

# Tunchai and Lindsay

## Creative ways to access help

TUNCHAI: ?edlanet'e-a. [How are you?] My name is Tunchai.

LINDSAY: Taanishi. [Hello] My name is Lindsay.

TUNCHAI: We've been supporting indigenous youth and Indigenous youth mental health for many, many years, and we met out of a conference that was focused on Indigenous youth organizing and mental health. We are constantly hearing about the deaths of young people in communities that we are connected to, and so it's almost like you're constantly dealing with that cycle of grief. It takes a toll on all of us.

LINDSAY: In a lot of Indigenous communities there isn't the same access to services or to mental health supports that may be present within urban communities or in other locations.

TUNCHAI: And sometimes it might not feel like you have anybody to talk to or like you have anybody that you can trust. But there also are other ways to reach out for help. For me that looks like going out to the river, out to the lake, sitting by my favourite tree. And that's a really integral part of our Indigenous identity is our connection to land. There are different creative ways that you can access help that isn't necessarily going to see a counsellor.

LINDSAY: I think that's what is different about Indigenous young people taking on leadership in life promotion and healing work is we have these other options or these other priorities of relationships that can guide us and support us.

TUNCHAI: A source of help that is often overlooked I think is laughter. In Indigenous teachings and Indigenous communities we consider laughter

medicine. And when I hear of events or something that happens that triggers my own mental health and I'm really struggling, often we'll come together as friends and we just laugh or we find things to laugh about, we find those elements of light and love and humour.

LINDSAY: For people experiencing isolation, you know, there's digital options for hearing words of support like in the We Matter videos.

TUNCHAI: Maybe like reading books or stories of people who you really resonate with like reading comic books and superheroes you resonate with. For me, my dog has been like a big saving grace in my life and being able to build a connection with my pet is a big part of my own mental wellness. So there are definitely so many different avenues of help that you can access, that you maybe wouldn't think of.

LINDSAY: I think we need to diversify. We can't place all of our reliance on one person or one resource. Depending on circumstances you may need different things, so that's why we try and encourage youth to take a look

# Maryam and Aswani

## “I’ll support whatever option you choose”

MARYAM: My name is Maryam, and I met Aswani at our university’s orientation, and ever since then we’ve been best friends.

ASWANI: When I started university, I was at a point that I couldn’t function anymore. I couldn’t sit through lectures, I was really jittery, and my heart was always racing. She started opening up about how she felt very similar, and we just started talking from there, and we trusted each other more and more.

MARYAM: Yeah, like having trouble sleeping was a big thing I found with you, and missing class when normally you don’t. Or at the last minute you’d tell me, “Oh, I slept in. I’m sorry.” I was just like, there’s probably some stuff going on.

ASWANI: Growing up in a culture where talking about your mental health is not appropriate, I didn’t know where to seek help, and Maryam was really there for me. We had a lot of resources at school that I could use but I wasn’t familiar with, and Maryam mentioned some different programs, and I found one that fit for me.

MARYAM: I knew of a few resources from my experience, so I suggested all those to Aswani. There’s no way I’m going to tell you what to do, I’ll just support whatever option you choose. No one deserves to feel grey all the time or sad all the time.

ASWANI: The first time I went, it wasn’t planned. It was because I was having such an off day I knew I needed something right then. I went to the counsellor, we talked for a little bit, did an intake and they recommended I go see a doctor. Even when I started taking medication, I had close family members saying, “What do you have to be depressed for?” So

it was really hard to come out and say, “Yeah, I have depression and I need help.” That was the biggest barrier to get over.

MARYAM: I knew she was struggling with the side effects of it and was having those down days. I tried to remind her that recovery isn’t linear. I just wanted to be there to remind her of how well she was doing.

ASWANI: She wasn’t pushing her experiences on me; she was sharing it and listening. Maryam really helped me stick to my plan to get better, and when I felt discouraged, she helped me continue. It felt really good to have someone who’s been through that and is in a good place now to see and know that I can also be in a better place. And that was Maryam for me.

# Estyr and Kirbie

## “I needed to broaden my support system”

ESTYR: Hi, I'm Estyr.

KIRBIE: Yeah, I did need to broaden my support system.

KIRBIE: And I'm Kirby. I'd say our friendship really deepened in third year university for me. I was going through the super tough life transition of coming out as queer. We both come from, like, a pretty conservative side of Christianity, where it's really tough for queer people to find their place and find support, acceptance, and love. Estyr was one of the most important people who encouraged me to be who I am and to discover who that is and celebrate that. A byproduct of the coming out process was that the depression and anxiety that I had experienced my entire life really hit me hard. I entered into a period of pretty deep depression and at that time we were living together and Estyr became, like, my number one rock.

ESTYR: But you've cultivated some really amazing friendships within the queer community that enrich your life in a way that I don't enrich your life. It's been really cool to see that and to see you grow in the context of those other friendships. So proud of you for that.

ESTYR: I've always wanted to be a helper, and I was taught to be a helper.

KIRBIE: And she's good at it.

ESTYR: That's so nice, thank you. That comes from obviously a good place, but it also comes from a place of insecurity and wanting to be loved and wanting to be useful, also a place of obligation sometimes. And that's something that I had to adjust through a lot of pain because I had a couple of friends who really needed mental health supports and I failed in those friendships to direct them to the supports that they needed. And so because this was kinda like not my first rodeo, I knew Kirbie – you are wonderful and I want to give you everything that you need, but now I finally know that I can't give you everything you need. So a big part of our story was me hassling you to go to counselling for over a year and sometimes I'm sure that didn't feel kind, that didn't feel warm or inviting.