

Conor: Welcome to the Circle of Knowledge podcast sponsored by the Edmonton Community Foundation. Today's episode is a previously recorded presentation featuring Doreen Thunder and she will be speaking about indigenous women in leadership and her own personal journey. Please enjoy.

Doreen Thunder: I'm so excited to be here to talk to you a little bit about what being an indigenous woman in leadership means to me. This is something that I'm very, very, very passionate about and I, first of all, wanted to just thank everybody for taking the time out of your lunch hour to be here and to listen to the stories that I have to share. I am very appreciative to the organizers of this event for putting on such a great Indigenous Speaker Series. I am super honored to be here today and I can't thank you guys enough. Absolutely, I love NorQuest. I'll tell you why I love NorQuest.

At that time in my life... I had come here in 2015, so at that time in my life I was suffering from low self-esteem and self-worth. I had at that time just gotten out of an abusive relationship. This gentleman that I was with for four years, I had suffered physical, mental, and emotional abuse and I struggled a lot with self-bad talk. That self-worth was just... it was gone. It just wasn't there. At the end of this relationship, I was looking for a way to transition into the workplace and I had my second baby girl. I was thinking, "What's a fast program that I could get into that would lead me into some type of work?"

I knew just being indigenous that I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to actually enter into a government position. I ended up researching all these positions and I came across the Administrative Professional Certificate Program and I thought, "Wow, four months. That's great. I can get into the federal government." With a one-month work practicum, I could get in and hopefully transition over. I thought, "I'll enter this certificate program." I ended up enrolling. Little did I know that NorQuest would actually instill in me a lot of values that I couldn't see at that time in my life.

I remember it was one of the programs that was like, How to Be Professional in The Workplace, or it was like some workbook that we had had and this workbook... It was near the end of the semester and I had gone through and completed all these courses and I was avoiding this one question and it was a mirror assignment. I thought, "What kind of is this?" It read, "Look in the mirror and tell us the first three things that come to your mind when you see yourself."

I thought, "Oh heck no, that's not going to happen," because I had struggled immensely for the past four years with who I was as a person that I didn't know. I was scared to look in the mirror and see what I actually thought about myself. It was a small subject on self-worth and self-esteem because in order to get into the workplace, you have to carry yourself in a certain way and you have to have a certain level of self-esteem. I knew that I didn't have it. It wasn't there. All I wanted to just get through the course and get to work. How come you just couldn't do that?

But I'm so glad that they had this one little mirror assignment and I had avoided it and avoided it and avoided it. But by the time that I had to look at this question, it was near the end of the semester. When I did look in the mirror, the first three words that came to my mind were determined, I was capable, and I was willing because I had been pushed to do all of my assignments. I had been encouraged and supported by staff at NorQuest College to continue to... I was pushed past exhaustion and every barrier that I thought I had, I had been pushed past that point and I had succeeded so far.

When I did look in the mirror and I wrote down, "I'm determined, I am capable, and I'm willing. I'm determined to succeed in this program and I'm capable of handling any tasks that come before me and I'm willing to do that hard work because I just realized that about myself." That was a very pivotal time in my life and I actually carry those in my life every day. That is something that I carry with me when I'm at work and throughout my life as well.

Anytime NorQuest ask me to come and say a few words... I can't thank NorQuest enough for helping me transition and helping me to realize who I really am. The fact that you guys have this great support system and I actually see a few of my old... my teacher here as well, Ashley. She teaches in the Administrative Professional Certificate Program and I'm just super appreciative of NorQuest, and what they offer, and the fact that they are putting on this Indigenous Speaker Series is absolutely amazing.

In talking about indigenous women in leadership, I wanted to touch on the three obvious categories being indigenous, being a woman, and leadership. Now, I had the opportunity about I would say a month ago to come and chat on behalf of Indigenous Services Canada, for indigenous recruitment. Conor manager of Indigenous Relations had contacted me and said, "Hey, could you do a little half hour presentation on indigenous recruitment?" I had the opportunity to share a little bit about my story. But some of you may have not have heard that and how I transitioned in my personal life and my education. I'll just kind of recap that for you as well.

First of all, I'm a momma of a 19 year old and I know he's 19. It's going to be crazy. I have a 19 year old. He's diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and he was diagnosed at the age of four years old. I also have a six year old. So, yeah. Big age gap, a very big age gap. When I got pregnant and he was only 13, I was like, "I can see the light." I'm like, "I'm almost done. He's 13 and then, well, nope." But I'm super blessed to have both of my children in my life and they both are... My son is just a genuine, pure spirit and he's just honest and true to who he is and exactly who he is. I love that about him.

My daughter is just a bubble of... she's joy. She's absolute joy. I just want to mention I'm a momma and in regards to my education, I do have my NAIT Photographic Technology diploma and I graduated from NAIT back in 2009 and then I was self-employed for quite a few years actually. Quintin was about 10 at the time when I graduated. I went in and I thought, "I'm going to be an artist." I

pursued being self-employed and I didn't do too bad actually. I was able to develop contracts with First Nations people and work with the province of Alberta and go in photograph medical facilities and really see what the underlying issues were and really get in touch with First Nations communities.

It pulled out my heart, but I wasn't making a difference in any way. I was photographing. I was preparing brochures, and pamphlets, and doing all these work for First Nation communities or the province of Alberta and developing website material. But I thought, "There's things here that I'd like to address that I'm not addressing, so how can I make a difference?" It was at that time in my life that my father wasn't doing very well. He had suffered his own trauma in his life and we all know about residential schools and the hardships that it caused and all the hurt within the communities.

Even though he was able to do amazing things with his life, he was a Canadian champion boxer. He was an indigenous activist. He traveled all over. He even ran from Edmonton all the way to New York City. There's a sacred bundle that belongs in our family and it's in the New York Museum. He ran and it took him nine months to run from here to New York City. He was covered, widespread news media. He was a great, great, great man, but he couldn't get away from that hurt. He suffered for the last 12 years of his life on the streets of Edmonton and fell completely to alcoholism.

It was a hardship when he passed away. I was like, "What am I doing to help?" Sure, I had photographed certain things and that didn't really seem to do much. I thought, "What else can I do to help?" I decided to go and work for Hope Mission. I worked for Hope Mission for two years and I loved it, absolutely loved it. I got to work with the people and reach on a one-on-one basis. My favorite was working in detox. Detox houses about 70 intoxicated gentlemen a night. I remember being the only female staff working there and I enjoyed it. I felt like I was talking and helping on a one-on-one basis to my dad's friends, to people that he surrounded himself with, people he even cared about.

But then I thought, "Well, I'm not really making a difference." Then again, I started to question myself, "Well, what else can I do to make a difference?" At that time, I had started a relationship and as I mentioned, it was a relationship that ended in physical, and mental, and emotional abuse. Both of his parents had gone to residential school, so they had suffered that cycle and that abuse that comes with that. This was passed down to him, and so he was never really taught how to love. It was passed down to me.

At that time, that's when I thought, "I'm going to enroll and do better for myself." That's when I felt really low and that's when I had applied to be at NorQuest College, because now I had two little ones, two children, and I only had a Photography Diploma and I couldn't transition into the workplace. I thought, "I'll enter into NorQuest and take the Administrative Professional Certificate Program." That has actually led to some great things. I was able to secure employment with Indigenous Services Canada and I've had so many

wonderful opportunities, especially with the new outlook that I put on myself. I just held true to my own values of being determined, capable, and willing to do these tasks.

I really pushed forward in seeking opportunity. I would be one of those people, like if a cubicle was empty and I knew a position was vacant, I was like, "Well, I see that one's empty right there." I'm like, "Where's the manager?" I'm like, "I see you, you need to hire me, right?" I was one of those. I would seek out opportunities and because I was really aggressive in my career, they would say, "Yeah, give her a chance."

Then I was able to take on different opportunities. I was able to work in emergency management. We deal with all First Nation communities all within Alberta. I was able to work within emergency management and help with fire, flood mitigations, road repairs, and I enjoyed the opportunity and I learned a lot. Then I saw that there was an opportunity in water strategy and I thought, "Oh yeah, I want that." Then I stocked the manager of that position and he would walk by my cubicle and I'd be like... and then he was like, "Ah." Then eventually he was like, "Yeah, I know Doreen. I know I'm working on it."

I was able to then take a position in water strategy and I'm like, "I'm determined, I can do it. I know I can, I'm capable, I'm willing to do the work. Put me in there." So he did, and I was able to work with drinking water advisories all across Alberta. That's something that is so important, so important. You see things and you go to these meetings and you're like, "Wow." To be in a position where you're not helping someone one-on-one, but you're affecting change across all of Alberta, you're instilling new water treatment plants, you're training new employees to run those water treatment plants. I thought, "Wow, I'm actually in a position where I feel like I'm affecting change now. I'm not one-on-one anymore. I'm actually doing something that says something and being indigenous, that's important to me."

I also had the opportunity to be a supervisor in social development as a social support officer. That position, we deal with income assistance, and social programs, and child out of parental homes and trying to make sure that children stay on reserves and that are not taken away from their families because we're all about community. Then I saw a whole another different world. I was able to sit on meetings and discuss, how can we affect change and what programs can we implement that would make things better for First Nation communities?

As a social support officer, I would look at trends. I was in charge of a data unit team and we would look at trends. I would look at those trends and I would say, "I see this trend happening. It's all within this certain age group. What program can we implement that would help that age group?" That felt really, really, really good for me. I felt like I was contributing on a larger scale. I'm very thankful for this opportunity that I've been given. That's a little bit about my education and how I came from photography all the way into working for the Government of Canada.

It's been like a transition and it's been like a personal growth, and it's been a wonderful process. I just... Sorry, here. Now, I lost where I am. Oh yes. I wanted to talk about what it means to be indigenous and what being indigenous has instilled in me. Being indigenous is culture, it's resilience, and it's strength. I remember the culture and the teachings that I had growing up.

My mom was raised and born in Detah in Northwest Territories and she grew up hunting and fishing and enjoying the land. She spent many of her months on the trap lines and just living land in the midnight sun. It was a beautiful, beautiful childhood that she had. She did also go to residential school and that was a definite hardship for her. But the one thing that my momma always taught me was that letting go is a gift that you give yourself, that when you let go you are allowing yourself a life of freedom. She always told me that. She was able to let go and instead instill light and grace where there was once hurt.

But I still remember that we still grew up with all those culture in the home. When she got married and her and my dad moved and we settled in Edmonton, when we grew up, I remember the traditional foods. Anytime we were gifted caribou meat or moose meat, she could be in the kitchen slicing it up and hanging up lines across the house because she wanted dry meat. We had this big bright yellow rope and we had the smallest house, but she would hang up all these lines all across from each side of the kitchen.

I remember those were the happiest times that I can remember growing up because in elementary... My brother and I were not even a year apart. We would run home and try to get to that dry meat as fast as we could. I remember we'd be teasing each other and try to make each other trip and fall. Then we'd be laughing and heading home and we would run into the house, grab some dry meat off that line, and then go run outside and play. I mean, the other kids in the neighborhood did think we were weird because we would have pieces of dry meat hanging out of our mouths. I'm talking full on slices of dry fish and dry meat, but those were some of the happiest memories that we had.

I also remember culture and all the teachings. I remember my kohkom had stayed with us and she was always in the upstairs bedroom and I would go and I would sit down with her and she would just have all of these deer high trimmings and large pieces of deer hide. She was just sitting there sewing and I would just sit there and, "I want you to come in, my girl. Come in." I would sit down and I would watch her and I was like, "How does she get all those beads so perfectly?" I didn't realize that it was that labor of love.

That year, we had walked around in beautiful made garments and we had mukluks and nice fur like jacket. We were so warm that winter and all three of us did. My brother got a full outfit, so did I, and so did my sister. But when we would walk out, when we go for family outings and when we go to West Edmonton Mall people will look at us like we're walking out of a museum because it was just beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful. I really enjoyed

learning about my culture and my history and have a lot of great memories from growing up that way.

I think being indigenous also is about having resilience. Sorry. Oh I was going to say about my kohkom sewing. The other thing I was going mention, there are a few home essentials if you are native, rope. My mom was going to hate me for this duct tape and tarp because you can fix anything with rope, duct tape, and tarp. When I was little, I would go to other people's houses and I would go and play and I'd be like, "Oh, but little like Susie, she has her own room. How come I don't get my own room?" She's like, "Well, you ain't them."

Then she's like, "Oh, you want your own room?" I was like, "Yeah, I don't want to share with my sister anymore." She's like, "I'll make you your own room." She goes and she gets a rope and she gets some nails and a hammer and she ties up the rope on one end. She's like... ties up, rope on the other end. Then she puts like bed sheets over and she's like, "There, you got your own room." But you know what? That home, even though I had to share with my sister and I would try to make my own room, it was still a home of love. She always provided a home of love. I'm super... I'm grateful. I'm grateful to my mother for the type of home that she provided.

When I tell these stories sometimes she's like, "Just making up stories." She's like, "They're not even true." I'm like, "Yeah, they are." She's right there. Hi, mom. They're true. I love you. Being indigenous is also being resilient. Resilience comes from many life lessons, many, many, many life lessons, sometimes hard lessons. They're not easy ones to learn, but it teaches you to be stronger as a person. I got my first lesson when I was about 16 years old. We had to go grocery shopping and my momma said, "We're in the Westmount area." She said, "We're going to go to Safeway." I said, "Alrighty." She's like, "Well, it's going to be a while. Why don't you go and do a little bit of shopping around?"

At that time, there was Zellers attached to that Westmount Mall. I thought, "Well, all right, I'll go have a look around." So I did. Being 16 and not having any money. I mean, what are you going to do? Being the girly girl, I thought, "Well, I'm going to go shop around for a little bit of makeup." That's what I did. But I kind of noticed that someone was in the area, but then I was like, "Whatever." Then some time had gone by and I had noticed that same person kind of still in the same aisle. I thought, "I've seen you like three times now." That's just weird. I thought, "Well, it's been about 45 minutes and she said 45 minutes. So, I'm going to head back into Safeway."

As I stepped from Zellers into Safeway, someone grabbed my arm and I had three people around me and they had grabbed me like this. I remember looking at my momma and she had this look on her face because people were grabbing me. They took my bag and they started searching through it like I had stolen something. This happened in front of everybody at the checkout in Safeway. I was mortified. I was bawling, I was crying because I'd never stolen a thing in my whole life. My momma was so upset that she's like, "We're going to go and

we're going to get an apology and we're going to go to customer service. They're going to make this right. This is not right. You don't get treated like that."

We went to customer service and they said, "We don't know who you're talking about. We don't have any secret shoppers here. We have nobody that does that. I don't know what you're talking about. So sorry, we can't help you here." That was my first lesson in resilience in being an indigenous person. So, what did I do? I better prepared myself because that's what you have to do and you build strength. Then I thought, "Okay. Well, what are the rules?" I know that someone can't... they can't put a finger on you. They cannot touch you. They are not allowed to search your bag unless you say it's okay. I learned those things.

My best friend at the time had worked at Walmart and she said, "We do have secret shoppers and we do tell them to watch out for indigenous people." You learn about that stereotype and... Sorry. That was one of the lessons that I learned in being resilient and now because I'm better prepared, I don't let those things affect me. I just keep holding my head up high, keep doing what I do, keep remembering the stories that my momma taught me, and I don't let things bother me. Now, we live in the hood. Right now, I'm not going to lie, we live in the hood and across the street we have No Frills.

My baby girl... she was like, "We love No Frills because no frills has No Frills, right?" I was like, "Oh what? I think so." We go to No Frills. I try to avoid that place because they also have a secret shopper. The last three times I have been followed by the same exact person, even to this day. The first two times I ignored it. I thought, "It's not worth it. It's not worth it at all." Then the third time he was coming down the aisle and I was like, "Man, I can't find the juice boxes." I was like, "Where are they?" I'm like, When going down every aisle, and then I go down the next aisle and then there he'd be, and so eventually I was like, "Well..." I was like, "If you're going to follow me anyways, could you at least tell me where the juice boxes are?"

He's like, "Oh, excuse me madam, I don't know what you're talking about." I was like, "Well, I've seen you here the last three times and you've been following the last three times. Honestly, I really can't find the juice boxes, so if you work here, maybe you could just help me and find the juice boxes." Then he was like, "Is it really that obvious?" He full on admitted it. "Is that really that obvious?" I'm like, "Yeah, it is." But he still shops there and he's still doing this thing there. We try to avoid it, but you just have to find that resilience within and keep moving forward the best way that you can.

Our culture and our history also gives us strength. We see many, many struggles in our own communities and it's a hardship that you feel, and we've suffered it in our family and... I'm sorry. Even with my own father and his passing away, and turning to addictions, it's an epidemic that we see and it's something that does need to be addressed. That's another reason why I love working for Indigenous Services Canada because we're taking steps with social programs

and with funding and implementing employment supports so that we can address those First Nation issues. But this is something that I have experienced even in my own life and seeing it all around me and seeing people fall, and not having my father there.

Then most recently, this last year, has been the greatest struggle I would say of my life and I'm still recovering. I'm still recovering. Last year, I was still dealing with a situation and four years of court with my ex for all that physical, and emotional, and physical abuse. I had lived in court for four years and last year it wrapped up. I finally was able to move forward and let go of living in the past and be free. Last year, I also lost a cousin to fentanyl overdose. It's hard to see people you love just struggling.

Last June, we also lost my son's father. This one's like fairly recent. He had been in my life for 22 years. 22 years. He was a love. We met when we were in high school and we had so many great memories together and he taught me how to drive. Why I ran a stoplight or a stop sign and he was like, "You need to stop." I'm like, "Oh my God, Oh my God." He's like, "You need to stop. No, you need to stop."

I panicked and I just floored it. He was like, "Oh my God, what are you doing?" Also, I remember the first time I met his parents, I had gotten all dressed up and I thought, "Wow, this is the actual meet. I'm going to meet the parents." We're walking hand in hand and going up the street and he was all loving and everything like, "Oh, you're going to meet my parents." Then he was holding my hand and then he saw there was a sprinkler. There was a sprinkler on someone's lawn, and he dragged me right through that sprinkler. I showed up knocking at the parents' door soaking wet. He was laughing hysterically. He was having the best time of his life. All they said was, "Oh my, you need a towel."

I was like, "Yeah, I do." But that was my first introduction and 22 years of co-parenting, of being there for each other. We may not have been together, but we loved each other. We supported each other. I had held him so many times during his addictions and I had to make that choice of just letting him go. He later thanked me for that because that's what got him clean. He was clean for eight years until he decided to do it one last time. That one last time is what took his life.

I've only cut my hair two times in my life, and that was once when I lost my father. I braided it, chops it off, I'm going to give it to my daddy. Then when John passed away, I'm not sure if I didn't do it until a couple of months afterwards. I don't know if it was an emotional cut. It wasn't quite the same as my dad's. It took me a little bit longer to cut my hair, but then I thought, "I've always wanted short hair."

John lived his life free. If he loved you, he would tell you he loved you. There was no fear there. He didn't care if you turned him away, he would still say, "I love you no matter what." I thought, "I want to live my life like that." I chopped

off my hair and I will say that it is a challenge. It is a challenge being indigenous and not having your hair. It challenges me to just look at myself completely for who I am when I look in the mirror and not anybody else. But those were the only two times that I did cut my hair.

I also wanted to talk about being a woman and what being a woman has taught me. Has taught me kindness, perseverance, and compassion. 100%, absolutely. We build perseverance in our daily walks, especially as parents. Man or woman, we all know that we build that. We build our patience as well. My momma always told me the importance of kindness and grace as a woman. She would sit down and she would talk to me and tell stories to me about her childhood and she would share things with me. All I thought was, "I just want to go outside and play. But she took the time. It was valuable to her and now it's valuable to me. She would say, "You need to be graceful in your beauty."

I would say, "What does that mean?" She'd be like, "You need to be graceful in your beauty because then it'll translate on the outside." I'm very thankful for that lesson. She would always say, "Remember Doreen, be graceful." She would always say that to me. I'm super... like I just... She's an amazing... absolutely amazing, amazing woman. She also serves others and she also taught me that by serving others, that's the greatest gift that we can give. She still does this to this day. She serves others. This has helped me when I was working in detox and serving other people, and being a woman and being taught to be graceful in my beauty and being the only woman that worked on the detox team.

Keep in mind there was like 70 intoxicated gentlemen on a nightly basis and things would get rowdy and you didn't know what was going to happen. Sometimes, there were safety concerns but it would be interesting if something was breaking out, they'd be like, "Doreen." I would go in there like, "Hey, what's going on here? Better settle down there." It would just break it up a little bit or other times I would just come in and I would just be like, "Hey." It would just... The demeanor of the whole place, it was probably about this big, the size of this room was 70 mats on the floor, one space. That demeanor would change and they would say, "We got your back, don't worry about anything in here."

They were no longer worried about scrapping each other or what beef they had on the streets because they were soft within. I think women, we have that quality and that gift especially being caregivers, we have that nice special graceful quality about us that we can just tone that down a little bit, that it didn't have to resort to any violence. Detox was one of the greatest times of my life. As I mentioned, perseverance in parenthood even as a mother. As I mentioned, my son was diagnosed with autism and he was diagnosed at the age of four.

But at the age of two, I didn't know what was wrong with him because I didn't have an understanding. I just thought I'm being a bad momma. I don't know. He would go to daycare and he would just hit himself constantly and they accused me of abusing him. They said, "Oh, that's abuse in the home. We're going to call

social services on you." I said, "I don't. That's my baby." But I didn't know what was wrong with him. My momma said, "No, you let them come. You let them come into the home and they will see that this is a home of love."

They came into the home and they said, "This is not what we thought. This is not what we're here for. This is a different issue." He was able to get the help that he needed, two years, medical exams, EEGs, MRIs, hearing tests. He had 11 doctors. He had 11 doctors. I learned perseverance and I learned to continue and to keep moving forward through everything. Even after he got his diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, they said, "Oh great. He has the diagnosis. Now, he can go into IBI, an early intervention programming."

I said, "Wonderful. I'm going to get the support he needs. This is great." They're like, "You're also going to have to take a parenting class." I said, "What?" One of the things that I learned is through the parenting classes, compassion for yourself as a person. I went to take this parenting class and I thought, "I don't need a parenting class. I've been parenting already. Why do I need a parenting class?"

I went to this parenting class and the lady stood up in front of the room with a nice big screen like this, and we were all in our seats. Then she goes on to continue. She's like, "If your child is suffering from behavioral issues, maybe you need to look at the source." I was like, "What?" "You need to separate the bad behavior from what is really autism." I thought, "Well, I don't know." She's like, "So, if you're looking to separate that behavior of what is autism and truly autism like sensory issues or whatever else, you got to separate that bad behavior."

Then basically she was implying that it was parental influence. I remember just being livid. I stood up in that class and I said, "Excuse me." I said, "I think you're being rude." As I stood up and started to yell, I thought, "Oh, there is a dose of my own medicine there. I'm just going to sit down. I'm just going to be quiet. I'm going to listen to what you have to say." Then I learned that I had to be compassionate on myself, that children are a reflection of who you are and they're a great resource for learning who to become.

For the next year, I really, really practiced being positive and man, did I see a difference? An absolute difference. I was amazed that I could separate that behavior from the autism and we still work hard at it each and every day, absolutely. But I think just being a woman in today's society, we also are supposed to be independent as well, in addition to being caregivers. All of these things lead to great leadership. All of these things and life lessons that I learned along the way, they lead to becoming a great leader.

What does leadership mean to me? Leadership is compassion. When I work for a boss who is very compassionate towards me, I'm like, "Wow, you're a great person." When they look at themselves for the solution, instead of looking at the employees, I'm like, "Wow, you're a great employer." When I think about a

great employer, it's someone down here lifting someone else up, right? How can I help you succeed? What can I do for you today? Not what can you do for me as an employee, but like, "What can I do for you to help you along your road?"

I think we all do that and everyone has their own story, and great gifts, and qualities that they bring to leadership. As hard as my struggle was, I'm very thankful that I wouldn't change anything. I wouldn't change anything that I have gone through, I wouldn't change the hurt. I wouldn't even change the autism. He is a genuine boy of true love and honesty. You think when you have kids that you're going to teach them everything. I don't think that's the case. I think that they teach you so many things. They teach you how to be more compassionate.

Now when I walk the street, I'm like, "I have so much love for special needs people. So much love, so much love for the parent because I know the judgments and I know the hurt that they've gone through." Also, when I'm walking and I see a homeless person, my heart goes out to that person because it could very well have been my dad. My heart goes out to that person too. Even though you've been through all these hurts, and trials, and tribulations in your life, I think that if you can take those things and learn from them and take the characteristics that you want from them, then we would have a more positive society.

When I looked at my presentation today, I had to actually look at all these things and try to categorize them. What did this teach me? What did that teach me? How did I learn and grow from this? I'm super... I'm just... I'm excited to be here and I'm excited that they had kindly offered me to come back and to share my story. I tried to share it in a way that made sense, that I'd speak to being indigenous and being a woman and what that has taught me and how it leads to great leadership.

I hope that you are able to take something with you today to maybe just be encouraged. Maybe it's a similar situation and... I still struggle. I'm not going to stand up here and be like, "Oh, I'm miss wonderful." I still have my struggles. I'm currently suffering from mental and emotional exhaustion. I'm exhausted but I persevere, and I'm determined, and I'm capable of anything. I still stand here and I say, "I'm still ready for today. I might go home and collapse and lay on the couch, but I'm going to get up the next day and still persevere. I'm not giving up."

I think that's the most important thing. I've had the opportunity to work for great, great, great leaders within Indigenous Services Canada even that have said, "I'm going to give you an opportunity. What are you looking for? What are your aspirations?" I'm applying on jobs right now as a manager within Indigenous Services Canada because I want to be one of those leaders that is able to effect change for First Nations across Alberta, but sit in a spot where I can still show compassion and still help others to rise up to where they want to be because that's what I truly think a great leader does.

Everything in my life up to this point, whether it was a good memory or a hard memory or trauma or suffering has led me to exactly who I am today and the outlook that I have today. I don't think that I would change that. I just want to just say... I know I'm running out of time here, so I just want to say thank you so much for your time and taking your lunch hour to be here and just to listen to me just ramble on and on and on here. I truly, truly appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

Conor:

NorQuest College provides learners with a complete education that balances strong academic foundations with indigenous cultures. Our Indigenous Student Center and its extensive network of supports and services includes indigenous student advisors, counselors, elders supports, indigenous awards, and a ceremonial space that allows students to engage in events, smudging, and ceremonies. Learn more at norquest.ca/indigenous.

Circle of Knowledge was recorded at the NorQuest College Innovation Studio, and it's hosted by me yours truly Conor Kerr. Production and editing by Corey Stroeder. Theme song is Eagle Rock by Wes Hutchinson. Special thanks to the Edmonton Community Foundation, whose generous sponsorship made the Indigenous Speaker Series and the Circle of Knowledge podcast a reality.

Lastly and most importantly, big shout out to all the speakers who have been involved. We are incredibly grateful for the knowledge and time you share to make this series a possibility. Thoughts, comments, questions, anything else regarding today's Circle of Knowledge episode, we'd love to hear from you. Contact us at podcast@norquest.ca.