

Transcript of Interview with Carol Hopkins

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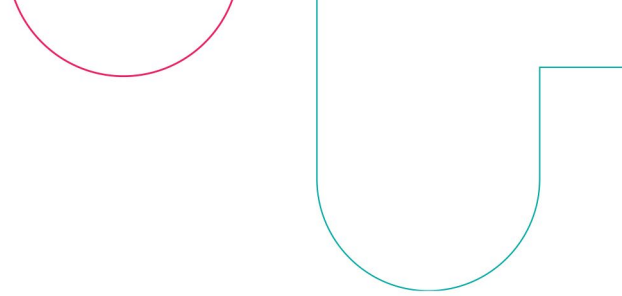
[Greeting in traditional language]. So I am Carol Hopkins, and I am the executive director of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. And I am joining you from the Delaware Nation at Moraviantown, which is the community where my mother's family line comes from. And my father's family line is from the Munsee Delaware First Nation. Both are located along the Thames River in southwestern Ontario. And I'm part of the Wolf Clan.

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I'm here to talk to you about the relationship with the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement and how that developed, and what were some key points about that development. So, just as a background, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation supports First Nations across Canada in mental wellness, so substance use issues as well as mental health, with, and we do that along with many partners. And so our introduction to the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement was an introduction to explore partnership and how working with CFHI might benefit First Nations across Canada in accessing greater health care resources to support them in their mental wellness. When we first started our relationship, we were very intrigued about CFHI and how they support their stakeholders through the collaboratives, and specifically in bringing on First Nations or Indigenous faculty or— to deliver training. And so that was one piece that interested the organization. Further to that, there was interest in working with CFHI to build relationships with provincial health authorities. And so we did that for a period of time. We were in conversation. We actually signed a memorandum of understanding with CFHI. But then there were some challenges in the relationship and really those challenges were broader issues than just an individual. And we didn't quite understand them at first in the context of the organization.

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And as we continued the conversation over time, there was a little bit of a pause. And when I think about that now, it was a good pause because it was an opportunity for reflection. And as new people came on, Carol Fancott, and later on meeting Despina Papadopoulos, we had an opportunity to have further conversation about the relationship, about the partnership and how to grow that, and to understand the different factors or variables that were part of every relationship. So whether it's a relationship between organizations or a relationship between people, there are different factors and variables that are at play. And so the conversation really was about exploring those elements and trying to understand them. And one of the key things that I found critically important and in our work together to re-establish the relationship with greater clarity is the genuine listening skills. And so often times there would be conversations



and then questions that maybe sometimes were asked with a little bit of shyness, not quite knowing how do I ask the question, not wanting to offend, not wanting to go backwards in the relationship, or perhaps be off-putting in any kind of way.

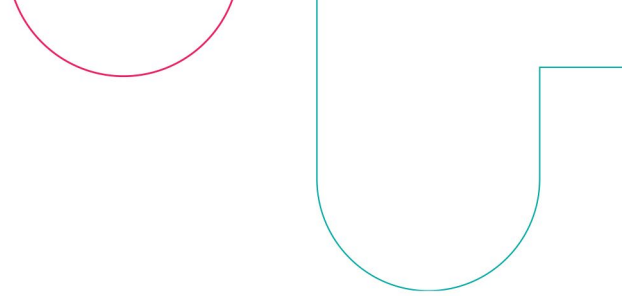
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And— but not in a, I want to say this as well, that those questions or that carefulness was not in a way to... situate the conversation or the relationship with barriers or unspoken concerns. And so as part of the discussion, there was carefulness. But there was also, the carefulness was in the context of the genuine desire to listen, to learn. And in the conversations that was very evident, because what would come back was, “This is what we heard. Have we got it right? Do we understand? Or we have these other questions, if we go and we try to apply this, what we've been learning, then here's what we encounter. Can we talk about that?” And so that, to me, demonstrated the genuine interest in listening to understand. And if you listen to understand, it's possible then to create change, it's possible then to have a relationship, because all relationships, again, whether they're personal, whether at the organizational level, they require conversation and open conversation, where you don't have to feel intimidated or like you have all of the negative things that come about from poor conversation, or the lack of conversation because you're afraid to ask the questions.

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And so that's the second piece of this key learning for me, and re-entering a relationship and working on it, is not letting fear hold you back and making sure that when you are in a difficult place of understanding that you simply say that. “This is the way we've always done business. And we've heard that that doesn't sit well. It doesn't accommodate, it doesn't respect, it doesn't reflect the values or the needs that you have expressed on behalf of First Nations people. Let's talk about that.” Or— so just the courage to have open dialogue, where there's a back and forth, there's true expression of trying, and what you're coming up against, what is the potential. And this isn't just one-sided. On the behalf of First Nations, I also had to have conversations with our partners, because our partners came along in the previous journey before the period of silence and reflection. They were part of that. And they had wondering and they had questioned. And so, they were aware that Thunderbird or the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, at that time we were called the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, they were observing the conversation that we were having and wondering, you know, what that would turn out to be. Would it go anywhere? Were previous concerns around ownership of information, how are they going to be resolved? And so slowly other people got into the conversation, but it took time.

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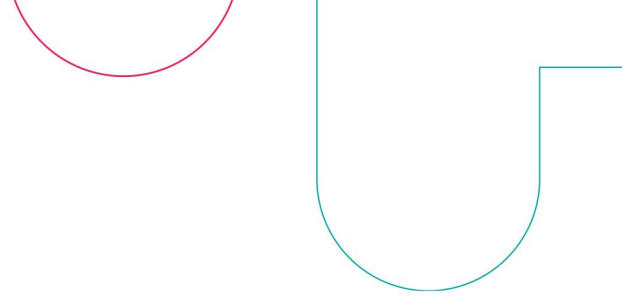
And so that's another important element, following, you know, the courage to have the dialogue, to have the hard conversation, to be respectful in the questions, is to take time. And my father used to say to me, anything worth having takes hard work. It takes time. And so we spent time in conversation and asking the question, exploring the possibilities, learning about where we've been and where we can go. Who else needs to become part of the relationship? Is it ready to invite others, are we ready to invite others to the relationship, to the conversation, for the potential and possibilities for the future? And so it's, it wasn't a conversation or a relationship that was nicely mapped out as a logic model. We're going to go from step A to B to C, and the outcome we're hoping for is this. We explored it and we were willing to map it out as we went along.

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I don't think that we sat down at any one single point and said, oh this is where we are now. But it was a continuous conversation where we had opportunity to reflect where we are now. So it was a natural element of the relationship. And that said to me that what was happening is a commitment to build that relationship, that we always took the time to reflect. And so when we got to, when we eventually got to the collaborative, we had already worked out an understanding about that one key piece that was so critical in a relationship, in a memorandum of understanding, which was about the ownership of knowledge, and how do you engage in a relationship that doesn't damage or take away or diminish ownership of knowledge? I often talk about Indigenous knowledge and the difference between Indigenous knowledge and sacred knowledge. Sacred knowledge belongs to the cultural societies, the medicine societies, ceremonial societies of First Nations people across Canada. And there are many distinct and unique societies that hold that sacred knowledge that has gone across many, many generations fully intact. And there are certain parameters around that knowledge, and it's specifically for First Nations people. But as holders of that knowledge, students of that knowledge, teachers of that knowledge, we all have the responsibility and learn how to translate that knowledge.

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Likewise, communities, they have their stories about how to live life well, and that knowledge is the same. It's been passed on from generation to generation with the mindset of supporting the future with good guidance for living life well. That's sacred knowledge. All of that gets translated across generations because it has to apply in the current context. And so the discussion on the ownership of knowledge was so critical because from a First Nations lens, it doesn't belong to any organization. It belongs to the people. It belongs to our future, and we have a responsibility to ensure its integrity and its safety for the future. That was the critical conversation that we were having with CFHI. And they had the courage to have the conversation, maybe courage because we were working with a lot of new people, and they didn't have all of the rules and the organizational structure to encumber their thinking. They were new, and so they had a fresh



lens to look at things, as well as individual characteristics. And those individual characteristics are also critically important. They were characteristics, like I said, if you have the ability to listen to learn, that is a foundational principle of good leadership.

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And so if you have that good leadership, you have also the ability to have courage, to have discussion. And so when we got into the collaborative, and we were working on principles, all of those kinds of characteristics were mentioned in the guiding principles of the collaborative, honouring Indigenous knowledge, respecting Indigenous knowledge as evidence, making sure that we were humble and aware, the cultural humility, being aware of who we are and what we bring to the table and what we don't. How we collaborate, how we fit together, where we clash and having the courage to have discussion about that. So, that much I'd like to share with you and thank you for the opportunity.

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I think in some ways, when I heard the discussion, when we were at Maniwaki, one of the things that came to mind is that travelling with the teams, or maybe it was on a phone call, but I also thought about this, but the travelling with the teams stood out to me as witnessing the reality of relationship between health care organizations and First Nations communities. And I think that that witness, like when we talk about witnessing something, right, we identify a witness to a meeting that can give reflection and feedback. And that witness's role is to be objective as much as possible and to provide the reflection and give insight that can facilitate learning. And that's how I heard or understood the travel and what was happening there.