

**Zoom Meeting March 2021 with
Facilitators Audrey Huntley and Wanda Whitebird
and 7 Community Members**

Audrey:

We're going to have an opening by Wanda Whitebird who is leading this project. I'm the co-founder of No More Silence and Wanda and I have been working together in No More Silence for many years. We're going to be asking a series of questions today. We have seven questions regarding the barriers and the challenges that you may have experienced when trying to access cultural or ceremonial spaces. You can either say those using your microphone or you can type them into the chat. Either way is fine. We have about an hour and a half, for all of that. That makes sense? Okay. Why don't we start off, Wanda?

Wanda:

Boozhoo, my name is Dancing Star, I come from the Bear Clan. I am a member of the Mi'kmaw First Nation and the territory I come from, is a place called Paq'tnkek which is about 19 miles outside Antigonish in Nova Scotia. Although, I live and work here now in the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Wendat.

Ancestors, Creator, we are gathered here today, surround us in that unconditional love that we know the universe has for us, fill our minds with the courage to ask the questions, to the answer the questions, so that we're able to create a dream: one of being able to provide cultural ceremonies for everyone.

Creator, Ancestors, I give thanks for the people who've joined me in this space but we're all in different places. Many of us are at home. Because of the pandemic, we have learned another way in which to connect, and that's through the internet. And so, it may be a bit confusing, but surround us in what we need to know. Help us to understand that we have ancestors who stand behind us and as we look towards the future, what it is that we can design that will last through all the generations. Creator, I give you thanks for today and for another breath of life. I give you thanks for the people who have joined me. Many I haven't seen in years and it is great to see you all here today. Let us relax, let us connect to where we are and what we are going to do. So I say miigwetch, nii'kinaaganaa, all my relations a ho.

Audrey:

Miigwetch, Wanda, thank you for that.

Participant:

We'la'lin.

Participant:

Miigwetch

Audrey:

Let's start with a round of introductions, if people are comfortable? I see most people are on camera which is great. And I'll just go by like my little screen which has D. to my right, if you

would. And why don't we incorporate the first question into our introduction? Which is: 'what do you think of the term disabled?' Is that a term that you use to describe yourself? Do you identify that way? What are your thoughts on the term? If you could just incorporate the answer to that question into your little introduction that would be great.

I could actually start because I didn't really introduce myself.

So, my name is Audrey: I go by she and her. I identify as having a disability but I'm not very fond of that language. I appreciate folks who use other language such as differently-abled, because 'disabled' sort of has, a comparator to a mainstream or a dominant way of being. It's what's considered 'normal' or 'not normal'.

Also, I'm mixed indigenous and settler ancestry. And to my right, I see D.

Participant 'D':

Good morning my name is D. I guess, I'm she/her. I'm Cree from 'X' reserve. I've been in Toronto over 20 years in the X area. I think I'm able, I think that everybody else out there is disabled, it's conflicting and misunderstood. And until they see me in my scooter, or the grocery store, unable to reach up to pick up something, they realize, 'Wow, she's disabled,'. Also, I feel sometimes like less of a person because I'm First Nations. Anyway, good morning or good afternoon.

Audrey:

Miigwetch thanks for that. S, you're next.

Participant 'S':

Yeah, so I'm S. I go by she and her and I am multi-indigenous: I'm Cree. As for the term 'disabled', I have to be honest, I use it in different settings that I go in community. So, some communities really identify with disability and some don't, so, I just I identify when I go into those communities so unfortunately it goes to the example that some communities are still very siloed so they don't always do intersection very well. So that's how I use the word disability.

Audrey:

Cool miigwetch. I really appreciate that comment about how communities are siloed and don't really understand intersectionality. O, you want to go next?

Participant 'O':

Sure. My real name is (Indigenous name) and I am from the Cree Nation and mixed race. I go by they/them. In terms of the term. I don't like to use it because people look at me and go 'well, you don't look disabled.' And so, I prefer the term 'differently-abled' because I have a few: I've got arthritis, I have some serious learning disabilities that I have managed to cope with over the years and found tricks to be able to do the work that I do. I've also am diabetic, which I consider to be 'differently-abled'. So yeah, I kind of don't like using the term 'disabled' because it just puts a negative and it makes people stop and go, like I said, "Oh, well you don't look it." and it's like, well, you know, there are hidden disabilities. And that, you know, it's really no one's business if I want to disclose or not, so miigwetch for listening.

Audrey:

Alright, thank you!

On my little phone screen I see L. If you wouldn't mind introducing yourself and giving us your comments

Participant 'L':

Hi, everyone. Can you guys hear me?

Afternoon.

Okay, great so I'm Ojibwe and little bit of Cree and French. And I'm from Mississauga First Nation. And I've been in Toronto for 29 years. And regarding the term, yes, I think any label is definitely confining, restrictive - it just doesn't take into consideration the totality of a whole person or their, what do you call it, or even being open to other development of capacities? So, and again, I just find that is a very westernized view point on people, right? So, but I will say that when I am in, when I use that term, it's to speak the language of the environment I'm in so that I can get my needs met. And because that's, what do they say there's this concept about when in Rome, you do the things of Rome or whatever, you know what I mean? So that's kind of like how I navigate, how I relate to that term. Thank you. That's, that's it for that.

Audrey:

Makes sense miigwetch. N? Please go ahead.

Participant 'N':

Good afternoon, everyone my name is N. I am First Nations Cree from Saskatchewan. I've been in Toronto for well over 30 years. I have been in a power chair for several years and I'm kind of mixed on the term 'disability' because there are the circumstances in which it needs to be spoken as in for what it is. What I find that word to be, to have a very negative connotation. It takes from our real values and it also keeps people from understanding what it is about. Like most people don't understand completely what 'disability' really means. And just because one part of my body doesn't work, doesn't mean the rest of me doesn't work. So, I'm kind of, I'm kind of split on that kind of a 'definition'. And because, as D. said, there are moments when it is necessary to label it as a disability. But there is a negative connotation to it and that just takes away. Thank you.

Audrey:

Okay, thank you and F, please go ahead.

Participant 'F':

Hi, everyone. I'm F, I'm mixed-race and Mi'kmaw and European and I was born and raised here in Toronto. I am - I don't, I don't like labels but like D., there are certain situations, especially when dealing with governments or, or with doctors, where I have to acknowledge I'm disabled. For me, I always say I have physical challenges, or I have mental challenges. I don't acknowledge the disability when I'm talking to people. And you know, like, if I have to label myself, I'm 'a

spiritual being, having a human experience'. And that's, that's the only label I choose to acknowledge. And yeah, that's it.

Audrey:

Awesome miigwetch F, thank you. C, would you like to introduce yourself?

Participant 'C':

Good afternoon, everybody, my name is C, my pronouns are she/her, they/them. I'm from X First Nation up in X. My spirit name is _____ and also I carry a second one, which is _____. I don't like the term 'disabled'. I currently live with diabetes and neuropathy in my feet. I constantly have pain in my legs every day. So, I'm in pain, every day forever. I don't tell people about my 'disabilities' or 'mental disabilities' if that's such a thing. When I'm out and about I just take my time with what I need to do and if I'm in a crowd that goes faster, I still take my time. I don't ask people for help. If I'm in pain while I'm in doing my grocery shopping, I just stop dead in my tracks. I don't care how busy the grocery store is I just stop. Even where I live today, I have to climb stairs, two flights of stairs to get into my apartment. I'm in the process of moving to a ground floor apartment for the beginning of the month because I find it really hard to carry groceries up the stairs. I'm sure, like me, most of us that have disabilities or have issues of carrying groceries or trying to get stuff into our place. And some days are good for me and some days aren't but I don't complain to people I just go about my day. And if I'm in pain, I just take my time. Even with the many different, small jobs that I do in the community in the downtown core they're aware of my, my challenges. And they understand the work that I do. That's all.

Audrey:

Alright miigwetch. So some people already a little bit touched on the next question, I believe it was D. who talked about disability being a westernized concept because our next question is: "Do you think that was an idea or a concept that existed prior to colonization?" Or was there a, you know, or did like traditional indigenous societies have other approaches to folks who are differently - abled? What do you guys think about that? I don't know anyone can jump in or you can put it in the chat. D., you had already commented a bit about that if you want to pick up on that thought.

Participant 'D':

I mean, it's even just this, our approach, it's like it's a collective. All of our voices are important in the circle you know, so it's like every person has a voice and is heard. So, like, there's so many different values that are very different in, in our society, I mean, I'm not a historian I don't know specifically but I don't believe that those things were part of who we were "before colonization". I think and it and we didn't have to have classes about it, you know? It was in, it was a way of being, it was attitudes, it was the way of relating. And, you know, I'm just starting to learn my language with my daughter who's 26 and there are some things in the English language that there is no such word in Ojibwe. You know, so it's like, wow, you know, like, and so really, I'm just kind of, like, you know, I feel like a new person in many ways, you know,

about what we're talking about. So, I'm always looking to learn from others and from learning from this, the circle that we're in today, as well. So, but you know just in recognition of the way that the westernized approaches are, they're built on linear you know? Hierarchal. Good, bad, right, wrong, like just you know, driven by conquering and winning and there's just so many things about it, right? And the way they look at their people like there's no value when you get old, when you're not well, when you're too young or whatever. So, it's like we don't have that, there's value in the human life and every person's spirit and all of the totality, of you know, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspect and our lived experience and the gifts we have and the teachings we learn and you know, it just is like there's just so much to those concepts and very kind of like small the other way, it's different. Anyhow, that's probably a lot enough.

Audrey:

Oh, it was great. Thank you, D. Anybody else have any thoughts?

Participant 'S':

Me, S. Can you hear me? So it's S., so the one thing is I agree with what D. was saying. I believe that, I mean again like, like D. is saying I'm not a historian so I don't know about like the history, but I do believe you know, it's because of you know with, with like you - people have made us like I was saying before; people have made us 'siloed' so people have always tried to you know, because we've got like application forms and we have to check that box or we have to, we have to check this criteria because we need this. So, for me because I have a disability, I have multiple disabilities, I'm on ODSP I'm on, I have to get this, I have to get this, so in a way I'm kind of pushed into that box because it's easier for Western medicine to understand, for them - for me to get what I need. So yeah, so sometimes Western medicine has made it that way because we have to, we have to check that box. So, we have to get what we need. We have to get ODSP we have to get accessible housing. We have to get our medicine, like some of our medicines, now, even right now with COVID we have to check that box, check that box so we can get the vaccine, that kind of thing. So, I do believe that Western medicine has made us conform to that and we have to like be a round peg in a square hole. I think that's the saying. I'm not sure but yeah. So that's what I think.

Audrey:

Awesome, thank you for that, 'round peg' and 'making us conform'. Go ahead, F would you like to speak?

Participant 'F':

Yeah, I feel that we have bought into the beliefs of labels as a society because we're so spiritually bankrupt. I find that the older I get, and the deeper my spiritual roots go, the less I allow myself to be labeled. And the labels that are put on me, I don't buy into them. And I just I really feel that the more spiritually balanced we are, the less the labels are needed. That's it.

Audrey:

The “less” labels are needed ... that’s a really good point. Awesome. Anybody else want to comment on that? And if you prefer to put it in the chat, that's an option.

Participant ‘D’:

From my experience, I've only been unable to walk and have lower so, lower back pain and I'm diabetic type two. I know in the past attending health conferences and stuff like that it's like sad that the government ignored our disabilities and our chief sometimes ignored them and sometimes they fought for funds and help to fly from reserves in town. And it was very complicated. And sometimes from what I read, from what I saw, from what I heard, disability people were last in line. So, in the past, I think that they were neglected, including as far as accepting being two spirited. So no, I don't think disability existed in reality to a lot of people for a lot of reasons because it wasn't seen, nobody seen it. And I guess, because of everybody's ‘me, me, me’ and sometimes people don't have the funds to support a disabled person, it was ignored. But obviously family did try their best to help people who needed the assistance. That's from my perspective from the past, from what I've seen. So, thank you for the listening and the awakening and there's more happening today.

Audrey:

Thank you.

Participant ‘O’:

This is O. so, are you done D?

Participant ‘D’:

Yeah.

Participant ‘O’:

So, I think like probably before colonization, that stuff was you know, not as sort of relevant even though there were people who were differently abled. And I don't think that it was such kind of looked down upon and sort of, because I find that people who aren't indigenous when they talk about disabilities it's not in a positive light, it's more sort of a putting down. It's getting better but just sort of an example with me, if I take you know the elevator and people say, “Why are you taking the elevator? Take the stairs,” and I have to start explaining “I'm sorry I have extreme pain. I cannot be running up and down the stairs. I would love to, my feet hurt, my whole body hurts and it's like I have to justify why I'm taking an elevator and I think that that's learned behavior. I think we're taught you know the oppressor's language and yeah, so I think that before it wasn't such a sort of big deal it was just part of life and these you know, we have different people as in our life and in the circle and I don't think that those people were like, pointed out and say, ‘Oh, well, they can't do this’. They were probably given other things they could do to contribute to the society.

Audrey:

Are you finished? You muted yourself there.

Participant 'O':

Yeah, sorry. I should say 'I'm done'.

Audrey:

Awesome, miigwetch there's a little comment in the chat that I just wanted to find. It's really awkward doing this on my phone. Yeah that, so O.'s point really addresses invisible disabilities, where it's not obvious to people and they feel like they have a right to question your choices. Just a variation.

Participant 'O':

So, if I could just add a little bit to that like even going to demos and stuff, or even going to ceremony and wanting to sit down when I was younger and getting into trouble for it and people saying, "No, you can't sit, you're supposed to stand." It's like, "well, I sit because I'm in a lot of pain". And so, I just sort of stopped saying anything and just suffer through it. And so, as I age, I'm 60 now and it's getting worse, I have my good days, I have my bad days, but I'm just not going to put up with any more of that. I'm done.

Audrey:

Thanks, O, for adding that. Yeah, I feel like a little bit has changed. When we ask people to stand up at the beginning of meetings and stuff some people now, you know say, 'if you're able', you know and at least point out that it shouldn't just be automatically expected. So, you kind of jumped ahead, that was good O, you brought us to our next question which is 'have you experienced barriers when or in accessing cultural spaces, or ceremony? So, it could be while you're doing it, or it could be that it's actually preventing you from doing it? If you all wouldn't mind sharing about those barriers that you may have experienced, that may have prevented you from accessing culture or ceremony, or that make it difficult? Whoever wants to go first.

Participant 'C':

I'll go. I'll go.

I'm just going to read the question here again, "have you experienced barriers when accessing cultural spaces or ceremony?" Absolutely, so in my case, I experience barriers when it comes to cultural ceremonies, such as going into the sweat lodge because I also have knee problems so I have issues with getting up and down, sitting comfortably inside the sweat, with keeping my legs crossed, or sitting sideways with my legs out, so I'm not touching the person next to me. Also, during other ceremonies, it depends who's in that space, and whether the space is going to be safe for trans-two-spirited people, or even two-spirited people, because I know sometimes there's mixed sweats. When I first started my job, I was one of the first to hold a Two-Spirit Trans sweat at X (Toronto Agency). I believe that was 2018 a week before Pride. I really wanted to go into that sweat but I couldn't because I had issues with my feet, my legs. A couple years back I fell down a flight of stairs. If I bend over too long, my back locks. But I also find sometimes people in that space, in ceremony in the sweat lodge, they just don't

understand where I'm coming from or my needs or what accessibility I need. And sometimes it also feels a little bit like colonization, depending who's in that space.

I just want to touch on a second question in regards to the colonization of taking medicine. So, like I said, I'm diabetic. I have other health issues. To this day, I do not take any medicine prescribed by a doctor. I use medicinal marijuana for my pain. If I feel like my pain's too much then I'll take that - that Western medicine, but not very often, I won't even touch it. I just don't feel a need for me to take it. I can remember when I was younger and I met elders who were disabled; they didn't have access to wheelchair ramps or how they were going to get in and out of the band offices or community centers that you had to climb stairs to get to, or the elevators didn't work and they would lose out on those ceremonies or those meetings or whatever, right? That's all.

Audrey:

Thank you, C. Anybody else? That was a great start, there are some comments in the chat. I see that a few people have similar experiences with difficulties with sitting on the ground, or having difficulty standing long, as has been described, difficulties getting back up if one has tried to sit down.

Participant 'B':

I just want to add to that too if I can, Audrey.

Like I said sitting down during sweats or whatever and when you're trying to get up, are people going to offer you help? Or do they just stand there or sit there and look at you and say stuff to themselves in their minds like, "Oh, you know, you're just putting on a show - this is all an act. You're just doing this for attention," Nothing - when you have these physical abilities, or mental health issues, it's not an act. It's not a show-and-tell thing. It's a part of who we are and we didn't ask to have these physical challenges, or the mental health issues that we all deal with today.

Audrey:

Thank you for that.

Participant 'F':

It's really sad.

I've been physically challenged for 27 years now after my car accident. And so, for many, many years, I have walked with canes. And even using canes, it was still hard for me to get into ceremony but I forced myself into it. And for a number of years now I've used a walker and I have to say, here in Toronto, most ceremonies are very willing to accommodate you if you can get into them. Right like when at X (Toronto agency) when they used to have Full Moon ceremonies on the roof, or on the balcony upstairs. You know, nowadays, I wouldn't be able to do it because I can't get my walker into the elevator. And, you know, now that I have a power chair, it certainly wouldn't fit to go into the elevator to go upstairs. And it's, it's, you know, two years ago, prior to COVID, two winters ago, I went to X for a New Year's Eve celebration. So, Wheel Trans dropped me off and I sat down by the elevator, and I buzzed and I buzzed and I buzzed and buzzed and I buzzed for 45 minutes, I went to the front of the building, nobody was

coming in or out. You know, so here I was New Year's Eve, it was chilly, it wasn't freezing - freezing, but it was chilly. And I had to sit outside because I could not access the building and that's when I realized 'that's it, I'm done'. I'm done with going to places that don't make exceptions for me. And even when X (Toronto agency) opened another location over by X, I forget the name of that street there...I had to fold up my walker to get inside because the two doors wouldn't open. And because I'm a plus size woman, my walker is 23-24 inches wide and I would have to fold it up, put myself in jeopardy of falling, just to get inside the building and it was very frustrating. You know that even with X (Toronto agency), this is a medical facility, right? They need to have both doors open, working, and they don't. So, with all these things that have happened I eventually got to the point where I said, I'm done, I'm done with going to ceremony. I'm done because I can't get down on the ground to get into the sweat lodge. The sweat lodge doesn't accommodate wheelchairs. You know, even with full moon ceremonies, like a lot of full moon ceremonies we used to do down where I live in Scarborough and we used to go down to the bluffs when I was physically more able, I can't do that, because I can't get my wheelchair out onto the sand. It's just so restrictive to do anything. So now I, I'm in a wheelchair apartment and I go out onto my balcony, and I do my ceremonies out there. That's it.

Participant 'D':

I've had certain places that had no access. X (Toronto agency) was one with one of them. You know, to go for teachings and stuff like that and they have no elevators and only stairs. Well then you can't join. You know like F said, I got to the point where I stopped engaging. You know, if stuff was outside, that was great. Where I work, they've revamped everything, so that there's a ramp there that is accessible, and there's enough room to move around. But even with a lot of places that you go into for any kind of services, they're not completely accessible. You can get in but you can't move around, so you're basically stuck. So, I don't really engage as much as I used to. Thank you.

Participant 'C':

Can I just add something to that, please? That some places that do have wheelchair ramps I noticed that a lot of people like to hang out on those ramps and don't move out of the way for people that need to access those ramps. They like to hang out there and think it's like a playground apparatus. You know, if you ask them nicely to move, they don't want to move and they can just be very rude and ignorant. But the way I look at it some days, you know like I said a few minutes ago, we didn't pick and choose to live with these physical disabilities. And one day, they'll, how should I put this in a good way? As they get older, maybe they'll end up with physical disabilities and think of the way they treated other people with physical disabilities.

Audrey:

Thanks for that. So, do people have experiences where they were accommodated? What was that accommodation like and who provided it?

Participant 'F':

When X (Toronto agency) used to have the shake tent ceremonies, I couldn't do the sweat lodges, so they there was always a medicine person there to do ceremony with me outside the shake tent just to honor that and they always made provisions so that I had a seat to sit in and not have to sit on the floors.

Audrey:

Nice. That seems like a pretty reasonable and not too difficult thing to do.

Participant 'C':

I went into the shakes and shake tent ceremony as well and because I didn't feel safe crawling into that small space, I just sat on the edge in a chair because I could just see myself not being able to be move around comfortably or even to get out of that space. So, they just added a chair to the entrance.

Audrey:

Cool.

So, if you haven't had experiences of accommodation, what about ideas for what people could do to make it easier or possible for you to join or access these spaces? We've already heard that sitting on the ground is difficult so we've got some good examples of how just a simple chair can make it possible, just a better seating arrangement.

Participant 'O':

So, I think - this is O. So, I think what they could start doing, we've done this you know for a few years now, is make it safe by saying in posters and in callouts that this is a differently - abled safe space. That they're taking into account that people have different abilities and that they will be accommodated and give examples like chairs, helpers, people running for you, whatever. I think that that would be a really good step forward to do that.

Audrey:

Love that idea. So, helpers, chairs. I know that No More Silence ourselves, we are doing this project because we've had to face our own 'ableism' because we certainly haven't always done that, you know, just as simple as making sure the location is wheelchair accessible, and putting that on your poster. And putting on your poster that you have ASL or explaining why you don't, really important.

Participant 'O':

And always making sure that the bathrooms are accessible and accessible to the point where a large chair can get in and move around instead of 'Oh yeah, it's accessible' and you look and even myself who's small but having difficulties maneuvering physically. So just taking into account that it has a push button, that it's wide enough for wheelchairs to move around, it's wide enough for walkers and people with crutches or with canes or who have difficulty moving that would be a big start.

Participant 'C':

I just want to add that one should never make the assumption, if someone's balance is off because of physical disabilities, that they're a drug user or they're high on opiates or that they're drunk. It's just the way that they walk and it's not their fault. I'm sometimes walking down the street and my balance goes off and if there are people behind me then I look and I see someone then I actually apologize to them if I got in their way. Some just smile or nod their head and others, well before the pandemic I could see the expression on their faces, give me dirty looks but you know what it is but at least I apologize. I'm sure we all have had our balance go off or whatever. It just happens you know I'm walking straight and all of a sudden, I start going to the left or the to the right. And I shouldn't have to apologize for my physical abilities to people.

Audrey:

Yeah, we would hope that people could have just empathy and compassion. So that's basically a good point, just asking that people have empathy and compassion.

Participant 'F':

I just wanted to touch on what O had to say, I totally agree, if we're doing ceremonies or events in our community, we have to make it accessible for every person. Not just physical, not just you know, LGBTQ friendly, it has to encompass everybody and not just make it so that a few can attend, right? And I think that's critical that we have to change the mentality of all. Not just some. All people because even, you know, even us sitting here we have our own limitations that we buy into and we have to get to that place of changing. So that we are accepting of all, thus making it possible for everybody else to be accepting of all. Thanks.

Audrey:

Thanks F, that reminds me of, the Disability Justice 'Nobody Left Behind'. You know, if we're doing something and we are, we're so proud of ourselves because we're fighting for social justice and we're doing this big, big event then we need to be inclusive. I remember when we organized the round dance last year, for Wet'su'weten and we ordered a bus that could bring people from the rally to where we were going to round dance at Nathan Phillips Square because otherwise, we're excluding people. So, we wanted to do that event but do it in a way that nobody gets left behind. Which is like a pretty fundamental principle I think of, of Disability Justice.

Participant 'O':

Yeah, I've had to stop going to demos because I can't do the marches anymore and if they don't have a van or a vehicle, I just can't go anymore because they walk like half block, a block and I have to stop and it's like, it's difficult because the pain is too much and I don't want to put other people out. So, I just I've stopped going, which is sad.

Audrey:

That's very sad! But I find that there's some groups that are addressing that now, in particularly, the younger folks who were doing the Black Lives Matter demos they had accessibility, they had

a bus and we kind learned from them and did it too and I think we need to build that into our budgets.

Participant 'C':

Also, excuse me, also to going to non-indigenous agencies such as the X (Toronto LGBTQ agency) when they asked me to go to events there to do land acknowledgments, they can't do enough for me or any other people who are physically disabled. You know, their volunteers or the staff. They're right on top of you, to assist you and make sure that, you know, you get in the elevator properly, or they greet you in a nice friendly way. Make sure there's space for you to get through to the area / section they have for disabled people in chairs, or walkers or canes and make sure that they're the first ones to go to the room before the rest of the crowd.

Audrey:

That's a positive example.

But you're finding that more common in non-indigenous spaces?

Participant 'C':

Yeah,

You know such as, X (Toronto Agency), they were never accessible when they were up on X (Toronto Street). But now that they're on X, they're more accessible. You have to go in through the back because the back of the building is flat and they have a small ramp that goes into this to that space. And they made that space, so you can get around in those devices, right?

Audrey:

Our next two questions are what would you want disability focused organizations to know about your indigenous experience? And then the last question is, what would you want indigenous focused organizations to know about your disability experience?

Participant 'S':

So one of the things that like, I've mentioned before about my feel that agencies are 'siloeing' and they don't really understand intersectionality. So, when I go, and I want to smudge I've gotten a lot of really negative feedback and I feel, I want to say, "Well, this is an accommodation for me that I need to feel safe. I need to be able to smudge myself and the room I'm in before I go and talk to a therapist or things like that. And some of them just don't understand it and I'm like, "Okay, can I show you what I mean? Or can you maybe get information?" So that, you know that I'm not doing anything that's going to harm anything, I'm not doing anything that's wrong. It's clear that they don't understand and they don't want to be rude but they just, they don't want to like go further and find out more information. That's one of the things I find and the other thing that I find that I've had barriers with is that I have issues with eye contact. So, eye contact is a very hard thing for me and so sometimes I don't hold people's gaze a lot because I find it, I find it very intimidating and sometimes in non-indigenous environments people like to stare me down. And I'm sitting there going, "Okay, I don't feel comfortable, please don't do this." And it goes, it leads into my trauma, right? So, it's kind of like I think somebody said: a lot of people need more education. And so that's the part that I

hope that people get is more and more education and more sensitivity. And, you know a lot places are doing land acknowledgments now which are great, but let's do more, let's do smudging. Sometimes when I need to go into a place where I feel very, like I want it, I want to be able to go there more times and say, "Can we do a smudging?" And I get more of my community to go to these places and say "yes, let's do this". I have my friend who I consider to be my advocate and I say, "Can you help me speak up with this?" Because maybe my words aren't right and I need you to help. So maybe say the right word so they can understand what I'm trying to say. So, I do have a person who I consider to be my advocate that will go with me and say it and I kind of get a little bit of what I need. Not everything but it's a start.

Participant 'O':

Yeah, I think, S you said it really well. And to think that what was started when they were doing cultural awareness training and I think people have gotten lazy over the last few years in that thinking. They'll see me and see that 'oh, you look all sporty and all active and stuff'. And then when I try to explain, I basically am looked at like I'm a liar or I'm making it up or I want free services, where I should be getting free services. And I think the whole cultural understanding ... because looking at people in the eyes can be rude. In some cultures, in some indigenous cultures in particular we don't - we look, you know, just a little bit past the eyes, or focus on something where it looks like we're looking at them but we're really not. And they need to be like aware that these - you know these challenges, these differences are also cultural. That you know, this is probably your ancestors saying, 'Oh, don't do that. Like stop doing that' because it makes me uncomfortable too when people give me this the 'eye stare': 'Well, why aren't you looking at me,' or and sometimes I will, and then I'm feeling very uncomfortable doing it. And it's not because I'm trying to hide anything or be deceitful. It's just that it just makes me uncomfortable. And it makes other people uncomfortable in trying to explain that. Some people just don't get it, they're like, 'well, they should be because it's about respect.' And it's like, no, wait a minute. That's disrespectful. So why should I have to disrespect? Why should I respect you when you're totally disrespecting who I am or what my culture is, you know? So. Thanks, S.

Audrey:

Awesome. Yeah, those are really good points, from you all. What about indigenous agencies and what you want them to know about your challenges? And not just agencies but organizations. Organizations that are focused on indigenous issues. What do they need to know about barriers and challenges?

Participant 'F':

I think what needs to happen is that, that it needs to be acknowledged that creating barriers for us is an outright form of prejudice. And when they claim that they didn't know, that is no exception. You know like they are 'intentionally' unintentionally leaving us out. And in this day and age when we know so much about all kinds of things, then we need to stand up and say 'this is not acceptable what you're doing is hurting people.'

Audrey:

Yeah, I agree. I wonder how we can do that. Like, given this project, part of the goal of this project is to develop guidelines. So, what you guys are telling us, we're going to use to develop guidelines and we're getting so many good suggestions from you so that makes me really happy and then we have to figure out how do we get that information to these decision makers. I mean, one thing that popped into my mind is TASSC. You know Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council... it's that network that all the EDs are at. That would be a good place for us to bring these suggestions. We have to figure out what the format is going to be.

Participant 'C':

Also, too you know, when you go into certain spaces that allow wheelchairs in and then other clients don't want to move out of your way and then you get into arguments with them.

Because your chair is in the way or you're in the way.

If the drop in's too busy then nobody should be questioned about why they're in a scooter, I guess what the point I'm trying to get at you know, because people use scooters, because they're just too lazy to walk. You know, I've seen time and time again where people who don't have a disability just use those scooters to get around. Or they got to do and do their stuff quick and when they park their scooters they get out of there and they're walking like there's nothing wrong with them.

Audrey:

Well, I don't think you can tell by how someone's walking.

Because they may be walking like they don't have any trouble because they've used the scooter and that's given them the ability to walk. And so, I think it's really like O was talking about, there are invisible disabilities. So we shouldn't be, we shouldn't be questioning or judging.

Participant 'C':

But even in those spaces where people come in on those scooters, or using walkers or canes other people should just respect them.

Audrey:

Exactly

Participant 'C':

And be mindful. You're in the same space, it should be a safe space at all times.

Audrey:

So, I think what I'm taking from that is that it's not enough for the agency to make it a policy, to actually have to enforce it by making sure that everyone who attends the space respects the guideline. Like where I work at ALS, we have a big sign up that says: 'I have the right to have my proper pronoun used all of the time.' We put that poster up but if we then sit there and allow one client who's in the waiting room to be transphobic to a two-spirit person then we're not fulfilling our commitment. We can't just put up a poster, we actually have to then intervene and educate that person and ask them to leave if they don't stop.

Participant 'C':

Right.

Participant 'N':

Can I just say like, what century are we in that people don't understand that treating people in a humane manner is just as important as breathing? Like, come on. If we can see somebody is unable to open a door or take something down from a shelf. Like what century do we live in. Why are we still stuck in this, in this ignorant frame of mind? Like seriously I just don't get it. I get frustrated and it makes me rage out a little bit every once in a while, because like, it just doesn't make any sense it's not like it's something new. You know it just; it's really frustrating for me.

Audrey:

I think it has to do with just the way society overall is structured and it you know, in the capitalist economy we unfortunately are in, it's kind of always about competition. And people are always afraid that they're going to lose out. So, it creates a very toxic culture. That's just like one thought I have about that. And so, you know, many, many people in the world believe that they're not going to get what they need, if they share it, they don't have that approach, that indigenous traditional values put forward.

Participant 'F':

I think you hit the nail on the head there Audrey with we live in a 'fear culture'. And it's you know, more people than not, live in that 'fear based' mentality. And that's where we have to start as addressing the fear. What are they really afraid of? Like, what are you afraid of by including LGBTQ, physical challenges, mental challenges? What is the fear behind the acceptance?

Audrey:

Right.

Participant 'O':

So, I think as a two spirited person, I think the fear is maybe not wanting to end up like 'that'. You know that, that could happen to them too they could become disabled. And I think the fear of the unknown and the fear of differences is really high and prevalent right now. And we've sort of kind of forgotten like even as you know cultural people that there are differences and those differences should be encompassed and celebrated. Instead of, you know, making it difficult, more difficult for people because you don't want to see it or because you know you're fearful of yourself ending up in a wheelchair or a power chair, or, you know, needing a walker or a cane. So, I think if we start talking about it more. I don't talk about my disabilities and I need to. Or my different abilities and I need to because when people say to me, "Oh O, take the stairs. What are you lazy?" Like I just, sometimes I'll just go eff you and just you know, try to do the stairs and then I get halfway going "Oh, my God, that was a stupid mistake," instead of

saying “no, you know it's none of your business if I take the stairs or the elevator. So basically, back off, leave me alone.”

Participant 'F':

Yeah, I want to say something. So, I'm in a power wheelchair now but you know years before I had a service dog. And so, a lot of times my service dog wasn't welcome and so similar to what you're saying, O, people are scared of what they don't know. But the thing is my dog when she was alive is well trained not to react to things unless I need her to do things for me. But again, somebody said in the chat, they need to be educated because service dogs are there to provide service. They were there - my dog was there to help me in case I fell, had a seizure, in case I got triggered. So, my dog was a working dog, my dog wasn't going to do anything but again, that's the fear that we are all talking about and I, similar to what somebody said, because I had so many barriers each and every time I stopped going to a lot of ceremonies and a lot of things and that added to my depression and my anxiety. And I got into a really bad, I got into a really bad space. So.

Participant 'O':

Can I just quickly say something too, in terms of traditional indigenous spaces? So, I also use medical marijuana as a pain, coping mechanism. But back in the day, if you said that to a healer or traditional person, they'd be like, “well, you're on drugs. And it's drugs.” And it's like, “no, it's medicine”. “Well, no it's not. If you take a medicine, you should be taking pharmaceuticals.” It's like well, what's the difference between taking pharmaceuticals and taking cannabis? Or medical marijuana, even though it's cannabis? Right? So, they need to be aware of that also, that people are taking medical marijuana, it's not you know a drug, it's a medicine and to acknowledge that and respect that.

Audrey:

Awesome points.

Wanda, do we have, is there anything that you want to add? Any question or anything that I might have missed? As well as everyone else on the call because we've pretty much wrapped up all the questions unless there's something that you folks want to add? Or Wanda, if there's comments or questions from your end?

Wanda:

I really want to thank all of you for having the courage to, to tell us what you need. Being someone who does ceremonies and being someone who's done ceremony for a long time, a long time I don't think we were looking at accommodations before. The attitudes toward medicinal marijuana, as you said. ‘It's a drug so don't come to ceremony. Use the term clean. No use no drugs.’ The other issue is a skirt. You have to wear skirt to come to ceremony. I don't think that was a part of our culture, before Christopher Columbus got lost. Everyone was accepted. But we're all caught up in colonization and not doing those things. I mean I've actually made accommodations I don't even say it's accommodation. I just like to take care of people's needs in my sweat or ceremony. But I got to say that some of the things you've said

today, I've not thought of. I've not thought of to ask. You know, S you mentioned your service dog and I know for a fact that around ceremony you're not supposed to have a dog.

Audrey:

You accommodated me, Wanda, remember?

Wanda:

Oh, yes. Yeah,

Audrey:

Me, I had my Morty Wolf-Dog join parts of my fast.

Wanda:

Yes, I did and I can tell you that I got a lot of heat from a lot of people who were there, saying we are doing ceremony "why is that dog here?" And I would just ignore them. So, there's that pressure as well, from the others who are attending ceremonies, that when you do make accommodations and it's not even accommodations, I don't even like to use that word. But when you clearly make the space, a space where everybody can come there are individuals ... there are lots of people who give you backlash. Or who gossip. Or, you know downright intervene and tell you, 'No, you can't do that'. You know I mean we started 'genderless sweats' at X (Toronto Agency), a really long time ago, because there was a trans community that needed us. We just didn't tell anybody what we were doing because they wouldn't have let it happen. You know, there's a base 'line' that, that people have; I don't agree with; that says 'One, you have to wear a skirt. Two, you have to not be on drugs or alcohol, you have to be 'clean' for a period of time." And that language is so bad but I don't think it was like that, you know. And I, personally myself, now that I don't have the use of my legs anymore and I can't even crawl into a sweat; one to do one, or even to participate in one because I don't have the use of my legs; I started to grieve that process. I'm like 'Oh, man, that was one of the things that I had' you know, I love to do and that's why we started this. It's like, why can't we build a 'disabled sweat' where people can get in and out. And so, you're helping - thank you so much, with all of the things that you're saying, that I realized that if four of us were in there, it's going to have to be a pretty big sweat. You know and that's okay it's going to have to be bigger. It's going to have to be taller. Or we're going to have to accommodate and doing a sweat is saying, 'Okay, we'll take the first four people because all eight of us can't get in there.' Because you know, I don't know how you're going to get in with your chair. I'm willing to look at that and go 'okay, how do we do that?' Full moon ceremonies I agree that you have to be able to have access and you can't go to the beach. You know and so where can we do them you know? Allen Gardens maybe, which is a reserve in Toronto so, you know we started the 'Neechie circle' anybody can go. You know, we got flack and we still get flack. So, we need, you know I don't know, I don't know what we need honestly right now but I'm willing to put it out there. I'm willing to try and change that, that we can all pray together. You know, no matter where we're from, or who we are, and I know that, you know, that quantum blood kind of stuff is a big thing that our people shouldn't be even looking at. Yes, many of us have status cards and many of us don't you know and so many of us were 60s scoop and rather than all of that, that you know,

we question people. You tell me that you're Cree, for instance, and like 'what's your community?' You may not even know your community. There's not a community, you know like our community's Toronto, we accept each other. And that should be enough. And so, it's warmed my heart to hear a lot of things that you've said. And I know it's taking a lot of courage. And I know, I, myself want to apologize to all of you, for those things that have hurt you. Those things that stopped you from coming back, those things that now you do on your own, but thankfully, you haven't stopped praying. So, it's another challenge and I know that when I; you know began to accept medical marijuana; people began to say that I was addicted to opiates. That's why I was doing that. Like, really? No, I wasn't, I wasn't even taking any opiates but now that I'm into harm reduction and work with homeless individuals, or people who still use substances to survive, you know they get treated like shit. You know and now with the encampments X (Toronto agency) and other native organizations are partnered with having people being picked up from the parks, by April 6. By eight, you can't go to X (Toronto shelter) if you're still using. You know and if you use, you know, you got to 'be off all drugs', whatever that means. I don't know if that means you're got to be off your blood pressure medication but when you bring that up, they just roll their eyes at you. But we're going to stay focused and we're going to change things together. And the more people that teach us about what you need, then we're going to be able to accommodate or, I don't even know if it's 'accommodation' let's just say, we want to 'include' everybody. And how can we do that? Well, I'm committed to building a sweat that I can go into. And I haven't seen F in a lot of years and I'm hoping that that's the space she can get into with the walker. You know or, I know you don't have your dog right now S, but you could have come with your dog. You know, but I know that it's a space we can all go to. What it's going to look like I have no idea. But I understand now that I'm in a wheelchair. I was in a scooter before and I know the discrimination around just that; while I was in that, in that space; was yeah, I didn't fit in places I couldn't get in, you know. Yeah, and it was like, well get off the scooter and like, you know, well, it's painful. So, it's the beginning of a new day. And so, thank you all for you know sharing. Some of you I haven't seen you for years. D, nice to see you, F, all of you - I haven't seen some of you in a lot of years you know let's do this together. I've never forgotten you in my heart you know. So okay, I really want to apologize if I was one of those people who didn't make you feel comfortable in the early days because in the early days at X (Toronto Agency), I have to say that I, you know, I didn't practice harm reduction I was a bitch. And I'm going to say that I know that. Right now, that I understand harm reduction and harm reduction is love and you know it's a whole different life for me. With those individuals who are elitist within our community, or misogynistic. We have to do what we have always done, don't let them get away with it. And we will create our own ceremonies together, like you have created your own ceremony at home. Don't let anybody tell you it's wrong. If you have respect and love in your heart and you do ceremony at home, hey that's awesome because that's ceremony. The ancestors will be with you. And also, that's the important thing. You know, people call me or ask me "Can you come over and smudge my house?" I'm like, "why can't you smudge your own house?" Really, they make you think that you can't and I always ask, "Well why? Why do you want to come over to smudge your house?" You know and the thing was 'well I'm not worthy enough, and I don't know how to do it.' And I'm like, 'Okay, let me teach you how, let me give you the smudge bowl and the sage that you need to do it yourself'. And so, the one thing that I do and I have

been doing for years because we couldn't light a smudge in a hospital or a funeral home or many places where I had to do my work, I boil my medicines on the stove and I get a smudge. Make it al liquid that I can spray. And I use it still and it's no different. And it helps because you know you can't burn sage anywhere anymore. And a lot of PSWs come in and say "I know you have to smoke your medicine but could you please not do it an hour before I get here?" And I'm like "smoke my medicine what are you talking about?" And then I realized it was the sage. So, then I questioned her: "How do you know what, how do you know what marijuana smells like? And it's not marijuana and if you say that again to me, you racist bitch, I'm not even going to let you in my house." But it's those things that really, those little, those little things that people hurt you, add up and it pokes at your Spirit and then you got all those 'holes' in there. Because people have hurt you and you just let it be. Like people who think that you're drunk C. It hurts the Spirit and then you apologize or you do something and then that little poke, there's a little hole in there. And eventually, you got a lot of holes in there that you to repair yourself. But don't ignore it, you do have to you know, recognize that it's painful, not on a spiritual level. Not even on a physical level. Like O takes the stairs. Every time someone says that to you it makes you doubt whether you can do the stairs or not and then you try it and then what happens? You're back in the area of being in pain a lot. So that's, that's hurtful. So, let's close those little pokes that people have left you with. Left all of us with their ignorance. Or their own laziness. They don't understand who we are, they don't want to know. Because you know what it's still not a safe place to be an indigenous woman in this country and we have to watch out for each other because you might go missing. So, I think the questions are great, I think the answers that you've given are phenomenal and I'm looking forward to working on, making it physically accessible for everyone to come. I don't know how yet, but I don't know you got to go with the bigger sweat that means you need more rocks. You know and I have been in a sweat with 150 rocks, but it was big. So, I know that it's, it's possible. So, thanks. Okay, that's it. Thanks.

Audrey:

I just want to say thank you too because I was really blown away by everyone's amazing contributions. But Wanda, would you like to send us off and then we'll end the meeting?

Participant 'C':

Can I just add one thing before Wanda does that?

As we are all here this afternoon talking, one thing that constantly came to my mind was around physical disabilities, or physical mental health issues that we have is the lateral violence that it causes all of us. And that needs to stop, even the stigma and the way people talk to us, the language they use, the wording they use. Yeah, stuff like that, right? And well Wanda, while you were talking, I had a vision what the lodge, the sweat lodge could look like.

Wanda:

Alright, well, we'll have to meet and we can talk.

Participant 'C':

It's a huge one, Mama.

Wanda:

Well, you know, hey, that's the way we've got to do it. That's the way we got to do it.

Participant 'C':

And then in, I don't know where, a part of that sweat lodge but I see the blue, blue Thunderbird.

Wanda:

Great. Thanks for sharing your vision.

Participant 'C':

You're welcome.

Audrey:

Thank you for that. Yeah, before Wanda sends us off, I wanted to let everyone know that we do have \$100 honorarium for each of you and if you could just send me the email address. Is that - just wanted to check that email transfer is okay, but that works for all of you? Everyone okay with that? And should I use the same email that I've been using to communicate with you? And thank you again so much, it's been really meaningful and really powerful to hear.

Wanda:

So, it's not about a closing or an ending, it's about a new beginning. It's about moving from this time and place. Although we're in different places we're in the same space, our spirits are connected. Creator, as we move forward from here, please surround us with people's kind words, loving words, no lateral violence, no violence. Let us find words that we can connect and communicate with each other, that make us each feel special. So, we take with us, as we move from this space, the friends we have met, we met, the laughter we have shared and the knowledge that we have learned. And we take that with us and put it in a space that we will calculate it, so we can calculate change. Thank you for surrounding us, ancestors today, giving us the words and the stories that we needed to hear. If there's anybody here, who needs that special touch, surround them and that unconditional love, that's the universe has for us. Wrap them in your arms or your paws, or your wings. And the many things that you have to comfort her. As we enter the dream space tonight, we lay our head to rest. Fill our dreams, with good things, good feelings. And then when the day means the night at the crack of dawn, it is then time for you to go home, to that place. And take with you all of those things that make us uncomfortable. Thank you, Creator and ancestors for being with us today. And there's one thing that we can give each other that we can never take back and that's the gift of time. So, thank you. For sacrificing that gift of time and spending it with us today. So that we can make change. Know that your courage has not, has been seen and heard. That your words have been accepted in a way that we are going to, we are - not even 'try' because I don't believe in 'try' - put that in to what we're going to build, what we're going to create together. So, Creator, thanks, for the love and the laughter, the joy, the re-connection to people I haven't seen in a very, long time. But I haven't forgotten. So miigwetch all my relations, thanks everyone, have a great rest of your day.