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Transcript

Ginger Gosnell-Myers [GGM]: …and this is what makes urban Indigenous living so exciting and so healing – is being able to go to like an Indigenous Fashion Week event, or being able to watch basketball teams in the tournaments, or going to an Indigenous Film Festival, or even, like an Indigenous burlesque event, you know…like all of these fun things that are happening could be supported through grants and programming. All of this is healing, because it connects us to one another in a really positive way, and it gives us hope. And that's so much of what our healing looks like – is coming together, creating hope.

Lynn Power [LPower]: if you look at your life like a book, right? Like, right now, this is a chapter in our book, tonight is a chapter. Everything that we've done in the past, those are all chapters in our book. And some chapters are long, some are short, some are sad, some are hard, some are happy, some are crazy, right? But they're all chapters in our book. And so what are the next chapters gonna look like? What is the rest of your book gonna look like? Because you get to create that.

[MUSIC]

Lyana Patrick [LP]: Hadi, hello and welcome to *From Ceremony Up*, a podcast dedicated to uplifting community conversations about how health, justice, and connection are foundational to Indigenous self-determination. I'm your host, Lyana Patrick, a member of the Stellat'en First Nation as well as Acadian and Scottish.

In this episode, we will be talking about Indigenous healing in urban spaces, how this work is necessarily connected to the land despite this often being overlooked in our understanding of what makes a city, and how traditional healing happens through the communities that we create and the practices that we uphold within urban contexts. Our conversation today features Ginger Gosnell-Myers, a member of the Nisg̲a'a and

Kwakwaka'wakw Nations and Fellow of Urban Indigenous Policy, Planning, and Decolonization with Simon Fraser University. We will also invite Melissa Vabic back who we heard from in Episode 1. This time, we will share some of the conversation that Melissa and I had with a group of frontline workers who are supporting healing and justice, as well as more conversation between myself and Melissa.

Here's Ginger to introduce herself in her own words.

GGM: I'm Ginger Gosnell-Myers, I'm Nisg̲a'a and Kwakwaka'wakw. These are two coastal First Nations communities. And I'm a fisherman's daughter. I come from like a significant fishing family, and spent most of my life out on the water. Very blessed to have grown up in my home community of Gitlaxt'aamiks which is a Nisg̲a'a community in northern BC and spending time in my mom's community at We Wai Kai on Quadra Island, on Vancouver Island, and have been in the city since 1998 so not too long after I graduated high school and found myself looking for community, finding it with a lot of my northern friends and northern cousins, and then over time, finding connection with all of the Indigenous peoples who have decided to make Vancouver their home, and have been working in and studying in urban Indigenous city building, urban Indigenous planning, urban Indigenous identity for close to 20 years now. And here I am at Simon Fraser University. I'm at the Wosk Center for Dialogue. I'm the first Indigenous Fellow at the Center for dialogue, and my fellowship is focusing on urban Indigenous planning and decolonization, and it's been great because it's given me an opportunity to really hone my craft as a practitioner in helping us better understand what are the pathways to indigenizing cities, and what does that look like, and where can it go?

LP: And here are some introductions from the round table Melissa and I shared with frontline workers from the Native Courtworker and Counseling Association of BC.

MV: So I'm Melissa. My last name is Vabic, and I am from the Heiltsuk Nation on my mother's side, and I am Slovenian on my father's side, and I am one of the addictions counselor at Native Courtworker and Counseling. And currently, we do one-to-one counseling sessions, and we connect with clients on a one-to-one basis, and we do counseling sessions, create wellness plans, treatment plans, using the healing modality of the medicine wheel, and talking to individuals about creating their goals, doing some goal setting, and getting them connected to wonderful people in the community. So it's been an honour, and it's been a privilege to be with this organization and sitting here with all of you tonight.

Aaron Mitchell [AM]: I'm Aaron Mitchell – mental health and addiction counselor with Native Courtworkers and Counseling. I'm originally from the Okanagan Nation, just

outside of Vernon. The work that I do is the same as Melissa. So we work with the medicine wheel, give people their treatment plans, if they want to go to treatment we help with referrals and start them on their healing journey.

LP: Thank you.

Ava [A]: **[Speaks Halkomelem introducing herself and her Nations]** respected elders in the community – because none of us here are old, just kidding…respected elders, friends. **[Speaks Halkomelem]** is who I am. My name is Ava. I'm an alcohol and drug counselor with Native Courtworkers and Counseling for eight years. Yeah. Thank you Lynn for opening up your doors and allowing us in here and Lyana for inviting us to spend an evening and share a meal and some stories, it's good to connect out in the community. All my relations. **[Speaks Halkomelem]** thank you.

LPower: My Cree name, I just got…received my name this summer. It's Ocicâhk, and that means crane woman. And the elder said crane woman…crane was coming to him, because when cranes flap their wings in the morning, they awaken people, he said, "And that's what you do. You awaken people." And he says, "You've had a rough life, a hard life, but you've had to go through everything to get where you are, to do what you're doing today. So I used to work at Native Courtworkers. I was one of their Clinical Counselors, and then I went on my own. So I've had my private practice now for almost four years. It'll be four years in November that I've been on my own. So I get referrals from the staff at Native Courtworkers and other referrals. So yeah, and I love what I do, and thank you for allowing me to be a part of your journey. So thank you. Oh and my name is Lynn Power – my English name is Lynn Power.

LP: In my conversation with Ginger, we started by discussing how she came to be involved in city planning and the connections she sees between city planning and Indigenous health. The policy making behind this work is foundational to the services for Indigenous healing that we see offered and supported in Vancouver, and ultimately flow into the work of NCCABC.

GGM: Well, my background and my degree is actually in public policy, and I was one of the people who really wanted to focus on cities – so municipal policy. And having worked at the City of Vancouver for a number of years in the city manager's office, as the first Indigenous relations manager, you really get the sense that the line between working in municipal policy and planning, it's a very fine line. There's a lot of crossover, especially when you're looking at Indigenous planning, because at a city, there is no such thing. There are a lot of one-off projects. There might be some meetings that the city had with local First Nations or the urban Indigenous community. But without this

foundation of policy and process, there's no actual planning that can take place in a way that's sustainable, respectful, useful, that meets the objectives of not just the city but the aspirations of both local First Nations in the city and the urban Indigenous community. And so this is how I got involved in planning, is really understanding what are the roots to getting Indigenous planning in the city off the ground, and policy was such a natural fit for me. And this is where I find a lot of my work today is building that foundation, because we just don't have anything in place for planners or architects or city officials to look to when it comes to planning appropriately.

LP: And I mean, it feels like there's been quite a groundswell of movement and activity over the last couple of years, but what was it like when you first started in terms even just that basic knowledge and awareness of Indigenous you know, issues of Indigenous communities, of what it was like to be an urban Indigenous person or a land-based Indigenous, you know, member of a community.

GGM: When I started at the City of Vancouver, I had just finished the Environics Urban Aboriginal People study, which is still Canada's largest research on Indigenous peoples' identities, experiences, aspirations and values. And I worked in all of the major cities across this country. And it gave me a really good basis to understanding, like, who is the community, you know? What are their aspirations? And what does this mean for the city of Vancouver and cities in general? And my Masters in Public Policy Research focused on policy – urban Indigenous policy – for the City of Vancouver, and I had a really strong sense of, like, what the gaps were. And that was amplified when I started at the City of Vancouver. They didn't know whose territory this was. They were identifying First Nations that were far, far away. They had misconceptions about our community being primarily, you know, in poverty and suffering with addictions, that the biggest Indigenous community was the downtown East Side. They thought that our community was transient, so not a permanent population. And when you're working in that type of environment that reflects society so well – which is very, like, inattentive and very like ignorant – that's where you need to start, is with cultural competency and helping them understand the truth, you know, the truth of who we are and what we want and what we need, beyond the misconceptions and the stereotype. And all they had were misconceptions and stereotypes. The TRC calls to action really focuses on the importance of cultural competency education and training for universities and government public officials and lawyers and basically every segment, professional segment of society needs to have an awareness of this truth on the history of colonization and whose land are they on. The city was no exception. And so this is usually one of my top and first recommendations for any city looking to embark on Indigenous planning, is how knowledgeable are your staff? Do you know whose land you're on? Are you familiar with the history of colonization and the intergenerational

impacts of residential schools? Because if you don't, then we as an Indigenous community are not going to make sense to you, and you can't do anything effective with that. And we're so used to having a hodgepodge of initiatives thrown at us as an Indigenous community. The last thing I would want to do is promote making that happen even more. We want things done right and well and respectfully and have it be exciting, because we're in a city, like, things should be exciting here. There's tons of opportunities, and we're doing a lot of things for ourselves, and cities can support that too.

LP: That's very helpful to hear that background and really important to point out things like the TRC that are like…all of the direction that people need to do better and to change is all there. They just have to, yeah, they just have to read it. So again, over your time working in the municipality, and I know that you saw and spearheaded a lot of the changes: the year of reconciliation, and being the first time I think a city – certainly the city of Vancouver – has ever kind of centered the need to attend to their role and responsibility in colonization. So in terms of you know the city as being on Indigenous land, and as you said, kind of coming to that shift and… like knowing whose land they are on. Did you see that change some of those internal structures? How did you see that process?

GGM: That was a huge one. For me, the biggest turning point while I was at the city, started with Mayor and council wanting to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. And I don't think they knew much about the UN Declaration. They were very passionate and committed to advancing reconciliation, and they felt that would be a really good step and would allow them to demonstrate leadership, which is really important when you're looking to make substantial, systemic change, is leadership. It needs to be big and it needs to be bold. And my feedback to them was, we're not going to be genuine about endorsing the UN Declaration if we don't acknowledge the fundamental truths about Vancouver, which is this is not Vancouver's land. This is Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh lands. It's been their homelands for 1000s and 1000s of years. And if we can't acknowledge that this is their unceded territory, and build that into everything that we do at the City of Vancouver, then we're going to be paying lip service to endorsing and advancing the UN Declaration. And they agreed. I don't think everybody agreed. There was definitely some pretty good dialog back and forth on the pros and cons. But at the end of the day, the political will was "We're going to acknowledge that this is unceded Musqueum, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territories. And yes, we will make this something that all work within the city of Vancouver needs to acknowledge." And that was extremely foundational, because that was a wake-up moment for all city staff, and especially a lot of the other decision makers, to understanding that their work will need to change, and that

indigenizing the city and advancing reconciliation isn't about attending a couple of events or saying a land acknowledgement, but their work would need to change, to recognize that these are unceded Coast Salish lands. And that rippled out to every policy…and you can see it today, every major city plan that's moving forward, like the Vancouver plan that's being worked on, the Broadway plan, Culture Shift, like the Music Strategy…Like a lot of Vancouver plans have that fundamental recognition of needing to build in how it can recognize that this is not city of Vancouver land. This is, you know, this is the land of the local First Nations. And I think the city of Vancouver is still the only government that has made this official acknowledgement and has built it into all of their other work. Other levels of government have gotten really close, but not, probably not as far as recognizing that this is unceded lands and bearing the responsibility of figuring out what that actually means.

LP: Well and it's…it really does move it so far beyond that lip service and it also makes it clear that the work…it's not the work of social planning or the Indigenous planner, that it's the work of all of city, right? Which I think is where still a lot of municipalities are kind of like stuck in some ways.

GGM: Yeah, absolutely, before the year of reconciliation, before recognizing that this is unceded Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh lands, Indigenous was a very much a social policy focus. And there weren't any foundational policies that guided this work. So what we had were one-off projects that maybe lasted a few years and were still very instrumental in helping build a relationship between the city and local First Nations and urban Indigenous communities. But it didn't transform work in other areas of the city the way that that it needed to.

LP: Well, maybe shifting a little bit…one of my other interests, and in my my dissertation work, I really look at that history of public health and planning and how they were intertwined early in the history of the development of those fields and you know, they kind of became de-linked, and they've slowly started to come back together. And I feel like this is kind of an under explored area of Indigenous planning, particularly in the urban setting, which is the role that the city plays historically and today in the health and well being of Indigenous peoples in the city. So I wonder, did you…Was this something that you kind of thought about or engaged with over the course of your career and experience with the city?

GGM: Absolutely, when we learn the importance of the social determinants of health and how healthy communities require this continuum of supports, like child care supports and housing and healthy foods and restorative justice. It's really hard to disconnect that from city planning. And health is no longer just going to the doctor – it's

public health. It’s important to recognize all of the aspects that contribute to one's well being, because for us as Indigenous peoples, bad health is reflected in, you know, us passing away earlier than most Canadians, or having a lot of stress related diseases or a lot of heart or bad diet related diseases. And we know that having safe housing will contribute to alleviating that. We know that having access to childcare allows families to access better employment opportunities, which then contributes to wellbeing for their family. And so health has always been incredibly important for any Indigenous policy efforts that are out there. And you know, you get a couple of Indigenous people in a room, and you talk about, “What is it that we aspire…What is it that we need?” And it'll come back to a health focus, and not in the medical sense, but in a holistic sense. And folks that don't understand this probably aren't in the best position to make informed decisions about Indigenous policy without having this health focus. You can't disconnect the two at all, and you can definitely reflect Indigenous health within municipal policy. There's a lot of avenues to making that happen, and this is very much reflected in the reconciliation focused work that the city engages on, and hopefully it'll continue to grow. What we did with the city of reconciliation framework was setting up the city to be more effective in creating the type of city plans that are needed to support Indigenous aspirations and positive experiences. But that was just a start. You know, the sustainability of that will look a lot different, and our future will require, you know, different different types of frameworks to help guide the next stages. And I think the city of Vancouver especially understands the importance of public health within city planning, because, you know, we do have a downtown East side that is suffering horrifically from a lot of poison drugs being sold on the streets, and a lot of overdoses that have happened that are at just horrifying levels, and it really affects the Indigenous community too. You can't, can't ignore that.

LP: Yeah, and we were talking about that earlier and about how the neighbourhood has changed over time. I wondered if you wanted to talk a little bit about that from its…you know, we have this incredible history here in Vancouver of this progressive activist, kind of grassroots-oriented work and movement…and just yeah, how do you see that being impacted especially over the last couple of years?

GGM: Oh yeah. I mean, we do have a really strong activist community here in Vancouver, and a lot of our strong activists have come out of the downtown East Side. Whether we're looking at restorative justice practices, whether we're looking at trying to bring attention to all of the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls that have happened over the many decades, and the need for better community policing supports. And for a long time, ensuring that people who do have substance use issues are respectfully supported. But it’s become a lot more difficult to sustain that advocacy in the downtown Eastside community, and what I'm hearing from my friends is that there is no

community anymore because all of the leaders and all of the activists have passed away because of poison drug supply. And when they talk about what the solutions are, it is very much a policy solution of getting safe drugs to people who need it. And there's places around the world where this is very much happening. So it's not even innovative, but there's lack of political will and investment in this type of public health structure in the downtown East Side. And what this means for our Indigenous community here is that they're on their own, completely on their own, in a way that our love and care can't even support anymore, because that's just not enough. We need political will and a change in public health policy, and we're just not getting it. And we've lost a lot of people who have contributed to making that sense of community real for us, and what we have left are shatters, and can we put it back together? Not in the current state that we're in right now – we need massive changes there, and we're just not seeing it, seeing it happen. We'll probably see 1000s of more people, people die, given the rate that we're going right now, before we see the changes that we need, and that's a shame, because it's literally a stroke of the pen decision that can turn all of this around, and we're just not getting it.

LP: The frontline workers that I have worked with throughout this project live through this reality of loss and policy failures in the Downtown Eastside. Organizations such as NCCABC struggle against barriers that government and policy create, and yet they continue on, finding hope, and creating opportunities for healing amongst the heartbreak.

MV: It's a slow process. It'll take some time, and frontline, it's like…yeah, it's hard to see a lot of people like struggling, like frontline…like, I see other staff, like in the community, coming through the neighbourhood, meeting individuals outside and realizing, like, we need to, like, connect more and provide a lot more frontline services. But how do we do this? How do we set it up? And people are falling through these cracks and these gaps, and so disconnected from spirit. And one thing that we did last summer, we did yoga in the park, and that was cool. There was different themes that we provided. One was for Indigenous day, and one was for overdose Awareness Day, and we had guest speakers that had lost loved ones to an overdose, and we put purple streamers in the tree to draw in people that were walking along the Seawall so we could talk about reducing that stigma, and, you know, share a lot more awareness about overdose and getting more active and involved. And we got like a…it was someone…one of the facilitator's birthday, so we got a birthday cake with purple roses. And people were walking along, and they were asking questions, and we had a table with information, so that was really neat. And another Yoga Day that we did was women's wellness for red dress day. So we had, like a red dress in the tree, and we had a few women that were facilitating, like, Pilates and yoga, and we were drumming and singing in the park. That was really nice.

Like, you know, connecting with, like, Lynn and Ava and, you know who they are connected with, a lot of… people that are connected to culture. It'd be great to get out again. Like, bring it back, like, to like old school versions of, like, land-based, you know, healing and…

LP: Sean used to bring people out, right? Like go out to like Stanley Park and…

MV:...or head to a sweat and help, like, chop wood, or, you know, set up the, you know, Grandfather stones for the sweat lodge. And same with Robbie. Land-based healing would be great, right?

A: Oh yeah. Well, Jade's bringing in her dad…her uncle, to do a ceremony at the office with, yeah…well, we're working on getting honorarium and funding, so we're going to talk to Ray. And then Molly said she might be able to get it through her organization, to have him come in. And I was like, “It would be good to have the clients,” but she said her uncle said that they don't need to be *in* in – they will feel it when they come in. So he's going to, like do a ceremony to bring the spirit and the life back into our office. And it will help us, and everybody will notice the difference, because we've gone through so much change, through COVID, through our losses, through our team, losing our team, you know, all of that. So we want to…I was like, “Perfect. We could start off fresh, right, and bring this spirit back in there, and bring it back to life." So that's…she's gonna ask when it can and I was like, “When's a good time to do this?” And I'm thinking, like on September 30, on Shirt Day, right? To do it. So we're just gonna get the funding, like honorarium for them, and it'll be amazing to witness, because it’s real powerful. I forget what they call it, but…not a **[...]** it's a **[...]**. What I saw is like they have these boards, and they run around, and it's a spirit taking them around, and it's like he's gonna go…so he's gonna go through the whole office. And it's so powerful, if you witness it. I witnessed it at the Long House, and she said her uncle does that ceremony, and she wants to bring it in. Because she can feel it right, because she's spiritual with the language and cultural ceremony.

LP: I think that's the only way. That just feels to me, the only way.

[MUSIC]

LPower: Over the last three years, and everything that's happened, and is continuing to happen, it's making people more aware. It's kind of like waking people up.

A: That's your name, isn't it?

LPower: Ocicâhk means to awaken. I awaken people – is what I was told by the elder who gave me my name. Ocicâhk means crane, and crane is when they fly – first thing in the morning, when they fly – they awaken people. So that's what my name means. Ocicâhk.

A: I cut you off.

LP: It's awakening people. So in terms of, like, COVID awakening people?

LPower: COVID and the pandemic, and just over the last three years, that's what I see people…other people have used and used the word woke, right? There's kind of like a woke movement or something, right? I think it's giving everybody also more opportunity to, I don't know, come up with new ideas, different ways of doing things that they didn't think they were able to do, right? It's created… it's forced people to do things differently and step out of their comfort zone. You know, a lot of times people get complacent, right? And this has all forced people to, like, make those changes that they maybe would not have.

MV: Yeah, it's like…we had, and still have, no choice but to sit with all of this pain and all of this discomfort

A: It made everybody uncomfortable.

MV: Super uncomfortable.

LPowers: And it's being able to be comfortable in your own skin

MV: Exactly!

LPowers: And that's what recovery is about.

MV: Yeah, like a lot of us had to kind of go deep within and do a lot of work. And I got really used to being by myself at one point, like, and looking for answers or researching, and a lot of listening to, like, podcasts and reaching out to people – like yourself, Ava. Asking, you know, for help, and using that as a strength. It got lonely, but, yeah, created a lot of deep self awareness. A lot of strengths. Yeah, it was interesting times. It was a lot of ups and downs, negatives and positives and…but we're getting some ideas and moving forward,

LP: Which I think then, in turn, helps you to connect differently with clients or participants, because you've gone through that, right? Like it just creates a different connection I feel, too.

LPower: Well, and also, like, even just this conversation here tonight, like…So you know, if you're talking to a client tomorrow, or you are, you know…like something that was said here tonight, you could use while you're talking to that client. And I think that's one of the beautiful gifts of working in a counseling group with other counselors, that you get different ideas from. Because, you know, four heads are better than one, right? You know, and I'd say to clients too, it's like, if you look at your life like a book, right? Like, right now, this is a chapter in our book. Tonight is a chapter. Everything that we've done in the past. Those are all chapters in our book. And some chapters are long, some are short, some are sad, some are hard, some are happy, some are crazy, right? But they're all chapters in our book. And so what are the next chapters gonna look like? What is the rest of your book gonna look like? Because you get to create that.

LP: Despite the hardships, the resounding message that the frontline workers shared is one of change, hope, and possibility. We know that big change is needed to foster the kinds of urban Indigenous spaces for healing that we need. I asked Ginger what she sees as our next chapter, the next steps to foster urban Indigenous spaces for healing, what those healing spaces could look like, and how we can advocate for policy changes to support this work.

GGM: Yeah, I really like this question because it is very future-oriented, and it makes me hopeful to think about what it is that we could have with the right type of plans being implemented for Indigenous peoples. And what that looks like for me is seeing the city's civic facilities, when they're being redeveloped, to include Indigenous spaces. I'm working on the West End Community Center right now – the redevelopment of that. And you know, people are talking about having a canoe shed there, because they're so close to English Bay, and it's a place where you could actually program canoeing, you know, within the high schools, within community organizations, and actually have, like, a space for this to happen, and you can have a canoe lane instead of a bike lane so that people can transfer the canoes, you know, down to the water. And that's incredibly healing, you know, being able to practice our culture. If we could have makerspaces built into civic facilities for artists in residence, for knowledge keepers in residence, to help teach us artistic practices, you know, like beading or leather work or drum making or regalia making. In all of these spaces that, you know, we're doing out of our, you know, kitchens and living rooms right now, but would be so much more effective for community building if we could actually bring community together to do this. If we could have actual spaces to rehearse our traditional dances. Right now, traditional cultural dance groups are

unable to find adequate places to practice because they need spaces of a certain size, and all of the current facilities that can meet their size needs are being used for, you know, basketball or meetings, you know. So any space that allows us to live our culture and be purpose-built would be, like, incredibly gratifying to see. And then, you know, we can look at the types of events that can be supported as well, because there's a ton of Indigenous events that are happening around the city, and this is what makes urban Indigenous living so exciting and so healing – is being able to go to like an Indigenous Fashion Week event, or being able to watch basketball teams in the tournaments, or going to an Indigenous Film Festival, or even, like an Indigenous burlesque event, you know, like all of these fun things that are happening could be supported through grants and programming. All of this is healing, because it connects us to one another in a really positive way, and it gives us hope. And that's so much of what our healing looks like, is coming together, creating hope.

LP: Definitely. And I think the other thing that's connected to that is the importance of that kind of grassroots level of engagement, right? And how that's just a really key, like…it's not a mechanism, but it's something that I think is really…I think it's what a lot of cities struggle with. And yet, there are some really amazing examples of how people have really created some very, very important changes through grassroots. So one example with the folks I'm working with out in Surrey, they have Skookum lab, and now Skookum Surrey, and they have all of these groups that really just represent the community and who the community are. So yeah, so I don't know if you…if that's something you want to talk about, and how cities and organizations and others can do that kind of engagement, and the need for it as well.

GGM: Yeah, yeah, the grassroots engagement is so critical to advancing healing and opportunities for our urban Indigenous community. Because it wasn't that long ago that our grassroots in the city, either as individuals or as community organizations, were completely left out of any supports provided by the city, or even philanthropic organizations and federal and provincial governments, for the most part. Most of the focus has been for First Nations on reserves, and it leaves out an understanding of the needs for the urban Indigenous community and so much of what is good is stemming from the efforts of the grassroots Indigenous community and our urban Indigenous community organizations. They've been creating a sense of community for us for decades, and a lot of leadership that we have in our community have been with us for decades, and they're creating spaces for new generations of younger leadership to, you know, take the helm and to create even more. Because our population here is growing; we can't just sustain ourselves with the current level of organizations and activities. We need more. So just this awareness of who our grassroots are and supporting them where they're at, so that they can be sustained, so that they can see their initiatives and

activities run successfully without worrying about funding or worrying about whether or not they're going to get booted out of their building because of gentrification. These are the things that cities and larger organizations…and here, if they knew about who these organizations and grassroots people were, would be able to make that connection and ensure that those supports are there. And a lot of times, if the supports aren't there, it's because there's a break in connection. There's no relationship. So that's almost an easy fix, except we still have a lot of discrimination, a lot of stereotypes. So, you know, we still have people who are a little bit wary about providing supports, because we're still misunderstood and not a very well understood community. But that is changing. It's changed a lot in the last 10 years, and it's changed a lot in the last five years. So hopefully, in the next, you know, five to 10 years, it'll be a lot different, which will probably be for our benefit. Hopefully.

LP: Are there…to that point…are there particular things that you would like people to know and understand about the urban Indigenous community?

GGM: I mean, I love our community here so much. I can spend my entire life in the city just participating in Indigenous events and activities. And it's because it's fun and it's interesting and it's just a great place to be. And even when we didn't have supports, we are finding ways to come together, to just celebrate or mourn or activate our culture and be very, like, innovative about it. But it would be so much better if we did have a recognition of how much life and energy we are providing to the city. Because it makes the entire city better, makes it cooler, makes it funner. It would be a shame if people didn't understand or know what it was that we are doing, because the Hoobiyee Celebrations that the Nisg̲a'a Ts'amiks Society hosts every February is open to everyone. The Coastal Dance Festival that happens every year is open to everyone. You know, anyone can get a ticket and attend a Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week event. Anyone can, you know, buy a ticket and see, like, The Snotty Nose Rez Kids perform, you know? So it's not just for us, it's for everyone, and it's a great place to be.

LP: It was so encouraging for me to hear Ginger's enthusiasm for healing in the city through community, culture, and celebration. These events reminded me of the initiatives that Melissa spoke about during our roundtable, so to wrap up our conversation, I asked Melissa if she could share a little more about how NCCABC brings culturally-driven and land-based healing to urban communities, and what is needed to do this work in a good way.

MV: I have been given a lot of flexibility from our leadership here and also suggestions and ideas from previous colleagues over the years: get up to the courthouse and connect with the individuals that are needing that support…and to be honest, many of

the individuals that I do meet, I may not see them make it down to our office, and that's where I have to check within myself that I can make my way up there. And for the individuals that are wanting to connect for support, there may be many barriers that stand in their way and prevent them from meeting with us. And over the years, we've had the opportunity to walk beside the individual and hear them out about what their plan may be and what their dreams are, what their goals are, what their visions are. And, bring them hope and give them, you know, positive feedback and bring positivity into their lives, knowing that we can support them throughout the process. And I've been with the Association for many years, and it's been great to see many people walking beside them through the court process until they've completed what has been asked for them through the Western justice system. And it's been great that the Courtworkers, you know, make space for us to sit in their office. And say hello to the folks that drop in, and I can introduce myself and our services and the supports that we provide, connect them with community and resources. And it's exciting because community keeps growing, as you know, with many different cultural organizations and supports. And each summer, many of these individuals, they go away and do great things. People come back and they say that they've gone to Sundance, or they've gone medicine picking, or they've connected, you know, to the land by hunting and gathering with their relatives and ancestors, and they're learning, and as I'm here, you know, waiting for them, they come back and share these wonderful stories with me. Yeah, so bringing it back, I'm thankful that we have the opportunity to go into the courthouse, meet with individuals that may be in custody, that are needing referrals to, say, treatment. We do help filling out referrals to treatment or say it could be making referrals to detox and working alongside the staff at the detox facilities and creating a healing plan. Or it may be they want to connect with us and build a slow rapport and build that trust, build that connection, build that safety. And that's completely understandable. Definitely meeting them where they are at and if they want to come down here and have a sip of water and smudge and pray together, that's absolutely okay. Our doors are always open for those that are needing that support. And the justice system, it can be scary. It was scary for me – walking through those doors at the courthouse and I didn't have any legal matters, and I can't imagine what a person that is facing, you know, the Western justice system, what they may be feeling, and the other various systems and inequalities that we continue to face. So it is quite the honour, you know, to be in this position today to support folks that are needing that ongoing support.

LP: I have to say they're lucky to have you; they're lucky to have your support. And yeah, what you've just said has really made me think of, well, two things. One, just the importance of not staying in your office. It's a place of safety and comfort for some. I understand. But the way in which you really make a difference is by, you know, being in relationship – you have to be out with the people, with the connections. So I really love

that relationship that can happen between the health team and the court team. But then just being out there, and even even seeing your face out there, and knowing that you're there, I think, is really important. And then the other thing we don't hear enough about in terms of justice and Indigenous people. We hear so much about over-representation and toxic drug crisis. And, you know, we hear all of these negative things, and we don't hear enough about those beautiful stories of strength and love and resilience, of going out, of making connections with ceremonial people, of going out on the land. And that's also the reality is that people do make those connections, find their way to different things. And, it's unfortunate that sometimes this happens within this western justice system context, but it's an aspect of the story that, I don't know, we don't hear, we don't hear nearly enough about. Because that's what's kept us alive all these…throughout this period of colonial violence and aggression. And so I think that's beautiful that you shared that. I really appreciate that.

MV: Absolutely, thank you. Thank you for that feedback.

LP: Thank you for the work that you do. As always, I really, really appreciate and honour the work yourself and the other health team and Courtworkers do.

MV: Absolutely, absolutely and NCCABC is definitely, you know, an essential service as we continue to walk with those folks to be treated with fairness and dignity and respect and to be seen and have understanding within the justice system. And as we do that, as you were saying, we honour, you know, culture and traditions and community healing, and that is extremely important and vital that we continue to hear their feedback and their suggestions and their input as we continue to hold space for the folks that are needing the supports and to provide community connections and that continuum of care. And you nailed it with the strength – identifying, you know, what each of us hold within ourselves, and bring out those strengths for one another and uplift each other through these challenges and the systems that we continue to face. And definitely in these urban settings and the services that we provide, many folks have suggested that they feel that safety and that connection within our organization and that it's like a home away from home, and that is super important to hear as everyone is doing that collective healing, and ultimately, as I was saying, create that safety and what matters for them and what safety means for them as they continue to heal from their multiple traumas.

[Music]

MV: Everyone's healing experiences are quite unique, and everyone, you know, heals differently to nourish and nurture their spirits, and it would be, great to – like you mentioned, there's silos across the city – and having a massive, you know, healing

lodge, or say, like the big house, and having, like, elders and many different healers that individuals can feel safe. Ultimately, safety is the priority, and also continue to, you know, present love, care, warmth, compassion, a deep understanding for each person. Lots and lots of time for the healing process. For myself, many individuals may be court ordered or mandated to spend 18 months, 24 months, you know, with us for their healing plans and staying in touch with us and coming up with their own personalized goals to contribute for their own personal wellness. Seeing people for who they are, and understanding that they have their own world views and they see, you know, through their own lens and giving them that self determination, and you know, sovereignty, to express what healing means to them. And it's hopeful that we continue to ask like for feedback for our services and to get their input and what they would like to see for more healing within like, urban settings. I'm hearing a lot more for land-based healing, but knowing like, what that might look like or sound like or feel like for individuals that are needing that connection and that support for that sense of belonging.

LP: Can you tell me a bit more about your own experience with land-based initiatives? Have you engaged in them yourself, or brought community members out to participate in different things on the land?

MV: Yeah, myself within the position here at Native Courtworker and Counseling, not quite. We did have an opportunity to host three yoga sessions last summer. And you may know Genevieve, and she was the behind the scenes person, and she put together the three events, and we were the ones that were facilitating the outline that she provided. And it was the most amazing experience, and to witness everyone around us feeling that sense of connection to the land, to Mother Earth, and looking around us and learning and becoming more reconnected. You know, invited to spend time outdoors doing yoga rather than being inside a studio. We did have three different topics and three separate dates, and it was spread between June to August. And we incorporated women's health, Indigenous day, and also Overdose Awareness Day. And we set up the venue with topics that we were sharing about. For women's health we presented a red dress to have more awareness and conversations with one another or passerbys – they were invited to join the yoga group if they wanted to. And really, you know, open up the conversation to reduce those barriers and you know that stigma about women's health or overdose awareness, and we presented some harm reduction information and supplies when we facilitated for harm reduction, and also we had those that have lived experience or peer supports in the community. They shared their testimonials. We did drumming outside and smudging. And it would be great…it's a lot of work to do this, you know, alone, and if we were to, you know, gather and do this regularly, there would be so much healing that we could see throughout the community.

LP: Yeah, I absolutely love that. And did you invite clients and community members to participate in that as well? Like, did you bring groups there that you were facilitating?

MV: Yes, yes. So we have a social media page, Facebook, and I believe we now have Instagram, and we have one person here at NCCABC that runs the social media. So we were advertising on our social media platforms. And then also we were sharing with many of the folks that we connect with on a regular basis. We just say, “Come on down. We have a treat for you. We're going to do something different, and we're going to get outside and do some healing – body therapy and more like connecting with our physical wellness.” And then it, you know, went to the emotional, mental and spiritual. Actually, the summer before that, we did do some mindfulness walking outside, and that was a great experience. And we got close to the water, no spirit bathing at that point, but we were able to do some mindfulness, walking together as a group. And that was there was great feedback from many of the folks, and it was coming out of the pandemic, and everyone was getting familiar with being together outside of the bubbles that we experienced back in 2020-21 and a little bit of 2022 and that was quite challenging for some individuals, and it was really helpful to get out and do some walking, and again, we were smudging and praying and drumming and singing together outside and taking a moment to sit down on the grass, and some of us took off our shoes, and we were able to, you know, really get rooted and connected to Mother Earth. And many people said it was helpful to connect with a group, particularly Indigenous folks, because it was such a hard time for people to be isolating and then getting back out to the…into the community. And so there was great feedback, and they felt really secure and confident after we did several walks together that summer.

LP: Amazing. And you mentioned spirit bathing. And for people who don't know, can you just like, briefly explain what that is.

MV: Spirit bathing, ok. So yah, getting in touch with their nervous system. I'm more like somatic, you know, getting, like a re-awakening, clearing your mind, getting a little bit of shock from the cold weather, and having a reset, doing a quick dip into the water, getting connected with the elements. Yeah, so many people do that at the treatment centers, from what I've learned over the years, or I've had, you know, close colleagues that do the spirit bathing. If they don't want to get into the water, you can do that in the in the shower and have a cold shower. So I for myself, it's like a quick reset for my nervous system to get grounded and get myself back into the present, especially if I'm feeling like I'm a little scattered, and it helps me reconnect. Often I can get stuck in the past or in the future, but if I can just take a couple moments just to, you know, get some cleansing and get connected to some cold water, it helps me stay present and grounded for the moment.

LP: Well, thank you for sharing that and I think this is just like such an important piece – everything that you shared about the yoga classes, the mindfulness. Because what it reminds me, and hopefully it reminds others, is that even as Indigenous people on urban lands, these are still Coast Salish territories, these are still lands and waters that are sacred, that are ancestral, that carry the the spirits of the ancestors across them, even if you know, large swaths have been paved over. And we have water and we have these different forms of connecting and and so that's what I really value and appreciate about these kinds of initiatives. And they do take a lot to organize, and yet, the outcomes are so powerful and so beautiful. And also you're bringing it out into the community. So you know, there are things that are just for us – for Indigenous people – and then there's things that we need to share so that we're visible and that people can also start to work together on, especially things like the overdose crisis, right? Which is, like…this is a collective responsibility. So I appreciate the work that goes into this and like I said, the outcomes are really powerful for community, for community members.

MV: Yeah, for sure, and all of this is harm-reduction and self-care and the continuum of care within the medicine wheel, and the healing and the teachings. And I echo what you say – it continues to keep us alive and keep us connected and also honouring what each of us can bring forward into the circle, and we can also pass on these teachings, these traditional cultural teachings, for the next generation. And what a time that we are in to you know, honour all of these traditional cultural ceremonies, and to be here sharing this with you, it's quite the honour, and to be learning from one another and all these different ceremonial practices that we've been doing since time immemorial. But yeah, definitely, we have many opportunities for that growth and that healing.

[Music]

LP: Mussi Cho, thank you, for joining me for another episode of *From Ceremony Up*.

In this episode, we have come to understand the intricacies supporting healing and creating wellness in urban Indigenous settings and the role that policies and the land play in seeing that healing bloom. I've asked our guests today to share some resources for you, our listener, to deepen this knowledge; you can find links to those resources in our show notes.

In our next and final episode of this mini series, we will hear two guests share their powerful stories of transformative land-based healing beyond the Vancouver setting. I invite you to join me on that journey.

From Ceremony Up is the result of so many people who have supported bringing this story to life. I want to thank our guests for taking the time to share their voices, and thank the many hands that have contributed to this project; you can find a full list of the folx who have made this work possible in our show notes.

From Ceremony Up is supported through the Podcaster in Residence program with the Creative Entanglement Collaboratory, a collective that takes a relational approach to platform the voices, stories, and artistic productions of those too often silenced in Western systems of academic knowledge and arts production. The podcast was also generously supported in its early days through an Indigenous Digital Media Grant from the Simon Fraser University Library.

Our Executive Producer is Emilia Nielsen, and our producers are Coco Nielsen and Emily Blyth. And I'm your host, Lyana Patrick.

The music for this podcast is composed by Jason Burnstick. You can find him at jasonburnstickcomposer.com that's j-a-s-o-n-b-u-r-n-s-t-i-c-k composer.com. We will have that link in our show notes.

This has been *From Ceremony Up* - If something stood out to you in today's episode, I encourage you to reflect, stay curious, and to get in touch - we'd love to keep this conversation going. You can find our contact form in our show notes.

[Music swells then fades]