

Courage My Friends Podcast Series VIII – Episode 4
George Brown College's 25th Annual Mental Health Conference, Decolonizing Learning and Creating Conditions for Student Well Being

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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

RESH: Why is a focus on mental health so crucial to the well being of today's post secondary students? How can faculty and staff address the growing needs of students and what pressures are they experiencing? What of systemic issues facing Indigenous educators and learners? And how can we create decolonized, inclusive, and healthy spaces of learning where all can thrive?

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: Welcome back to this podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College.

In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

TOMMY (Actor): Courage my friends, 'tis not too late to build a better world

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

RESH: Welcome to the Courage My Friends podcast, episode four, on *George Brown College's 25th Annual Mental Health Conference, Decolonizing Learning and Creating Conditions for Student Well Being*.

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In episode four, we focus on the upcoming 25th Annual Mental Health Conference at George Brown College in Toronto, and this year's theme, *Thriving Together in the Classroom: Creating the Conditions for Student Well Being*.

Author, storyteller, Indigenous academic, and conference keynote, Carolyn Roberts, Dean of the Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies, Susan Toews and Director of Student Wellbeing and Support, Alex Irwin, discuss this year's conference and its focus on teaching, the mental health and wellbeing of post secondary students, decolonizing learning, and Indigenous resurgence through education.

Carolyn, Susan, and Alex. Welcome. Thanks for joining us.

ALEX: Thank you.

SUSAN: Nice to be here.

CAROLYN: Thanks for having me.

RESH: So on February 27th, Toronto's George Brown College is holding its 25th Annual Mental Health Conference. Susan, tell us about this year's conference theme.

SUSAN: So this year we're focusing on teaching.

This conference has a really long history. So this is our 25th annual mental health conference and it's really evolved over the years. I would say the last three or four years we've even more intentionally focused on students. So last year, we focused on international students. The year before, the focus was on the national standard for post secondary mental health. And this year we're really focusing on teaching.

We know that teachers play such an important role in students' well being and sense of confidence, and what they can accomplish, and if they belong in the program, on campus, and at the college. They wield a lot of power, I think, and for good.

And so this year we're bringing out a lot of teachers, a lot of professors at the college are going to be giving a range of sessions. We have 12 different sessions to choose from around empathy and curriculum, humanizing the classroom, anti-racism and well being. using UDL [Universal Design for Learning] learning to enhance student well being and so on.

And we have the wonderful Carolyn Roberts talking about decolonizing learning.

And then in the afternoon, we're going to have a panel talking about the connection between student learning and student well being and what do post-secondary college teachers really need to know. How can they really positively impact student well being.

RESH: Thank you for that. And this is in person, correct?

SUSAN: Yes, it's in person one day.

RESH: And it is focused on teaching, but can anybody attend?

SUSAN: Oh, absolutely. And we have workshops for everyone. So of course, Carolyn's, keynote will be appealing to everyone and the panel in the afternoon. And then the sessions, we have one on employee wellbeing delivered by Manager of Employee Wellness in HR and quite a range. So not every workshop is on teaching. They're all relevant to teaching, but also relevant to support staff, administrators and also external community members.

RESH: Carolyn, as Susan mentioned, you are delivering the keynote address again on "decolonizing learning". And this has really been the focus of much of your work. And you wear many hats.

So you are faculty at the University of British Columbia, but you're also a storyteller, facilitator and author. Just last year, saw the publication of your book, *Re-storying Education: Decolonizing Your Practice Using a Critical Lens*. So, first of all, tell us more about your work and what drives your passion in looking at education from this perspective?

CAROLYN: Good question. So, yes, I wear many hats and most of the work that I've been doing in the past six years is teaching teachers. So, I work with pre-service teachers before they head out into the system and a lot of my work revolves around how do we do work in Indigenous education and how do we start decolonizing the spaces that we are in?

So the book came out of all of the work that I was doing with presentations and working with educators about how they can step into their practice.

That's where my focus is of all the work that I do. And I think the passion that comes behind it is that I really want to be able to change the system for students who don't see themselves within the system.

And how do we encompass all learners in our classroom? And how do we make sure that the next generation comes out of our education system actually knowing the true shared colonial history of this place that's known as Canada today, are really a lot of the factors that allow me to do the work that I do and feed my passions.

RESH: Could you give us a bit of an introduction to your upcoming keynote in terms of, for those who don't know, what do you mean by decolonizing or re-storying learning?

CAROLYN: Well, the term "re-storying" has come a lot through an Indigenous perspective of storytelling. And I am a storyteller, .And I find that when I go and I do this work, people really connect with how we engage others. And through story we can engage others with personal anecdotes or ways that we have done the work in order to help support other people to do their work. So, when I think about re-storying, it really is starting to tell a different narrative of what we have been taught.

So the talk will go through so many different paths of how the education system is for Indigenous students within it. And then how we can start as educators and even just citizens of Canada, how can we step into the work to make sure that we are re-educating ourselves about the untold histories that we haven't been taught in our education system. So when I say "re-storying", it just means let's start to tell the story of this place, the shared story of this place together.

So I go through some history. I go through some ways that we can do that in our classrooms. I use stories and analogies of my own life, my life with my children and how I do this work as an educator and have been doing this work as an educator for a lot of years.

RESH: I can already tell that this is going to generate a lot of discussion because there is so much to talk about from the different experiences that are also coming from within the classroom as well.

And again, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the Mental Health Conference. I think it says that it is a special 25th anniversary edition of the conference. And Alex, why is a focus on mental health so crucial to post-secondary education?

ALEX: Well, I think it's always been so crucial, but I think in this moment, it's particularly so.

We see of course, lots of data and indicators that our students are having a rough time. And I think that manifests in terms of just straight up numbers of visits to our core services, which have gone up pretty dramatically in the last couple of years. So it's a very important moment.

And I also think it's an important moment because we're looking at, as Susan has said, and I really feel as Carolyn has said as well, and really resonates what she's talking about in terms of social connection and inclusion and belonging in the classroom. I feel like we're heading towards the whole campus approach to our students well being and the well being of our employees. And in that way, I think we're just looking at the whole experience for our students.

So the moment's important because it's a hard moment. There's immense pressures that our students are under. The ones in the past that we've always had, jobs and family. Social dislocation if you're an international student. But then also other pressures in the world, right now that are very, very hard for our students.

So we are stepping up with as robust as services as we can on campus in terms of traditional counseling services and our accessible learning services, which works a lot with students on mental health issues. And Peer Mentor Plus, which is a wellness focused peer service. At the same time as we're really trying to be at the forefront, working with all our colleagues across the college and particularly in the classroom on fostering a sense of belonging and community and all of those important things so that perhaps students don't need some of the front-facing services as much because they get that sense of inclusion in those spaces.

RESH: Right. And as Director of Student Well Being and Support, you're sort of ideally placed within that intersection between learning and mental health and all of the supports that are needed. Will we be hearing from students at the conference as well?

ALEX: Yes, yes, we will. In fact, our MC is a student, which is very exciting this year for the first time. We also will have students attending the conference, students working at the conference as volunteers., and then at the end of the day in the program, we will have a panel of students and faculty to discuss the classroom experience and mental health generally, which we're very excited about.

RESH: And Susan, from the vantage point of a college Dean, could you add to what Alex was saying in terms of some of the key factors that you're seeing impacting student mental health and well being and teachers at this point?

SUSAN: Well, I think what we see is so much pressure on students these days.

Post secondary education is so expensive. Living in the city is so expensive. Everybody is worried about where their program will lead them in terms of employment. And particularly for international students there's just an incredible amount of pressure. Time pressure. Pressure to succeed.

Definitely faculty feel that, often from students as well. And when their students find themselves in desperate situations where they feel they need to pass a course or so much is riding on whether or not they pass and they're on visas and restrictions and may need to return home and so many different pressures.

So I think everybody is feeling it and everything that's going on in the world today, which we probably won't even touch on, but it's adding to the sense of what is our future all about. So I think students bring that to the classroom and to courses. And our teachers are so incredibly dedicated and care so much.

And it comes up in class discussions. Sometimes requests for informal accommodations. And I think teachers these days are balancing a huge amount of individual requests from students as well as formal accommodations through the Accessible Learning Services Office, trying to get through the course, the content and help students reach the outcomes in a very short period, 15 weeks. It's an enormous amount of pressure.

We have much more of an understanding now of the environmental impacts on our well being. I think back to years ago with the conference, there was much more of a focus on illness and talking about understanding mental illness. And we really have shifted, the whole conversation in society has shifted, which is great, to more on understanding the environmental impacts on health. And mental health just being part of our overall health, and physical and mental health being connected.

And everything that happens, including as Carolyn and Alex were talking, about how much you feel you belong on campus. Whether you have a friend. Whether you feel like in the classroom you're seen and heard. Whether your voice matters. All of that has an impact on our well being and our mental health.

And so teachers I think carry a lot of responsibility. And so we're hoping to both showcase their incredible skill at George Brown and passion. And also, we hope that people will leave the conference with maybe a few new ideas on how they can do things a little differently.

RESH: Right. And, you know, again, in terms of those social factors, I mean, we can go a little bit into them because just the 2020s alone have been wild as we've all been experiencing. COVID, conflict, as you mentioned, the situation facing international students, the housing crisis, the cost of living.

Students, really are not just students at the post secondary level. So many of them are also workers. They're also balancing family. There's so much that's going on in their lives.

And Carolyn you're coming at this from the faculty perspective as well. And again, all of this translates into the classroom. You are one of those frontline workers who are dealing with this every day. So could you speak to that in terms of what you are seeing in the classroom and how you're dealing with it?

CAROLYN: Yeah, and as you're talking, I was just thinking of how it has changed over time, even from when I was in post secondary getting my teaching degree. How the system had been set up like a full time one year program and the option to work wasn't an option because it was a full time program.

But now when I'm teaching the students and understanding that the program's still a one year program, but students are still having to work and having to balance outside life and the life at school, there's a lot of things. And a lot of it has to do with how expensive things are. How expensive it is to live in the city. And then just juggling trying to get everything done within it.

And I think that the pressures really do take a mental toll on us. And maybe it wasn't something that was as talked about before, but it is definitely talked about now, and how can we better support? And I think that a lot of the work that I do is about slowing down the pace, at least in my personal classrooms. Setting up the intention that we're building a community here and that we have that opportunity to have conversations and connections with other people rather than just pushing through all the work that needs to get done by the end of the semester.

But really creating that sense of community for students. So that they feel like they do belong, that their voice does matter and that they personally matter within the course are all things that I think about as an educator, especially in today's classrooms that there's a lot of other things going on as well.

RESH: Today's classrooms are also just looking so different with the advent of technology and the learning curve that has to happen there and the resourcing and whatnot. I mean, there's a lot going on. The social factors impacting them, personal factors that are impacting them, but also the deeply embedded and systemic factors that tend to impact different groups differently, and therefore, you know, what we've

been saying about belonging being so important. And Carolyn, your work is focused on confronting and transforming the colonial nature of education.

So could you go a bit more into that? First of all, how are educational systems colonial systems? And how do they harm the mental health of particularly Indigenous and racialized students?

CAROLYN: Well, when we think about the system, the system was really created and built for a certain demographic of students to be successful. And within that, we were not told the stories of Indigenous people.

And when I talk about this, I really talk about when I personally was in my Master's program, because prior to my Master's program, I didn't have any Indigenous authors, Indigenous scholars or Indigenous educators. So I never saw a reflection of who I was within these spaces that were supposed to be teaching us all about the world around us, but they only ever told us one narrative of the world around us. And it didn't include many voices, many stories, from many different perspectives. It told us one.

So when Indigenous students step into the classroom, we are being asked to leave a part of who we are at the door, because that's not talked about or shared within those spaces. So we have to leave our indigeneity at the door to come in to learn about something else. And that's not a sustainable thing.

And not only for Indigenous students, but for all non white students that are walking into these spaces. It's not sustainable for us to leave our culture at the door, to be able to come in and learn. We can't. It's a difficult and challenging thing to be able to do.

And when I stepped into my Master's program, it was a program that was with my Nation, the Squamish Nation and UBC. It was a joint program. And we had all Indigenous professors. We read all Indigenous scholars and works. And we had conversations about Indigenous education and Indigenous people that we could actually connect with and have a conversation about because we've come from that lived experience and understanding.

So out of the 12 people that graduated from our master's program, eight of us are in educational leadership positions because we had the moment in time where we got to be able to see who we were and connect with who we are. And that's a lot about what I talk about within our classrooms. We need to make sure that we're having multiple stories from multiple perspectives in our classrooms, so that all of our students can see a piece of them within the work that they're doing.

RESH: Wonderful.

And this is something that has pervaded, obviously, not just the post secondary level of education, but all levels of education to the extent that many Indigenous and

racialized people don't actually make it to the post secondary level. so o this is fantastic that so many out of your program have gone into teaching because another part of the systemic racism that we've been seeing is a lack of hiring from these communities into the teaching profession, especially in higher education.

Could you just go a bit more into what you mean by, Indigenous resurgence through education? How should faculty and and not just faculty, but post secondary institutions approach this?

CAROLYN: Well, when I think about resurgence I'm really thinking about how are we setting up the next generation to be able to succeed and do well within it.

So that means that institutions need to be able to take the time like today I'm heading in to work after, because we're doing a book club. And we've taken a bunch of different Indigenous authors, and together as a group, we're having conversations. So the faculty and the staff are taking the opportunity to learn more and to understand more from an Indigenous perspective. And then talk about how are we going to put that into practice. Because it's not just about adding an Indigenous reading to your syllabus. And it's not just about maybe sharing a book from one lesson within your syllabus.

It's really how do we embed this in the work that we do to make sure that we're continually talking about it? And how are we addressing the spaces within the work that we do that are clearly just one-sided spaces, right?

If all the readings that we're going to do in the class all come from white males, whose perspectives are we listening to in that classroom, right? So how are we engaging with changing that piece of it to make sure that we have multiple different voices from multiple different perspectives, worldviews and cultures within our space? And then how are we able to teach that?

So taking time to be able to unlearn and relearn and then really understand how to do this work in those spaces are things that we'll need to do in order for us to be able to get Indigenous students to the point where they're actually coming in and wanting to be teachers.

They have to be successful in K to 12. And if we don't start to change the things that we're doing, we're never going to change that. Right now in higher education. I think Indigenous faculty is 1 percent of the faculty across Canada. In BC there's only 4 percent of the population that is Indigenous that's teaching . So we have a lot of work to do to be able to create that space and change that for Indigenous people coming up.

RESH: Absolutely. And again, you've been doing a great deal of this work and you've been seeing sort of the positive outcomes of that. So could you perhaps give an example of how this impacts students and and the communities that they belong to when they are in this more inclusive and thriving and rejuvenating space of learning.

CAROLYN: I don't know if I can speak directly to that. What I do know is that our teacher education program, which is the Indigenous Teacher Ed program, it's called the NITAP program at UBC. There's 28 first year students, and they're all from Indigenous communities all over, not just in British Columbia, but across Canada. They come to our program specifically because of the type of care that we provide and support for students. We really do a wrap-around care. All of the faculty know each other and we all have conversations of how to best support each student. And the students feel comfortable coming in to share what they need and we can support them with housing and with food and with counseling and all of those pieces that most universities have as well, but ours is really streamlined for the Indigenous students within our program.

So we really do focus on the well being of the whole student and not just them being at school. But how can we make sure that all the other things in their life... because a lot of them do come from really far away and are pulled out of community to come to this program. How do we take care of them as a relative as they're staying here with us is the focus of the NITAP program for sure.

RESH: And I'm assuming the responsibility for decolonizing education does not fall on faculty alone or stop at the classroom, as you've just said. Could you speak about wider institutional responsibilities? What measures should colleges and universities be undertaking?

CAROLYN: A lot of that has to do with generating spaces for learning and professional development. Just exactly what they're doing next week with this conference is allowing the space for people to come and learn and to understand more. So as much professional development as they can, that is focused in on teaching and educating and learning and creating.

I know in lots of the spaces that I'm at we have Indigenous authors that come in and do talks periodically. We have book clubs. And we encourage the faculty and the staff to participate in all of it. So we don't just focus it in on one piece, we focus it in on all the pieces. So all the staff, all the faculty, and the students are always invited to all of these different things that happen so that they have opportunities to learn.

RESH: And context matters. For the last number of years, post secondaries have been experiencing drastic cuts and underfunding, especially in Ontario. Faculty, counselors and other education workers are themselves more precarious, more pressed, and also experiencing burnout. They are also experiencing mental health impacts themselves.

Susan, what is the responsibility of academic institutions and policymakers in supporting the mental health of learners, but also faculty in the classroom and beyond the classroom. Because you have, as you said, really dedicated faculty, but it's also becoming a far more pressured job, workloads are increasing.

SUSAN: Yeah, that's such an important question. I think the institution has a responsibility to really listen to people on the front lines, what they're going through in

the classroom and to respond. We know that there's been an increase in students acting in a way that we describe as dysregulated and faculty really feeling like it's beyond their scope to respond and need a lot more support. So, we're really looking at that.

I know Alex and his team are doing some training on de-escalation and supporting students in distress and trying to do a lot more collaborative work. He's part of a care team that responds when there are issues. Because things have really changed and the expectations for teachers in the classroom are really different.

And as a Dean, I'm trying to really understand and listen and be responsive and supportive when I hear faculty say, I feel overwhelmed and this is beyond what I can do. And we need to be more connected to people who can provide support.

These are in situations, as I said, where students are in distress, but also in the daily sort of grind, or when students, as I said earlier, experiencing so many difficulties in their personal lives, and then it comes out sometimes onto the teacher in begging for marks and things like that. And that also has such an emotional toll on teachers. So really trying to understand that. Seeing how it impacts their ability to manage their workload, where they need supports. And just trying to be responsive.

Now, that's sort of the teacher level. I think the institution also has of course, the responsibility to all the employees and their well being and their mental health. And need to provide resources and supports that are accessible to everyone full time, but also contract employees. And make sure that everyone knows about those resources and can access them easily. We need to be flexible in our time-off policies and all of the things that people are requesting so that they can care of themselves and so they can bring their best selves to work.

RESH: And I'm sure this is going to really inform a lot of the discussion that's going to be happening at the conference. These are the discussions that are happening every day within classrooms and about classrooms as well.

And Alex from the supports and services side, do you want to add in here? And again, as Director of Student Well Being, what are the conditions for student well being. When you are picturing the ideal scenario, what are you seeing?

ALEX: I mean, so much of what Susan said is the same with services in terms of the needed supports for employees.

I just think the pressures are huge at the moment. When you're frontline staff, faculty, counselors, accessible learning consultants, people working on all levels with students right now, could be very stressful. There's a real need for self-care and as Susan said, flexibility on the part of the institution.

Particularly now overlaid with the stresses of the world, the stresses of the work environment that we're experiencing in the college environment. So I think the care

of the institution as much as is possible in this environment is so important. And I think that can very much be on a local level and certainly we try our very best in Student Well Being and in Student Services generally to be there for staff and recognize the pressures that they're undergoing right now.

And, of course, when you talk about what is student well being? What would the ideal state be? I think it would just be very holistic, very multi-tiered in the classroom in the environment, recognizing the diversity of voices and experiences that Carolyn spoke about. So that in the classroom and when they come to services, students are recognizing themselves in the people around them and feeling like this is a space for belonging for community where they can feel accepted. And that's always ongoing work that needs to be done at the college.

So I think we use language that feels very positive right now in terms of whole campus and all of those elements. Living up to that is always a challenge. That's okay. We have to always be ready for critiques and we have to be ready to improve how we do things.

And I think a conference like this and bringing people together to talk and to share viewpoints, even if difficult at times and challenging is so, so important. So we're always wanting to be there for that.

RESH: And thank you for including counselors and people dealing with access and accommodation and the other frontline workers and education workers who are involved in this, because it is very much a whole community that's needed.

Carolyn, who can or should deliver decolonization, anti racism, diversity initiatives? And who are they for? Is it only those belonging to historically oppressed groups? Or can they be delivered by those coming from perhaps historically privileged groups as well? Who are you speaking to through your work and your upcoming keynote?

CAROLYN: I'm speaking to everybody. Everybody who wants to step into the work to start to change the conversation within our education system. So it's really to everyone.

And what I have found most interesting once my book was published was how many non educators pick up my book and love it and have learned so much from it. And then they go to share with their friends the book as well. So I really do just speak to everybody who would like to learn and know more.

RESH: Right. And we'll be linking your book in the show notes to this episode as well.

Now the reason that I asked that question is that there may be some who feel that, you know, mental health, decolonization, inclusivity is either not their concern, or it's not their place. And we're also seeing how diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI

initiatives and policies, which includes mental health, all aspects of mental health, is being used as a political dog whistle.

If this conference were being held in the United States right now, it likely would not be happening. So, could you speak to this and the discomfort or resistance that you've encountered in your work and how you deal with it, Carolyn?

CAROLYN: Yeah, well, when I think about it, when you talk about DEI, you're talking about human rights. That's where we need to start from. Every student has the right to have an education. And everybody has the right to further their education and do other things within their lives. And not just be slated for one particular way that their life is going to go, simply because of how and where they were brought into this place where we are being. So when we think about creating a space for everybody, of inclusion and knowing that we all come in with different strengths and different abilities of what we can do, we actually need to honour all people coming into our spaces.

I just believe that everybody deserves a chance at doing everything that they would like to be able to do and being of a historically silenced demographic shouldn't stop you from doing that.

RESH: And have you actually encountered a great deal of resistance when you're working in decolonizing learning environments?

CAROLYN: Oh, yes, every day, on a daily basis. On a daily basis, I encounter pushback. White fragility is really big. I encounter people who are not willing to see or understand how it affects people on a daily basis. Some days are better than others, but yeah, it's a daily basis for any non white person in academia to be in those spaces, to have the ability to do the work in such a good way.

RESH: And what are some of the strategies that you use?

CAROLYN: It just depends on the day.

So I'm super fortunate where I am today is that I have a really great support system of Indigenous people who work in the same office.

When I was alone in a space, it wasn't very good for me to be because I didn't have those people that I could come and we could talk and we could debrief and think about ways that we could step back into the work. Or even just to get it out. So having a support system is really critically important in the work that we do.

Also knowing and understanding when you're having conversations with people - and this is something that I've learned as I continue to do this work - is that there's some people who would just like to be right, and then there's some people who would like to learn.

So understanding the difference of how the questions are coming and how you're answering them and how they're responding really makes a difference.

Some people, I just say, well, here's a really good book. And I pass them the book. And I said, once you finished reading that, maybe we can have another conversation. But I'm going to step aside from this conversation at the moment. There's times that are like that. But honest to goodness I believe that there's so many more good people that want to do the work out there than those who push back. That just really want to know more. And then you can have those conversations with them.

RESH: Absolutely. Now, Susan, what are you hoping attendees will take from this year's Mental Health Conference?

SUSAN: Mm hmm. Well, I can't wait to hear Carolyn's keynote. I'm already inspired. I know it's going to be fabulous.

I was just thinking of a session this morning for senior leadership on intersectionality and privilege and what it means to our leadership. So I think it's such a big priority at George Brown. So I'm hopeful.

And I think that most people come to the conference really love it. And we've got a lot of repeat people who come every year because it's such a great opportunity to connect with other like-minded folks, but also have some good, interesting, eye-opening, mind-shifting conversations with each other.

We're going to have a wonderful keynote. Carolyn's going to be very inspiring and thought-provoking.

And then people will have lots of choice. So they can really find their own pathway, through what would they like to focus on from the 12 sessions. You can really make it your own day. And then incredible lunch made by the Chef School at George Brown.

And lots of chance to network. We often have people coming from outside the GTA and inside the GTA, community members, but also other people who work at post secondary or in government.

And then round out the day with the panel. I always find the panel goes over really well for people, and they really get a lot out of that experience.

So I'm hoping that people find it an enjoyable day where they really feel like they belong and their voice is critical to the conversation. And that we want as many people as possible from a wide range of departments, as well as situations, students, jobs to participate. And I hope they're inspired to just critically self reflect.

What are we doing? What are we not doing? What are our biases? How are we thinking about things? What could we be doing differently? What small change can we make to make things a little bit better?

RESH: And in this very quickly shifting social context as well.

And the same question to you, Alex, what are your hopes for this year's conference?

ALEX: Well, I think Susan just said it really, really well. So I would hope for all of that.

And I would also just say that recognizing that we spend a great deal of the conference, and we will this year again, looking at how we support students. But of course the majority of attendees are employees, staff, people in a learning environment, people in the service area, counselors. And I think my hope would be that we have really a lot of space for that this year in particular, and for people to talk about their own role, themselves in this work. And how this is impacting them in this moment.

So I'm hoping for that as well as great discussions and supports around how we are there for our students. And I'm also very excited to hear Carolyn's keynote as well after today.

RESH: And Carolyn your final thoughts on how do you envision a decolonized, re-storied and truly inclusive approach to post secondary education that benefits the mental health of learners and education workers?

CAROLYN: I think a lot of it has to do with relationships. And building relationships and connections to people and to place. For people to feel that they belong, that they can be successful and that there's a support system there for them to be successful.

RESH: And in building those relationships and in building that path, what do you want participants to take from your keynote and from this year's conference?

CAROLYN: I would like them to take a way to be energized of new ways that they can think about how to do this work and be really enthusiastic to step into something that they might not have done before and looking at new ways to do things.

RESH: All right, and listeners can attend Carolyn's keynote session and the rest of this year's 25th Annual Mental Health Conference on *Thriving Together in the Classroom: Creating the Conditions for Student Well Being*. And this is on Thursday, February 27th at George Brown College in Toronto. For online registration, conference fees, and location, you can visit www.georgebrown.ca/25th-annual-mental-health-conference. The conference and registration link will be posted in the show notes to this episode.

And with that, Carolyn, Susan, and Alex, thank you so much for joining us. It has been a pleasure and I am looking forward to the conference as well.

ALEX: Thank you.

SUSAN: Thank you so much, Resh.

CAROLYN: Thank you.

RESH: That was Carolyn Roberts, conference Keynote, author, storyteller, and Indigenous academic, Susan Toews, Dean of the Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies at George Brown College and Alex Irwin, Director of Student Wellbeing and Support at George Brown College.

The registration link to George Brown College's 25th Annual Mental Health Conference, taking place on Thursday, February 27th in Toronto, is posted in the show notes to this episode.

And this is the Courage My Friends podcast.

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

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Produced by Resh Budhu of the Tommy Douglas Institute, Breanne Doyle of rabble.ca and the TDI planning committee: Chandra Budhu and Ashley Booth.

For more information about the Tommy Douglas Institute and this series, visit georgebrown.ca/TommyDouglasInstitute.

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