



Feast Centre for
Indigenous STBBI Research

**Indigenous Sexual Futures Podcast Episode 6 – A Love Letter to our Aunties & Kokums:
Honoring STBBI Community Builders**

In this special WORLD AIDS Day episode, Indigenous Sexual Futures puts a spotlight on Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc., a remarkable Indigenous community-based organization in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Doris invited Aunties, Leslie Spillett, Jacqueline Flett and Laverne Gervais to the table to tell the story of Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. The Aunties tell the story of the community ceremony that put the medicine in motion to build this organization in 2001, highlighting key points in the community building story of Ka Ni Kanichihk by visionary community leaders, Elders and Aunties. Ka Ni Kanichihk is a Cree word that means - those who lead.

This podcast went LIVE on World AIDS Day to honor and remember all our relatives and to mark this day in remembrance.

[Intro] (00:00 – 00:27) Doris Peltier:

Indigenous Sexual Futures is produced by the Feast Centre for Indigenous STBBI Research on the ancestral lands of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations within the lands protected by the Dish with One Spoon wampum. We acknowledge the ancestors of this territory, and we also acknowledge the lands and territories of all our guests.

[Intro] (00:54 – 01:57) Doris Peltier:

You are listening to Indigenous Sexual Futures, a podcast storytelling series that is produced by the Feast Centre For Indigenous STBBI Research. And, yes, you heard the word sexual, STBBI's, and research in my first sentence. Hope that caught your attention. But you also heard the word feast, which is what we hope to do with all of you through this podcast storytelling series. You should also know that we are aligning this podcast series with a growing body of work by scholars, artists, writers, and community in Indigenous futurisms. You will have to listen to our series to learn more about what Indigenous futurisms is and why we dropped the word sexual into the middle of Indigenous futurisms. Stay with us. Now let's get started.

(02:01 – 05:05) Doris Peltier:

Adiniwemaaganidook. E-amakawaataagoowazid dizhnigaas, waawaashkesh nidodem. Anishinaabe n'dow. Hello, and welcome to Indigenous Sexual Futures. My name is Doris Peltier. I am Anishinaabe and your host for this podcast storytelling series. Today is World AIDS Day across the

globe. It is also the beginning of the Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week National Campaign here in Canada. I am imagining that there is an extra busyness happening across the country today as we commemorate this important day and week. We are purposely launching this episode of Indigenous Sexual Futures on World AIDS Day to recognize and honour the community builders in our Indigenous communities. This episode is a love letter to the aunties and kokums who have worked hard to community build our Indigenous response for more than 3 decades now. There are unsung heroes in our circles. For this episode, we want to highlight Ka Ni Kanichihk, an Indigenous community based organization in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Ka Ni Kanichihk is Cree and means those who lead. I have invited three aunties to the table to tell the community building story of their organization. Community building is busy. And as an auntie myself, I have been observing this organization for some time. Aunties do that, you know. We quietly observe. Just saying. As an auntie, I am reminded on how I perhaps honed my auntie observation skills even more on my first fast. My fasting lodge was inadvertently built on an anthill, a red anthill to be exact. Eeps. So I decided that I needed to let the ants know that we needed to get along for the short time I was living with them. I prayed, offered tobacco, and asked them to not bite me. And you know what? They never bit me. But what I did do was watch them and notice how busy they worked and how organized they were. Imagine learning about work ethics from red ants. Kind of reminds me of the Indigenous work ethics that I have observed at Ka Ni Kanichihk. The few times that I have had the opportunity to be there. Okay. Let's meet our guests now. We start with meeting the fabulous auntie and elder Leslie Spillet.

(05:05 – 07:00) Leslie Spillet:

Miigwech Doris for this opportunity to talk a little bit about the journey we've been on that is Ka Ni Kanichihk. So [05:14 - Indigenous Language] to all the relatives that will be listening to your podcast for this World AIDS Day, and thank you for the opportunity to highlight the work that we do at Ka Ni Kanichihk. My name is [05:27 - Indigenous Language] painted sky woman, *Mukwa dodem*. I belong to the Bear Clan, and I was born and raised in Treaty 5. So I always say I belong to the land in Treaty 5 where my ancestors are continue to be. So my Indigeneity is from my mother who is Cree and Metis, and my dad was a non-Indigenous settler. And I am, you know, how I identify myself and what's the most important to my identity is that I'm a kokum to just beautiful young women, young children, [06:08 - 06:14 - Unsure of spelling for the 3 names]. And, of course, the other piece of my identity has always been rooted in Treaty 1 where I've been a guest since about 1977. I always say that I'm community-built, you know, because everything I am, you know, who I am, my identity is so strongly rooted in urban Indigenous community here in Winnipeg. And it's just been an honour to walk alongside people who are, in our view, all leaders. All... we're all leaders in our own ways and to try to build, you know, a nonhierarchical relationship, which I think is really important when we think about our relationships within the community. So that's a little bit about me.

(07:00 – 07:32) Doris Peltier:

Miigwech, Lesie. That's beautiful. Yeah. I've known you for some time and a very humble kokum, and I just love that about you. So let's go to, Jackie. Jackie, if you could introduce yourself, and you could tell any little story you want. This is really an opportunity for you to maybe tell us a story that you normally wouldn't tell about yourself so that we could get to know you a little better.

(07:32 – 09:25) Jacqueline Flett:

Okay. Well, thank you for having me this afternoon, Doris. My name is Jacqueline Slett, and I am a single mother of two beautiful boys here in [07:42 - Indigenous Language], which is the Redwater River, [07:46 - Indigenous Language]. I am many stars, and I come from the *Ajijaak Dodem*, the crane clan. I am a mother, an auntie, a friend, and a colleague here at Ka Ni Kanichihk. My story started from Ka Ni Kanichihk a long time ago. I was a student at the Aboriginal Centre and they had a program there. And I initially started there, and I was having some difficulties with the law. And they really helped me guide my way through those and navigate that system. And I was able to graduate with honours, and I took the family support program years later at the Red River College. I, myself, have been walking with HIV on my HIV journey for 12 years, and I've also been an active member in the community supporting Indigenous women here with the pandemic with HIV with Sisters of Fire, which was a group started with Ka Ni Kanichihk to support Indigenous women living well with HIV here in Canada. Some of my favorite things to do are, really taking up beading, but I really have my heart is with my drum. Ever since I started here with Ka Ni Kanichihk, it's like they gave me my voice back, and those songs just really come to me. And I didn't think I had that ability to have a powerful voice and just to be able to hear myself with my community and hear our voices together really make my day here. *Miigwech!*

(09:26 -10:32) Doris Peltier:

Wow. Beautiful. I'm glad you mentioned the drum, Jackie, because, for each of the podcasts, we usually feature a song. So, you know, I'm gonna be asking you to, if you're open to it, to maybe recording yourself on your... on an iPhone or something and sending me that drum song because I'll weave it into this podcast storytelling about Ka Ni Kanichihk. That would be really tremendous. And if Laverne wants to help you with that, because I know you all drum and sing, so thank you for that. Laverne, who is Laverne Gervais? I really, want our listeners to hear a little bit more about you. They probably see you in the community. You're always busy, and I wanna know a bit more about who Laverne Gervais is. It could be a story about your family. It could be a story about your connection to the land. Whatever you wanna share at this time just so we get to know you.

(10:32 – 13:57) Laverne Gervais:

Sure. Yeah. Right now, I'm thinking about I'm the red ant that bites your... So [10:42 - Indigenous Language], my name is Laverne Gervais. I'm a Anishinaabe Dakota and French Canadian from this territory. And, yeah, we chase our roots back here. Well, I'm a second generation French Canadian, so I can say that. And I'm a member of Peguis First Nation. I'm also a member of the Bear Clan. But my grandfather is from Long Plains, and my grandmother is why we're connected to Peguis. And that said, if we actually looked at it, which I did a few months ago and realized, oh my god, I don't know how many people I'm actually related to in this area, and it's kinda scary and maybe I should be cautious about dating anyone. Because between my French Canadian Roman Catholic family who had average 9 to 15 babies and my Indigenous family who also had lots of babies, god knows, There's maybe less than 6 degrees of separation. But I've also had the privilege of travelling around the world and eventually came back home to do, I guess, this work that I'm doing now. My spirit name is [11:50 - Indigenous Language], which is, Dakota for Sees Far Eagle Woman. And I always say it in, Dakota because that's how I was I've learned to say it through my Sundance ceremony time and time I spent in ceremony, which is an important part for me. I'm kinda missing some of that a little bit. Yeah. What else is there? But thank you thank you to Doris for inviting me on here.

There's so much... sex and sexuality is an area that I've always that I'm very committed to. I hate that people see me as busy. I wish I'd looked less busy or find a better way to do things, but I love the work we get to do. And as a little girl growing up in this city, this is where my sexuality started, and my education, and my learning and how I understand myself. This geography, this territory is how I've learned to... both positive and negative. I've learned to understand who I am as an Indigenous woman and as a French Canadian, who I am as somebody identified as cisgendered female. I identify as open to anyone in a way, but you could put me into the 2-spirit or queer category, if you must. Proudly. I carry that in my heart. But I often reflect on that, on how this land influenced and this territory influenced who I am from my early learning to my now as an adult. And I'm grateful for the time I've had around in other areas where I've been able to spread my wings and grow and come back here. And hopefully do some... make a contribution for another little girl or boy trying to grow up and just have a healthy sense of who they are as an Indigenous person. And I feel that my role is kind of a facilitator. I really like that's the one job title I've carried in my life that I've actually really enjoyed, because I feel it really reflects my desire to make spaces where people can feel safe or grow or come together to talk about the fun things that we like to talk about. So I like that. But, yeah, that's just a little bit about me. So thank you.

(13:58 – 15:25) Doris Peltier:

Miigwech Laverne! That's awesome. And I like the little poke about the red ants. We need those red ants, obviously, in life. Every creature and every little crawler, everybody's important. And in terms of the busyness, it just shows that there's a lot of work that's needed in all our communities. And maybe I'll stop saying that about you, Laverne. So we're gonna get into some storytelling here, and this is a special podcast for World AIDS Day, and I wanted to kind of present it as the story of Ka Ni Kanichihk and tell that there's a trajectory of cultural response in the story of Ka Ni Kanichihk from my perspective. And I also call it a retrospective, but it's also historical, And we need to kind of map these things, you know, but we come from oral tradition. So this story will live in virtual world as an audio story, which kind of matches our oratory kind of ways. So I wanted to get this story moving and maybe ask Leslie to kinda kick-start it and tell us about what is the story behind the creation of Ka Ni Kanichihk.

(15:26 – 22:06) Leslie Spillet:

It is an interesting story. I think in retrospect, when we were involved in Ka Ni Kanichihk, I think that we would never have imagined it to be where we're at now. So... but, you know, I would say, first of all, it started with ceremony. We started kind of the creation by bringing a group of women together probably in about 2000. And we really were looking for a response to, I would say, the type of social services that see... inherently see Indigenous individuals and collectives as where the issues are centred. And we wanted to, we knew that was a very... not trauma informed and not culturally safe way of working with people. And we knew from lived experience of the folks that came around, all women, by the way, including elders, including people that we knew would be using our, you know, using whatever the outcome of Ka Ni Kanichihk was. So, for example, a young person who has lived most of her life, also HIV positive, she just passed to the spirit world. So I just want to just to acknowledge her and the work that she did, but was very long term individual who had been in and out of child welfare and did pretty much supported herself through survival sex work. And so she she was very much present at that beginning of Ka Ni Kanichihk. So the name kind of came out of

that vision of what we wanted to do. We wanted to be involved in our own services that centred Indigenous people, Indigenous leadership, Indigenous culture, Indigenous world views in as much as we understood it because we were also, you know, growing along the way. But we brought a group of individuals together, and we just did brainstorming. And out of that brainstorming... and we did sweats, and we offered our tobacco. We did all of those things. But after the brainstorming or during the brainstorming, the name came to us from an a grandmother at the time who was a Cree speaker. And because we wanted people to see themselves as, you know, this... how the idea of kind of mainstream social services would have been based in kinda white supremacy and in white saviorism complex. And we knew that it wasn't working. It hadn't worked. And that we thought that, you know, knowing that we're the ones to save our own selves. And so... and building our own institutions, our own programs and services was what that vision was. And that so many of us have struggled within those mainstream institutions to try to change them. And an elder by the name of Stella Blackbird really kinda guided us along that. And she said, you know, you can't change someone else's vision, but you can build your own vision. And so out of that came Ka Ni Kanichihk and we started providing... the first project that we worked on was through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which is a funder no longer exists. But we were able to bring a group of women together to begin that reclamation of Indigenous matriarchy. Because, of course, you know, within the colonized project, the colonial project, the role of women have been severely diminished to the point of, you know, Indigenous women experiencing high rates of violence in all in both manufactured state violence, but also that individual violence that comes within the settler state. And so that was our first offering. And, again, you know, before we did anything, we did ceremony. And so that's kind of been a theme, I think, from, you know, from the very beginning, and it continues into the present. And how I understood your analogy of the red ants, you know, one of the things that we knew, it was that we don't only wanna provide really good high quality culturally safe trauma informed programs. We were doing it before those words became kind of popularized. We just did it because that's kind of how we roll. And that the red ants, we wanted to challenge those systems of oppression, challenge and change those systems of oppression that held... that hold that continue to hold all of the, you know, the outcomes of colonization in place. So we've not only... and this is quite a...and I think in at that time, you know, you don't wanna bite the hand that feeds you because we were a nonprofit, mostly government funded. And I think we did pay prices for that. We were not always the most popular kid on the block. And, yeah, personally punished, but also collectively punished for speaking out against white supremacy around the, you know, the domination of that the whole industry of social services that really, has never challenged where the, you know, the systems that produce the trauma and didn't really, really understand it or really didn't care to understand it. And I think we've actually moved them as well. Like, so, you know, even today, like, the organizations that I talk about are still... have moved. I mean, they've gotten a bit a different analysis, a better analysis, and some even know to just back off when it comes to Indigenous folks that they understand. These are our white allies. They understand that we need to take the role in leading our own program services and how we work and support us. So I think things have shifted a bit. And, yeah, we're in a very different place now. But at the beginning, it was I always say... or it has been said that they never give anything without a struggle. Right? And so it was a struggle. It was a struggle. There was some... lots of lots of work, but lots of, you know, lots of pushback as well, which we just had to stand up to. We were always there challenging how things were done and

trying to, you know, educate, inform people to, you know, to share power, you know, to share power. And, yeah, it's dialogue.

(22:07 – 23:43) Doris Peltier:

You cut right to the point, Leslie. Like, you call it out, you know, like, in terms of calling that system, you know, white supremacy. A lot of people will not do that. Right? And maybe that's why sometimes you get the pushback from allies or... but I'm glad to hear that they're backing off now. They know... which tells the story of that strong position of the organization. The organization has a strong stance. We're just gonna kind of take ourselves through different parts of this story, and I know that Jackie is part of the story from the last 12 years or probably even before that based on what you said, Jackie, in terms of how the organization supported you with some of the other things. You know, one elder recently told me something that really resonated for me, and she said, you know, in this work that we do around HIV and AIDS and STBIs, STBI is not the problem. It's everything else around it, and that really stuck with me when she said that. And, there are things that people say that really stick with you sometimes. So, Jackie, I just wanna kinda get you to tell us more of the story of, your understanding or your leadership, you know, because Leslie said we're all leaders. What does that feel like for you to be in that leadership role?

(23:43 – 26:43) Jacqueline Flett:

I think my HIV status really plays a big part and a big factor into my leadership abilities and my role modeling that I do here in Canada and at Ka Ni Kanichihk. I initially got involved with Ka Ni Kanichihk because they had a program to support women with HIV and to have a voice and to get into some... it was just simple things like beading. It was simple things like getting your resume together or just talking about your HIV status with other women who had HIV as well. And so that's how I really became aware of what Ka Ni Kanichihk did. As well as when we hit the pandemic, they were the only organization that was really reaching out to community members that were going above and beyond helping us obtain groceries, obtain COVID rapid response test kits, basic needs for your family, and I remember Laverne and her team really used to come above and beyond trying to help me out. So really coming to drop off groceries with me and my children so that we had the opportunity and the ability to sustain that pandemic when that was going on. And as somebody with HIV and somebody that had limited resources, and I was going through addiction issues at the time. But although for the members and people that worked at Ka Ni Kanichihk to still treat me with dignity and allowing me to have a voice really made it all better and worthwhile to eventually being able to build a rapport with community and allowing community members being a part of Ka Ni Kanichihk. So even though I was going through so much personal trauma at the time, they still walked me into the spotlight and limelight I am in today. So that was supporting me with my roles and responsibility and walking me through my journey having HIV and being positive and allowing me to have that voice and opportunity and even allowing me to apply for a job, a position. Because at that time, I didn't think I would get a position. And, like, I had so much support from everybody at Ka Ni Kanichihk saying, you know, just apply. Just apply, and you don't know what's gonna happen. And I've been here a year now as a community host and an auntie, and I get to walk with my fellow relatives. And some people, I even see on the streets that we're giving out harm reduction to. And just to now knowing that I'm helping out those brothers and sisters that, you know, like support them and walk with them on their journey where they're at, like Ka Ni Kanichihk did for me.

(26:44 – 28:09) Doris Peltier:

That is tremendous, Jackie. Yeah. I've known you for... since you came onto the scene, into the HIV movement, and, I'll let you know. I've seen a lot of people come into the movement. And as Indigenous people, we notice things and we observe things, you know, and we're kind of built that way, I think, to be very... to know what people are doing, you know, quietly observing, like my grandmother used to do and like elders do. They quietly observe, and so that's tremendous, Jackie. In terms of the aunties, so I do remember quite a number of years ago that there was a medicine bundle, and there was a document that was created that told the story of the grandmothers responding to HIV and AIDS in Manitoba. I think, for me, that was a huge moment. Like, that was, from my perspective, that was huge because there, again, like you said, Leslie, it's about the matriarchy. And the grandmothers were with their ceremony were leading the way. So I'm gonna jump to the aunties first, though, because that's kind of there's grandmothers and then there's aunties. And maybe I'll ask Laverne to tell me a little bit about the aunties with the Mino Pimatisiwin Sexual Wellness Lodge.

(28:10 - 28:16) Laverne Gervais:

Mhmm. In terms of how the aunties kind of came into the... taking up their role?

(28:16 – 28:17) Doris Peltier:

Yeah, why aunties?

(28:16 – 29:53) Laverne Gervais:

Why aunties? Yeah. I think, you know, at Ka Ni Kanichihk, we at looking at those different like, Leslie's describing the not for profit model that's out there that's not really conducive to ways of doing things as we know them to be done, which is very much a kinship model that we understand it. Right? It's how we relate to each other. We don't people come in to our agency, and I've heard this since I've arrived at Ka Ni Kanichihk that we don't have patients or clients. We don't use those kinds of terms, you know. Participants maybe, but more importantly that these folks coming in are relatives. And they can be quite literally our relatives biologically and, you know, nieces and nephews and aunties and uncles who come in to use the service as well, which puts us in a very beautiful position to do this work. And so it only made sense that when we think about the roles that we're doing and the work we're doing, and we think from that mind frame. And so aunties made the most sense for some of the work we're doing in sex and sexuality because, as some of us understand, aunties were kind of that safe space to go to for questions and things that you might... and aunties play a kind of special role in our communities. Right? They're the ones that could set you straight or they could be your biggest ally. So a lot of people have had that experience with their own families and aunties and and valued that role. So we just made sense to have to bring that position in and function from that way and in trying to do you know, deliver care or support to folks, our relatives in the community. So, just made sense, really.

(29:54 – 30:00) Doris Peltier:

And, Leslie, what about the grandmothers that were involved right from the beginning? And I understand they're still involved.

(30:01 – 32:34) Leslie Spillet:

So I think that what you're referring to, Doris, is a collective, a group of folks, including grandmothers that came together because they had lost someone. They had lost a loved one, a daughter, a brother, a father, a sister, a mother to HIV when it was not, you know, when when treatment for HIV wasn't... this was, like, 20 some years ago now. So they gathered and they sewed they had a... they did different art forms, but one of the things that Ka Ni Kanichihk inherited from that collective of women, grandmothers included, was this quilt that has always hung within Ka Ni Kanichihk's main entrance. So the quilt itself symbolizes, you know, something special, something unique in remembrance of those ones that they lost. So each of those unique and very beautiful artwork where told stories. Like they held the stories and the memories for those families. And it's been a real, you know, honour to hold that bundle and to tell a story of that bundle. One of the things I always wanted to do was, if we ever had an opportunity to do that, is to kind of go back to those storytellers to get, you know, the names because that get... kinda gets lost in just the way it's presented. But we know it's there. We know it's there in a very physical way, but the individual stories and the relationships would have been so wonderful to have a kind of an index or an addendum or a book that told those stories and and what each of those symbols represented. Like, they were... it was a... it's amazing artwork that was done on that quilt. So Ka Ni Kanichihk, that we held that bundle. And because of that relationship, we started... we were one of the first and now the only urban Indigenous organization to work with Indigenous, particularly Indigenous women on HIV. And I think that was the origin of the Mino Pimatisiwin and Sexual Wellness Lodge, which it kind of evolved into something. Partly because of funding requirements, but also partly because of the meeting the needs of the community in very, you know, the immediate needs of the community. And Laverne can tell that story because she thinks that.

(32:34 – 33:00) Doris Peltier:

Was there an aspect of... In creating the sexual wellness lodge, was that in response to this is what somebody had told me before, and I just wanna ask about it? It was in response to youth not accessing, the health care settings for testing. Is that kind of why the sexual wellness lodge was established and funded to do?

(33:00 – 35:04) Laverne Gervais:

In part. In part, it was. It is more of just a general agreement that if we ask ourselves why people aren't getting tested, one of the responses and the strong one is that people the healthcare system is not a safe space for people to access. And people's experiences can be very disrespectful and violent even sometimes when they enter into those spaces. So why would anybody wanna get tested if you know you're gonna be experiencing something that's not really healthy for you? So it wasn't part their youth... you know, and the question too, how are youth getting access to the kind of care around their sexual health that is safe, that is culturally safe, and that is well informed? Because, I mean, both of our... or a lot of our experience, you know, if we look at sexuality from the sexual exploitation lens that we done some work in is that there's not... there's a lot of folks that wanna take advantage of somebody's and to use people and exploit them. But there's not as much safe resources out there for folks to... healthy resources for folks. So it was in part, it was just to really address, well, why, you know, why aren't people accessing health care? And we started with it. Well, because of the history of health care in this country. And it's we've been treated like guinea

pigs. We've been... we've had people die in emergency rooms. We've had, you know, women, like, that happened in Quebec, you know. She died right outside. Like, those experiences were enough to say, well, then we need to just do it ourselves because people keep coming to us to ask us how to do it. And we keep telling them or explaining, and it never happens. So we really just need to do it ourselves. Right. And so that's really what it kind of fueled it, and then then we just went for it that way. And I think, finally, like, Leslie is pointing out, you know, like, some of our allies and whatnot have kind of realized, okay, now I need to stop and step back and let people do what needs to be done because I don't get this. So, yeah, that's kind of the funding helped for sure. But... yeah.

(35:05 – 35:25) Doris Peltier:

So, Jackie, I'm gonna throw this to you now. Like, in terms of... you mentioned that you were one of the aunties. So can you describe for us a day in the life of a... the work life of an auntie working at the sexual wellness lodge, like, from you as an auntie?

(35:25 – 37:39) Jacqueline Flett:

Like Laverne said, the title auntie, it's a very high title to hold. It means that we meet our community members, our relatives where they're at. We walk with them. Me being 2-spirit, half of our team is gender diverse, which is amazing. So we have all different kinds of unique abilities and experiences, walks of life, and lived experience that we can help be a better relative to allow that safe space and those safe interactions happen with the kokums and having those community members come in and feel like they're really a part of our lodge. And this is a lodge. It's a healing lodge. It's not just where you come to see a nurse, you heal. We have the ability to heal with you and walk with you in our journey. So part of being an auntie is we smudge out our space every morning. We open up to sharing circles, which is really unique setting. I've never worked in any atmosphere or place anywhere where we have the ability to work as a team, and being allowed to leave our... any kind of feelings of anything that we're going through that day, anything that we may be struggling with, that circle holds us, and that circle holds us accountable to be good relatives. And so we smudge out the space in the morning. We make tea, sometimes bannock. We get medicines ready for those that are coming in. We give out supports for healthy sexual safe supplies as well as harm reduction. We give out big lunches, and we make sure that they're able to see a nurse, to see a kokum, to come and play on that community host drum, to work with medicines, to help us build on our ribbon skirts, to allow 1 on 1 with kokums, allowing those traditional teachings to come into play, for them to ask any question without being judged, without being criticized, and really honouring that safe ability to come in here and feel that they're getting the quality of care that they deserve and that they need. And that's what aunties are for.

(37:39 – 38:52) Doris Peltier:

Wow. Thank you, for that, Jackie. Wow. It's... it sounds beautiful. I'm remembering my aunties. One of my aunties so just a quick story here. My auntie was like our mother in kinship terms. My auntie would call me [37:58 - Unsure of Spelling], and it was just the way. You know? And my mother would call me [38:04 - Unsure of Spelling]. See the... there's a... it's slightly different how an auntie

addresses you, [38:12 - Unsure of Spelling], and because she's like that other mother as well in that role, and they take that seriously in our kinship. Yeah. So I know you have to go, Leslie, And I wanted to ask you about, like, how secure do you ever get... maybe let me contextualize this a little bit. When I ran into Laverne at the CAR conference last year and Dana they were telling me the grandmothers were the security for the sexual wellness lodge. And I went, what? Really? That is so cool. Like, you know, you don't have these big burly types that are the security. It's the kokums. Why is that important, Leslie?

(38:53 – 40:14) Leslie Spillet:

Well, I think that, it's love that is a security, and it comes really from the whole team. And the kokum's role is just to, I think, just having pictures of those the kokums that are in our lodge. They're kind. They're loving. They're funny. They're human. They're learning with everyone. They do ceremonies, and they're there. They're there for the people. And so, you know, I think that it is, you know, we kind of expect in terms of security, the burly, but that's not security. That's force. So it's really the antithesis of that - that people don't have to come into the space feeling defensive. I think the medicines contribute to that. I think everybody plays a role in making that space safe and especially making people that come into the lodge feel that they're welcomed. They're not judged. They're cared about genuinely, authentically. And I think all of that contributes to this... to the peace that is the I think the one of the main feelings of that lodge, you know, the energy of the lodge's peace. It's a beautiful it is really a beautiful thing. Yeah.

(40:15 – 41:17) Doris Peltier:

I love that, Leslie. And I see the big heart on your t-shirt right now as you talk about love and that kokum Security is about love. I just love that. That would make a good t-shirt, I think, for your lodge. Because I remember when I ran into, Laverne last year and Dana, I said, wow. I want one of those t-shirts that says kokum Security, but it has a different meaning. I like how you defined it, Leslie. Thank you so much for that. I think we'll begin to wrap up now, and I just wanna do a quick round here in terms of the future because this podcast is about Indigenous sexual futures. And I just wanna get, like, your perspectives on what is your vision for if you think about Indigenous sexuality and Indigenous sexual futures? What is up ahead? What is the vision that's up ahead for all of us that are involved in this work? Who wants to go first?

(41:17 – 42:16) Leslie Spillet:

I think that I'll go first and then take my leave and to say thank you. I think what you're asking for is as where we see our relationships going forward. So I see us more connected. And when we get more connected, we feel like... to people like you, Doris, and so many others that are doing this work, I feel like that has been also a real gift for our lodge to having the kind of profile that we are beginning to have is to make those partnerships, to make those connections, to build a better service, a better connections with people that that need really excellent health. All of us do. And so I just see us getting better. I just feel like this is the beginning of something very... that'll just continue to grow and become more powerful as we grow together as a collective.

(42:16 – 42:28) Doris Peltier:

Awesome. Thank you, Leslie. And I know you have to go. So *gichi-miigwech* Leslie, I'm gonna keep Laverne and Jackie here for a little bit longer. Not much longer, though.

(42:29 – 42:31) Leslie Spillet:

[Indigenous Language]

(42:31 – 42:34) Doris Peltier:

[Indigenous Language]

(42:35 – 42:41) Leslie Spillet:

I love both of you too, Laverne and Jackie.

(42:43 – 42:53) Doris Peltier:

Yep. Okay. So what is the vision, from your perspective for the future on Indigenous sexuality? Who wants to respond?

(42:53 – 44:09) Jacqueline Flett:

I could respond, and then Laverne can kinda close up. I see us really breaking down some barriers one day at a time, really decolonizing those health care settings and combating that stigma with our relatives so that they can come somewhere to get a peace of mind, to get tested, to get their harm reduction, to be treated like a relative with dignity and respect, and to being allowed to get freely tested. Knowledge and treatment of what STBBIs are and how to walk a good life the way they see fit and just meeting them where they're at. I wanna continue with Ka Ni Kanichihk. Some of my mentors are here, and they've just really allowed to give me back that voice, allowed me to be treated with dignity and respect as a human being and as a relative. And I'm honoured to be an auntie and have that title here at Ka Ni Kanichihk. And I just hope that our vision really, really bursts off into the community because we're doing so much great things here to break down those systems and those barriers that were set in place for our Indigenous relatives. *Miigwech!*

(44:09 – 44:13) Doris Peltier:

Oh, thank you, Jackie. You're so beautiful. Thank you.

(44:13 – 44:14) Jacqueline Flett:

[Indigenous Language] Doris

(44:14 – 44:20) Doris Peltier:

[Indigenous Language] Laverne

(44:20 – 48:25) Laverne Gervais:

Yes. So as I mentioned, my spirit name is Sees Far Eagle woman. And how I understand that to me it's not so much... I don't necessarily have a vision of what that future will look like, but that I know it's there, and we're heading that way. If we keep doing the great work, you know, that we're doing in the way that we're doing it. And that's challenging. It's not always easy because the system, the way

it's designed, wants us to be doing... is resisting, very, very resisting. But I wanna share... I've been in the process of, connecting to some of our partners that we work with. And there was a story shared with me about a participant that had come in when the aunties were there doing their thing, and the nurse was, you know, offering testing. And this person came in, and they were a young woman. And, you know... that would never really access the service, but just happened to, for some reason, that day come in and sat down and met with people. And they really connected, and they got... this person shared their story. And their story was connected to a lot of the relatives in our community that are not accessing care, and there's very good reasons. Right? Not just the ones I've mentioned, but, you know... anyways, they've got their reasons. I'll leave it there. I'm trying to struggle with maintaining that person's privacy. But what was most exciting for me when they shared that story is that they looked at the aunties, and they looked at the lodge and said, you can do that. And that's where I would... I wanna work there. And to me, that was really that's a really exciting thing to see because when I look for a while at what opportunities Indigenous youth in particular see or Indigenous people, period, see, there tends to be some very similar categories, you know, like social work or become a teacher or... and so this area that we work in sexuality and sexual health is not something people see as know as an area they can do work in. Like so when they see that, and they say, I wanna do that, that makes me excited. And so the idea that we could maybe have a larger community of folks that are gonna follow what's in their heart and do the work that they wanna do to help build community and as... because it's as much for them as it is for everybody else. Then that's what gets me excited, and I think we're kinda heading that way. We'll get... even... yeah. We'll keep doing the work we do and and keep growing together as a community. Yeah. It just feels like good wa... that we're on a good way. And it's because of community. It's because of a good commitment the community has in us as well. Because even even the title of, you know, Mino Pimatisiwin and Sexual Wellness Lodge, there's a really good reason why we have that name. You know? We're all seeking the good life. Yeah. And sex and sexuality is a big part of the good life. Yeah. And it's been heavily impacted and targeted by, you know, the history we have in this territory and across the country. And so... and it's not about health because health is that very biomedical. Right? I mean, you shared a lot of that in your work of, like, that's very just about the body, and there's there's good health and bad and it's not. It's about wellness and and how we seek what brings us pleasure and joy in our search for Mino Pimatisiwin and for ourselves and our family and our community. And it's not about a clinic. That's why, like, we actually had clinic in our title first. And we watch people literally flinch because what that name holds for people. But when we said lodge, even folks who've not had experiences in the lodge because they've been disconnected from their their culture have hope of what that actually means and a vision of some sort of what it could be to grow, of what what wellness and those cultural tools we've had for centuries could mean to them. That's just beautiful to watch and to be a part of and grow.

(48:25 – 49:38) Doris Peltier:

Yeah. Well, people just walking off the street that are that haven't been connected to their culture. The medicines do their work when people walk into the lodge, I believe. You know? The... I remember when I was a child, I spent a lot of times with elders, and I still, when I smell sweetgrass, it takes me back to those elders. Their house... their houses smelled like sweetgrass. I call them sweetgrass elders, and, so that medicine's working just from the smelling the medicines walking in. And, yeah, I just love that. So I want to thank all of you for taking time out of your busy day to come

and be a guest on Indigenous Sexual Futures. And I say *gichi-miigwech* to both of you. And Leslie had to run, but I say thank you to Leslie as well, and have a fabulous day. So *gichi-miigwech* for being a guest as an auntie on this podcast. *Miigwech*.

(49:39) Jacqueline Flett:

Miigwech

(49:39) Laverne Gervais:

Miigwech

(49:42 – 52:54) Jacqueline Flett:

[Sings]

(52:56 – 56:23) Doris Peltier:

Miigwech for that beautiful song, Jackie. I did catch up with Jackie about the drum song you just heard. Beautiful tribute to the peers we have lost and for those peers we continue to support. As peers, we too are community builders alongside everyone else *miigwech*. And *chi-miigwech* to these fabulous aunties. Auntie and elder Leslie Spillet, auntie Jackie, and auntie Laverne. You leave us with much to reflect on. It was such a rich discussion with so many important inflection points in the story of a community-based organization and the community building that took place and continues to today and into the future. A big takeaway for me was when Leslie said, in reference to the start of the organizations, one of the things that we knew is that we don't only want to provide high quality, really good culturally safe trauma informed program, she said. We were doing it before these words became popularized, she said. We just did it because that's kind of how we roll, she said. We wanted to challenge those systems of oppression, challenge and change the systems that hold the outcomes from colonization in place. Wow. This is huge to stand against the underbelly of white supremacy. Very brave and courageous positioning. I admire that so much about aunties. Soft gentle voices with so much strength and resolve. A second takeaway was about starting something in ceremony - on how vitally important this is. It sets the medicine in motion and the ancestors are called in to help, and they do. Another takeaway was on the type of leadership it took to build a community organization. Leadership that is nonhierarchical, that acknowledges that we are all leaders. And lastly, how the word security is flipped around in terms of what the Mino Pimatisiwin Sexual Wellness Lodge aunties provide. The security they bring is love. I absolutely love love that. On this beautiful note, we are now coming to the end of this podcast. *Chi-miigwech* to Leslie, Jacqueline, and Laverne. Continue the great work. Listeners, I wanna thank you too for tuning in to this podcast. Please continue to listen to Indigenous Sexual Futures. This wraps up episode 6. Hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. In closing, we would like to acknowledge our funders, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, for making yet another aspect of the Feas Centre possible. Thank you for tuning in. This is auntie D, your host, signing off. *Baamaa-pii miniwas kakinoodidme! Miigwech!*

[Outro] (56:27 – 56:45):

There's so much healing that needs to take place. And we, as Anishinaabe people, have these sacred items that Creator left us that we can share with the world in our healing journey for ourselves and everybody else that walks with us equally.