



Transcript of Interview with Denise McCuaig

[00:07]

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Denise McCuaig, and I'm a Métis Elder residing in Kamloops, British Columbia, in the unceded territory of the Secwepemcúcw. I joined the Promoting Life Together Collaborative as a coach two years ago. And when I was first contacted, it was described to me that I would be a coach for one or two teams somewhere in northern Canada that were looking at doing a suicide prevention project with youth, and that they were partnering with non-

original description that I received, but it very quickly became much more than that. So, as a coach and a mentor, I think one of the things that I brought to the table was not only my understanding and knowledge as an Indigenous woman, but was the fact that I had worked within the health care system in Canada as a director of Aboriginal health. And so I brought forward sort of a double-edged sword, if you will, in that I had a moccasin in both worlds: my ancestry and my lived experience as a Métis and my lived experience of working in the mainstream health care system, attempting to get them to respond in a more appropriate way to the needs of Indigenous patients.

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So the very first experience I think I had with CFHI at the time, the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement, looking at entering into this space was that we, as Indigenous participants and partners, provided them feedback that suicide prevention was not terminology that we wanted to use, that we wanted it to be strengths-based, positive-focused, and that really, prevention is about promoting life. And they received that really well and embraced it.

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In addition to that, they took us as coaches, who were originally designed to be supporting the projects across Turtle Island, and they embedded us into their guidance group. So already sitting at the guidance table were their Indigenous partners, the First Peoples Wellness Circle, the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and the Aboriginal Advisory Committee to the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention, or what we call CASP. And then we joined as coaches. And so that was the first time that I think I saw that model where the front-line work was directly linked into the guiding body. And it became so much more rich for that, I think, because we were able to share the experiences on the front line in real time. And then the guidance group members were able to dialogue about the impact of that and give feedback that would directly support the challenges or further build on the strengths that were happening at a community level. So it was almost like you were cutting out the risk of misinterpretation by a middleman. You were creating an environment where things could happen in real time. And I

