

**Courage My Friends Podcast Series IV – Episode 6**  
**Iron & Earth: From The Oil Patch To The Green Economy - A Just Transition**

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**ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.  
*Needs No Introduction* is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

[music transition]

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

**STREET VOICE 1:** When I graduate, will there be such a thing as job security? Will I still have access to healthcare?

**STREET VOICE 2:** We're not seeing the same increase in wages as we are in inflation and cost of living. And I'm worried about what that's gonna mean as far as having a future, having a family and being able to grow.

**STREET VOICE 1** Everything is more expensive. I don't know if it's because of the climate crisis or all of this conflict but I have kids and I need to believe their future is going to be better and brighter.

[music]

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

**VOICE 4:** Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

**RESH:** In our bid to mitigate the impacts of an accelerating climate crisis by moving to a clean energy economy, what must that transition look like for those working and living in Canada's oil patch and for Indigenous communities? How can we ensure that our energy transition is also a just transition? And how are organizations like Iron and Earth creating pathways to do just that?

Welcome to *The Courage My Friends* podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In our sixth episode, Ana Guerra Marin Communities Director and Just Transition Lead and Lead Indigenous Researcher, Dara Wawatie-Chabot, discuss the mission of worker-founded Iron and Earth to create pathways for workers from traditional carbon-based energy jobs to jobs within renewable energy sectors, and how green

transition meets climate justice when it comes to the needs of workers, Indigenous communities and the country.

Ana and Dara, welcome. Thanks for joining us.

**ANA:** Thank you.

**DARA:** Thank you for having us.

**RESH:** Let's start with you, Ana. Tell us about Iron and Earth and your role.

**ANA:** Iron Earth started in the oil sands in Alberta, where some workers were concerned about one of the many boom and busts of the industry cycle. And they were also concerned about what they were seeing with the environment. So we started this organization in 2016 and one of the founders stay with the organization until 2021. And then 2021 started like a new version or an updated version I would call it, of Iron and Earth. So with the new leadership, I came along. I am the Communities Director and Just Transition Lead.

**RESH:** And who are your primary stakeholders? What groups are you working with?

**ANA:** Well, that's a great question because right now we're in the middle of expanding our mandate. So, our mission and vision, and what you can find on the website right now is to empower fossil fuel workers and Indigenous workers to build and implement the climate solutions required to transition.

My title is Communities Director. It's kind of interesting because a lot of times when we talk about workers, we talk about them in the vacuum. And it's not just the workers. The workers, their family. When a refinery shuts down in a town that affects commerce, education, churches, it affects everything.

So we started looking at a little bit more systematic and like more comprehensive. And that went in the same way with Indigenous workers. It's like, well, obviously there are Indigenous peoples that participate in the transition, but there are other Indigenous Peoples across nations and urban centers that are being impacted one way or another by this transition, by climate change.

So we are currently in the process of doing that internal work. Our audience right now is workers, their communities and Indigenous Peoples across nations and urban centers.

**RESH:** And speaking of Indigenous workers and Indigenous communities, Dara, you are the lead Indigenous Researcher with Iron and Earth. So could you tell us a bit more about your role?

**DARA:** So I'm the Indigenous Lead Researcher and while the title really portrays the fact that I work from an Indigenous perspective, given that I'm Algonquin Anishnaabe. I have grown up on the land with my family and I have that relationship with my communities that I'm from.

But it really just represents the fact that to do any of this work in a just way requires acknowledging the history that Canada has socially, historically, economically, with Indigenous Peoples across this land. So what that means for me, is that for community work, these relationships are our primary focus.

We don't just meet with Indigenous people, you know, we meet with politicians, educators, community leaders, different organizers and frontline activists so that we can assess the needs of everyone living in so-called Canada. And the principles around this are really just to highlight the holistic nature of the work that we do. And ensuring a future for all really does mean for all. It's not exclusive.

**RESH:** And we're gonna go back a bit more into those principles and how they're operationalized through these partnerships with Iron and Earth.

But you mentioned Ana, that Iron and Earth was founded in 2016 by workers from the Alberta Oil Patch, or those working in the oil sands, and that was also the year of the Fort McMurray wildfire that led to Alberta's largest wildfire evacuation. Was that also sort of a motivating factor in the founding or beginnings of Iron and Earth?

**ANA:** I can't tell you specifically if the wildfire was a factor. The workers that were thinking about building Iron and Earth, were thinking about all the environmental impacts that we're seeing. So I think if I'm allowed to extrapolate it, definitely supported that idea. If not, maybe led it, I would say.

**RESH:** Because the reason that I'm asking is I remember videos of those wildfires people driving through and it looked like they were driving through hell. And right now wildfires are raging across the country.

Nova Scotia is going through a nightmare. Last week in Toronto where I am right now, we made the world's top 10 list for worst air quality. So this is an accelerating climate crisis where we're breaking records every year. And so moving to a clean energy economy is therefore a necessity.

Is this feeling shared by oil and gas workers more widely? I know they are certainly by those who founded this organization, but is this a growing feeling among workers in those sectors? Are you seeing more of a buy-in to the need to transition?

**ANA:** Well, I can tell you, in January of 2022 we hosted our first sort of community session, with our new community engagement model. We hosted that session in Hinton, Alberta.

About half of our participants were workers in the extractive industries. Forestry, coal, and oil and gas, Hinton is very diversified on those aspects. And it was very interesting because they had gone through a 2021 big dry season that led to forest fires. And so what people were seeing then and now, they're seeing the impacts and how they're affecting them in an economic way, like how much it affects their expenses.

Another thing we saw, and I think this is quite important, is that workers were indicating that their companies ... I will just kind of paraphrase what someone once said, "we had to create like a fire fighter brigade and we had to create some sort of procedures to protect our company and our production against forest fires".

And this I think is something that we see across Canada - is, it's been left to companies and to people and there hasn't been a comprehensive or supportive pan-Canadian way of this is how you mitigate, this is what you need to do with regards to forest fire.

We've seen people relate it to economic impacts. We see people relate it to how their workplace gets affected. But we see a lot of ad hoc solutions.

**RESH:** And where again, the burden is being placed on the workers themselves. Are you working with organized labor on this as well? The union movement?

**ANA:** So for us, at Iron and Earth, we believe that one of the key points required to transition is to have well paying union jobs. It's the only way we can entice workers that are making a lot of money in the oil and gas field to other industries. Right? So unions are a big component of what we see as a Just Transition.

We do have conversations with unions and we do try to work together. I personally like to work from a collaborative perspective, and so all of our approaches ever since I started at Iron and Earth have been like, okay, what's the union movement doing?

So, yeah. I think one of the main messages that is coming from the union movement is that they have the workers required to transition. Right. That's their response to a lot of what the companies and governments are saying for sure.

**RESH:** Right. Just to mention that a couple weeks ago we had Jamie Kirkpatrick from Blue Green Canada who was really talking about this consolidated union effort that is being put forth.

**ANA:** Exactly,

**RESH:** Yeah. Within a Just Transition.

So Iron and Earth is about transitioning workers, as you say, communities and industry toward meeting the national climate targets of reaching net zero or carbon neutrality by 2050. And a major focus is on training and transferring skills of oil and

gas workers to renewable energy sectors. So give us an idea of this. What types of skills transfer are we talking about, Ana?

**ANA:** One of the things that we're doing with the expansion of the mandate is to lower the barriers to transition more than like transitioning the workers. So I just wanna do that little bit of an intro. Because a lot of times . Oh. So you're a training institution. It's interesting how the conceptions can go.

But I would say that from the skill perspective, a lot of times electricians, people that are in those trades are fairly easy to transition. A lot of times unions already are offering that kind of skill transferability.

I think something that a lot of people don't really see is that, for example, a driller in the oil and gas or oil sands can be a driller in other mining industries. The size of the drill might be a little bit different, but you still can do the job fairly easy and electrician is needed anywhere, right?

So I think it's more about what the pay is and what kind of benefits you can get from moving from one company to another. We know, for example, there are certain companies that don't even require that you graduate high school to go into this kind of job. So obviously it's a low hanging fruit or like a low barrier participation industry that attracts a lot of people.

So what we're trying to do is like: Hey, you have the skills. The skills are very good and they can help you a lot. And maybe we can figure out a way how you can transition.

But the model that Iron and Earth is trying to go about is to meet people where they're at. So basically have conversations one-on-one with participants and assess: So what do you want to do? Because a lot of times the other problem is choice. People don't have choices. We're just like, oh, you have to transition from this economy to this economy. And people are like, what? I just want to retire, you know?

**RESH:** Yeah.

**DARA:** One thing that comes to mind for me, when I think about workers, and what I've read and what I've heard from people so far is climate anxiety and the mental health crisis and how it's going to really impact people and families and relationships and how we navigate life day to day.

And what we really need to do is provide people with stories of hope and inspiration. And like Ana said, like making avenues that remove these barriers to participation that really allow for people to feel like they belong in this movement.

**RESH:** So what are some of the key or the major barriers that people are experiencing in moving forward with a Just Transition?

**ANA:** Well, I can start a little bit talking about what Iron and Earth does. Barriers are quite individual. So for instance, Resh, you and I are immigrants, so we face different kind of barriers that someone that's Indigenous or someone that is fully born Canadian, right? Someone that finished high school, someone that actually has a graduate degree or an undergraduate degree, right? So like the way we're trying to see about it is to put it back on the person. So what is it that you need and what is that you want?

We're trying to utilize harm reduction methods and models of care that have been used frontline in public healthcare, like the overdose epidemic. All that kind of public health awareness and work that a lot of amazing people are doing on the ground. And we're trying to utilize some of those concepts into this work. Because it is about caring for one another.

I think one of the biggest conclusions I got from the people's response to the COVID pandemic and other reactionary processes have happened in the past few years, is that people feel - and this is a big word- FEEL, that they're not being taken into consideration. They feel they are not being heard. They feel that they are outside of what's going on with the world, right? And so what we're trying to challenge is that feeling. And it's really difficult.

I work in program delivery with Iron and Earth. I work, again, more on the engagement piece. But a lot of times what I hear from my counterparts at the program delivery is like, well, actually someone just needed a little bit of talk and talk to a mentor, and they felt like, oh my God, okay, there's so many things I can do, right?

There's a lot of, I don't know if it's fear, but it's more like it's the unknown. And you know, we as humans kind of are difficult to move from things that we don't understand or that we don't know. We're not good at changing.

**RESH:** Iron and Earth is also engaging in projects with Indigenous communities. What are some of these projects right now, Dara?

**DARA:** So currently, we have a few projects going on actually. So Iron and Earth has many different sectors where we have different things going on. We have a Climate Careers Portal, which is something entirely different from my work and that involves Indigenous peoples on its own front. I am in charge of the Indigenous research component for the communities and Just Transition and Visioning. And the work that I'm planning on doing is really just trying to amplify the voices of Indigenous communities where we see the long-term impacts of these Clean Energy Projects they're called. So solar projects.

For example, something is built on a community; what happened 10 years later? Cuz we are in that process now of tracking and really seeing what the impact of clean energy is having in communities. So that's really what we're trying to do, is bring these stories to the front and remind people that this technology is not new.

And we do have power as a collective, and we just need to work together to amplify those voices.

People feel disempowered politically, socially, in so many ways, right? Especially from the pandemic, like Ana was saying, people didn't feel heard, people didn't feel listened to or respected.

And as much friction or conflict that that may have caused in society. What I want to take is those lessons that we can use to build onto a more collaborative future. Like what do people want? And they want to feel involved. They want to feel like they belong to this new world that we're going to create.

**RESH:** There's so many communities that are going through this. But when we're looking at Indigenous communities cuz they play a particular role. So many resources, whether it is the old, coal-based resources or the renewable resources, are by and large found on Indigenous lands all over the world, not just in Canada. And historically, when it's come to, again, resource-based industries in Canada, fossil fuels, also forestry, fishing, the list goes on. The relationship between industry and many Indigenous communities have been less than stellar to put it very lightly. In many cases it's been downright exploitative. So what has been going wrong and what needs to change going forward? What transition needs to happen there in terms of how industry works with Indigenous communities?

**DARA:** Well, based on the research that we've been doing so far, listening to what people have to say, who are already talking about these things, economic reconciliation is a word that comes up a lot. You can call it a buzzword, you can call it whatever you want, but I think it's really important to think about the way that these concepts will have very real impacts on the ways that legislation and policy are going to be written. The way that research is going to be conducted. The types of statistics that are gonna be kept track of. And all of these things feed into each other. Right? And so for me, with my background from working in the federal government as a public servant, there is such a lack of collaboration, I guess.

And as an Indigenous person, what I see is just these hierarchical, bureaucratic systems being recreated over and over again, trying to find solutions that these various systems created. I wouldn't say problems, but gaps. And I think, from what I've experienced in my own journey as a researcher, as an academic, as an activist - this comes from one of my teachers actually - and it's that there can be many truths and then there's still like that objective truth.

And we have to, as people acknowledge our own positions and where we are at as humans, and just let go of that ego. And be willing to sit at the table and be willing to be wrong. And be willing to continue that conversation. What I say to people all the time when they challenge me: You know, well, you can't make everybody disagree.

I'm like, Well, everybody could also just be a little bit unhappy. That's the concept of compromise is that we each give a little bit so that we can get a little bit, and that's

sustainability, right? That's reciprocity. And the law of reciprocity is something that is lacking within the current economic system.

All human beings would benefit from the implementation of principles like this. Ensuring that people are taken care of. For example, we see the benefits of providing people with childcare for the duration of their prenatal and postpartum periods like that would totally eradicate the need for a childcare system that would solve so many issues if we just took care of parents first and foremost and allowed them that time to situate themselves in the world as a family.

That would have positive impacts as well on different things like healthcare issues on family, family dynamics and just being able to take that time to heal. Right. And so for me, like we have to heal our families as much as we have to heal our governments.

We have to walk the talk. And so I have seen that ideological shift towards economic practices like eliminating food waste, plastic use or the need for certain unsustainable materials overall.

And a lot of that change is being collaboratively led by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people because we need resources, we need time, we need capacity. And those are all things Indigenous people just don't have right now.

**ANA:** Yes. It's actually interesting listening to Dara. I actually come from the extractive industries. I used to be a geological engineer and I worked in Latin America and Canada. I dealt with a lot of those communities that are being impacted by those resources.

So it's a very interesting perspective to be on the other side.

A well fundamental difference that relies on timing and profit. So for any sort of resource extraction project, you need to do what's called exploration.

Like you start with prospecting, you go to exploration. It can take two to five to six years to actually have a project up and going. But because you have to have community buy-in, you end up promising the world to communities even though you don't even know if the project's gonna go ahead.

So that's one thing I've seen across the world. The other bit of timing that I see is a lot of Indigenous communities are trying really hard, especially in Canada, to determine and to fight for their own self-government rights to their right to self determination.

So they're going through that process. And that is anathema to the needs of the industry, particularly when we talk about critical minerals as one of the ways to solve the current problems we're going for.



It's like, Oh, we're gonna do these amazing things. Oh, in three years from now, actually we're not gonna do anything because the project was not feasible. Sorry. Bye.

So you already, you lost the trust there. And then it's like, Hey, we're working with the government, we're doing negotiations between the federal government or ourselves about our own self-governing rights.

And then your land management is like, Hey, you got five new claims to look for critical minerals every day. And that also ties it into what Dara was saying, is that the capacity, the resources for Indigenous peoples to actually say, well, what do we want in our land? What kind of economic reconciliation we're looking for?

**RESH:** And Iron and Earth is currently involved in particular partnerships with Indigenous communities in terms of their vision and this transition to renewables.

**ANA:** Our longest partnership is in Maskwacis, Alberta. So Maskwacis, Alberta is an incorporated town that hosts four different First Nations.

I think it's 45 minutes away from Edmonton, if I'm not mistaken. And what we've done in Maskwacis has been an ongoing relationship. So we started installing solar panels at the daycare of the Louis Bull First Nation. There was some training there and there were some plans, but then the pandemic obviously hit. So last year we were finally able to finish the other project that had started before, which was installing solar panels and the wind system in the Maskwacis Cultural College that also included training.

We're currently planning - folks from program delivery mostly, but also our communities program - there's another installation hopefully coming this summer.

We're in current communication with Fort Nelson First Nation with Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Saskatchewan, Fort Nelson in BC. We have also some communications with McLeod Lake Indian Band. We did some work with the government in Nunatsiavut. These are all more towards program delivery.

Right now we're also in the Northwest Territories in Deh Cho region around Fort Simpson and Hay River, and we're doing some solar installations with training and inviting community members to be part of the work.

**RESH:** Okay. And also you mentioned financial reconciliation.

The government of Canada is a major stakeholder in all of this, obviously. They've made a number of global climate commitments. They've brought in a Just Transition plan to meet these commitments. And earlier this year, they released the long awaited Sustainable Jobs Plan with funding in the federal budget. Iron and Earth has received a major injection of government funding.

What is this funding and what projects are they being earmarked for?

**ANA:** This is quite telling cuz today I just received an email that the Sustainable Jobs Act has been tabled. We just don't have access to it. So we're hot off the presses.

**RESH:** Wow, okay.

**ANA:** Yeah, so I don't think it's gonna change a lot from the Sustainable Jobs Plan document that came out a few months ago. So our funding come from the sectoral workforce of the ESDC employment service.

**RESH:** The Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program.

**ANA:** Yes.

**RESH:** Okay.

**ANA:** Thank you. Well, it's very interesting because basically what we proposed there was a comprehensive vision. Actually, the title of our proposal relies on Resilient Communities Being Part of the Just Transition and those climate solutions that we talked about.

So it starts with communities where we're doing the community engagement and then it's basically across programs. So it involves components for our Renewable Skills Program, which is the one that focuses on installation of solar and wind, and then training.

Then our newly developed Net Zero Pathways that works on soft skills and what is required for workers to transition across industries. Our Climate Career Portal, which Dara mentioned. So it's actually across programs and our idea is to really try to put to the test that model of care and harm reduction that I've mentioned before.

So what does this look like? What are we talking about? How does that make sense? How does it really actually look like to talk one-on-one with workers? How does it really look like to use public health models into this kind of work?

And part of it also funds Dara's program. We really here at Iron and Earth wanted to put Indigenous Peoples at the forefront of the Just Transition.

**RESH:** And if I recall, the actual amount was \$16 million, right?

**ANA:** Yeah. It's a little scary.

**RESH:** Too much or not enough?

**ANA:** I will say we were a small organization with big ideas and doing the work, and then because of that money we had to scale up very fast. It's helping us a lot. It's one of those things where you're like, is this a once in a lifetime thing or are we gonna continue getting those kind of programs or projects or funding.

**RESH:** Absolutely. So Dara, did you wanna come in here and speak more to your hopes for that funding?

**DARA:** I hope our program expands and continues. And having a fully Indigenous implementation team to facilitate that these relationships continue and these relationships continue to be sustained.

My people also have wampum belts and they're very sacred tools of education that have to do with spirituality and their instructions on how to live a good life. I never leave who I am out of this work, and I never expect anyone to leave who they are out of this work.

And so what I hope from this is that anything we put out, anything that happens just continues to be good with good intentions. Like I said, I've seen this ideological change, right? Like I have children, I am a single parent, so. It's not about the money for me, it's about making sure that my children have a safe world to live in and that I can provide for them for the years to come. And I can't do that without a world to live in.

**RESH:** Our jobs are connected to every aspect of our lives. Income, yes. But it's not just about income, as you said, Dara, but also our identities, the social capital and culture of our communities, our histories.

And I'd imagine that this is quite a change. Going from the traditional energy sector to the renewable energy sector for workers, for industry, for communities. We were talking about fear. Fear can often be the result of change. And we've seen this playing out within provinces as well as nationally. In 2019, before the pandemic, we saw it in a big way when we had a trucker caravan that was driving from out west to Ottawa to protest the federal carbon tax and the stalling of oil and gas pipelines. So can we talk a bit more about the fears that you may be seeing and what's driving them?

**DARA:** This is really, I would say the focus of my work. And as much as I want to, you know, emphasize on the fact that we have to stay hopeful, we also have to recognize that there's still so much work to do.

The language that they're using, the terminology that they're using, it's not appropriate, I would say for the very real crisis that we are in. That we have been in for decades already. I spoke last week with the David Suzuki Foundation and Elizabeth May had mentioned that this was a crisis people were talking about in the nineties, before I was even born. And so the fact that we are so unprepared for the crises that we knew were coming, like these wildfires that we have never seen at this rate at the severity in these locations before, I don't, understand it. you know. And as

a younger person who is now coming into this industry and into the world, I'm basically taking on this responsibility. But it's more of a burden. A burden of trying to maintain a society that seems to be crumbling at our feet. So, it's not just climate anxiety, it's economic anxiety, it's poverty, right?

Like I come from a background of so many challenges. And this position, this job, this organization, this team, these people really lifted me back up and helped me get back on my feet. And they believe in me, and they're giving me the space to do things in a really good way where it really is Indigenous-led. And I do believe in the work.

And I think if we're gonna face any kind of challenges, whether it's fear of getting food delivered in from the next town over because the roads are getting shut down from the wildfires or flooding is also shutting down roads. People are suffering, people are starving, people are gonna freeze, people are overheating, we're losing power.

Solar power dropped drastically, I think like 60% when there was all the smoke in the sky from the wildfires. So we can see that even with these technologies, we are not prepared.

And so instead of trying to, I think control, we have to just learn to adapt and really just get comfortable with being uncomfortable and realize that fear, anxiety, these are survival mechanisms. We need to listen. Why are we feeling this way? We need to understand it and do something about it.

**RESH:** Yeah. And as you said, the terminology right? So we've moved from climate change to climate crisis. From global warming to global heating, just to be able to communicate the urgency of this issue. And yeah, fear can be a real motivating factor. It could also be something that could instill paralysis as well. Or even fuel opposition to a Just transition.

**ANA:** Yes. Well, this is very interesting. You're right, we're making the terminology more dramatic, but it's not resonating with a lot of people. So what a lot of communications experts and a lot of politicians are interested are, are the movable middle. Those people that are not either in the complete negative of an opinion or are not complete in the positive.

And so when I came to this job, I knew that there had to be a way for us to engage with communities that move beyond the polarization I was seeing on media, from politicians. Especially when you're working in rural communities, the negative reactions that people will respond to, to being against oil and gas, even though we're not. Like the first thing that you get asked when you're in a community is like, are you against oil and gas? And you're like, no, we're not.

**DARA:** If I can add. Even on that front, it's just about even resources and money. Like people don't wanna spend extra time and money learning new skills, doing new

things, having a new project because they fear it's gonna take away from something that already exists.

**ANA:** Exactly. So, what we ended up doing when we thought about how we wanted to engage with communities, we actually focused on language. And so the way we're trying to have constructive conversations across this land is to localize it so that people are talking about whether they're affecting them, like within their neighbors, their community, their families.

And we're trying to not continue narratives. So, like depending on the audience, we don't necessarily say "just transition", we talk sometimes about "extreme environmental events". This is all because of that fear and that negative reaction. And I think one of the key components on that fear is the social contract.

We as a society have a social contract that said, Hey, well you can work and you're gonna get your house and your car. This is basically what we agreed. And so with climate change, and obviously as it goes worse and worse, basically what a lot of people are feeling is that, oh, but what do you mean that my way of living is wrong? What do you mean that how my family immigrated to this country, how my family created wealth, how my town got better, is all wrong. It cannot be wrong. I live it. Right. So there's a fundamental challenge because we're basically saying that what you learned from the past 50 years, it's wrong.

That already makes people fearful and obviously react negatively. So what do you mean? Am I gonna lose my house? Am I gonna lose my truck? Am I gonna lose the truck that I love tailoring every weekend? Am I gonna lose my job that allows me to have my house, my cottage, paying for my kids' university?

So there's a lot of realistic fear, and there's also the feeling of fear. It's like, nobody told me I was doing wrong. I cannot be wrong. My father cannot be wrong. My grandfather cannot be wrong. So that is that fear that we see.

And so the way we're trying to navigate that is by, again, localizing the conversations.

Here in Victoria, we've been very lucky so far, knock on wood. But if I were to have a conversation here which is where I'm based Victoria, BC, I mean, I would talk about the extreme heat that happened a couple years ago cuz it was pretty bad. Just try to localize it to what happened in the town, how did that affect you?

And so people start finding some common grounds. People start seeing that their neighbors are having the same experiences as you did. That it wasn't something wrong that you did. It's just like, oh my God, this is happening to our town. So that's the way we're trying to combat that fear.

I will say though, there is another kind of fear and it's the fear that's coming from workers to talk about issues. So this is part of our whole research project. We were

trying to conduct interviews with workers across Canada. And this is not something that we only identified. We've seen a lot of research institutions, other organizations . And one of the main things that popped up throughout all of those interviews, are the workers are afraid. They're afraid of repercussions: If I say that I'm pro the transition and I want to transition, does that mean I lose my job? So that's a very big fear.

Workers are also afraid of how they're portrayed in the media. And it doesn't compute to who the person is. So one of the things we do when we talk to workers is that to combat that fear we try to provide as much anonymity as possible. It's like, you have those fears and so we validate those fears and we try to navigate around it.

**RESH:** Right. And these fears are also, as you both mentioned, being perhaps taken advantage of or exploited

**ANA:** Yes.

**RESH:** Within the media and really again, that politically partisan narrative, where those challenging a transition are articulating this as sort of a Jobs vs. Environment debate. You can have one or the other, but you can't have both jobs and a healthy environment.

Recently, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's response to the Federal Sustainable Jobs Plan was essentially that this will be an industry and job killer in Alberta. So what would be your response to those political messages?

**ANA:** Well, I honestly would like to give the response that people from Hinton indicated.

When we first did our work in Hinton, we tried really hard to not impose any narrative. So we didn't talk, as I mentioned, about climate change or just transition. And we didn't even involve the government. So we had questions that were very localized: There was this drought and this fires. How did that affected you? How did that affected economically? You know, very basic stuff. In Hinton, a town that is very rural, people said, we see this polarization. We see that there are external narratives and we actually would like to challenge that with facts and climate education. And that is a very, very interesting ask because the state of local media, not just in Canada. It's like Hinton has a small newspaper. The person works another job it's really hard to get ahold of. So basically Facebook and Facebook groups become their main sources of information outside of the radio stations. Right? And so people are asking for facts, but then when there's no media, there are doing facts. When there is no local media that are supporting that.

When all you see in the media is the Premier of your province saying that that's a job killer, right? People say, like, I don't see that. And another thing that people from Hinton indicated, which again totally unscripted, which I love, was one of the participants was very clear: "I don't understand why does it have to be the environment versus jobs? Why can't we have both?"

So one way of how to look at just transition in a way that worked for them, in a way that they felt that they were supporting the environment and the same time supporting the industries that were there, was talking about diversification.

So they're not ready for a phase-out, but they're ready to have more options so that the environment is taken care of. They feel like they're doing something, but their livelihoods is not threatened. And that I think is very important. Because in other parts of rural Alberta, for instance, Tabor, Alberta. Tabor is quite conservative. People are interested in talking about opportunities. You will not be able to talk about just transition, especially because of all the work that politicians and media have put into that concept. But people are interested in opportunities. They don't wanna shoot themselves in the foot. They are just not ready to commit to completely abandoning that industry.

I'm very interested in narratives and language, so this is kind of my, my happy place. I'll shut up because...

**RESH:** It is interesting, because this is the drama that's playing out in politics. This has become such a partisan football, this debate and really the climate crisis itself.

And for workers, this is not sort of a flip the switch kind of deal. You know, one moment you're working in oil and gas and then the next you are in renewables. There's going to be a lag time that's needed for training or retraining. And that's also where a lot of the fear can come in.

Because in other instances of industry shifts, say in the automotive industry.

**ANA:** Oh yeah.

**RESH:** Right.

**ANA:** It's not good.

**RESH:** It's not been good. We've seen workers who were left behind and left to the mercies of the market.

So what must a Just Transition look like for workers and their families? Because Dara, you were talking about, you're a single mom with kids, so many people have many different families situations. It's not just the workers, it's their families, it's their communities.

**DARA:** What I've noticed too in these conversations is that people don't really understand like what the term Just Transition is. But I think the fact that it is ambiguous needs to be reframed overall. We are going through a time of change. We are going through a time of transition.

And so for me, what that means is including everybody. And that means going to the people who are oppressed, going to the people who face challenges, who face barriers. Not just Indigenous people, but people who live with addictions, people who are struggling with homelessness or mental health issues.

People who just have accessibility needs in general when it comes to economic participation. And so that's really what we're just trying to focus on is bringing those stories to the forefront.

**RESH:** So how is Iron and Earth supporting workers and their families in this lag time?

**ANA:** You have reached the conundrum, the major conundrum. The federal government has completely abandoned the term Just Transition. So now it's Sustainable Jobs Act. That's how they're talking about it. To combat the narratives that are coming mostly from Alberta. So that Just Transition, I keep seeing it more and more diluted personally. But you're right, transitions are not new. And this is something very important is that transitions happen a lot of the times, especially with extractive industries.

And so far, very few countries or towns have done it right. I come from Columbia. I saw what happened when the price of oil would go down and what will happen to the economy in my country. What happened if a coal town, the mining town will shut down and the town becomes like a ghost town. And we see it here again and again in Canada. Every time a pulp mill closes, every time there's a steel factory that closes, every time there's a oil and gas refinery that closes, the whole town gets affected.

And the transition is not really seen as something that we have to deal with. So the concept of Just Transition, which as Dara indicated, it has become very ambiguous. That idea, how do we make it, just? How do we make it fair? And just as in justice, right? What is on the Sustainable Jobs Act. What is being presented does not really address the structural issues that perpetuate the situations that happen.

Dara mentioned like people with disabilities, people with addictions, people that are experiencing homelessness. These people don't even get to participate in this economy, right? A whole vast population that don't even get to benefit from it. So it's obviously complex because what the government will tell you is we're trying to focus on what we can pass. We're trying to focus on the workers that we can handle. But then in order to make it just, and that is the key part, the just bit, we're not gonna achieve it as it is.

**RESH:** Does Iron and Earth have programs that are there to put in interim supports where you you have this sort of government neglect?

**ANA:** Well as I mentioned, our new mandate is to lower barriers of participation. And that is still like a work in progress.



But one of the things that we do is that we offer wrap-around support for everything we do. So at an engagement session, you'll get the choice. And this is very important. You'll get the choice to get money, you'll get the choice to get a dependent care stipend. You'll get a choice to get either a transportation stipend or support driving you to and from the venue. And then that also percolates to program delivery. It's like, okay, you're going through a training with us. You get paid for the training, you'll get dependent care. So we are trying to basically put our money where our mouth is.

It's like, how can we make this happen? How can we as an organization, try to make it a little bit more fair so people can actually even get the choice to take a training course. Right?

So another thing is that we're partnering with United for Literacy, what used to be called Frontier College, because as part of the harm reduction model or the model of care is that some people didn't graduate high school. Some people fail because honestly classroom settings weren't good. So we're trying to account for those people that are either neurodivergent, didn't graduate high school because they had a family to care of. We're trying to connect with other partners, such as United for Literacy to help us build those bridges. So that anybody that comes through us gets a chance. That's already way better than how it is right now.

**RESH:** So it's not just about helping workers in oil and gas sectors to transition skills and to transition into this new energy economy, but you're also opening pathways for younger generations. Because we're also seeing a generational shift across all sectors. And also I read equity deserving populations as well. So those minority populations too, right?

**ANA:** Yes. One thing we do because that's something that I've been very careful about, is people don't have to identify as Indigenous or as a part of any equity deserving or equity abandoned, you know, there's so many ways to call it, but I like to call marginalized communities.

**RESH:** Yeah.

**ANA:** We don't ask them that. These supports are for everybody. What we try to do is we lower the barriers of participation. Because first of all, who are we to ask a person? Are you Indigenous? Prove it. Kind of stuff. That just doesn't work.

And so the way we're approaching this wrap-around supports. We give the choice. So we're like, Hey, you have the choice to get money. You can either get it or you can donate it. No questions asked.

**RESH:** Dara I want to go back to you. For a long time, when we were thinking of dealing with a climate crisis again, a lot of the focus and language has been around sustainability. What is the difference between sustainability and climate justice, between transition and just transition?

**DARA:** When I think of transition, personally I think we're in a time of change. We're in a time of adaptation. As somebody who started my undergrad actually in history and I switched over to political science, I guess that's where I started to really observe the world, the way that stories and religions and cultures have developed, the way that civilizations have developed and changed over time. Collapsed and rebuilt themselves over and over again.

So when I think transition and I see people and politicians playing into these fears only to cause more division and to gain more control. At the end of the day, like this isn't the first time that we have to go through changes like this.

This isn't the first time we have experienced global crises or environmental impact and devastation. And from an Indigenous perspective, I personally am not afraid of global warming or climate change. I am afraid of people refusing to, because we are the ones that seem to be stagnant.

We are the ones that continue to hold onto things. This boom and bust cycle, the type of economic system that our country has thrived on since its establishment through the fur trade, actually this continues to happen. It repeats itself, right? So we're never gonna get away from this unless we fully step out of that extractive model of economic activity for our nation. And I think that when it comes to workers, if people are going to work to provide for their families, what if we create different ways of providing for our families and communities that are more localized. That take those responsibilities off of individuals and create a better community. We can rely on each other to pick up our kids from school if we can't make it down the street. Something happened where we have an emergency. Like all of these little things add up, right?

People can't go to work because they have kids. People can't bring their kids to school because their kids get sick because of the wildfires, because this, this, this, right? Everything adds up. And I feel like the more people feel like they are just alone in this, or like they have no responsibility to other humans or like their actions every single day do not matter. I feel like the further away we're gonna get from any kind of solutions,

**RESH:** Yeah, I mean, we've gone through so many different industries, but the modes of working, have not really changed all that much how we treat workers, how we treat the planet.

It's not just about switching to different sources of energy, which really was what sustainability sounded like, but actually changing how industry works.

**ANA:** Yeah. For me sustainability has never been enough. I started learning about sustainability when I was an undergrad, and that was very early 2000, so I totally aged myself here.

So people were starting to talk about sustainability. What sustainability has become is a way for companies and governments to continue to perpetuate the status quo

and just say, well, we're sustainable, we're helping, we have a corporate social responsibility fund and we support certain foundations.

Climate justice addresses the issues that are the status quo right. So like, climate justice talks about environmental racism, about reparations, about reconciliation. Talks about who are the most vulnerable communities or populations that are being impacted by climate change. Climate justice also address migration, whether it's climate migrants or migrants in the country. It tries to challenge what is known as business as usual.

And that's the same thing about a just transition to a transition. What this movement is trying to do is how can we address some of these wrongs and make it a little bit more fair and welcome for everybody. Gender, race, sexuality. Because we know that if we continue business as usual, we won't get where we need to or we might get to a place where just a few of us are comfortable. Which is how it's always been.

**RESH:** Yeah, business as usual, the status quo. And we're hearing this at the global level as well. For instance, last year's Biodiversity Summit, that was in Montreal; there was a real recognition that we're in an extinction crisis, number one. Yep. And we need to incorporate Indigenous led approaches and ways of knowing into climate and conservation efforts.

You've both talked about reconciliation, this is a big word in Canada. It very much came to the forefront after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their calls to action.

Is this approach that Iron on Earth is working in with Indigenous communities part of reconciliation?

**DARA:** Well, another huge part of the work that we are doing is really working on situating ourselves as an organization in the context of what is our responsibility as people within this particular social contract.

On the topic of reconciliation, absolutely this has to do with it because anything resource and land related has to do with land, first of all. And land has to do with Indigenous rights and access, whether it's treaty or Crown land or sovereign or self-governed territory. There's different ways that we have to navigate these relationships. And I don't think people realize, especially in the public sector and in the policy and legal sectors, just how much Indigenous rights are implicated in every single thing that we are doing. In regards to environmental protection, in regards to economic transition or workers' rights, Indigenous issues are not Indigenous issues. We're just kind of placed at the bottom, even though we experience things that everybody experiences.

I mean, it's our land, right? We have the most recent experience on this territory with this particular context of colonialism.

When it comes to reconciliation, it's just meeting in the middle and finding a way to move forward in a really good way.

**RESH:** Absolutely. And you know, Indigenous populations behind in terms of rights and certainly sovereignty, and all of that, but frontline when it comes to crisis. And of course the climate crisis is part of that.

When comparing oil and gas jobs to jobs in renewable energy, what are the benefits or the incentives for workers? So if you were speaking to workers trying to convince them, what would you say are the benefits of shifting over?

**ANA:** Right now renewable companies are being sort of considered from the entrepreneurial business model, so they actually have a lot of freedom to create this. The government is allowing for a lot of investing and a lot of new companies coming up and forward.

I would say that we want - we, as from the unions and from Iron and Earth - we want companies to offer good paying unionized jobs with benefits. I'm not seeing that everywhere. Unfortunately. So when you ask a oil and gas worker, Hey, don't work for \$45 an hour, but work for \$18, it's really hard for me to tell him to switch.

If it's a union job, it has benefits. That's definitely a plus. And another thing that we do try to do, no matter what happens with the salaries because obviously we can't control that and it's not our job, I would say it's like staying in the community.

So not doing the fly-in/fly-out, right? So like we try to find jobs that are within their communities so that they can stay and be with their families, right? But that's the reality. The reality is that right now, as the industry stand, it's really hard to ask a worker to change because the pay is better.

**RESH:** The pay is better. Dara the same question to you. So if you're speaking to somebody and say, Hey, it's a good idea to transition over from oil and gas, what would be some of the benefits?

**DARA:** Well, why not? Like we've already seen what this current system has to offer, and I think everybody's not really getting what they want and what they need.

I think everybody would benefit from having more time at home with their families, or at least having more leisure time and being able to do what they want to do.

What is the point of creating a prosperous society if every single person in that society can't enjoy it, including the workers?

And so for me, like it's really about giving workers that power and allowing them to decide how they want to live their lives and what they want to be the ultimate goal of their existence. You know, and that's a question that western philosophy asks people all the time is, what is the purpose of our existence? What is the point of living?

And for Indigenous people, our answer to that is *Minobimaadiziwin*, and that's to live a good life. And that looks different for every single person. So it's not for me to tell each person what a good or appropriate lifestyle is. But if we can find ways that take care of people in a holistic way in terms of their health, their mental health, their ability to live and travel. These are human rights that I think everybody deserves.

**RESH:** There are those ethical and moral imperatives and also health imperatives of transitioning to a clean energy economy. And also, as you mentioned, real practical or logistical benefits as well.

People can stay within their communities, within these clean energy economies. It seems where carbon-based jobs rely on energy sources that are finite and focused in specific locations; renewable energy is infinite and everywhere. We've got sun, wind, geothermal everywhere. And working in those sectors is more about harnessing what we need to meet our needs instead of having to truck out to somewhere where there's oil rigs and having to dig into the earth and use these resources until they've run out.

So Ana, I imagine this would also be better for meeting the energy needs of rural and remote communities. And could you give maybe one example of where this is working?

**ANA:** I will talk a little bit about our program in the Deh Cho region which is west of Yellow Knife and Fort Simpson, Hay River, Fort Providence in Northwest Territories. We're actually supporting the second round of a program that started last year.

Deh Cho region consists about 11 Indigenous communities, or First Nations and two Métis associations. So one thing that really worked well with them was to put solar panels in their cabins, because then they become self-sufficient. So they don't need to haul diesel up river to get into their cabin. And it was so successful that the communities were like, can we do it again? Can we get more solar panels in our cabins? So we're currently working with a local partner, [??] Energy, and we're supported by the Arctic Energy Alliance and some other partners in doing this work.

So we're installing solar panels in 17 cabins, and we're doing some training about solar energy and how to maintain it. It's a really good way to talk about solar panels, especially in remote communities, is that you won't need to use diesel.

And we got a lot of testimonials of people that already had the solar panels. they were like really happy about that option because the self-sufficiency, self-reliance, especially with the more and more dramatic climate catastrophe. So either really bad snow, the wildfires. Actually, there were really bad wildfires in that region of Northwest Territories just before it started in Alberta. And so we actually had a wildfire near Hay River and some people actually shelter in their cabin. So that would've support a lot for their shelter during a wildfire.

So there's a lot of really good responses from people when they realize that it will help them, especially during a storm season or fire season.

**RESH:** Is this also changing sort of the relationship about how communities are getting involved? Are these for instance, collaborative approaches? Cooperative approaches?

**ANA:** Yes. We have to have a community partner. We just don't wanna go in and impose.

For instance, the community kept asking about that program. We normally don't do individual solar panels, but the community is looking at it and they like it and they're seeing the change. And more and more people are becoming aware. So we're creating that critical mass that is so important for someone that might feel fear, might feel reticence to change, that we can be like, oh, okay, yeah, well my neighbor is doing it. That's awesome. I want it too.

**RESH:** Is industry feeling the heat, excuse the pun, but is the oil and gas industry, fossil fuel industries, are they feeling the pressure that they now have to do a sea change as well?

**ANA:** Well, I think that the pressure, what I've seen, is more about their supplies, their extraction being carbon neutral.

**DARA:** Within the last, I think five to ten, years fossil fuel investments have actually tripled.

**RESH:** Interesting. Because the other thing is we're coming out of, well, we're hopefully coming out of a pandemic and we saw you know, a lot of industries suspending or narrowing their work and then suddenly they're all opening up again. So how well is the transition doing at this moment?

**ANA:** Well there's two points to that. One of the things is during the lockdown of 2020, there were some environmental measurements and our earth had not been greener or cleaner for like, the past 70 years. So that one is a very important one.

But I think one thing that people don't talk much about, because the industry doesn't want it, is automation. If you look at the statistics jobs in the oil and gas industry have actually been decreasing for the past decade or so because there's so much automation. And so they are needing less and less workers anyway. You can get that information, but they're not advertising it. Because that narrative about we're supporting worker rights and we're supporting workers to have a job, you can challenge that with automation.

I think investors are being a little bit more critical about how they invest. So that's where I see supply chains, like the carbon neutral supply chains, buying acres of land to set up some forests to outsource, like the input of carbon that we're creating, stuff like that.

So that is, as far as I can see, the response from the industry. I unfortunately don't see any ideas about a phase out, especially not the new Sustainable Jobs Act.

**RESH:** Well, that's interesting about automation because I hadn't even thought about that. So it's business as usual, but without as many workers. So you might have workers that are doing the transition, but now these businesses can continue without those workers.

But attitudes are changing among consumers. Is that another pressure that is on industry? People want to drive clean and buy clean and all of those types of things?

**ANA:** You're just speaking to my language. So EVs, electric vehicles . So the idea for automotive industry is replace one, replace the other, right? Oh, you have two trucks, you can get two EVs. You are not really addressing the issues about mobility, about public transportation or anything like that, right. So like there is no change in that industry.

**DARA:** I might add also to create the batteries, we still need to extract those metals and minerals, so it really isn't changing anything about the industry.

**RESH:** And that's a good point. Because when you have fuels and then you say, well, biofuels, but then we're water logging more land in order to create the biofuels as well.

**ANA:** Something quite interesting about biodiesel and biofuel. It actually happened in my country, there was a huge ask about biodiesel, biofuel. And so companies starting to do that and a lot of agricultural land was replaced to do that. So instead of getting food, you were getting biofuel. They were repurposing land because obviously there was more money on the biofuel industries than on the agricultural industry. So we were losing agricultural land. Oh, so we're gonna eat biofuel now?

And I did talk about critical minerals because the resource extraction might not be so carbon intensive; the problems with the land, the land conflicts, particularly with Indigenous people, the Free Prior Informed Consent, all of that continues, right?

So by those approaches, we're not really addressing the structural issues.

**RESH:** Yeah, I mean, again, it goes back to that question of the difference between sustainability and climate justice. It's not just transitioning to better materials, but actually changing practices.

So a final question, say a listener of this podcast is a worker looking to transfer skills or someone who wants to start their career in the renewable energy sector. How would they begin to engage in this process? And Dara, I'm gonna start with you.

**DARA:** I think we just have to redefine what we think is wealth. What we think is success, because it doesn't have to be money. It can be a life. You know, it can be

health. It could be family. An abundance of experiences. It can be so much more than just money. So for me, having a career, first and foremost is to provide for my family. And then second is to acknowledge and uphold my responsibilities to my communities. And my family and my people and everybody who believed in me and gave me this opportunity to do this good work. And that's that reciprocity that I was talking about before.

We all have something to contribute. And so when we find our place and where we can contribute, it doesn't matter where that is, that's our role. That's our role in this web, in this system. And without each person up-keeping their role, it won't sustain itself. And if we open our minds to being able to help each other and adapt, even just in a workplace, like just being able to answer a question for a friend or be open-minded to learning a new skill or taking a new course. I think it'll just really improve a lot for everybody.

**RESH:** And Ana, if somebody wants to transfer skills or start working in the renewable energy sector, wants to get involved with Iron and Earth, how do they begin? How do they connect?

**ANA:** They can go to [info@ironearth.org](mailto:info@ironearth.org). But I would say our Climate Career Portal will be the best place for them to start. The Climate Career Portal is a web tool that they can put their skills and it will show you what kind of jobs you can find in renewable energy. You can also book appointments with mentors and then they can talk to you a little bit about how does it look to work in the renewable industry?

It might be a low barrier for some to be like, okay, I can go to this website and I can see if my skills work.

And for students or people that want to just start on this, it's not about transferring. It also shows potential jobs and careers needed in the energy transition. So I think the climate career portal will be a really good way. It's [climatecareerportal.com](http://climatecareerportal.com).

**RESH:** Okay. And with that, Dara and Ana. Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

**ANA:** Thank you Resh.

**DARA:** Thank you so much, chi-miigwech.

**RESH:** That was Ana Guerra Marin, Communities Director and Just Transition Lead and Dara Wawatie-Chabot, Indigenous Lead Researcher for Iron and Earth.

And this is *The Courage My Friends* podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.



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