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Transcript

Darla Rasmussen [DR]: ...when we burned his items, oh man, it was one of the most powerful things for me to witness because it was like, in that moment, he was taking back his power of who he was as a man, and as a father. And as the person that he wanted to be here in this community, right. And it was like all those labels and all those years of believing into lies that were being told about who he was, he was able to just allow to lift from his shoulders. And he physically looked lighter; he physically stood taller.

Nicole Redvers [NR]: There's such deep-seated trauma, there's such deep-seated dysfunction as a result of historical trauma, colonization, and all of the other impacts that Indigenous peoples have faced. You know there's often a block that people have a harder time going past. And that's where the ceremony piece becomes absolutely fundamental and imperative to get past. It's one of the few things that can really get people moving along, if they are getting to a certain point of their healing, but they can't get over that last piece at the end. And we've seen that time and time again, the power of ceremony and the power of our Elders and the land to be able to be a facilitator within that ceremonial process.

[MUSIC]

Lyana Patrick [LP]: Hadih, 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 today's episode, we'll be talking about traditional healing and advocating for health and justice from Indigenous perspectives. We'll weave together two conversations: one, with Dr. Nicole Redvers, member of the Deninu K'ue First Nation, author, mother,

Associate professor and Director of Indigenous Planetary Health at Western University. She is a globally recognized Indigenous health advocate and co-founder and Board Chair of the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation. And alongside Dr. Redvers, we'll hear from Darla Rasmussen, a member of the Siksika Nation and former Program Manager of Indigenous Incarcerated Parents to Reintegration Initiative at the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC. First, here's Nicole.

NR: I'm a member of the Deninu K'ue First Nation from Denendeh up in the Northwest Territories, treaty 8 territory. I've been privileged to spend most of my younger life up there, and also have been privileged and honoured to be on the lands of various Indigenous peoples around the globe, and really humbled and honoured by the amount of amazing knowledge out there that contributes to the story and the narratives that we talk about today, and happy to have this conversation as a result of that.

LP: And now we'll hear from Darla, introducing herself in her own words.

DR: Hay hay, thank you. My traditional name is Red Elk Singing Woman. I am Blackfoot and Cree from Siksika Nation on my father's side, and Norwegian, Danish and Austrian on my mother's side. And I've been living in the Semiahmoo territory for the last two years. I'm from Calgary, Alberta. But yeah, BC is home for me.

LP: In our conversations about the connections between justice and health, both Darla and Nicole speak to what's getting in the way of Indigenous self-determination. State-sanctioned disconnection – from land, from waters, from community, from culture, and from ourselves, plays a major role. To explore this disconnection, in the context of the carceral system, I began by asking Darla to tell me about her work with the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC.

DR: Gosh, I was there for six years and got different opportunities. One of the programs was working with Indigenous youth who were criminally involved. So, engaged with the criminal justice system, but they were being referred for FASD assessments. And so our partnership was with the Asante Center. And more recently supporting Indigenous incarcerated parents to reintegration. And so really just trying to support Indigenous parents who are incarcerated, as well as through their transition back into community. And the goal was to help them to have access to their children: support, reunification, support more visits, support access to culture, community engagement, their family, and any other connections that could really benefit and create a sense of belonging for them.

LP: Yeah, and the first program you mentioned was through an Aboriginal lens, is that correct?

DR: That's correct.

LP: And that was like a pretty unique and powerful program, wasn't it?

DR: Yes, yes, it was, it was culturally-led. Native Courtworkers played a huge role in guiding the Asante Center, in changing some protocols, some processes, even things within the assessment, around language was one of them. Really had to educate the clinical team and the Asante staff around Indigenous history with Canada, and how the healthcare system plays a role in that. And this was because the Asante Centre wasn't having much success in having families complete assessments. You know, Indigenous families were very intimidated by the whole process. They were overwhelmed. Even the language that was being used was really harmful for Indigenous families. And so TELL was created to kind of be a bridge and support Indigenous families and youth who were going through that assessment process. And it's a three-part assessment. And it was really about walking with the family, making sure that they have full understanding about what's going on, sharing every step of the way, you know, and really just moving as fast as, or as slow as the family's willing to go. But as well as keeping the Asante Centre clinical team and staff really well informed. And that couldn't have been done without the help of Chastity Davis as well. She was a part of that work that was being done with the Asante Centre. And it couldn't have been done without just the willingness of the staff to want to learn, to want to have a better understanding. There were some tribulations along the way, which always happens when you're trying to make changes to something that's been in operation for so many years, a certain way. And it's not to say that there weren't things that were even a challenge to work with. But we did what we could.

LP: Yeah, yeah. It sounds like just incredible and very necessary and important work. I just want to comment on what a beautiful day it's turned out to be! Here in Tynehead Park.

DR: Since we've been here, the sun's already coming out!

LP: It's amazing. So everybody will hear the birds in the background and there's a dog park nearby. So you might hear dogs barking too. That's great. So, you know, we talked about this last time...the many challenges that you faced working in that..the incarcerated individuals that you are working with face in the prison system, but I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, you know, what that looked like for you? When you were working in the program?

DR: Definitely. I think that one of the biggest challenges that I experienced was that the incarceration system doesn't hold value to Indigenous ways of working with our peoples, culturally, right? And so the acknowledgement even sometimes was dismissed. It was really hard to be a voice in a lot of the conversations that were necessary to support Indigenous parents, men and women, even youth, you know? And not only in that program were we supporting our parents through the correction system, but the Ministry of Children and Families as well, right, for any of their children that were taken by the Ministry of Children and Families. And then you have to work with foster parents, or families where family dynamics have been harmed. Right? And so there were a lot of challenges. I think, in the correctional system, they have the mentality of these individuals that are being incarcerated or brought into their institutions must pay for the damage they have caused. [Laughter] Right? And that's just not an Indigenous approach. Right, we are very much about looking at the root of the behaviours, the thoughts, and the feelings of our peoples who are suffering from a history that has horribly harmed their communities, their families, their own personal lives. And the system isn't really accommodating to looking at some of those really big issues that impact Indigenous peoples' ability to heal, to move forward in their lives, to reconcile. And when I say reconcile, I don't even just mean with the people that maybe they've caused harm to, I mean, themselves. Reconcile with themselves first and their families. In my experience, it felt like condescending. They'll listen to what you have to say, but it's just kind of like they'll just give me a little pat on the head, like "Oh, thank you, thank you for telling us." But then there's no action to support or show like, "Oh, we really believe in the work that you're doing. We really want Indigenous people to succeed, and we want recidivism to be reduced. And we want to see Indigenous people become healthy individuals and, you know, be able to break free from addiction and suicidal attempt and mental illness and, you know, heal from their trauma." Right? But their mentality is like, "No, they have to pay for what they did in society. And we're here to make sure that happens. And so we're going to micromanage and observe every little, you know, behaviour and experience that we have with them, and we're going to dissect it and and we're going to be the ones to say whether or not they're good human beings and worthy of being back in society again." Right? And that's just not the mentality of Indigenous worldview.

LP: Yeah, so it's a whole culture that's just entrenched part of this long history of coercion and control that's deeply embedded in those structures, in those institutions.

DR: Oh, definitely. I mean, it's almost like, they'll invite Indigenous Elders, or Indigenous liaison Officers or Indigenous Support Workers or programs like the one under Native Courtworkers, Indigenous Incarcerated Parents Integration. Sure, they'll invite you in,

but they're going to tell you how you can operate while you're in their institution. Right. And so even for our Elders or Indigenous liaisons, they're not actually getting to work from an Indigenous lens, because of, to be frank, who's paying them. Right, and who's paying them is delegating how they're going to operate within those walls. And so there isn't actually an authentic ability to be able to, you know, really have some of those traditional practices inside the institution without it being questioned. I mean, we had an Elder, at one of the maximum institutions, her bundle was taken away, you know, and they still haven't returned it.

LP: Why did they take her bundle away?

DR: So in her bundle, she has tobacco and tobacco is contraband in there. And so she was considered to be bringing in contraband items.

LP: Right.

DR: Right, but this is where their lack...or their just straight up ignorance, you know, where they just don't see this as important work, but they'll coddle it, they'll call it and they'll tell you that it's important and that, "Yes, we need more of it." But the implementation or the support or the backup of that it's challenging. And I understand that, you know, they're in a system that's like a well-oiled machine. And they're content with the operating parts of it, right? It's unfortunate, though, because I find with the program that we worked with, when we were able to implement that cultural support, and really advocate, you know, for some of our parents to be able to have access to, you know...for example, I would always request an Elder or an Indigenous liaison officer to be available after an intake because an intake can be very invasive, and really scratched the surface to some old wounds. And I would always inform the institutional parole officer, "Look, you might see some behaviours or some attitudes, maybe even for up to four days after this intake, because we talked about some pretty invasive things. And I just want you to be aware that if there's any lash-outs, or, you know, disassociation or unwillingness to cooperate, it could be rooted to the conversations that we had today. And I just want you to be mindful of that." And sure, you can say those words, but how often are they actually taken in? Because in their eyes, they're prisoners.

LP: So there's no accountability, really, is there? Built in?

DR: No, not really. And there seems to be a lot of apathy within those walls, within the staff, and really a lot of control, you know. And there's no room for flexibility or trying to see things in a different way. And there are – not all of the, you know, individuals that

I've worked with were that way, but many of them were, you know? And you're kind of... in my experience, going into some of those institutions, I really had to be mindful about how I behaved, what my thinking was my, you know, how I use my words, I had to be very mindful, because I was in their territory, if that makes sense, right?

LP: Just to go back for a moment, just for any listeners who don't know what a bundle is, would you be able to explain or describe what a bundle is?

DR: Yeah. So, just from my understanding of the bundle, and everybody's is different, it is basically, our medicines that we carry with us. And we use those medicines to help us, you know, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. And that bundle is usually held close to the individual that it belongs to. And sometimes, you know, healers or aunties, or grandparents, they might even give you medicines that need to be in that bundle to help you. And so, for instance, in my bundle, you know, I have...it's carried with the sacred pipe. So it's the pipe, and then I'll have the tobacco and I usually have a copper cup for water and a candle for that spirit. And there's always some sage, lavender, cedar in that bundle as well, just to keep things cleansed and to help me be cleansed. But everybody's bundle is different. Some are very humble, and some are very elaborate. It's all depending on the work that that person's doing with that bundle.

LP: Yeah, thank you for describing that. I know...it seems to be an area that is really problematic when it comes to enforcement. And, for example, a few years ago now, I did a short film on the Canada-US border. And often I heard stories about bundles being opened and messed with at the border. And I don't know that people understand how offensive and traumatic that can be. Again it goes back to the sort of like control and this need to be in control of what's happening – whether it's the border or whether it's prison.

DR: Definitely

LP: So those spaces just really produce in and of themselves, a lot of harm to people.

DR: Yeah, and I mean, for people that don't have an understanding of what a bundle or what our drum or, you know, what our smudge kits or whatever it is that we carry with us, the medicines that help us to walk in a good way. If they don't have an understanding, or if they don't value it, or see it as something that is worthy of spiritual connect to your Creator – if that were a Bible, that would be a different story, right? So, I think a lot of that just comes from, there's this stigma, and it dates back to our great, great, great, great ancestors of witchery. And, you know, dark medicines or etcetera, there's this huge stigma around our spirituality. Just a little tidbit, it was interesting...I work with this woman with the Mennonite community. And so she pulls me in sometimes

to do like, Indigenous 101 sessions. And it's interesting how people don't really understand our spirituality and our connection to Creator or to the land, and how we see all things being connected. And, you know, when I was explaining some of our ceremonies, and how prayerful we are, and how everything is a prayer, and everything is coming from a place of gratitude, and love, you know, at the end, it was like this light bulb went on for them, and they had a completely different view and understanding of Indigenous people and our spirituality. And I think some of that was really relieving for some of the individuals who participated there. Because, you know, they understood like, "Oh, they pray, we pray," right? And there's no right or wrong way to pray. That is your connection to your higher power, whoever that is for you. Right? And I think with the correctional system, they don't have an understanding of how important prayer and staying close to our Creator helps our people, you know. And staying close to the land helps our people, our language, understanding our history and how to heal from that through our traditional practices and our teachings. And all of those come from the land, just like our people did. Right. And a lot of that is prejudice, discrimination, racism. You know, there's stigmas around Indigenous peoples, and we all know them as Indigenous people, we know what those are, because we live with them every day. And we have to face them every day. Right? But to try and help individuals that have absolutely no understanding, to have an understanding, first, they have to have an open mind and an open heart, right? And they have to have a willingness to take in the words that are being shared with them, and kind of be flexible in their ability to understand even right, but if you're up against a system that just doesn't, because they just blatantly don't care, that's challenging.

LP: So what are some of the strategies that you use yourself to sort of deal with that kind of apathy or to..?

DR: I would say, being a squeaky wheel [Laughs]. Constantly just trying to send as many emails or leaving messages and...Of course, these kinds of things get lost in transition, or, you know...the turnover is so high in the correctional system that, you know, you're not always kept in the loop when there's a new IPO - Institutional Parole Officer or liaison officer. But it's definitely just like, being the squeaky wheel, making the phone calls, trying to make the connections. It was very different from inside the institution to outside the institution, working with community parole officers, as opposed- or probation officers, as in comparison to the ones that are inside. And I think that's because there's a lot of restrictions working inside there. They're really on a schedule and you know, things are sometimes challenging to work around. In community our program really is supported from a cultural approach. And so that was taking parents to sweat lodges, taking them to drumming circles, taking them to healing or talking circles, connecting them to elders, sitting down and having cultural days with them and just

working on art or working on you know making a staff for their regalia or whatever that was for that individual. But it was sitting down and spending time with them and allowing them to work on something that was important to them while processing a conversation that they needed to have, keeping their hands busy as well as letting their hearts share, right? And I found in community there was decent support. And, you know, some of the probation officers that I got to work with, they were really happy to hear that parents were engaging in these kinds of practices. And some of them were, you know, they needed to question everything, which is fine, I think it's good to stay curious to have a better understanding, right? So it was really just trying to educate and inform. I spent so much time making sure that I was meeting with, you know, different organisations that fall under CSC. So a lot of the community living houses or residential facilities, presenting to the probation officers and community, really just educating and informing them about our program. And sometimes I would do that multiple times, because there is high staff turnover, and I wanted to stay fresh in people's minds, right, about the work that we do. And some of it was even just being able to educate them a little bit about the history of RCMP with our Indigenous peoples, and the history of the education system and the health care system and the justice sector, and, you know, our missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, men and boys, and, you know, Every Child Matters, some of these movements that are going on within our communities, and trying to educate them and even engage them. You know, a lot of times I would invite the...even the staff, the house staff, or the probation officers, like, "Come! Show up at our winter solstice event that we're hosting, and, you know, be there and come be witness or participate." And, you know, often they, they..

LP: Did they show up? That's what I was wondering.

DR: No, often they wouldn't [Laughs]. But they would be grateful for the invite, right? That's something that we need to have more of, is when you get those invitations, take them up, you know? Come be with the people and witness for yourself and have an experience of your own. And that even will help to have a better understanding of how important these cultural practices and these teachings that are being shared with Indigenous peoples in our community are really helping them to thrive. Right?

LP: Yeah. And so that...I was wondering if you could talk about that for a little bit, about what impact you saw on the...was it primarily men, or both men and women that you worked with?

DR: It was both men and women, but the majority of my caseload was men.

LP: Yeah. Yeah. So I'm wondering, like the impacts you saw on them of being involved in the program?

DR: Yeah, oh gosh, we had this one fellow. He wanted to...he's like, "Darla, I need to have a ceremony." And I was like "Oh, okay, this is great. What kind of ceremony, you know?" He's like, "Darla, I need to let go of my time that I served, I have to let go a CSC. I have my jacket and my shoes, and some papers, this black and white paper that saying all this stuff about me that's not even true, some of it. And I just need to burn it." I was like, "Oh, okay, so this is great." And I just let him lead it. "How do you want it? What is it going to look like? Who do you want there? You know, what's important for you?" And so he chose this beautiful location by the river in Abbotsford, in Mission, between Abbotsford and Mission there. And he told me who he wanted there and why. And we got him a blanket. So this father, up to that point, I mean, emotional breakdowns, overwhelmed, stressed. You know, it was almost every phone call, there was an emotional breakdown, you know. And, and he was just really trying to just be better, do better, create a better life for him. It was so important to him to have his kids back and out of the Ministry's care. And it was rare to ever see him smiling or, you know, because he was just so stressed about work and meeting the conditions of the Probation Officer and, you know, just life after being incarcerated for so long. And so we're there at the river. And it turned out to be a beautiful day. And as I'm walking up, he's got this huge grin. And he had really cute dimples too, eh? And I'd always make comments on those dimples when I saw them. And I was like, "Oh, those dimples look good on you." And so it was awesome to see him smiling because he felt good about what the work that he was going to be doing that day. And so we had the fire prepared and we offered up tobacco in our prayers and we sang welcoming songs and then our program provided a blanket and we passed that blanket around so that each person that was attending could pray over it. And then once they were done praying over it, we put that blanket over him. And then each of us said words about him. And he was just like grinning and blushing, and you know, giggling, and every now and then, bashful, you know. It was just so...it was so beautiful to see. And when we burned his items, oh man, it was one of the most powerful things for me to witness because it was like, in that moment, he was taking back his power of who he was as a man, and as a father. And as the person that he wanted to be here in this community, right. And it was like all those labels and all those years of believing into lies that were being told about who he was, he was able to just allow to lift from his shoulders, and he physically looked lighter, he physically stood taller. As his jacket, and everything burned, all of those things that he carried, you know, he was able to just give up, and he cried, and we cried with him, you know, we cried with him, and he just felt so much lighter. And for days after that, you know, he was just so much more optimistic. It was like a big dark cloud was just taken away, you know. And he was finding more clarity, he was starting to advocate

more for himself, I noticed when we were in meetings. He really developed this voice for himself. And a lot of the times, it got to the point where I didn't really have to say much in those meetings, because he was starting to say it for himself, you know. Whereas before that a lot of us support workers that were attending those meetings, were doing a lot of the talking for him, you know. Like, this was a spiritual and emotional and mental and physical change for this man. And all it was, was a fire and some prayers, you know, of just giving encouragement to this man who spent years being controlled and told that, you know, he was not lovable, and he was a criminal. Right? Even though that offense happened years ago, and he served his time for that. And he was changing himself you know?

We had another dad...this was a really humbling moment for me – I'd picked him up and I noticed he was very anxious. I picked him up right from the treatment center that he was released to, and he had completed. And I was bringing him to one of the CSC houses, it wasn't the one he wanted to be in, he wanted to be in the one where it had Indigenous programming, but he was there temporarily until they could get him a bed. And he was so full of anxiety. And he was just sweating. And his body just wouldn't stop moving, his legs were just bouncing. And he was having a really difficult time. And so I asked him, would you like to go see Mary, the Elder over at the other house where you wanted to be? And maybe we can see about smudging you? And he was just like, "Yes, please can we do that?" And so, you know, I let him go on his own. I didn't really feel the need to be there. And he spent time with the Elder. And she brushed him down. She shared some words with him. And after he was like, "Oh, I just feel so much better. I feel so good. Thank you, Darla, thank you. And I was like, alright, well, let's feed you. And so we go into this Denny's. And we're sitting down. And I'm, you know, I'm just talking to him and excited for him. And he's looking around. And he's really just taking everything in. And he's kind of touching the bench that he's sitting on even and I was like, "What's happening for you? What are you thinking? What's going on?" And he's like, "I haven't been in a Denny's since I was 12 years old. And it was with my grandpa." And he's like, "I'm just really having a moment here." And I was like, "This is awesome!" Like... "and I get to share this with you!" And you know, it was just so humbling how we take the simplest things for granted and how this for him was huge, that here he was back in community and he's in a restaurant that he hasn't been in it for over 10 years and everything looks different. And, you know, the menus look different. And, you know, he was just really taking it all in and to be able to witness you know, just...i think that experience would have been totally different prior to that smudging and that conversation with the Elder, you know. I think that that would have been a very anxious meal we might not have even been able to go in. You know, I think he was so concerned about everybody knowing that he just came from treatment or from jail. Right? And I think that that experience would have been very different had he not had that cleansing,

and that guidance and encouragement from Elder Mary prior to being there. And these are the things that these medicines and these traditional practices do for our people. They bring us out of a darkness and show us some light. And that light is hope [voice breaks] Right? And our people need hope.

LP: Those are very, very powerful stories. I feel emotional too. It's hard not to feel that when you hear of that, because it's...yeah, culture as healing and being connected...being able to do those ceremonies on the land, or if you don't have access to, you know, your own homelands or to land, you've got the elders who bring us. They are the connecting fiber, yes, to to our communities and to our nations.

[MUSIC]

LP: Let's bring in Dr. Redvers here. I asked her what Indigenous-led health and healing can look like. She responded by introducing us to the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation's healing camp, which is an on-the-land wellness centre located just outside Yellowknife, in **Denendeh**, also known as the Northwest Territories.

NR: Our experience running an urban land-based Healing Camp, I think facilitates some needed reflections on how to operationalize these types of projects, and I believe we were one of the first within an urban area to have a permanent urban, land-based Healing Camp that's still in operation today. We opened in the spring of 2018 and we are open every day of the year, aside from major holidays. And we serve First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities, due to the diversity, of course, within our Indigenous northern communities. But then we also have Indigenous peoples from all over Canada that tend to come and then from the smaller communities into the urban center of Yellowknife. And we were very specific in ensuring that the values and foundations that we operated the camp on were collective. We brought elders in from the northwest territories, and Nunavut – Metis, First Nations and Inuit coming together. And it was one of the most beautiful gatherings I've ever been to, because to see the synergies and the consistencies and just frankly, the love for all our people, no matter the background, and the willingness to come together to figure out ways to ensure a space is respectful of all of the given traditional protocols. So when people come, we don't specify a way that they need to pray or that they need to do ceremony. It's really up to them. And we encourage the land to be a participant within that ceremonial process for them and our support people, whether it's traditional counselors or our elders, they're really just the guide and a support for them to engage in their own teachings. However, many of our urban peoples are also disconnected from their cultures due to historical trauma and colonization. So, you know, in those cases, we're very much open to whatever the person wants to engage with. If they if they want to try some of the ceremonies that are

available, then we're very much open and reflexive to that. We don't have set appointments. We don't have set time frames of when people can come or not come. It's, you know, reflective of the need of the person at that moment in time, and trying to be as responsive in that moment to whether it's just sitting by the fire and enjoying a cup of tea or otherwise. I think the biggest challenge, however, though, aside from all of that in urban context for land based healing, is getting by all of the city permits and the processes for actually having this because, you know, the fire codes...I mean, we had to do dry architectural drawings of teepees. It was just kind of amazing. But ultimately, despite much fight, to be frank, to have this situated within an urban context, the city of Yellowknife ended up creating a reconciliation land lease for \$1 that basically encouraged us to abide by our traditional protocols as a part of that land base, although we still had to ensure, of course, safety for participants and relatives that come to the camp, it did allow us a bit more flexibility comparatively to what would have been, you know, required otherwise, but it definitely was, you know, a good two years of trying to work through the mess of municipal policies and all of those things. So the healing part was the easy part, not so much dealing with the bureaucracy of trying to even set up urban spaces in the first place.

LP: Those are perfect examples of the intersection of planning and health and wellbeing, which I think cities and municipalities are very slow to understand what their role is, and yet they play a key role, as you've just described. The one thing that you said, I thought, was just such a...what an idea...the land as a key driver of the healing, that the the elders are there to support, but it's really it's the land that does that work and so I guess I wonder, because this podcast is called, *From Ceremony Up*, and you know, how do you think ceremony and is connected to Indigenous health and wellbeing, and perhaps planetary health and wellbeing, as well as connected to the land?

NR: Yeah, well, from our perspective and our work, it's absolutely critical and foundational. And, you know, a good example is that we'll have relatives coming into our camp community for support, for various reasons, and will benefit greatly from being with traditional counselors or eating traditional food, or just being in the presence of the camp. And we devised the camp, the tents, and the teepees to invoke sort of a sense of going into your grandmother's or great grandmother's cabin – the smells, the feels, everything just permeating the experience of being as you walk in, which just gives this absolute sense of peace. So even just being there is healing in and of itself, because of the visceral, you know, emotions and connections that come from those senses. You know, a familiarity of peace, of knowing you're in an environment of love and non-judgment. And you know, those are just so powerful. However, in some cases, there is such deep-seated trauma. There's such deep seated dysfunction as a result of historical trauma, colonization and all of the other impacts that Indigenous peoples have

faced. You know, there's often a block that people have a harder time going past, and that's where the ceremony piece becomes absolutely fundamental and imperative to get past. It's one of the few things that can really get people moving along, if they are getting to a certain point of their healing, but they can't get over that last piece at the end, and we've seen that time and time again, the power of ceremony and the power of our elders and the land to be able to be a facilitator within that ceremonial process. And one of the things that I think is important to emphasize as we think about from the individual level to the community level, to the planetary level, to this universal level of thinking, is that ceremony in and of itself, there is no space or time parameters on that. It spans all of those things – the individual, it spans the community, it spans the planet, By embodying ceremony, by living as a ceremony, you're automatically embodying the health of all of those levels of being within the world. And I think that's incredibly powerful and sometimes not appreciated as a part of that ceremonial process. You know, it's for us, but it's also for everything, all relatives on the planet, up until the planetary level. And I've often had, you know, one of my elders tell me that the, you know, the trees, are not doing well because we're not singing to them anymore, you know, we're not singing to them, we're not giving them attention. We're not, you know, embodying them as part of our ceremony process anymore, and they're not doing well. We need to start reengaging on that level, so that we're bringing in all of those planetary elements to our being and in the relationships that we have in our day to day life. So you know, I'm absolutely foundationing the importance of ceremony on all scales of wellness and all scales of influence as a part of co-led solutions to some of the greatest issues that we have and face on the planet today.

LP: It also addresses...one of my other questions was around this sort of scalar connection that you've already spoken to across individual, nation and community. That those efforts towards healing are really connected, as I see it, to justice and self determination. Did you have anything to add more to that, other than what you've just shared, which was really powerful?

NR: Yeah, I think one thing that just comes to mind is one of the elders that is the co-founder and one of our board members of the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation, who's the organization that runs the urban land based Healing Camp within Yellowknife, used to run a on-the-lands justice program within the Yukon, and it was many years ago where there was a lot more latitudes in what could be done. But she actually had federal inmates come out on the land to her camp, which was completely isolated. She was the only elder out there. People that had done very unfortunate things to others as a part of their engagement getting to the justice system. And what was amazing hearing about her stories of, you know, these big guys coming out and...it didn't take very long, you know, for her little lady with her little voice and her love to get

a lot of these guys, you know, outside of their shell, but back into themselves, and training them how to build traditional tools. They had to go out hunting. They weren't allowed to use guns or anything. They had to make their own tools for hunting. They had to make their own tools for fishing. Everything from the land is a part of that process, and going through healing as a group with that, and the change that was a part of that transformation. And at the end, she talks about a ceremony where she got all of the men to change into new clothes at the end of the process, and all of those old clothes and their things were burned in a huge fire to let go of that past way to move on to the next phase within their life. And many of them didn't want to leave, of course, because of the amazing changes they had seen. So I think you know that program is a great testament to how powerful the land, our traditional teachings can be, and how justice systems can consider looking at those types of programs again, because I haven't heard of anything other than what that elder told me at that point in time, many, many, many years ago. And I just think, wow, you know what would happen if we had that available to our prisons, and being able to place people in these environments to really, truly allow them to heal and move on from all of the things that you know contributed to the consequences that they have had within their life and putting them within these systems. So it's just just a reflection I had in thinking about the justice system interrelated with some of these land based components and healing.

LP: It's amazing. And I have also not heard of anything like that really happening, other than being in like a carceral context. You know, they have healing lodges and things like that, but nothing, nothing like that. So thank you for sharing that example. Is there anything that I haven't asked about that you would like to share?

NR: Yeah, I think the only thing I would say, briefly at this point is, this is a deep and complex topic that you know could take weeks and weeks of discussions just to sort of, you know, even touch the surface of in and I hope, as we move forward within the movements that we create, but also opportunities for healing. And one thing that I tell my students often, who sometimes have a hard time thinking about the complexity of the issues, and how many things we have to deal with in our communities, the amount of problems to tackle, all of these things and trying to figure out solutions. And the one thing that I always remind them about is that it's not about solving problems, it's about creating the spaces to allow those problems to solve themselves. And I think that work of our camp is a prime example of that – just create the space, allow the opportunities for those other things to fall into place.

LP: In reflecting on Darla and Nicole's stories of healing, I can't help but feel hopeful for the future that is being created through their incredible community-building efforts and the work of organizations like NCCABC. This work takes time, commitment, and

leadership from Indigenous Elders and people like Darla and Nicole. To me, this is the essence of a “ceremony up” approach; a grassroots way of working that privileges and builds from lived experiences.

DR: Ceremonies are so powerful for our people because it helps us to get honest with ourselves, because we know that Creator loves and accepts us no matter what. And we need that in order to feel good about ourselves. I attended a sweat lodge with one of our dads and he was able to bring his daughter. His daughter had just moved here from I think it was Winnipeg and it was their first ceremony and sweat lodge together. And you know, just being able to witness a dad sweat with his daughter and share those prayers together and share that ceremony together and help in their healing and repairing, you know, the sorrow, and the fear that they carried, but instead to bring in more love and joy for them, right? And to witness that, like he was on cloud nine. He was so proud to introduce his daughter to the people and to the Elder, you know. He was so proud that his daughter was even there in the lodge with him. The love that was just radiating off of him, you know? And just the humility that I had to be able to witness that, right? And be a part of that part of their journey and that reconnection. It was truly honouring, really. Whew! Memory recall [laughs].

LP: Well thank you for sharing those stories. People need to understand and have that kind of visceral connection to how important these things are towards healing and also towards, I think they're just an integral part of justice and the response that these systems and structures need to really engage with in order to truly see. Like we talk about decolonization and all...well, that's the work that you're talking about. And that needs to be embedded across. And I know there's a big resistance to change, as you've been describing, but that's the kind of really fundamental shift in understanding. And I think it's really...and maybe it's hard to understand it if you haven't really really connected at a heart level, at an emotion level with that kind of transformative experience. What do you see as the necessary change? What do you think is going to get us past this system that is indifferent, or doesn't want to change?

DR: I think the biggest thing is to not stop talking about it. And not trying to encourage implementing some of these small practices into those institutions or the residential facilities in community. I think it's about challenging the higher-ups. Educating and informing. I think even providing opportunity to experience. Kwikwèxwelhp is a good example where they bring CSC Staff into their institutions for monthly ceremonies to witness and be a part of, but I think it needs to be more than once a month, you know? And I think there's lots of ways to be able to implement some of these practices within those CSC walls. We have institutions that are already doing it, like over in Osoyoos and Kwikwèxwelhp, and we need more. I think our education system needs to start

having an actual Indigenous curriculum that is mandated on any persons that are going into the justice sector, the health sector, education sector, etcetera. I think that there needs to be an actual foundation of just Indigenous learnings before they even start their educations to further their careers in those fields. To really have an understanding of working with and supporting Indigenous community. I think Corrections needs to really take a look at their operations and just really how harmful they are because there is room, it is possible to change and implement new ways of working. There really is. We know that. But what is the fear? What are they afraid of? That people are going to succeed and recidivism is going to go down and this is going to benefit people? [Laughs].

LP: Their jobs might be....I don't know...at risk?

DR: But that might not even be a reality. Their jobs are just going to shift into something that is more proactive and more engaging with people in creating safer environments and creating healthier human beings.

LP: Isn't that something that you wanna be aligned with, rather than coercive control?

DR: Exactly! Yes. I do. I do!

LP: I do too.

DR: And I see that restorative justice is starting to be more present in communities and what's unfortunate is the way that the justice sector works, it is similar to Indigenous laws. Like, we too hold our people accountable. We come with our own laws that teach our peoples to be responsible for their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. To be able to forgive, to heal as a community, because we are all connected and when one part of that community is out of balance, we are all out of balance, right? Our approaches aren't as harsh though. We come from a place of, our mistakes are an opportunity to grow. There are growing edges, we need to make mistakes in order to develop and evolve as human beings. When it comes to making those mistakes we are given encouragement and a new way of seeing. We are told to go fast and have some introspection with yourself. Take a look in there, what's going on, right? We're taught to go pray in the lodge or the longhouse. We're taught to go talk to our Elders. We're taught to go be on the land and get regrounded and regroup, gather our thoughts and figure out what this is really about. And then go to those people in our community that can help us with that, right? And so we hold our people accountable as well but in a different way, and that way works for our people and it keeps us in a good way. This way of shame and fear, these fear-based and shame-based techniques, they're not working and this is why

people just keep going back in there, you know, keep being reincarcerated because they're not getting the love they deserve. They're not getting the understanding or the empathy. They're not being supported or encouraged. You know, so many of the fellows that our programs supported, some of them are being released with no housing, no ID, their medical records aren't being transferred from the medical system inside the institution to a medical system outside the institution. The Elder connections and cultural connections they had inside the institution, they're no longer allowed to engage in and so they're plopped into these communities where they have no idea where to go, or who are the Elders or the Indigenous leaders in these communities. Most of them aren't even from these territories, so they're being plopped into communities that they're completely unfamiliar with. We have individuals who are coming into community and these expectations are put onto them after serving so many years of time and then all of a sudden they're just expected to go just get a job and go back to school or whatever it is, and some of them are just trying to manage their anxiety for the day. Some of them are just trying to manage an addiction they have. You know, we wouldn't tell somebody in a wheelchair to just get up and walk. We'd wheel along with them and help them and you know, depending on what their situation is, physiotherapy, or just accept where they're at and help them succeed in the capacity that they can succeed in.

LP: Which is exactly what you identified when you dropped the man off and he was just in a heightened state. You said "Ok, we need to address that before you can eat, before you can settle in, before you can do all these other things." So it's that fundamental acknowledging of what is needed and, yeah, how are you going to get there.

DR: Yeah, and we're all human beings. We know what fear and love and joy and sorrow feel like. And you know in some capacity we can empathise with peoples. We might not have had the exact same lived experiences but we can empathise what those fears or those sorrows are. And, the fear is just getting a heart connection. And that's what Indigenous worldview is. It's a heart connection with people; it's a heart connection with our higher power and with ourselves. And these systems aren't made like that. Our foster care system is the same...just because I had that experience working in the Ministry of Children and Families. You know, we would have kids getting removed just because they were getting too close to their foster parents. We don't want a connection here. We have to...and sadly my brother was part of the millennial scoop and he was one of those foster kids. He was removed from homes for getting too close to the foster parents. We then we ruin connections which causes more harm and more thoughts about not being lovable or not being good enough or worthy or entitled, right? These are all lies, but we don't think they're lies because this is how we've been shown or taught or treated. But with an Indigenous lens, we are constantly telling people that you are worthy, Creator loves you, you have a purpose here. And what is your purpose? How do

we help you find that purpose? What is your contribution back to this life? Right? Who are you? What kind of person do you want to be in your community? These are all things that our Elders and our peoples and our communities want for each other, so that we're all contributing in a good way.

LP: Is there anything I haven't asked about or that you'd like to say or share?

DR: I appreciate this opportunity. You know I think these conversations just need to be had more often and I think this is the only way to create more curiosity and break down some of those walls that we hold between ourselves. And just to be able to heart speak and share truth and as an Indigenous woman, it's very important not only to me but for my children's future that we start changing some of these systems, right? It breaks my heart to know that just because my children are Indigenous they're at over 50% chance of being incarcerated or being taken into care or not graduating. These numbers are important to our people. There's like 68% of our children in the Ministry's care. 63% of our peoples are incarcerated. We're only 3-5% of the population, right? And of that 63% that's incarcerated, almost all of that percentage, they came from the Ministry of Children and Families. And many of those individuals came right out of the Millennial Scoop, the Sixties Scoop and Indian Residential School and Day School. These systems are not working for our Indigenous peoples and the more that we talk and educate and bring it up, it will start to encourage some shifts. So thank you so much for letting me have this opportunity. There's so much that I want to say, right, this conversation is endless really.

LP: It is and this is just an opening, an invitation to continue going, talking about all of this. So thank you for sharing today and for a very powerful conversation.

DR: Thank you and thanks grandfather sun for shining down on us during this interview...this conversation.

LP: Beautiful! So much to be grateful for. Mussi.

[MUSIC]

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

In this episode, we heard stories of being together on the land, engaging in ceremonies and other healing activities, and the power this holds for transformational change. These examples point to how organizations like the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC are working to create futures that center Indigenous perspectives and

experiences of health and justice. These changes might actually help our justice system to earn the “justice” in its name. 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.

I want to thank you for taking the time to lean in and learn alongside me on this journey, and thank all of our guests for the teachings they have offered. This mini-series has documented the future-making work our guests do to restore Indigenous practices that counter the violence of colonial carceral and health systems. We know that where there is oppression, there is resistance; *From Ceremony Up* believes that our communities, lands, and waters are sacred; we uphold each other and we generate healing wherever we gather. We can and must hold our governments accountable to the barriers on the road to Indigenous wellbeing.

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 my email address in our show notes.

[Music swells and fades]