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Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast
Season 1 Episode 18: Myra Parker and Danielle Eakins
<https://gladysrowe.com/s01e18-Indigenous-insights-myra-danielle/>
August 7, 2023

Gladys Rowe ([00:04](#)):

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.

I am so excited to be here today with two amazing guests who are co-authors – with a team of people from Seven Directions, A Center for Indigenous Public Health at the University of Washington – of a new Indigenous evaluation toolkit. Very exciting work. So Danielle Eakins is a licensed clinical psychologist and a research scientist at Seven Directions. Danielle is dedicated to supporting behavioral wellness through collaborative strengths-based partnerships with Indigenous communities, and also Dr. Myra Parker, who is an enrolled member of the Mandan and Hidatsa Tribes and serves as an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Washington School of Medicine. She's currently the director of Seven Directions, which is housed in the Center for the Study of Health and Risk Behaviors within the Department of Psychiatry. Great. So I'm so glad to have you both with me here today. I'm wondering if you would like to introduce yourselves into this space in any additional way beyond the short bio that I shared.

Myra Parker ([02:11](#)):



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I don't think I have really anything. I just wanted to point out the name of the other tribe that I identify with as Hidatsa.

Gladys ([02:19](#)):

Hidatsa. Thank you so much.

Danielle ([02:22](#)):

I could say a few additional things. Thank you so much, Gladys, for that introduction. I also want to introduce myself as a granddaughter, a daughter, a partner, and a collaborator for healing with the wonderful clients that are in my clinical practice. Also, I'm enthusiastically at the beck and call of a 12-pound Pekinese named Moose who's behind me <laugh>.

Gladys ([02:43](#)):

Amazing. I definitely hear you there in terms of office mates, <laugh>. Wonderful. So I was really looking forward to having this conversation because on social media I came across this amazing toolkit that you all have been working on, so I'm excited to jump into that. But I wanted to start off by asking you a little bit about how you came into this space of evaluation, Indigenous evaluation, what's been your journey into this work so far?

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

Yeah, I can go ahead and start off and then kick it over to Danielle. So I was trained in evaluation through my doctoral program and then immediately after graduating there was this really wonderful opportunity through the Administration for Children and Families and they opened up a whole new grant program for Tribal home visiting. And so I was invited to join an application that was put forward by United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, which is the Urban Indian Center here in Seattle. And part of my role was a co-evaluator for that application and then it just so happened that the other folks who were joined received additional positions. And so I became the lead evaluator and just had an amazing time working with the foundation to plan out the home visiting program and think about how to collect data from the urban Indian population in Seattle King County area. And so that was kind of my first real evaluation effort that was very comprehensive, very holistic, and I just wanted to say kudos to the folks who put together the grant program because they really did take into consideration the fact that tribes and urban Indian communities probably have their own ways of evaluating home visiting programs and really made space to have that kind of dialogue and discussion. That was actually the first time that I met Dr. Joan LaFrance, who we'll be talking about more later. So I'll turn it over to you, Danielle.

Danielle ([04:57](#)):

Thanks, Myra. A little bit about my background, which is slightly long form, but I've worked in partnership with Indigenous communities for over 10 years. I'm non-Native and I come from a mixed-race background. I had lived in eight different states before the age of 14, and those



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background factors really drove my interest in identity, belonging, community, and ultimately led to my pursuit of psychology in undergraduate. And it was at that time that I was determining my path in terms of research, individual therapy, teaching, and I had the opportunity to take a community-based participatory research [CBPR] workshop led by Dr. Bonnie Duran. And I had this aha experience at that point where these were principles, approaches, and ways of interacting with communities that I wanted to learn more about and be able to really use in partnership with the work that I wanted to do and the communities that I wanted to work with.

So from that, I had the great opportunity of being mentored by Dr. Duran and Doctors Myra Parker and Maya Magarati in my graduate training at the University of Washington. And many of the really foundational work that we did with American Indian Higher Education Consortium and Tribal colleges and universities nationwide was from CBPR approaches. And while that was a research lens, there were many also train-the-trainer and community-involved pieces to that. And from more of that research background, now working with Seven Directions, evaluation and translational capacity building has been something that we've really focused on and something that has become a passion of the work that I do and the teams that we work with. And I also wanted to really highlight the team approach that we've had in this development. Angie Gaffney, Caelin Marum and Tsering Wangmo really helped as well in this development and kind of speaks to this approach from a team perspective.

Gladys ([07:02](#)):

Wonderful. Thank you for sharing how you show up into the space and definitely hearing the collective generation and the knowledges that have, you know, really been grounded in community to prioritize what it means to do this work in a good way. So thank you for sharing those pieces. So this toolkit that just launched in the spring, I know there's been a lot of excitement around the toolkit. I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about the history of its development.

Myra ([07:37](#)):

Yeah, I'll go ahead and kind of start it. So we started to hear a little bit about Indigenous evaluation about three or four years ago. And in the very beginning with our partnership with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Network of Public Health Institutes, we were charged with exploring what are some of the needs and issues surrounding opioid overdose prevention within Tribal and urban Indian communities. And about a year or year and a half into that partnership, we started to talk about what are some ways that maybe Indigenous evaluation could be included in that focus, within opioid overdose prevention. And so the first step, because I had met Dr. LaFrance through my evaluation work with United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, I reached out to her to invite her to campus, to UW. She has her doctorate in education and she's originally from the Turtle Mountains Reservation in North Dakota, and she's worked with Indigenous communities worldwide and many here in the Pacific Northwest.

And so I had known about her work and read her papers. And actually in the interim, since I'd met her way back in like 2011 or so, we had taught a couple of classes together at Standing Rock



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Community College. And so I had gotten to know her a little bit and then I read her paper on her Indigenous evaluation framework that she developed with her partner Richard Nichols and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium or AIHEC, and got really excited about the framework and started having a conversation with her about how we could learn from her and would she be willing to share the framework and could we use it as kind of a basis for exploring opioid overdose prevention efforts and how to assess whether those efforts were having an impact within communities. And she was very open to it, very supportive, also very generous, and just allowing us to explore that with her and partner with her over the past three and a half years or so.

And so back almost three years ago exactly, we invited her to campus and she provided these free trainings on the framework. And that's really kind of how it all got started, was through these layers of connections over the years, and then also requests through the CDC project, and just a real interest in understanding how can we bring Indigenous perspectives into the evaluation efforts, particularly within these opioid overdose prevention programs. Especially because many of the Tribal communities that we work with are including Indigenous approaches within these program efforts. So they're using ceremony and culture and their particular language and understanding of wellness from a very holistic perspective in the work that they do. And so by incorporating an Indigenous evaluation approach, we're able to understand how those important elements of these programs are so pivotal in helping to support healing journeys for the folks who are taking part in that. And I'll turn it over to Danielle to expand on that.

Danielle ([11:11](#)):

Thanks Myra. Myra really captured a lot of the background development pieces, and some additional developmental pieces that we engaged with were approximately 20 key informant interviews with Tribal and urban Indian community partners, those that are focused on opioid overdose prevention efforts. And in those interviews, the message that we continually heard over and over again is, We want more control and we want more involvement in the evaluation of our programs, in addition to planning, also evaluation, and that that needs to come from an Indigenous perspective and that needs to come from within community. And having that support and having that be something that is prioritized was the message that we received, again, over and over from our community partners. So that also really drove the partnership efforts that eventually became the toolkit, were those conversations that we had in 2021 and 2022.

Gladys ([12:18](#)):

Thank you. Well, it certainly sounds like it's been quite the journey to get to this development and really rooted and driven by relationship and by community priorities. So you talked about 20 key informant interviews and the partnerships that really helped to form this toolkit. Can you tell me a little bit more about the development process itself? Like what did that look like?

Danielle ([12:40](#)):



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Absolutely. So as Myra mentioned, we were working with Dr. Joan LaFrance and having meetings with her in terms of how might we translate the Indigenous evaluation framework into an actionable guide of phases, steps, prioritizing storytelling and metaphor throughout. And what we wanted to do was not have a guide that is overly prescriptive. In fact, we have throughout the toolkit the information that communities should adapt and use however they see fit. But again, having a guidance of how can we go through evaluation and go through that in an iterative community-driven, continually reflective process was something that was a priority. And the feedback that we received from Dr. LaFrance, our key informant interviews, and then another really important piece was the piloting process that we were involved with. So we had three main piloting partners: Wabanaki Public Health, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. And those partnerships really gave feedback as we went through a year-long process of writing, where we would write a piece, we would get feedback from our partners: what was landing, what needed to be adjusted, how they might use this in their community or with the programs that they were considering. And that, again, that iterative process was one that really honed the toolkit writing and made it so that it was not something that was written internally and completed. It was this continual process that we were all involved with.

Gladys ([14:29](#)):

That process that you use is really exemplary of the principles of Indigenous evaluation, ways of engaging and the cyclical iterative checkbacks, validation, processes, to really test out something that's meaningful for the people who are contributing to it. When you think about some of the learning that you've gathered as a result of developing this toolkit, I'm wondering if there's anything that stands out to you right now about what it was like to develop this and some takeaways from the process?

Myra ([15:04](#)):

Well, I think for me, I think the takeaway, you mentioned it earlier, that relationships really matter. And I think that's also something that we see in the programming, that we're kind of focused on with this iteration of the toolkit, the opioid overdose prevention. We just also finished up a national conference that we put on last week called Our Nations, Our Journeys, and it was focused on actually the opioid epidemic in Indian Country and also decolonizing and Indigenizing data collection efforts around opioid overdose prevention in particular. And throughout we're seeing all of these different connections, the importance of relationships and the importance of building and strengthening those connections with the folks who are going through these really challenging times trying to address addiction and trying to address all of the things that come with that, all of the very huge challenges and the importance of helping to really sustain relationships that are supportive, that are helping to contribute to them really healing from this space of dealing with addiction.

And so we see it at the individual level, we also see it at the program level, and the folks who are actually engaged in putting on these programs and the need for teams to really trust one another, to really understand all of these different perspectives and be able to talk about them,



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communicate about them clearly and effectively, and then also holding that space for reflection and also time for celebration too. What we heard at our conference, and I think we've also seen this throughout the past three years as we've been looking at this work and focusing on the toolkit, is that there's a real need to acknowledge and recognize strides in our communities that have been made. Yes, it's very challenging work, particularly in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. At the same time, there's so much effort that people are putting into this and really pouring themselves into it to protect youth and to support Elders and to help support healing journeys and pathways for folks who are struggling with this.

It's important to recognize that and to be able to lean on these relationships to help grow in these relationships as well, so that we can all keep moving forward together to address this issue in our communities. So I think that's kind of the one big takeaway that I would say I've seen from this effort. And then I think the other second one is just the pure generosity of knowledge and spirit and support that we've seen with all of our partners, with Dr. LaFrance, with AHEC being so generous to share the framework, with other evaluators like Dr. Rose James at the Urban Indian Health Institute. There's many others who are working on Indigenous evaluation efforts. And people have been so thoughtful and generous in sharing all that information because I think people recognize that this is a huge effort. No one person or entity can really address it alone, and we all need to kind of work together and share that information so that we can all learn together and continue to make strides in order to really bring this to a close and also to really do this in a way that is culturally grounded and that really speaks to people's understandings and knowledge base and all of the things that are important when we're with our respective communities.

Gladys ([19:08](#)):

Thank you, Myra. Danielle, I'm wondering if you have any aha takeaways, learnings as a result of this journey?

Danielle ([19:16](#)):

The importance of relationship, as Myra said, was one of the main key takeaways and the speed of building relationship and trust and partnership and how that speed needs to be set by our partners and how often the time period for that needs to be as long as possible. And one thing comes to mind, in terms of a first meeting that we had with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and we had planned an introduction and a few things that we were going to review. And in that review, one of the partners at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium stopped and said, Wait, can we first have a discussion about what Indigenous means? What do you think about that? And we paused there and we actually spent our entire hour meeting discussing that. And this is an example of something that comes up often, where we can have some plans in mind, but what is important and what takes precedence is often driven by community. And again, that really helped in development and thinking for the toolkit.

Gladys ([20:29](#)):



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Thank you. You've both offered some really great takeaways there. And Myra, I really love the comment around generosity, really the recognition that this isn't up to one person, it's through collective space and time and contributions and the gifts that we all bring into this space and into this work that'll get done. So thinking about the learnings that you personally have noticed, I'm wondering if there's any feedback or reflections or like how is the toolkit being received now that you've launched it publicly into the space? What kind of feedback have you been getting about it?

Myra ([21:09](#)):

It's overwhelmingly positive, which is wonderful on the one hand. On the other hand, I'm hoping that we continue to push forward and identify areas that could be revised or updated. I think that this is just the tip of the iceberg, and I think there's a lot more that could be done in this area. And this is just one version of Indigenous evaluation. I think that there's probably very culturally specific ways to think about evaluation. Our communities have been evaluating and doing data collection since the beginning, and my husband and I have been doing a lot more, I guess, efforts to learn about our respective tribes and languages. And finally, like everybody was on Zoom during the pandemic and we were all connected even though we were hundreds of miles away from our home communities. And so I've been learning Hidatsa with my parents and my sisters and their families.

And then Dave, my husband, has been learning Coeur d'Alene with some folks who taught the language within the Tribal community for decades and learned from fluent speakers, and is looking at ways to building out a curriculum to teach Coeur d'Alene within the community. And so one of the pieces of that – because a language doesn't just stand stand alone, there's so many elements of culture that come into it, of course – and he was looking at some of the historical accountings of the Coeur d'Alene tribe and ran across this really great story from I think probably the early 1900s, late 1800s, where there were Coeur d'Alene Elders. They're surrounded by mountains, I should say, with the tribe, and they're on Lake Coeur d'Alene. So they get a little bit of everything. They have the lake, they have the mountains around, and then not too far away is the Palouse Prairie.

And so in the northwest there are these fruit called huckleberries up in the mountains really close to the top of the mountains. And so the Elders back in the day would send out several youth to run up to the top of these different peaks surrounding the reservation area, which was their traditional homelands too, and ask them to bring back a branch of huckleberries. And so the youth would bring back a branch and then the Elders would talk about, Are they going to be ripe soon? Are they overripe? Are they dried out? What does the crop look like this year? And they would decide whether they were going to spend a whole month and invest that time and energy going to go berry picking with the whole community, or would they go off to the prairie to hunt buffalo, or would they go fishing, or how are they going to apportion their time?

And so I really love that story, because for me doing this work, it really kind of made me think about how our communities have been using information and data and collecting that information every day for thousands of years in order to understand, How can we do better? How



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can we be more efficient? How can we ensure that we are bringing in nutritious foods and sending youth out to run up mountains? You just think about like the knowledge transmission that's occurring there and thinking about all of the other beneficial supportive things that are happening in those moments where youth are learning from Elders, they're getting all this massive exercise, running 10 miles up a mountain and collecting the huckleberry branches. And then also the fulfilling of accomplishment, that fulfillment of recognizing that they're powerful youth that can make that journey by themselves and really contribute to the community in this really important way.

So there's all of these very positive cascades of supportive actions and behaviors that come into it. And this was happening right at the time we were talking about developing the toolkit. And that for me just kind of gave me that grounding to be able to think about, Okay, we need to somehow capture elements of that. How can we build that in for program teams who are wanting to do essentially kind of the same thing with the effort that they're going through with their community? And so that was really an eye-opening moment and hopefully we've accomplished that to some degree with the toolkit. But I think there's stories like that all across Indian Country. And we've worked with a handful of folks now with the toolkit and have gotten amazing feedback and insight. And there's also, within the US alone, 570 plus tribes. And so the toolkit may not address important things from communities in the Southwest or the Southeast or there's a lot of different Tribal variation and diversity. And so we know that probably there are other ways of building in some of those cultural components that are so important to tailoring it for particular programs.

Gladys ([26:31](#)):

Thank you. What a beautiful story. And you know, as you were sharing I was picturing that space and that time and the journey to gather the huckleberry branches. What an amazing gift. Thank you.

The next question that I want to ask is thinking about, and you touched on this a little bit, is this is just the start. This is a living document. This is one iteration, one offering, and in some ways it's kind of like a beacon of what is possible from my perspective around creating evaluation that is meaningful by, with, and for community Tribal nations. And so where do you see this going? What else is needed? Where do you want to take this? This is a huge question I know, but like what are some of the things that you vision for the work of this toolkit itself and then the field of Indigenous evaluation, like where else do we need to go?

Danielle ([27:31](#)):

One thing that comes to mind for me, and this piggybacks off of the last question, was the feedback that I've been receiving is one of excitement and empowerment, meaning that community partners, we are all having conversations about expanding how we define data and how we define evaluation and really prioritizing Indigenous Knowledge in terms of empirical reveal Traditional Knowledge pieces. And something that I've heard often from our partners is, Oh, I've been doing evaluation all along and I didn't call it that and I'm glad we now have this



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guide for speaking about it like that and packaging it in a way that can be translational for our communities and for some of the funder-driven mechanisms. One thing we touch on in the toolkit is the concept of two-eyed seeing and how we at Seven Directions see ourselves as advocates and as collaborators, and how can we prioritize Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous evaluation.

And one example that comes to mind is a program that we worked with for opioid overdose prevention where they have wraparound services, and one indicator that they were on the path to the vision that they wanted for their program was having multiple community members in recovery asking to host their sobriety birthdays at their organization. And that sharing is something that was so beautiful and poignant and being able to again show that and show those points of progress, whereas prior that might not have been something that was collected or gathered in a way that was shared out. So to answer your question, in terms of next steps, I think we are really excited to continue to work with more partners and also potentially broaden the use of the toolkit. Right now it is focused on opioid overdose prevention, but I think it can be also utilized for broader public health promotion and healing. And so that's one main goal that we have in this coming year: What are some other ways that we can use the toolkit and expand with the partners that we're working with?

Myra ([30:18](#)):

Yeah, and I think the other folks who can benefit from this kind of two-eyed seeing approach are, as Danielle was mentioning, the funders; there's a real strong interest because I think you know, the folks at least that we're working with, that we have the benefit of working with, is they really want to learn. There's a lot of funders out there now who understand that the Western science approach to evaluation is just one way of thinking about evaluation. And there's many other ways to plot it out and to understand it and to really try to kind of match it up with some of the community priorities. I think for a long time, decades, a lot of Tribal communities have been required to file certain reports and the information that was collected was mandated by federal agencies or state agencies that they were funded by, and also philanthropic entities.

And a lot of times those were kind of off-the-shelf approaches to evaluation. So they're probably very nice questions for a standard evidence-based intervention that had been tested in that particular community and it all fit together. But a lot of times these evidence-based interventions that we rely on for opioid overdose prevention or treatment or whatever it is that we're looking at, have never been tested in Indian Country. They've never been assessed for validity and reliability with our populations. And that's really important because then how do we know if it's having the impact that it should have? And in addition to that, how do we know that it's incorporating those Indigenous social determinants of health that are so important in our communities? I think we're starting to see more and more that people are also understanding that there are all of these social factors that put our communities at a higher risk of certain bad outcomes, and we have to look at those.

If we don't, we're kind of really putting blinders on and we're only seeing a very narrow part of the picture. So if we're not really thinking about how Tribal sovereignty can help support these



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types of efforts to ensure that Tribal programs are able to engage in harm reduction activities, for example, to reduce opioid overdoses in their communities, then we're really doing a disservice to that program because we're not really looking at the benefit of these Indigenous-specific contexts that allow us to really incorporate some of these best practices that really haven't traditionally been included in some of the federal and state programming until recently. So I think that there are many opportunities to continue to expand that knowledge base, because, like I mentioned earlier, we've only kind of started to tap that area and map it out a little bit. And so I'm hoping that this Indigenous evaluation field will continue to grow, continue to expand as more people are employing these Indigenous evaluation approaches, whether it's the one that we describe in the toolkit or another that they've developed with their Tribal community or wherever it's coming from.

Because I think we'll all stand to benefit from continuing to grow that information base, continuing to understand examples of how people can apply this approach or other approaches and really see like maybe what works well in this community could work for our community, or maybe we need to make some changes and adapt it to make sure it's a good fit for our community. And so to really just continue to explore those types of questions, I think is super important so that we're really drilling down for a given population and making sure that the data that we're collecting is a good reflection, a good measure of what we're hoping to actually measure. There's a lot of examples out there in the field of evaluation where there's these measures that have never really been used in our communities, and I think that's probably true for opioid overdose prevention as well. So I think there's a lot of potential here to just continue to expand this field and to continue to grow that knowledge.

Gladys ([34:48](#)):

Thank you. That feels like the right note for this last question that I'm going to ask you, is that thinking about your hope for Indigenous evaluation, if there's any final thoughts that you'd like to share with the listeners, to leave them with around your hopes, your dreams, what you'd like to offer as words of inspiration, perhaps with all of the wisdom and experience that you bring into this space as we close off our time together?

Danielle ([35:18](#)):

For myself as an Indigenous ally, I am here to enthusiastically listen, learn and support. And I have the hope and excitement to continue to do that and to continue to learn from the communities that we're working with and to help promote Indigenous evaluation as what should be prioritized for communities and for programs.

Myra ([35:45](#)):

And I'm just super excited that folks are finding this helpful, that they're excited to try it out in their own communities. We've received requests from other Tribal communities and consortia who are interested in adapting it for cancer care among many other areas, which is super exciting to me. And then I think the other piece is a colleague of ours, Dr. Derek Jennings at University of



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Washington, is currently working on developing a school of Indigenous health. And I can see that this content could continue to build out and to offer classes in this to students who are going to be coming up into the field of public health and other areas where this type of an approach could be really helpful. And so in that way they don't have to go out and recreate the wheel. They can build on this approach and continue to grow this field.

So I think, you know, it really takes all of us pushing in and trying to kind of expand this work. And I'm excited to hear that communities are wanting to grow it in their areas, that there's opportunities within these Western institutions for more Indigenous knowledge to be included and integrated into the curricula. And I think it will just kind of continue to expand from there. So it's very exciting and I just want to thank you so much for allowing us some time to talk about this and to share some of our experiences with this and hopefully get the word out to others who might find this approach useful.

Gladys ([37:25](#)):

Absolutely. And thank you both for sharing this space with me and your generosity as well, really living that value into the world. So I'm so grateful for your time today, and I know that listeners are going to be very excited to get their hands on this toolkit that I will link in the show notes of course. And I'm sure that you'll be getting many more inquiries as awareness about this really important work just continues to build and ripple throughout Indigenous communities. Ekosi.

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