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Interviewee: Kendra Gage
Interviewer: Marshall Watson
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MARSHALL: Awesome, thanks, Kendra. Alright, first, check! We're on a roll. So, to start, why don't you just tell me a little bit about where you grew up? Your family life? Your school life? If there's anything that stands out about the... maybe moments or interactions or people that led you down this path or if it kind of started later in life?

KENDRA: Well, okay, I grew up in Calgary, Alberta. Mostly—

MARSHALL: —that's really unfortunate I'm sorry—

KENDRA: —it is really unfortunate. I know, I'm really sorry too. I wasn't born there, though, I was born in Vancouver. But we moved there when I was like four, so um, went to French Immersion school, Catholic school.

MARSHALL: Catholic school?

KENDRA: Yeah, because in Alberta, French Immersion schools are Catholic schools.

MARSHALL: Yeah, I, [mumbling] grew up in Edmonton.

KENDRA: There you go. You know what I'm talking I'm.... see? That's unfortunate. So [laughs] had a lot of experiences in school about not being accepted and not being good enough and not being... because you know I was not Catholic, I wasn't baptised—

MARSHALL: —me neither.

KENDRA: So people often, or... people at school would say I was going to hell because I wasn't baptised and y'know and couldn't go to certain events that all my other classmates could go to because they were catholic, y'know couldn't go with them. In hindsight, I actually appreciate that now [laughs] because now I don't have to be a recovering Catholic, but y'know at the time I felt really, y'know, excluded. And then in Junior High, I kind of got into a lot of trouble as a young person. Made some bad decisions in life.

MARSHALL: I mean, as you do, teenagers.

KENDRA: Yeah, I decided I was going to run away and I stole a car and drove it from Calgary to Duncan.

MARSHALL: Wow, that's a decent trek!



KENDRA: I was fifteen. February, did the Malahat, or not the Malahat... well did the Malahat, did the Coquihalla. Yeah, first time I ever drove in my life was on the Coquihalla, in February.

MARSHALL: Damn!

KENDRA: I had a friend with me, she drove the other parts. The creator was taking care of us, eh? So, made some bad choices, really struggled, went to high school. Although, that was in my high school year. And then, I went to school in Calgary, I went to Western Canada High School. Right downtown, and lots of rich kids and I did not have a lot of money. So there was a lot of... I don't know I just started to notice how shitty people are. Y'know? Saw some things as a kid that y'know I remember going to a party and I saw y'know... now I know which was like... well at the time I even knew it was wrong, but y'know I saw a bunch of jocks sexually assaulting a girl that was passed out, or, well, having sex with a girl who was passed out, I now know that's a sexual assault. Y'know, just stuff where I was just like "funny, people are shitty" [laughs]

MARSHALL: People suck!

KENDRA: They really do, so, um... then two months before I was supposed to graduate from high school, I dropped out.

MARSHALL: Because?

KENDRA: [Sarcastically] Because I was smart? I don't know. And then actually I went to alternative high school in Calgary, it's called alternative high school and... really different process. Democratic system, the students vote on everything, you call your teachers by their first names, small classrooms.

MARSHALL: And did you just like, right there, like I'm quitting this school so that I can go to alternative school or was there a gap there?

KENDRA: No, no, there was a gap there.

MARSHALL: Did you go on another road trip in the meantime?

KENDRA: I didn't go on a road trip but I went on some, y'know, drunken sailor type scenarios, y'know?

MARSHALL: Okay, you became a pirate [unclear]?

KENDRA: I became a pirate for six months and then went back to school. Yeah, so, it must have been September that I got into alternative school and it was just such a great experience, like a lot more about "what's your opinion on things?" "why do you believe that?" "what's important to you?" Lots of art-based stuff being taught but they taught all the subjects through a very democratic more progressive process then... so I flourished there, it was what I needed, right? I was not a typical student. Y'know, and I



needed to be challenged and I needed to be able to think and—

MARSHALL: —right 'cause it seems like it was a little more egalitarian than like prescriptive — learn this then learn this, then learn this — and you're more involved in—

KENDRA: —yeah! [5:00] So I think honestly that was probably the tipping point in my life to really... maybe not determining that I was going to be in this field, in this sector, but for sure on how I wanted to be in the world and I think it really was the beginning to having an impact on me as far as my leadership style, like I what I believe in and what's important to me and how I want to, y'know, like I think that was probably if I was to look back and really think about it, yeah, that's when I knew — whether I knew that I was ever going to be in a leadership position — it was like that had a major impact on my life as far as my understanding of how people work and what, you know hold people up as opposed to shaming them or doing things democratically — let's all talk about what we want to do, let's talk about the pros and cons to that, let's find a solution together.

MARSHALL: Right, were there specific moments or people that stand out or was it kind of just like seeing this completely different approach to something that you'd been involved in for so long in your school system?

KENDRA: I think both, but there were particular people, and I feel awful that I can't remember any of their names. Just, yeah, really gave me an opportunity to kind of see that I could offer things in a different way and then my art teacher, and again I can't remember his name but she reminds me a lot of my art teacher, like same look, y'know. Kind of that hippy, and you know the beard, and the kind of oiled hair. So I really... and then through that journey I ended up having an experience where, um, during that time I got pregnant and I ended up having an abortion, so that was a really struggling time for me just trying to figure out and I was supported a lot there because I talk to my parents about it and the school knew and they were really supportive—

MARSHALL: —and there was support at the school?

KENDRA: Yeah. The teachers had relationships with you, like they got to know you, they liked you—

MARSHALL: —as people right?

KENDRA: Yeah, it was really... I shouldn't say it was so cool because that's the way it should be, but it was so cool.

MARSHALL: But in a lot of other places, you're a name on an attendance sheet and that's it.

KENDRA: Yeah, exactly. And nobody cares what's happening to you, and they don't, right, so... and there, when I graduated, I became the class historian, so y'know, and that



would've never happened in high school and I was told I was never going to go anywhere in life and that kind of stuff because —

MARSHALL: Oh yeah, I'm gonna take this car and go wherever I want—

KENDRA: [Laughs] Yeah, exactly! I'm going to Duncan. Fuck you.

MARSHALL: [Laughter fades] Huh, class historian?

KENDRA: Yeah, so that was pretty exciting and graduated and—

MARSHALL: —and you graduated in?

KENDRA: I was probably eighteen at the time so that would've been 1993... so then I decided, I went to College to go to... I went to Mount Royal College in Calgary — which is now a university, I guess — to try and figure out what did I want to do and to do some courses too so then for some reason I decided that I was going to be a French teacher and I was going to major in French. So that's what I was doing. So I went to college for two years, did my courses, y'know my electives and everything to get it and then I got accepted into the University of Calgary's Bachelor of Education program in the French stream and I did that for... I never finished my degree because um... we got partway into... so we got into the courses, we were doing really well the first year. I mean the first year was hard, I was working full-time—

MARSHALL: —first year at UofC?

KENDRA: Yep. I was working full-time and doing five courses in French.

MARSHALL: Phew, that's a lot!

KENDRA: I don't even [unclear]. Oh and in between there... sorry I had gone to Windermere for, uh, six or seven months. Yeah, I think I didn't start college until I was in my twenties, so there was a period of time I went and lived in Windermere and worked and that's where I met my partner at the time, my male partner at the time, and then we moved back and then I started to go to college and then—

MARSHALL: —okay so you had like a gap year where you just worked for a bit and yep?

KENDRA: Yep, no car stealing or anything like that. I was completely following the law, well mostly. Yeah, none of those big ones anyways. So anyways I got into university and I was doing really well and then what they did is the University of Calgary decided they were going to switch from a four-year program — because they still had the four year Bachelor of Ed — to that post... you know how most people you have a degree and then you go two years to be a teacher, whatever it is, I don't know what you call it. So they decided to do that [10:00] right in the middle of us finishing our degrees.

MARSHALL: Oh, that's delightful.



- KENDRA: And took all the french teachers that were part of our program to put to the new program, so...
- MARSHALL: Instead of just letting you be grandfathered in and finish the program you already started? Well, that's a bummer.
- KENDRA: So then... it was a bummer. So then what happened is they started teaching us and that was the year we were doing curriculum and learning how to develop curriculum and all that kind of stuff and everything we were doing was in English. And I was like "so I'm supposed to learn to be a French teacher with all English teaching, that doesn't make..." and so the very social justice side of me took over again and I "fuck this, I'm not finishing this" cause I'm not one of those people that I'm just gonna go through the motions because I'm supposed to, it has to be meaningful.
- MARSHALL: Right, if something's not working, if the system seems like you're butting up against it then you, you can leave that system.
- KENDRA: Right... but I left that and I went "oh god, what am I going to do with myself?" right?
- MARSHALL: So you'd finished almost... three years in?
- KENDRA: I was three-and-a-half... three and a couple months.
- MARSHALL: So you like going right until you can see the finish line and then you go "fuck you, byeeee?"
- KENDRA: That's right, I know, eh? Yeah I never realized that, good point. Good re-frame! [Laughs] So yeah I tend to be... and it's almost like my world goes "no this isn't right, you gotta do something else" so... and in between while I was going to university I also was a camp counselor in a camp for what at the time they called underprivileged children's — so children that may have come from y'know families that didn't have a lot of money or we had some new to Canada immigrant families. At the time there was a lot of Romanian refugee families because there were a lot of people coming out of Romania and stuff like that.
- MARSHALL: So this would've been late 90s?
- KENDRA: Yeah... like... how old would I have been? Probably '96/'97. Yeah and so I um... so I worked as a camp counselor—
- MARSHALL: —and this camp was in Calgary?
- KENDRA: Yeah it was called Camp [unclear] and it was just up by Red Creek area. So I did that for the summer and really loved it, and I was good at it! And my camp name was Solar [laughs].
- MARSHALL: Oh, delightful. You could also be a superhero.



KENDRA: I could be, I think when you are a camp counselor, you feel like a superhero. I also have a really good story about that, which I don't know if that would be helpful but I'll tell you anyways.

MARSHALL: Yeah, tell the story, that's the point of this.

KENDRA: So, I, as a camp counselor got a pretty good teaching on how being competitive is not always a very good thing. We had this thing every camp where you would do the polar bear swim, so it was really early in the morning, someone would come and knock on your door, everybody would have to get up and get their bathing suits on and run to the pool and jump in the pool and whichever cabin was in the pool first won the prize... and all summer we kept losing, so I was adamant we were going to win this time, right? And I probably even cheated a little bit which was also probably why I didn't get where I was supposed to get.

Anyways, I had my bathing suit on the bed, I made sure I went to bed early, I made sure all the kids... I gave them a pep talk before bed and everything, right? I was like "we're gonna do this!" right? So, somebody comes around and knocks on the door — "POLAR BEAR SWIM! POLAR BEAR SWIM!" — and I jump out of bed and I'm like "COME ON, KIDS! COME ON!" And I'm putting my bathing suit on, right? And I'm running out there and I'm, like, so excited and all the kids are with me and we're all together cause you all have to get in the pool at the same time. We get in, we jump in the pool and I'm just like "YEAAAAH, we won!" and all of a sudden the lifeguard starts laughing her head off and she's pointing at me and I'm like "what's so funny?" and she's like "oh my god, Solar, what are you doing?" right? And I'm like "what's so funny?" and I look down and I have my bathing suit on inside out. [Laughs]

So, anyways, we did win but I learnt some lessons in that... and still to this day when I see that same woman, she still laughs about it. She said, she's never saw anything so funny and I'm like in your whole life you've never seen anything funnier than that? Come on!

MARSHALL: That's a little depressing but—

KENDRA: —it was really funny!

MARSHALL: Good for you for... you're a highlight.

KENDRA: And I said "well, I'm glad I could be your entertainment."

MARSHALL: Yeah that woman's [15:00] highlight reel of her life, like you're in it. You're a star.

KENDRA: I know. That's a good point, good point. Good frame. Now she's a PhD, and she teaches at the university and I'm like "I'm the highlight of your life? Whatever!"

MARSHALL: And she's telling that story to all of her students...

KENDRA: She probably is... probably.



MARSHALL: Get some mileage out of that one.

KENDRA: But that was fun, so anyways so that kind of gave me an idea that "oh, this is something I can do and that I really love" but what I have learnt over the history of my life is you can't... well maybe people plan this out, but I don't think things that you plan out ever work the way they're supposed to. I've never been one to plan my life out. I kind of just go with the river, like don't push the river, y'know?

MARSHALL: Yeah, so what was it about being a camp counselor... like what was it or when was it that you noticed that you were good at that and what about it were you good at?

KENDRA: Well I think like... well young people would come to me to talk about things that they were having a hard time with and that gave me an indication that there's gotta be something here because it takes relationship. I'm good at building relationships with people. And I think I'm getting better at it because I think the most important thing with people is you have to be authentic. And I don't know if... well I wasn't my most authentic self at the age of 20 or 21.

MARSHALL: Right, and few people are.

KENDRA: Yeah and if they are, wow I want to get to know them. But I, yeah, I think it was that and um, and the young people really just, they... when they would leave they would hug you and like "thank you, thank you" they were to you... us you made a difference in my life. And it's like oh, okay. I can do this... and I enjoyed it. That was the best thing, I was having fun and I was making a difference and if you can do both of those things, amazing, right? So then, I, after I left university, I kind of went "what am I going to do with myself, right?"

MARSHALL: Not going to be a French teacher, right?

KENDRA: No. Non. [laughs] Non merci. But then what I did is... I decided I was going to walk dogs for six months.

MARSHALL: Alright.

KENDRA: Cause I was like, hey, I don't know what I'm going to do, this gives me an opportunity to like think and really you know reflect and—

MARSHALL: —be outside.

KENDRA: Yeah, and I started doing it in the middle of Winter in Calgary 'cause that's smart. You know what I ended up doing is, um... I remember some days it was like -35 and I'm out there with these dogs... oh and I had just gotten a puppy too so it was great because I could spend time with my puppy, right? Which was in itself an interesting experience because you know... I have some comical experiences with walking dogs, I must say. We were one time, I was like grouped with them at the dog park, off-leash,



and you know they're playing and my dog, Samantha, goes running off and is like... and I can't find her and I'm yelling and I'm yelling and she's probably about I don't know nine months old and this point and I'm yelling like "come on, Sammy, Sammy" and whatever and finally she comes out of the bushes and she's carrying something in her mouth and I'm like what the hell is that? Cause I couldn't see it because she was so far away and she's getting closer and closer and closer to me and [laughs] she's got a deer leg in her mouth, like she's getting closer to me and I'm like oh that's a stick, AH that's not a stick! [laughter] I'm like EW, EW. But of course then I'm trying to get the deer leg cause I want, right? And I've got treats and she's—

MARSHALL: You can't keep that, you're not bringing that home!

KENDRA: No, you're not bringing that in the car, right? And I've got treats but the dog's looking at the deer leg, looking at the treats like "are you kidding me?" and then all the other dogs get excited so I'm chasing this group of dogs around the park with a deer leg and I'm sure it was very comical for people to watch.

MARSHALL: Your life sounds like a sitcom! Who's setting up these scenes? Because this is great writing.

KENDRA: So I got the deer leg away and then I had to find somewhere to put it. I had to find a big enough garbage it would fit in. [laughs] Anyway, so that was fun, I had some good times in that experience, then I lost my... and then another time I lost my boss's dog, her dog took off. Oh my god I thought I was going to die. And it was the dog... we found the dog but there was a big loud sound and the dog bolted.

MARSHALL: That's scary.

KENDRA: That's the worst. It's one thing to lose your own dog, but someone else's dog... so I did that for six months and really enjoyed it. Oh, and at that point I was living with my sister and the man I was with and I think we got married by that point, it's hard to say... '98 I got married. [20:00] So... then I got a job... or so then I was like "I don't know what I'm going to do" and there was this program my sister used to work at called HERA in Calgary which was a program for high-risk adolescent girls. Most of them had been sexually exploited—

MARSHALL: Right... Hera, like H-E-R-A?

KENDRA: Yeah, it's based on the Greek goddess. Feminist program. Yeah, so I got hired on there to be the life skills coach for the young people.

MARSHALL: Awesome.

KENDRA: And... so I really enjoyed that, but we had the hardest kids, right? Like—

MARSHALL: Right, and you got the job through your sister who was also working there?



- KENDRA: Well, my sister didn't work there anymore but she introduced me to these women that worked there and I was able to um... so that's where I met some people that I still have a really strong relationship with. The therapist at Hera is Sonia Clement who is... her kids are Tegan and Sara.
- MARSHALL: Oh, wow!
- KENDRA: So I met them when they were fifteen. I used to listen to them play music in the living room of their mom's house. Yeah, the world is a crazy place, right?
- MARSHALL: Yeah, my guitar player is their new guitar player. They were just in the studio together. They're going out on tour together.
- KENDRA: See? Yeah! See, I knew we were connected.
- MARSHALL: We have a lot in common already. I'm going to do list of all the patterns and similarities so far in our stories.
- KENDRA: Cool.
- MARSHALL: So, you met a lot of cool people—
- KENDRA: Did you have a dog eat a deer...? No I'm just kidding! [Laughs]
- MARSHALL: No, no. I don't have that one, that's all you.
- KENDRA: So I met a lot of really interesting people, I learnt a lot about practice and how to engage... and I also really learnt about how to work with youth in a good way, like how do you connect with them? What works for them? It was all about y'know, relationship and recognizing they have something to offer and so that piece came from really my struggles as a young person and the fact that I didn't feel heard or understood, or... and for me it was also I never had this thing where I wanted to be their best friend, relationship is really important, but I think relationship is also about people understanding what your boundaries are when you meet them.
- MARSHALL: Yes, any good, healthy relationship needs to have good, healthy boundaries and being open and able to establish those boundaries is important.
- KENDRA: Yeah, and what I found with a lot of people is they would kind of be their best friend for a little bit and then they'd put the boundaries in place and then they wouldn't understand why the youth was like upset right? And it's like no, you need to tell them right away, this is what I will and will not do, right?
- MARSHALL: So did you learn... is this like leftover from your alternative high school experience or like as a camp counselor or was this something you saw in practice at Hera?
- KENDRA: Probably all of it but quite honestly like this is one of the challenges I've always had. People say like "where'd you learn that?" and I'm like "I don't know...I just—"



- MARSHALL: You just kind of glean little bits of it here and there and at some point you just do it and it becomes a part of you.
- KENDRA: Yeah. And I think that's also because you're on the path that you're supposed to be on, right? So I um, basically I did that and then I worked at AIDS Calgary as what was called the youth exchange program so it was people under the age of twenty-nine working with street entrenched youth in the foster care system, educating them around sex and sexuality and their... risk of HIV transmission, stuff like that. So I was a sex-ed teacher for a while and I loved it.
- MARSHALL: Amazing, I also worked at HIV Edmonton for a long time.
- KENDRA: Did you? You and I... I think we're like brother and sister from another mother and father or something.
- MARSHALL: Perhaps... so did you go straight from HERA to AIDS Calgary? How long were you at HERA before you...?
- KENDRA: I think I was covering a mat leave so probably a year. And then I went to AIDS Calgary for a year and that... the reason that was not as long is because or didn't go longer is because you could only do it for a certain amount of time, it was the type of funding they had, like you could only do it.
- MARSHALL: It was like a contract position and then it's not necessarily renewed?
- KENDRA: Well, it was renewed but it had to be a different person in the position, how the funding went, like federally, it was a federally funded program. I either did that for a year or two years, I can't remember now. Anyways, that was a lot of fun, I learnt a lot about myself in that, got to know some really interesting people — first time I ever met someone that was transgender, was in that experience — and I really like um, it was interesting because I never grew up in a world where...[25:00] I mean my parents were really lovely people but I, we never obviously talked about stuff like that or—
- MARSHALL: If you're not exposed to it, it doesn't come up, you don't get the opportunity to learn it, no matter how liberal or open your family is.
- KENDRA: Yeah, exactly. And so it was a really wonderful experience and I've always been one of those people and I don't know where I learnt this — that every relationship I have with someone I see it as they're there to teach me something, right? And I'm there to reciprocate that. And that relationships are reciprocal, like I've never ever had this value system that I'm more important than someone else or you know what I mean, like, so.. And I think when you, when you enter into relationships with people that way then you learn your experiences... your experience is so much more full-some because... for example even with the kids I worked with it was like yeah I have a role and a responsibility but you know I didn't have that authoritarian or... and it was the same thing with anyone I worked with at AIDS Calgary or got to know, it didn't matter



if they were sex trade workers or if they were y'know injection drug users, like that, to me it was like... there was just so much beauty in learning from people and getting to know them and so I got to... I worked with youth on the streets and did sex education and then I also did... I would go on the EXIT van, EXIT was through another organization and the van would go to all the strolls in Calgary and would provide like condoms and hot food and a place for the women to sit and... or the young men to sit and be, just like get resources or speak to someone or whatever.

So I loved that, I would do that a couple times a month and it was from like 10 o'clock at night to 4 o'clock in the morning or whatever but just you know again the most beautiful experiences and then I worked with uh, um... and then I went from there to street teams and street teams was a group of people working with sexually exploited youth trying to diminish, you know either get kids out of the sex trade or support them so we did... I mean I tell you, though, after that job, that job was a dark, dark world. You know there's certain things in this field that you can't do again or you—

MARSHALL: Yeah, you reach a point and then you're full or you're done and you can't anymore.

KENDRA: And, just to back up, when I worked at AIDS Calgary, my first exposure, my first real exposure to the Indigenous community was there because we worked directly with another organization, an Indigenous kind of component of AIDS Calgary and we would go out together and work together with the kids and I learnt so much about culture and ceremony, so it was kind of my first real exposure to it and I was like "oh my god, why don't we all do this?" So then I worked at Street Teams and—

MARSHALL: And was Street Teams a separate organization or a program within—

KENDRA: Yeah, they were a separate organization and I worked there... and in the time of that process I was also figuring out that I was not a straight woman and I had married someone that I should not have married and was discovering who I... my sexuality and who I was as a young, gay woman. So all that was going on at the same time—

MARSHALL: —and so this would've been, what early 2000s, right around 2000?

KENDRA: Well, I moved here in 2000 so it might have been—

MARSHALL: —late 90s?

KENDRA: Yeah, late 90s, cause maybe it was '96 I got married, I can't even remember now.

MARSHALL: Right, so a year at HERA, maybe a year or two at AIDS Calgary, this would've been like '98 maybe?

KENDRA: Yeah, yeah. I moved here in 2000. Everything is very fast. [Laughs]

MARSHALL: [Noise] Okay, we'll say '98-ish.



- KENDRA: Yeah, cause I moved here in 2000 and I was with my girlfriend... and I moved here because I was girlfriend was moving here. So somewhere in there: I worked at HERA, I worked at Street Teams, and I came out of the closet [laughs]. That's a lot.
- MARSHALL: Yeah, that's a lot. Yeah, that's a busy period.
- KENDRA: It is, busy, busy. Yeah, Walked dogs, chased deer legs. I had a lot going on, yeah and you wonder why it's all a blur. I thought it was just the drugs and alcohol. [Laughs]
- MARSHALL: I mean there's also a lot happening!
- KENDRA: So, uh—
- MARSHALL: —so you figured it all out while you were at Street Teams?
- KENDRA: Yeah, street teams. I also figured out that I never wanted to be involved [30:00] in that ever again.
- MARSHALL: Yup.
- KENDRA: But I started a really cool project between AIDS Calgary and Street Teams where I started to raise awareness around sexual exploitation of young men and um...it was called REVAMP — Reduction of the Exploitation of... oh I can't remember now... Males involved in Prostitution... I can't remember now but anyways it was cool because there was such a misunderstanding in community where if a girl was in the sex trade she was a victim but if a male was in the sex trade it was a choice and also this misunderstanding that young men in the sex trade were... that oh, and also in the sex trade it was about your sexuality—
- MARSHALL: Right, as opposed to... right. Yes.
- KENDRA: So it was about educating the vice squad around it, educating community around it, working with young men that had been in the sex trade, also acknowledging the fact that majority of men that access male prostitution are not... do not identify as gay men. Like all of those kinds of things, like trying to dispel all of those myths and recognizing that if someone is brought into the sex trade as a child, they're a victim, it's not, like oh today, I want to go and...
- MARSHALL: Yeah, you can't change things or help those people unless you understand how it's different or not different from y'know.
- KENDRA: Exactly... and during all that time I was working the PCVP — Protection of Children Vulnerable to Prostitution Act came in in Alberta, so that was when children, now it's called PSECA or something like that? But that's now when children can... or you could have kids apprehended based on the fact that they were at risk or were being exploited and they were kept in safe houses and supported and sometimes secure safe houses until they were ready to get... you know acknowledge that this was prob-



ably not the lifestyle.

And then it was challenged at the same time, that it was unconstitutional, so there was a period of about six months where we couldn't use it, so I experienced this really different world of sexual exploitation and being able to provide services and supports and then without that just being there to talk to kids and what that was like. And although I don't necessarily believe that apprehension is the way to go I did see a real benefit to it and how it provided services and support to those kids that they would've never accessed because youth don't think. And I remember it as a kid — you think you know it all and you're not unsafe and you're not at risk, and so that really created my values system around what we call Here, Secure Care, right? Y'know that, and maybe there are other ways to address it but that's a sticky—

MARSHALL: It can be beneficial but it's not the only solution to a complicated problem. There's a lot of other things that need to be in place and it's often argued about as if that yes or no could solve all their problems when really you need a system of care that prevents a lot of stuff, it has a lot of stuff and other resources available, so that it's not just safe care yes or no.

KENDRA: Yep, exactly, yep. I mean, I should just bring you with me when I go to those meetings. So—

MARSHALL: [Unclear] I'd do that.

KENDRA: Yeah, I'd love that. So that was kind of, so I got a lot of um, so I was really, and quite honestly and I hate to say this but it also reflects maybe BC Social Services but Alberta's way far ahead of us in their child welfare system and how they—

MARSHALL: —yeah?

KENDRA: Oh my god, it's night and day. Honestly when I heard I could move out here I was so excited because you know I thought "oh, it's an NDP, there's lots of New Democrats" and people that really care about the environment—

MARSHALL: —and a little more left-leaning, progressive.

KENDRA: Yeah, a bit more progressive and it's going to be so great, and I... every... I've been so disappointed. [Laughs] [35:00] Like so disappointed. The... we work in silos here, we are so bureaucratic, we don't want to seem to do things quickly, we don't put money into things that matter. Like, that's my opinion, and I love this province and I would never move and I love where I live but I tell you, we have a lot to learn and I don't say this a lot of times but Alberta — as far as how they look at child welfare and how they're responding to things and their relationships with community organizations — surpasses us like crazy. Like my sister still lives in Alberta and works in the field and she tells me about stuff they're doing and the innovation and I mean everyone in Calgary, I mean Alberta, all the social workers were trained in Signs of Safety.



MARSHALL: Right, yeah.

KENDRA: And I'm not saying they don't, and Darcy's like "we have our problems, there's shitty things happening" but—

MARSHALL: —Alberta has a well-established and well-funded college of social workers that's been around for awhile. I wonder if that's part of it?

KENDRA: Yeah, well and I think they're just willing to go we're not doing the best we can do, and let's... and you know they've been a Conservative government for... you know what I mean?

MARSHALL: Decades.

KENDRA: Since time immemorial. Y'know? They had the NDP government for what, four years?

MARSHALL: By accident and then they—

KENDRA: She didn't tell them she was NDP. [Laughs]

MARSHALL: Yeah, I mean maybe I wonder if that could be part of it too, though, just in that there's less back and forth, so every three of four years you don't have to re-shuffle or reset or change the ministries. You have the same people in charge and so when, regardless of your political alignment, when something needs to be done the infrastructure is more permanent and established, you don't have to revert or reroll or change legislation when the party switches every four years — as is more common kind of the case in BC or Ontario.

KENDRA: Yeah, and even there they have things like... so my sister works for a large organization called McMan Services in Calgary and they have an office in Edmonton and they have one in Red Deer, and they're large, right? And I'm sure they have their own issues but one of the things is like, there, you have the two resources for example so foster homes and stuff like that, they have foster homes that are done by the child welfare system but the majority of their foster homes are done by not-for-profit organizations.

So they actually do the screening, the training, they're like resource workers, and they have way less less issues than... I think where we've done, we've made, uh... I would say what's different there, one of the biggest differences, and then again maybe people that work there would completely disagree with me, is they have recognized that people in the social services sector, community organizations, have the ability the skills, and the intelligence to do the work better than they can but here we put everything internal, right? It's like "oh, we're going to take that back, we're going to do it because it's not working" instead of... and we're like "but you're so broken," y'know? I think that's a big difference, I think community organizations in Alberta have a lot more autonomy.



- MARSHALL: So that kind of gets back to your point earlier when you were talking about the way of being with people and building kind of relationships on a personal level kind of also applies on like a systemic or structural level where if it's not about ego and you just meet the people where they're at and let them do what they need to do, then they can do great stuff. Where as if it's kind of controlling or about your own, y'know ego, even if it's a government system or ministry, that gets in the way, the relationship is fundamentally flawed on lots of different levels.
- KENDRA: Yep, absolutely, and I think we have such bureautic... I mean every government has bureaucracy that we can't even get the work done because we're so busy putting this bureaucratic system in place that stops us from being able to move forward in any way, shape or form, and it's all a bunch of talking heads.
- MARSHALL: Managing and controlling the work rather than letting the work happen.
- KENDRA: Yes, yep. Ang the other thing that's really weird is in Alberta, you would think that their philosophy of how they look at being a conservative province is... even social responsibilities for companies, like you see that way more there, where big corporations, I don't know if it's about a tax break or making them look good, but they will put money into social services because it's called corporate responsibility. We don't have that here.
- MARSHALL: But I feel like here, or maybe it's the type of companies that have head offices here rather than the type of companies that have head offices in Calgary or Edmonton. I mean, to an extent those are always about PR.
- KENDRA: Yeah, but they got a shitload of money.
- MARSHALL: [Unclear] a shitload of money. I mean maybe it's all just the big oil companies and they have more money. Maybe.... That's the other thing Alberta has going for it is consistent levels of provincial funding, which makes anything easier and regardless of where you are, whatever jurisdiction you're in, generally speaking social services are the first to get cut when there's like... the budget's tight or there's austerity.
- KENDRA: Oh yeah, cause why do we give a shit about people, right?
- MARSHALL: Oh, yeah. We care about jobs and homes, not people.
- KENDRA: But I would venture to say, and I could be wrong because I haven't lived in Alberta in a really long time, is that where you might see where people aren't really happy and thinking it's great is around Indigenous communities there, what's their experience? I think we have a much stronger voice here because there's way more Indigenous communities in BC. So I think the voice is stronger, it also creates other challenges for communities.
- MARSHALL: —different challenges, yeah. The other kind of important distinction from what I un-



derstand is the fact that Alberta has many more treaties where most of BC is unceded territories, which is fundamentally different relationship between First Nations and the Government.

KENDRA: Yeah, yep. For sure. Yeah so it's um I don't know um... and the other thing I noticed about Alberta that I haven't seen here is the... whole idea you were talking about system of care, continuing of care, like supported independent living, they have different stages of supported living.

MARSHALL: Right, or if a like a kid with developmental disabilities moving into the adult-serving system, there's fewer gaps, it's less of a mess, and it's more consistent than it is here, which is sad.

KENDRA: Yeah, we have a lot of silos here, that's what I find and nobody... like even within ministries like the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing and nobody is talking to each other. There's like this communication gap that happens.

MARSHALL: Yeah, I wonder if that's partly because of the more... or the changes in government and resulting changes in ministries. Like, having done these interviews with people, I mean we moved here in 2009, so my knowledge of BC's political history was all based on anecdotes I've heard mostly through this project, but I've heard dozens or a bunch of different people talk about when governments change ministries get blown up or shifted or this ministry becomes this ministry, whereas if you have in Alberta the same party ruling for eons, the ministries don't change as much, the people don't shift as much, the rules and responsibilities are more consistent, so there's fewer gaps, there's fewer breakdowns, just cause you're not breaking and remaking the system as much.

KENDRA: Well, I think it's also like, and I don't know cause I think in Alberta it's been the same for so long and maybe we have that little gap where... so it'll be interesting to see but here it's been kind of this "okay, it's the Liberals, then it's the NDP, then the NDP for a long time, then the Liberals come in" and then it's almost like they just want to undo everything the other government has done because they're shitty and they don't know what they're doing as opposed to maybe they had some good ideas and we just need to tweak this—

MARSHALL: —let's build on this or work on it as... yeah that's a good point.

KENDRA: And any time there's a new, even if it's the same party, we still get a dance of the moving chairs, y'know?

MARSHALL: To an extent, yeah.

KENDRA: The Deputy Minister changes and if the Deputy Minister changes in the ministry then everything changes, right? Then all the ADMs change, and then all the plans change, and it's just like seriously, can we just do something? Like, can we stop planning, to



plan, to plan, to plan to have a meeting to plan? Can we stop doing that?

MARSHALL: Yes, we can Kendra. I will allow it.

KENDRA: Thank you.

MARSHALL: Vote Marshall in 2020!

KENDRA: I'm there, I'm there!

MARSHALL: I'm never running for office.

KENDRA: No, me neither. I'd get fired.

MARSHALL: So, how did you end up in BC? You were in Alberta in the late 90s...

KENDRA: So, I had a.. I had shacked up with a girl.

MARSHALL: Yep.

KENDRA: And, she was moving up here to go to UVic and I think the... the job I applied for and interview for, I kind of caused a bit of a drama because they had already thought they knew who they were going to hire and then I came and... [45:00] this is the feedback I got, when I say this I'm not trying to sound like arrogant.

MARSHALL: It's okay, you're allowed to do that. This is all about you.

KENDRA: But anyways, the feedback I got when they called me back was that they actually questioned if they were going to hire that person after they met me.

MARSHALL: Phew, game changer!

KENDRA: Game changer. But anyways, they ended up going with who they thought they were going to go with anyways, but there was... and again this is the feedback I got, not my words, but they were so impressed that they started to try and find me work. So the first job I had here was with The Boys and Girls Club

MARSHALL: Awesome, of BC?

KENDRA: Yeah, in Victoria. And actually Amy Woodruff and I... that's where I met her, we worked on the same team, so I did that for a little bit, I worked at the Boys and Girls Club working with youth that had been involved with probation and that kind of thing.

MARSHALL: Okay, and you said you moved in 2000, so this would be 2000?

KENDRA: That was a mat leave, so I was only in that position for a year, and then I got a job right away. I transitioned to Pacific Centre and I worked at Pacific Centre only a year I guess, because that was also... yep, that was a leave, because the guy that was in the position had gotten seconded into another job, so that was a leave position. So I



was there for a year, that was working with high risk youth and their families around, you know, communication issues and stuff like that, it was very counsellor. So I would go into the home and try and mitigate and that was 2002 and again that was a mat leave.

MARSHALL: I see a pattern forming.

KENDRA: Yeah, there is a pattern. Well, it's hard to get a job here, right? Like a permanent job. And a lot of people have children here, I don't know what's in the water. So I worked in the Friendship Centre with the youth department and really loved that and just as I was about to leave, I heard that there was a supervisor at [unlcear] and Family and Community Services or Social Services at the time, so I was like "I'll go and apply, I'll see but there's no way blah, blah, blah" cause I'm like I'm not ready to be a supervisor. I had been, I guess I had supervised staff at the Friendship Centre and stuff but you know, I wasn't really part of Community, I didn't really know anybody yet, that kind of stuff. Anyways, got the job, again, had a little bit of a, created a little bit of a crisis... drama. Didn't mean to...

MARSHALL: Yeah, you're just stirring the pot wherever you go. Kendra!

KENDRA: And then, yeah I've been at Hulitan for seventeen years almost. So I got the job, 2003, so it's almost been seventeen years and I supported, or I started as a supervisor then moved...when I got there the organization was five staff, and I think I had a budget of \$400,000, \$398,000 something like that, and through work with... and at the time the Executive Director because at the time we were a part of Makola Group, so now Hulitan is twenty-five staff and we have a budget of \$1.5 million, and yeah, so that's what I've been doing. So I went from supervisor to manager and then became the Executive Director in 2010 when we separated from Macola in 2010.

MARSHALL: Okay, and those happened at the same time?

KENDRA: Uh, yes. Yes, they did. Basically the board decided that I be acting ED as we transitioned and then... I was placed in the position.

MARSHALL: And once it was sorted out then you became the Executive Director of—

KENDRA: Yep, yep. So—

MARSHALL: In 2010.

KENDRA: Yeah, so it's been almost ten years. It'll be ten years next year. I have a lot more grey hair.

MARSHALL: So what did your work look like when you started in 2003?

KENDRA: Well, very different. Hulitan was not a well-known organization. We did a lot of like support services to families... it was actually interesting the only reason Hulitan



(50:00) even existed is cause in '94 there was some money available to do family... like to work with family support work and stuff like that and to work with families around kids who had behavioural designations in the school and the Friendship Centre turned down the contract because they said they didn't have the capacity to do it at the time. So that's how Hulitan started.

MARSHALL: That contract?

KENDRA: Yeah. And then we just grew really small but then you know I think, y'know there was also a change in the climate at that time too there was more looking at Indigenous communities or Indigenous organizations doing the work themselves and so there was a little bit of bump up and bump up and then in 2007 to 2010 I guess, there was that whole... when Leslie Detoitte [??] I guess and there was that transformation process and there was talk about us taking over some responsibilities and that's when Hulitan really started to provide the services we do now.

MARSHALL: Right, because of that period of... yeah?

KENDRA: Right. But, I don't know if people realize that it had on the community too. Like not only were we segregated significantly, particularly on the South Island but a million dollars went off the tables when they transitioned it. So they took it from the non-Indigenous organizations in the South Island, there was supposed to be five million dollars, when we got to the table there was four million dollars.

MARSHALL: And that was just because?

KENDRA: Well, nobody can say what happened to it, but we believe it went to paying off debt or deficit. Cause really the Indigenous communities don't really need that money. They'll just take a million bucks from them.

MARSHALL: Huh.

KENDRA: Yeah, so that's been a bone of contention for a long time. The other thing it impacted was at least here and I know this isn't the case in other districts, but here what happened was our families had 100% access to services and now they only have access to 30% of services and I don't know how that's better. Cause all of sudden now really here people very much segregated and I don't know what it's like in other areas but here it's like Indigenous Services/non-Indigenous services, there's no...

MARSHALL: And not all of them are available to both groups?

KENDRA: I would say most of them aren't available to both groups.

MARSHALL: Most of them aren't? And that changed during this period for reasons that are unknown, or?

KENDRA: No, I think I know.



MARSHALL: Right.

KENDRA: And I said that to Lesley Detoitte [??] I said y'know you have to recognize the impact you've had. If I was an organization and I was providing services to people with disabilities and all of a sudden you came in and said "all the money you have to provide services to people with disabilities is no longer going to be there" I probably wouldn't be serving people with disabilities anymore. And I said whether that was your intention or not, that's the message you gave people.

MARSHALL: Right.

KENDRA: Right? So the message wasn't a good one to begin with so many organizations that did have Indigenous families accessing services no longer would provide service or... and I think also having an Aboriginal Services team here, so if it's ministry specific services, they have contracts with people.

MARSHALL: Right.

KENDRA: And this may have changed but for example the non-Indigenous child welfare offices have contracts with Cascadia and inter-tribal health and whatever but not everybody has status. That's only if you have status and that's only twenty sessions and they don't do couples counseling.

MARSHALL: Huh. So when this happened, was this sudden, was this gradual? Was it just like a rough three? [Kendra's phone rings] You don't have to answer that, it's fine. [Laughs] Was this like a subtle thing where the money just started disappearing or was it like all of a sudden we're doing things differently and it's just not there anymore. Like, how transparent was this, was this like slow or sudden? Like, did you see this coming?

KENDRA: No, no. It wasn't transparent, I can say that and I think that's probably a theme um... it was [55:00] like they did the transition, not the transition of the actual change of money... I would say they gave a few years of support to non-Indigenous organizations to come to terms with the fact that their money was going to go, which wasn't good, I mean we had horrible experiences, I remember going to meetings and people yelling at me and being like "you people" and it was a very racist, people's best parts of themselves came out and that's what happens when you say okay you're going to lose and—

MARSHALL: —hey it's going over here instead.

KENDRA: So, that was not a nice experience but then when the transition happened. You know, first of all a million bucks went missing and that was like overnight. Cause we were told all the way up until then we had five million dollars to plan with and then we get to the table to do our planning and the five million dollars was five million dollars between the agencies, we get to the table when we're supposed to be doing our negotiations cause all of the Indigenous organizations are at the table and the Ministry



and then all of a sudden it's like "no, it's only four million dollars." \$3.98m and we're like...

MARSHALL: Question mark?

KENDRA: And then they just had nothing and like no answer. "Well, I don't know where you heard that." And we kept going back... but again we've had six or seven directors of operation or CSMs, whatever they were called, in less than ten years, in the Aboriginal Services team.

MARSHALL: That's a lot of turnover. It's hard to have any sort of consistent relationship messaging, agreements, understandings about how things are going to work.

KENDRA: It's huge turnover. Yeah, so it was like well, we didn't say that, that was so and so, and right, then you can also pass the buck because it wasn't you. So at the time that that happened Lisa Erickson was our CSM and then I think not too long after that she went to the EDS position or whatever and then we got someone else, so um, yeah so that was really difficult, and also they kind of just put us all in a room and were like here's the money, figure out what you're going to do with it.

MARSHALL: Great. Thanks for your... help. So it sounds like this not only changed the relationship with the government based on how the transition was handled but also your relationship with the rest of the sector based on how things were handled, regardless of what you were doing, right, like it's out of your hands, they're just... someone else is making all these moves and shuffling and shifting but as a result you have bad experiences or the relationship or perception amongst is fundamentally changed also.

KENDRA: Yeah, and then there's this new journey we're on where it's this whole idea of transfer of jurisdiction or responsibility but you have a bunch of mainstream thinking people trying to create this journey within their own mindframe, right?

MARSHALL: Sorry, back up. Can you say just a little more about that, assuming that I don't know what you're talking about.

KENDRA: Sorry, what's the word, getting information from not collaborating but checking with the nations or—

MARSHALL: Consulting?

KENDRA: Consulting! Thank you. It's like they pick certain people cause it's about how do we get the biggest bang for our buck to do — and this is my opinion — the least amount of work, right? So it's like oh, we'll go to First Nations Health Council then we'll go to the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres because they're the ones that serve the urban community, right?

And then there's DAAs and so an organization like mine and I'm not the only one in BC, gets completely left out of the mix even though in this area we're providing



the child protective services, not child protection, but this is support services so you wouldn't ignore in Vancouver, you wouldn't ignore an organization that's doing that really important work but here, that's what happens. We don't get consulted because we don't have a nation behind us or we don't have a big organization behind us so we don't have a say. Right? And that's a very mainstream y'know like we're not actually going to look at... I mean it wouldn't take a lot of work to figure out who's doing that work in this area, right? Look at your contracts, right? (60:00) And then there's a whole group of people that... there's now there's this new journey of oh, now we're just going to transfer jurisdiction so we don't really need to do anything more, we'll just wait until that happens.

So, um, like I find even the conversations oh we're going to put more money into family preservation, particularly Indigenous kids, my question is: what have they actually done to make that happen? And where is the money? Cause they keep talking about this money but I haven't seen any of it. There was at one point a little bit of an influx but it was given to the SDAs and they made a decision about what they were going to do with it, so out of that we got \$55,000.

MARSHALL: You're talking about from provincial government here?

KENDRA: No, from MCFD it was a million dollars for this SDA, we got \$55,000. And the rest of it went to social work positions, stuff like that, so each SDA got some money. That's the only influx of money that I've heard of in three years?

MARSHALL: Huh, that's not a lot.

KENDRA: No. So, there's no money and I haven't heard anything about new money or anything like that but we have these frameworks where we're going to change how we do the work but we're not going to put resources into it and now they're putting all this money into — well I shouldn't say all this money — there's money going into helping communities plan to take over jurisdiction, which if you remember in two-thousand-and... what year would that have been? Well, Mary-Ellen Turpel-Lafond wrote that article about too much talk, not enough action, it was all about all the money that was going into planning in indigenous communities—

MARSHALL: —yes, that wasn't too long ago.

KENDRA: It wasn't too long ago and so then what the government did was it was about eight million dollars in this area or whatever, I think on the island, and they went ooh, we better pull that money back and that's how Aboriginal Service innovation through the province, child safety money came up, right? So then agencies, so organizations like South Island Wellness and Sauciman's up island, they had either to start delivering service or disappear, right? But it seems like now we're back to that whole let's put money into planning.

MARSHALL: Yeah, so they're just back and forth between these two ways of working with Indige-



nous sector and just going back and forth between the two and either way there's not the money that's required to do what they say they want to do?

KENDRA: No, I mean, it's the same thing with the... I mean what I will say is different now than when we first started down the journey of jurisdiction when Vancouver Island transitional team was up and running. That's the artwork on the wall.

MARSHALL: Do you want to say more about that?

KENDRA: Well, so that was...so there was a period of time it would've been... it was around the time of transition, like the transformation process with Leslie De—

MARSHALL: Yeah so two-thousand, just before 2010?

KENDRA: It would've been like 2008/9? Something like that, we'll have to look those up but...

MARSHALL: We can double check those, we have a fact checker.

KENDRA: Yeah, fact checker.

MARSHALL: We'll say 2008/9 for now.

KENDRA: And then what happened was so as part of that there was also the process of jurisdiction, taking over jurisdiction or responsibility, so what they looked at doing was kind of creating regions... so Fraser region had their own authority they were creating, Vancouver Island Transition Team — VIATT was the name of it — and it was supposed to be the authority for the island, so they were doing planning, they were talking to the community and the plan was to see the responsibility of child welfare of Indigenous families and service delivery to transition to VIATT. This was liberal government and it would've been not Christy Clark but who was the guy before her?

MARSHALL: The internet can put that in.

KENDRA: Anyway, he was in and it got to the floor and right before it was going to get to the Cabinet floor, like you know, read in the—

MARSHALL: —just committee?

KENDRA: Yep. In the standing committee or whatever, it got kiboshed by First Nations Health Council or First Nations Council or something like that, we'll have to check that out, but leadership, First Nations Leadership said "no, we don't want that" so it went downhill and then these other organizations South Island Wellness and at the time Sauciman was called North Island Wellness — or society — created themselves and they were going to plan for their own region and it was going to be a different journey where you would plan with the communities in your region [65:00]. So what was different then is the federal government wasn't going towards transfer of responsibility, there was no bill seekers too.



MARSHALL: That wasn't existing at the time, this was just happening at the provincial level.

KENDRA: So that creates a bit of a challenge because child welfare responsibility on reserve is a federal... right? But service delivery or child welfare service delivery is a provincial responsibility.

MARSHALL: Right. It gets a bit complicated there, yeah.

KENDRA: And that's why also during the VIATT and all of that, and the transition time, we were seeing all of these delegated agencies coming up because they were starting to see that was how the service delivery was going to be developed for the authorities — delegated agencies would provide the service. So now we're in this time period where they've made amendments to the CSA around engaging community and bill C92 is—

MARSHALL: Currently there is, yeah, federal legislation slowly moving its way through committee.

KENDRA: Well, it's been accepted now, it's already done its third reading or whatever.

MARSHALL: Oh, it has?

KENDRA: Yep. So, but what none of them have done is attach resources to it, right? And this is one of the issues with C92 is yeah, you can talk about jurisdiction and transfer jurisdiction but if you don't put resources behind it and you don't attach resources to it, the next government that comes in can say "mreh, put it on a shelf" right? Until money's attached to it, it really doesn't mean anything and we all know that.

MARSHALL: Right, yeah. We've been doing this job, right? And we've been y'know... [mumbles] we're in charge of this job. Now you do that job for me with nothing, with no money, no anything.

KENDRA: So now we're in this different planning stage and from what I understand BC was the first province to sign on to Bill C92 and say they would say communities to do their own planning, which is a little interesting to me because we have, what, 203 nations in BC?

MARSHALL: A lot. And some other provinces are refusing absolutely to listen to or have anything to do with bill C92.

KENDRA: Yep. So ministries here... er, sorry the province is all on board, which I agree that money needs to go into the planning but not at the risk of service delivery not being supported, right? Like my question is: you have the money to put into planning. Where's that money coming from? Whose budget? What, is that a regional... or is that the provincial budget? And if the province has that kind of money, why aren't we putting it into service delivery?

MARSHALL: Great question.



- KENDRA: Cause y'know, I was just meeting with the ministry this morning. That was the reason I was late, I apologize, and I was saying to them "we're the only people doing the child protective support services in this region" so on reserve nine nations, and a whole urban community, we have seven family preservation workers, and that's because I've rejigged all my programs so that I can have seven. I have a waitlist of eighteen families and that's after everyone is full and the other issue we're running into is we have a waitlist of seventy on our mental health... for a therapist. We're so under-resourced, we can't even like scratch the surface, and I said, we have the highest number of children in care but we get the least amount of resources.
- MARSHALL: So... so there's a lot of different things broken in the system. And at a certain point, regardless of jurisdiction, you need to just provide what's needed to offer the services—
- KENDRA: —yeah and y'know here it's like y'know it's not like families can... for example there's... cause again we're in this segregation thing, right? So we have an Aboriginal Services team and I say that loosely cause the only thing that makes them Aboriginal Services is they serve Aboriginal people, right? But, because of that it's become that's your budget and this is our budget. So for example, we have a parenting program, right?
- There's another parenting program in Victoria that is contracted with the non... with the Jutland office, right? If we're full and we're always full because we don't have enough people, I can't send people... [70:00] I can't say to the social worker you should refer to that program or I can't even call up that program and say... because now they've given us twelve spots a year but it's become about that's our budget, not your budget and then it's like but you've got to pay for those twelve spots... the Indigenous... and I'm like when I serve non-Indigenous people, I don't throw a bill in there, I'm not like here's a bill, not that the organization that's doing the program wants to charge but—
- MARSHALL: —no but there's uh cascading double standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations when it comes to jurisdictions funding and service delivery on a lot of different layers and given how it has changed I mean less back and forth but more just moving services out of other organizations to Indigenous organizations without the same amount of support or funding.
- KENDRA: Yeah, when the work... anybody that works with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous service, they know the work is harder. I'm sorry to say and this does not take away from other people's work, it's harder in the respect that you have way more historical trauma, it's intergeneration, like it was the same thing when they set up the Aboriginal services team here, they set it up the same way they would a non-Indigenous, y'know? And it's like really? So if you give someone a file like when I work with a file or I give you a file, it's not just y'know mom, dad, and the child, it's mom, dad, auntie, uncle, grandma, the community, you have to connect with the band, you have to con-



nect with the supports, right? Like, there's so much more involved in doing that work. So they have the same caseload sizes as everybody else, which means the Indigenous community members get less service and crappier service, and were just perpetuating the trauma and the experiences of families that—

- MARSHALL: —right because you're moving y'know regardless of jurisdiction or segregation, like moving the programs or services or if there was funding moving it over you're still basically downloading a structural system that's based on racist and colonial practices and whether you're removing yourself, the government, or the ministry of responsibility, it's still functioning within and a part of this bigger system, whether or not the system is giving you the money to do the services and that system is very broken and very racist and has been forever.
- KENDRA: Yep, yep, so it makes the work and that's the other thing is you're constantly... you're fighting the fight, right? I mean I hear people that work in the disability world y'know speak about the same thing, like, it's like under-resourced, you're just always fighting, you can't crawl out of the hole.
- MARSHALL: Yeah, for some reason when it comes to big institutions or bureaucracies or systems, as soon as like identity politics become involved, hierarchies start to emerge and those hierarchies are often based on stereotypes or like racist perspectives or like ableist perspectives or homophobic perspectives—
- KENDRA: —yeah like you don't continue to receive privilege without the systems that created the privilege, right? It's like y'know, I'm going to continue to experience privilege in life as a y'know white woman, or settler, because that's the system we live in and until we change that system, right? And I, myself, will do whatever I can to make sure that's not the case and to do things differently and look at my privilege and recognize it and make sure I'm not abusing it, but the reality is the systems have y'know, and we have this mindset in this world that in order to... like privilege, privilege comes from keeping things the same way, right? And also colonial world view is if you give to someone else, you have to give something up, and we're not going to do that, right? [75:00] Can we really change these systems? Like I hate to sound like a Debbie Downer but, y'know it's like—
- MARSHALL: —but these are the important questions to ask if you're looking at the history of a sector like this or a province or comparing two provinces or the sectors within them like these are the questions you have to ask.
- KENDRA: Well, I mean, for example, and I don't really know if I'm allowed to say, but I just read a report not too long ago that looked at wage comparisons between CEOs or Executive Directors in this sector and women are still making 5% less than their male counterparts in this sector and it's a female dominated sector. Like, you can't even get that shit right—



MARSHALL: —I mean, on so many different levels all of my experience since I started working in, y'know the social sector, whether that's like leadership camp for queer kids or social services here or wherever, there is always kind systemic hierarchies and double standards in y'know funding for youth camp: \$10,000, funding for queer youth camp: \$2,000, right? Or funding for program here, funding for slightly different here, and it's not the same services for different people, it's depressing but you have to ask those questions about where the system is fundamentally broken or biased or prejudiced and then how to change that.

KENDRA: Well, I mean even... and I think I'm trying to even go further than that in the world I'm in, and I have to remind myself to slow down like where people are really at but it's like... we are even at that place, same thing if you look at communities of disabilities, queer community or whatever, it's like that's for you guys over there, you just do your thing and we'll keep doing the right stuff over here. It's not, we can learn from that, we can experience from that, people have something to offer us as y'know as human beings, right? It's the same with Indigenous communities, oh we'll only do that for Indigenous... it's like no I'm sorry we could all learn from—

MARSHALL: —we could all learn from that! Yeah, there's other ways of doing it and Indigenous communities have a lot that they could teach us about that.

KENDRA: Well and the thing is, what is that saying "you can't solve the problems of the world with the same value system that created them?" So if we say we want to do things different and we continue the colonial value system we had before we're never going to change anything. You either step outside of that ways of knowing of being and you step into one that's going to be different or you just both to stop saying that, because it isn't going to happen.

MARSHALL: Yeah, just call a spade a spade. I like being an entitled privileged white man, I'm not going to change that, I'm just going to keep being in government, great, bye. Yeah, at least call a spade a spade so we know what's up and stop expecting—

KENDRA: —well I have to say, and when I say this I in no way, shape, or form support this person, I am sad that this world is, but Donald Trump, he says it how it is. The man, I don't appreciate him, I don't appreciate his values, I think he's a horrible human being but what I do appreciate is you know exactly what you're going to get.

MARSHALL: He's going to try and distract you from one thing and focus on this other thing and—

KENDRA: —and he's like yeah, I'm a dick and I'm okay with that.

MARSHALL: Yeah, there's something, I mean, I hate him but there's something... you know what you're going to get, right? You're not going to elect Justin Trudeau and get the bait and switch where oh, YES pipelines, NO reconciliation. Oh, okay. What?

KENDRA: Yeah, and I and that's the sad... and we talk about that in this country, we're politely



racist, we're politely homophobic, don't be polite about it because I want to know what I'm dealing with—

MARSHALL: —yeah, I want to know where you stand. Throw your beer can at me out of your friend's truck window again. Fuck you, Alberta. That happened a lot.

KENDRA: But it's like when you don't even know what you're dealing with, how do you actually address it?

MARSHALL: Right, and that's the thing, if you need to make change within the system, you have to understand that the system is going to if not act rationally, be at least somewhat transparent about how things are moving or going, you need to... on one level system change is hard and big but on the other level there's people working within the system and they can be just as, and these are strong words but essentially like deceitful or malicious or there's this much money, now there's not, or we're going to move these services but not without any money. There's people making those decisions. As much as the system is broken, those are human beings saying things, deciding things, moving things.

KENDRA: And I think what it is is the system we have allows for people like that to continue to be people like that. The system perpetuates [80:00] that and holds people up, right?

MARSHALL: Right, it protects them.

KENDRA: Right, it does. And that's also why the system's not changing cause people know that y'know... right? I'm not going to give up being a privileged white man, or a privilege straight, white man and I get things for this and if I have to give up—

MARSHALL: And if things go poorly you're just going to be removed— well you'll be moved to a different ministry, well you'll be shuffled, or promoted up.

KENDRA: Oh yeah, there's usually a promotion. It's the only thing in... I'm like seriously what kind of world do we live in where the shittier you do your job the better of a job you get?

MARSHALL: Yeah, so in terms of, this is partially my personal curiosity but also I think this would be helpful to just go on a little bit more... so you've been in the same organization for awhile and been able to understand what it's like to do that work and try to grow in a sustainable way in this province, in terms of that kind of segregation over the last ten, however many years, how has that changed or not gone as you expected, or could've been different in terms of, I mean there's probably a lot there, but for people who might not understand how we got to where we are or why things are the way they are now in terms of within the sector or Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations within the sector—

KENDRA: —and I hope I'm understanding what you're asking and you'll tell me if I don't but I



think... quite honestly I've changed how I've understood it based on the fact that I've changed my worldview too. I've always had, y'know been... like I said even when I was younger it was like when I'd meet people it was like this opportunity to learn something and it didn't matter who they were or where they came from or whatever, well it did matter cause that's a privileged way of looking at it but what I mean is, there wasn't a judgement there, it was just like "hey, cool" I just want to know who you are... it was all about relationship, right? But I have learned over my experience working in community how much your worldview is different and that the and how I guess part of it was my way of knowing and being and now I can name it, some of it. Some of it was a real learning experience, y'know—

MARSHALL: Yeah, gaining a different level of self-awareness.

KENDRA: Yep... but that whole thing about relationship, relational stuff that you're connected to everything and everyone and every decision you make impacts something... and if we actually sat back and thought about that as people when we do things, not just how we're serving self but what decision am I making and how does that impact other... would the world be a different place? I believe it would... like I was saying to someone the other day, you don't have to teach Indigenous children — if they're brought up with their teachings — you don't have to teach them empathy.

MARSHALL: Like it was just built in? It's just there?

KENDRA: It's there because you're taught from a very young age, well from the minute you're born about your relationship to everything and... but we have to teach in our mainstream culture we teach empathy because we don't have a connection to things—

MARSHALL: —we don't understand the world in that way, it's us versus the world around us—

KENDRA: —yeah, so I can't be empathetic to something right? It's like... and I think when you have a relationship with somebody and you have a relationship to anything that's where empathy comes from, it's all about relationship. It's going to be way more difficult for me to hurt you if I know you, right? If I have a connection, if I call you my brother, someone I love and care about, or even if I don't even know you that well, but if you're my brother, is that okay to do to my brother if I'm in my good teachings, right?

If I'm standing in my truth, in my integrity, so that's been y'know. Or even how I lead or whatever the term is, I've gotten a lot of flack for that over the years, "Kendra, you're too close to your staff" "Kendra, you're too..." I actually think it's easier or not even easier, it's more authentic to be able to have difficult conversations with people when I have a relationship with them, they're not, and... it doesn't mean I don't hold people... and again that comes from when I say my staff at Hulitan we're a family, we really are a family and yes I will hold you up but there's time where even in every family we say "you have to go for awhile" right? But people reflect our way of being in our organization from a mainstream viewpoint, right? Y'know it's like I will



do things behind closed doors for family, y'know like I'll break the rules for family, well that's not how I've been taught, that's not what it means. I hold people accountable, I support them inside and outside of the workplace, they're not just a coworker, they're my family.

MARSHALL: Yeah, I'm gonna come work for you. That sounds great.

KENDRA: Okay, please do! But I don't know does that answer your question?

MARSHALL: It does, I'm going to pause for two seconds because I have to go to the washroom.

KENDRA: [Unclear]

MARSHALL: [85:00] Yeah, that happens.

KENDRA: Yeah, it does. Especially when you drink water like that.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

KENDRA: There's water in my coffee, I keep saying.

MARSHALL: That's true. So, okay I lied I have three questions.

KENDRA: Okay.

MARSHALL: One is: so having spoken with a bunch of people and better understanding BC's sector, the experience here, it seems that, as much I also know having seen this in Alberta, there's always been organizations for, there's always been Indigenous organizations or queer serving organizations because they needed to exist, because you couldn't get help or services elsewhere, right?

Because of homophobia or racism or whatever and then to an extent over a couple of decades those things were brought into the fold to an extent either because of social awareness or government priorities but now it seems that there is... it's kind of devolving back to how it was before and maybe for reasons that sound well-intentioned or helpful or positive but it's also not manifesting in the most supportive or helpful way when those services then are kind of you know are pushed back out to the periphery without the support, and maybe yes that's where they started because they needed to, because... Indigenous people couldn't get the y'know the community organization would've serve them so they created their own organization, funded on them alone... your brought into the larger fold and now it's just being pushed back, I wonder if that's... in your experience working within the sector, does that... what does that say to you, is that more about our social understanding, is it more about political funding—

KENDRA: —bingo—

MARSHALL: —does it just come down to money because the conversations I've had people are just



like the money's not there, something's gotta go, they're framing it as oh we're giving jurisdiction back or oh, we're going to empower the queer community to support their own people, but it's not, in your... I don't want to put words in your mouth, what does that mean to you? What's going on there?

KENDRA: What that means to me is that, this is what I think and I think it's really sad, right, it's not about honouring self-determination or honouring that people who have lived experience have a better understanding of what their needs are and can do things differently, and it's not about honouring that there's different ways to do things, right? It's about I believe it's about... getting rid of a problem, and also because... and it also is a demonstration of it's less important therefore we can push it to the peripheral, and I believe again if we talk about a colonial world view it's all about saying the right thing, not doing the right thing. So, y'know that's also a reflection, if our government system is based on a colonial worldview then really can we say that it's being done for the right reasons?

MARSHALL: Yeah, we're exploiting but it's for these noble ideals of y'know—

KENDRA: —cause we like to say the right thing, right? I mean again that goes back to that whole polite society, y'know politely racist, politely homophobic, and I mean it's also why Canada can't recognize our... we have such a hard time taking responsibility for the fact that we've committed genocide over the last two hundred years or longer. You know I was just reading the other day that Andrew Scheer, his response to... he refuses to accept the report on the missing and murdered women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA community because he says they shouldn't have used the word genocide, so we're gonna fixate that instead of taking responsibility for the fact that the system we've created and the colonial system and worldview we have has perpetuated and created risks for Indigenous women and girls and it is a part of a continued form of genocide because we haven't changed the way we see things or do things! Y'know? But again, and I'll just talk to that, and talk about privileged, Mr. Andrew Scheer, right? [90:00]

MARSHALL: Yeah, Governments spin and then you deal with your problems, that's not my problem.

KENDRA: Yep, Renata [Aebi, of St. Leonard's] sent me a um, sent us, actually Rebecca [Ataya Lang, of The Federation] and I something and she said "oh have you looked at this?" and it's all about reconciliation and we're looking at gender, not within the federation but that's what Canada is talking about, you know gender equality and queer issues and blah, blah, blah, and reconciliation and then she put in a row the pictures of all the premieres — they're all white men! They're all white, straight men as far as I know.

MARSHALL: Bummmmmmer!



KENDRA: So, really, are we? How can they have a reflection of? And okay, maybe, there's one or two in that group that are willing to hear and listen and have y'know collaboration with communities and they have... and they're willing to have an advisory council that has people of colour and queer people and Indigenous people and people with disabilities on their committees and they actually sit and listen to them and take what they have to say into consideration, I don't know if that happens, I'm pretty sure it's not... but really that's... THAT'S our country right now and we're supposedly going a different way? I don't know.

MARSHALL: I don't buy it. There was a beautiful — this is a non-sequitur but— there was a moment that perfectly summed that sentiment up and a lot of y'know an example of the things that conversations that I've been having about not being able to work outside of the system, and not being able to change anything from within the system also.

I was at... Jamie and I were in Edmonton last week, that's why I wasn't at the conference, his little sister graduated from high school from Vic [Victoria High School] an art school in Edmonton and we are sitting there and we are sitting there and there was this beautiful, the dancing was great, the singing was great, the high school drama spoken word pieces were just groan-worthy but there was a really beautiful, poignant moment where they were introducing everything and they had a half-dozen or so first nations students talking about reconciliation and what it meant for them in the school as a student, like feeling recognized and involved and what not and they... I mean it wasn't the most perfect speech because I think they wrote it all themselves and they're just like seventeen year old kids so whatever... but it was this beautiful moment and then it paused and I couldn't see the program cause the lights were all off in the auditorium and because I am a cynical jerk but also because I live in Canada and know how things work, I leaned over to Jamie and his other older sisters and I was like "twenty bucks they sing the national anthem now" and that's exactly what happened.

Immediately after this speech written by students who clearly put this on the agenda cause they wanted to have it involved in the ceremony, then the structural... y'know school system or principal or whatever was just like "and now, everyone stand up and sing Oh Canada" and they didn't give me the twenty dollars, but, still.

KENDRA: Cheap bastard [laughs]. So are you cynical or are you just smarter than the rest of the people?

MARSHALL: Well, I don't think those are mutually exclusive things, right? I'm a queer from Alberta, most of my friends are queers, or feminists, or people of colour, right, so I have pretty good understanding of systemic oppression and the flaws of living in this Western, liberal society. You know what's going to happen and that just kind of summed it all up.

KENDRA: Well and that's the thing... that's that whole thing... and this is actually one of the issues that's coming up with reconciliation is that some people — Indigenous people



— are really unhappy about the fact that they've helped or supported communities to, institutions and stuff to acknowledge the territory and whatever because it's being done from a colonial place, it's not a direct acknowledgement or an understanding of that relationship, or how or why are we doing it. [95:00] It's not a check-box, and in colonial worldview it's a checkbox—

MARSHALL: —it's a checkbox! It's a thing I can do so I can feel good and say that I'm progressive or helping lead change but it's just a thing you say at the beginning of your crappy graduation.

KENDRA: It doesn't mean anything and it doesn't change the way you see the world or how you're living in that world or what, again that relationship to something, so say you have an idea, oh okay we can check a box, we let those little brown kids talk about reconciliation, we let those little brown kids talk about reconciliation so we can move on to it and no understanding of the fact that, what is the impact that it has in singing "Oh Canada" right after that. And that's that thing about how do our actions impact others and that whole relationship piece. Y'know, the sacred circle is that we're all connected and nothing more important than the other because there's no beginning and there's no end, cyclical. And but we don't look at the world like that, there's a beginning and there's an end and then in the middle there's a couple of checks and we can feel good about ourselves and walk away and say, oh I'm a good person.

MARSHALL: And it's just about us getting to that end point. It's us versus the world around us.

KENDRA: Yep, exactly, and worldview is a huge piece of this and how we look at it.

MARSHALL: Most of people don't think that way, most people don't think the way we do.

KENDRA: But if we want the system to change, we need to do that.

MARSHALL: You have to help other people get there, and then everyone once in a while you just get really depressed and you're like most of the world doesn't think like me and they probably never will and that's terrifying.

KENDRA: Yeah, it is. Y'know? And how do we... y'know reconciliation is not a checkbox and reconciliation is not an Indigenous responsibility.

MARSHALL: Right, yeah. I wish people wouldn't skip over the [unclear]. We're not going to get to reconciliation for a long, fucking time, if people keep ignoring the truth. We still need to be talking about the truth because so many people don't actually know what's happened, how we got here, what's currently happening.

KENDRA: We need grief [unclear] You know, we have to keep saying truth AND reconciliation and I try to remind myself of that because you're right and also a very colonial worldview is we say it and then we move on, right? It's done, we don't need to talk about it anymore but the reality is part of truth is sitting in it, part of integrity is standing



in your truth, and we cannot change how we see this world if we don't stand in our truth.

MARSHALL: Wow, that's good. That's going to be in the bumper, that's what going in the clip. Okay, now my two final questions: I don't like... so a common question in oral history projects... I don't like talking about failures but what I do like asking people is about a missed opportunity that has stuck with you or maybe one thing that you could've done differently, like one thing that maybe with the benefit of hindsight you could understand differently or see differently. And it doesn't have to be you personally, it can be a systemic thing or province-wide thing, but y'know if there's anything that stands out.

KENDRA: Well, I think hindsight is that... understanding that we can't change the road with the same values and that if we actually look at things differently, things will change. I mean I've had tons of learning in my journey y'know really the biggest reminders I've had is when I've questioned myself and I've questioned my way of how I see the world is when I've questioned it and not done it that intuitive way, that's when I've had problems.

When I've been true to who I am and I've stood in my own truth, things have always gone the way they're supposed to. So I don't know, um, like we spend so much time trying to control things and push the river and make things a certain way and really the world is set up to let us go the way we're supposed to go and so, yeah, I think... and every experience we have is an opportunity for growth, whether it's good or bad, so yeah I think that's really... when I've not been my authentic self and stood in my truth is when I've had some not so nice things happen, and that's when I've been challenged and so the lesson for me is always look at yourself [100:00] and always be self-aware but y'know honour that truth and if you know who you are and you stay in that authenticity things will go the way they're supposed to—

MARSHALL: —that's beautiful, there's tons of wisdom in there, yeah, I mean we always forget that like pain is an opportunity for learning or struggle is an opportunity for learning and you just try to understand how I got to this pain and how to make it stop without y'know getting that piece of wisdom out of it whether it's like—

KENDRA: —and the reality is, would I have done it differently? No, because I wouldn't have learned the lesson.

MARSHALL: Yeah, you wouldn't have got to that place and it's wasted if you don't learn the lesson. You went through all that sorrow, anguish, for nothing, and then you make the mistakes over or you don't understand why the mistakes happen.

KENDRA: Exactly, and there's gratitude in pain. I'm grateful for... it's kind of the whole thing about the grief you experience after someone leaves you like in death — or any kind of loss— that grief is a reminder of how much you love that person and without grief there is no love and so without pain there is no learning and there is no opportunity,



right, so for me it's like, no, I don't know if I would change anything, there's lots of growth and learning but no, wouldn't change it.

MARSHALL: Great answer, 100%. You're doing real good. Final question: what is one thing you are hopeful about for the future?

KENDRA: Well, I hope that I have a small impact on this world being a better place.

MARSHALL: Great, I love it—

KENDRA: —sorry

MARSHALL: No! That's perfect. Yeah, that's wonderful. Nope, nope. There are no right or wrong answers.

KENDRA: I have hope that... and that impact continues. Whether that's through my daughter or you know that I think you always hope that you make this world a better place... and that I leave this world better than I got here for. You know one of the most beautiful things... or one of the learnings I've had and this is a little off topic but not really is I just think about something an elder said to me once... we always say what kind of world are we leaving for our children but the reality is what kind of children are we leaving for our world... so that's what I think of.

[end of recording]