautiful world to be in and I have so much gratitude to be in it. I still ask myself, how did I end up here? I'm not really sure. But I'm super excited to see where that work goes.

Gladys ([25:00](#)):

Amazing. Me too. And thank you for stepping courageously into that space even though it felt like a big leap, I'm sure. That's amazing and I can't wait to see where this journey goes. I want to ask you some like higher-level thinking around Indigenous evaluation as a field. Some big questions that I ask most people that I sit in conversation with on this podcast. But when you think about the field of Indigenous evaluation or what Indigenous evaluation means, what does it mean? what does it feel like? what does it look like? What does it sound like? So when you say Indigenous evaluation, can you describe what that holistically is for you?

Marissa ([25:50](#)):

Yeah, when I think about it, it feels like love, it feels like home, and it feels like – I always go back, I think it's this water, it feels like the healing energy of water for me. And when I think about outside of feeling, what is it? For me, evaluation is an Indigenous evaluation. It means telling our stories about who we are, what are we doing in these spaces that we're in and how are we creating – because we know there's so much tremendous impact that happens when we have community-led work, self-determined, self-governed work that is rooted in ceremony and our values and our principles. We know the beauty that comes out of that. We know the impact that comes out of that. We know the truth of the things that we do in these spaces. And for me, Indigenous evaluation is the way to tell that story of what are we doing? and how are we doing it? what is that really substantial impact that's happening in the community as a result?

And doing that in our own words and in our own ways that are rooted in both our traditional and ancestral teachings and protocol and practices, while at the same time – so there's that reclaiming component of what have we done before and how did we do this before? Coupled with – and I'll be honest – there are tons of contemporary models that have a lot of resonance and that can align and can be adapted and molded and reimagined within the context of supporting First Nation, Inuit, and Métis evaluation. And so I think it's both this storytelling piece honoring who we are and how we are and what we are doing and why it's so important, coupled with this re-imagination piece of we've been excluded from the world of evaluation proper in this settler colonial context where evaluation as a word and as a regime and as a structure has come to life.

I think if you asked around communities, there's no word for evaluation, but there might be a word for something else that feels similar or that is related around like the learning and the exploration and the curiosity space. So I think it's bridging both of those sides of this reclamation in a contemporary space, and bringing back what is important to us and what is important to our wellbeing as a community for how we do this evaluation work. Coupled with this – some people might call it this two-eyed seeing, I'm seeing what are the contemporary models that I can bring



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into my view and apply in this space that feel aligned and they feel like they are rooted in community and what community wants and needs that we can cobble some version of it together. That makes sense. So for me, that is what I see as Indigenous evaluation.

Gladys ([28:51](#)):

Beautiful. And I'm hearing in that as well the ability to determine what is right for us as communities, right? The concept from Linda Tuhiwai Smith around research that's by us, with us for us is similar in evaluation and the power to determine what and how and when we will understand what success looks like, what impact needs to be described, and how to tell those stories as well. So Indigenous evaluation, you know there's, there's a lot of excitement I would say right now about it, just engaging the amount of people who are interested in hearing about it and learning about it and in queries that I get and I'm sure that you get. What are some the challenges that you are seeing right now in thinking about where Indigenous evaluation is at right now and thinking about the context of this excitement about this field?

Marissa ([29:53](#)):

Yeah, I have to start by saying I love how much excitement there is, because it means people are looking and it means they're starting to listen. And so I get so excited when people are like, Hey, do you wanna talk about Indigenous evaluation? I'm like, yes I do! When do you have time and how much time do you have? I am so excited about the amount of interest. I think – my experience at least has been – there's still a lot of challenges because I think it feels maybe bright and shiny and for lack of a better word, maybe sexy for people. Ooh, there's this new way and I'm like, it's not new, because we're trying to reclaim what we've already been doing, but there feels like there's still so much work to be done for people to truly understand what does it mean to create and hold space for Indigenous evaluation.

It's not just a bright shiny thing, it's a fundamental way of being for our communities. And there's still for me this big disconnect, and that's where I spend a lot of my time is trying to explore with people like what is that bridge? and what is that gap? And what is in that disconnect? Because it's not as easy as just saying, hey, I support you, or that sounds great, let's do it. As I talked about at the beginning, there's such a tremendous amount of unlearning that has to be done. And a key theme I've seen in my journeys is trust. And there's something around – I'll use the example of government funders – it feels like there's just this tremendous amount of trust in this kind of colonial process that we followed. And reallocating that trust and transporting it to something else is a really big journey.

And we go back to talking about how slow it is and all those things. So there's this component of – although there's lots of excitement, the reality and on the ground for the majority of folks is that we're still situated and working within a hypercolonial context that hasn't changed. The people in that space might be eager and willing and curious about what Indigenous evaluation is, but the reality is the structures that make those systems go still haven't evolved and they're actually much farther behind that interest than we think. I know you had Kim from Reciprocal Consulting on one of your sessions recently, and Kim is a lovely dear friend and I met her and spent some time with her last September at a gathering where we were talking about Indigenous



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evaluation. And the biggest thing – and I'm actually holding in my hand right now – a sticky note that she wrote and gave to me, and it says, Dear Indicators, we're breaking up, xo.

And I think one of the biggest challenges is that we're still in this world of indicators and key performance metrics and numbers and quantitative data. And I remember looking at some performance measurement frameworks that had hundreds of quantitative data, like indicators in them, that government were like, you can just track and report on these, right? And we're like, there's hundreds of them, but also they don't mean much. And so we're still in this space where we're deeply rooted in quantitative indicators, these output or efficiency or vanity metrics for defining what success looks like, defining what progress looks like, defining what impact looks like. And I'm working on an evaluation right now and I'm like, all we talk about is indicators; where are the stories? What have we learned and what have we been gifted from community to tell us how this looks and feels? Not just how many people have we reached, how many bums in seats, how many services did we offer, how many this, that, and the other thing, because that doesn't tell the story.

So we're still deeply struggling with how to separate ourselves and how to break up with those indicators, which is a really big problem. Something to think about in that regard is – so you sit as an Indigenous person in an organization for example, and you've got funders on one side and you've got communities on the other and you're sitting with this thing of, I have to tell you how I'm performing based on these numbers that you're asking me to measure and report against. But I know they're not telling a story, they're not telling the story that I'm committed to telling. But also if I don't have an equally as appreciated mechanism to share those narrative stories with you, are you going to hear them? Are you going to listen? Will you inform your really colonial assessment of me based on these narratives that I'm sharing with you? Or is it just based on these numbers? That's what you care about. And so that's a really big challenge.

The other challenge I see – these are not the only two, these are the two kind of key themes – is around finding the people that will come on that journey with you as co-conspirators. Some people might call them allies, some people might call them something else, but who is that partner that's going to come on that journey with you and carry that weight with you and for you sometimes and stand up and be part of push their weight around so you're not the only one doing it. It does feel very lonely sometimes and very isolated sometimes. And I think if you get too far into the day-to-day, you might feel like giving up. It's always a challenge of who you're surrounding yourself with, who's going to step up for you and be that co-conspirator, ally role that's not performative.

They're going to sit in the complexity of that space with you and they're going to move through that complex journey with you and they're going to take that labor from you when you need a break. There's a lot that goes on. There's a lot of challenges despite how beautiful of a journey it is when you're on that pathway with people, there are core parts of it that are really challenging and I think taking care of yourself and taking care of each other, but also surrounding yourself with the things that will nourish you on that journey are really important and create substantial and very specific challenges in that space.

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



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Yeah, thank you for sharing both of those areas. And really what I'm hearing are like invitations in there: invitations to funders, invitations to co-conspirators or allies to pick up some responsibility, but what it means to support Indigenous evaluation, which is in a super exciting time. I feel like there is this moment of awareness that's happening. And so what are the next steps that need to be picked up and who needs to pick up some of that responsibility?

Marissa ([36:42](#)):

Yeah – and I wish I had the details, I can try and find it – but I was watching this video recently and I had a dream and I was like, next time I'm asked to give a panel discussion or speak at a thing or host a, whatever it is, next time I'm asked to do something, I had this dream that I just said all the words that I really wanted to say, and the next day I saw this video of a man, I think it was in Australia, who did that exact same thing. And I think part of the challenge is he's like, why are we doing this work for ourselves? Where's everybody else? Why are we carrying the weight of fixing generations of colonial harm and violence in these spaces? Why are we the ones carrying the weight of making a space for our communities to heal?

Where is everybody else? He had a lot of expletives that I will exclude in this scenario, but I was like, yes, that's the thing that you want to say. And so it's sharing really gently, like we can't do this alone – I've said that a few times – and bringing together those people who will really bravely step into that journey. And I think an invitation for funders, we're not here to be a pain in the butt, we're not here to make your life harder. We are here to do the right thing for the communities that we serve and that we are obligated to supporting and just creating a space where we can all sit in that mess, sit in that chaos, sit in that discomfort together and that we are in partnership and in relationship in that space.

Gladys ([38:19](#)):

Yes, <laugh> so many things that want to be said, need to be said, and still the gentle invitation there as well <laugh>. So when you think about those invitations to others to pick up responsibility – and also I heard you share earlier, sometimes it can be lonely, sometimes you're the only Indigenous person between organization and community – I'm wondering if you have anything that you'd like to share to other Indigenous evaluators, emerging Indigenous evaluators. What are your hopes for them? What are your insights that you'd like to offer in this space for them?

Marissa ([39:04](#)):

That's a really important question and I think I've spent time chatting with folks and they say, it feels scary. It feels like really hard complex work. Am I ready for that? Is that for me? And one of the things that we talk about a lot is do not let imposter syndrome stop you. And we talk about how we are here, we have always been here and we will be here and we don't need permission to be in these roles. We don't need permission to be in these spaces. I fell into this by accident. I think there's a lot of people that feel like that's not a place for me, even though I want to be there. And so if it's a place that you want and need to be, be there; it is a place for you. You don't need



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permission to be there. And surround yourself with the things, the people, the ceremonies, the medicines, the songs, the teachings that will lift you up on that journey.

And I think that's why this collective and this conversation around how we have to do this together because it's way too much for one person or a small group of people to carry. But I think if I'm a new person coming into this space for the first time, I think I want to know that I'm not walking into it alone and that there's this collective here that can nourish me and guide me and be my helper when I need it. We're all on different paths, but we can be on them together and lean on each other and share the abundance of things that we know and learn along the way and open up our bundles to each other and offer forward what we have, if and how it can be helpful to folks. And so sharing with those folks who want to come into this space, be here, we are here, we're ready, we want you here, we love you, and you are good medicine and you are worthy of being here.

And in those moments where it gets really tricky and really uncomfortable and really scary, those are the moments where we want to run away. And I think those are the moments that we need to lean most into. I think of buffalo right now and I think about the weight of buffalo and I imagine leaning into buffalo and like, okay, I've got this. There's this big strong weight of that collective around me. Buffalo's got soft, warm fur, and so leaning into you are not alone and you deserve to be here. And that we are together, creating a lot of incremental change slowly and quickly all at one time. And that it is a really beautiful place. And I imagine like this contemporary colonial regime of evaluation and then I imagine it just like exploding into this beautiful butterfly and that moment of transformation when it can be a place for everybody and where it can be a place where all these very diverse worldviews, ways of being, protocol practices come together and they flourish and they nourish each other and they grow and evolve alongside each other. And I just imagine this really beautiful, bright, colorful space like a butterfly for everybody to be a part of.

Gladys ([42:26](#)):

You truly have a gift with visual metaphors. <laugh> I was closing my eyes and imagining this brilliant vision that you have. Thank you for sharing that. Ekosani.

Marissa ([42:41](#)):

Miigwetch.

Gladys ([42:42](#)):

So we're coming to the end of our time together and I wanted to check in and see is there any final thought that you'd love to leave the listeners with as they move forward in their day and carry the gifts that you've shared with them to sit with and to reflect on?

Marissa ([43:03](#)):

First of all, a big chi-miigwetch, like a huge thank you and a huge offering of gratitude for everyone who shows up in this space in big ways, small ways, all the other ways in between. If you're here for a little time, a long time, no matter what it is, just a huge offering of gratitude for



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folks who come on this journey in a ton of different ways and a ton of different spaces and places and who keep showing up. And I think that hope that I have, that offering that I have, that dream that I have is that we keep standing up beside each other, and we keep walking with love and compassion, and we keep in this space no matter how hard it gets, keep being brave, keep standing up. We will find the places and spaces that are for us and we are finding them, and we will recreate those, we will reimagine those, we will reclaim those, whatever that journey looks like.

So please keep coming to this space and please keep showing up, because I look at my daughter and I look back and I look at our ancestors and what they went through for us to be here today. And I have so much gratitude to be part of a generation of people for the first time who can start to reclaim so proudly and so bravely and we can stand up in these spaces and demand the things – with love and compassion and gentleness – but demand those things that are rightfully for us and do the work required to be well and to heal. And so I look at my daughter and I'm like, I look to that future where that butterfly has been birthed and that is only possible if we keep coming together and if we keep showing up and if we keep moving with love and compassion. And wherever that next right step is for each one of us, continuing to come into that space, whatever that vision folks have – mine's a butterfly, other peoples will be other things. And to come into that space, which is joy and love and knowing that there's so many beautiful relationships. I'll bring up Kim again. I remember when I met her I was like, yes! this is that medicine. Gladys, when I met you, I was like, yes! these are these people that are in this space and make it so beautiful. So I just want people to keep coming and celebrate in this space and enjoy it and take care of yourself along the way.

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

Ekosani, Marissa, and thank you for being such good medicine, so grateful to have you <laugh> alongside me today and in this space. Many thanks for your time.

Marissa ([46:03](#)):

Chi-miigwetch. I really appreciate it and I look forward to continuing to follow your beautiful journey and all the folks who come along and who will teach me. Chi-miigwetch.

Gladys ([46:21](#)):

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 favorite 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 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,



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and the questions you're thinking about. That's it for this week. I look forward to sharing this space with you again soon. Ekosani.