Indigenous Disability Awareness Month Webinar Transcript

November 25, 2025

Kenny Huynh: Hello, everybody. Welcome. Just let people join. We are at 157 people here right now.

Shaneen Robinson: And my voice sounds clear, you can hear me okay, Emily?

Emily Walker: Yeah, you sound good.

Shaneen Robinson: I couldn't find headphones and my laptop charger but we're here so it's okay.

Emily Walker: We're here and people are joining us, and we're really excited for today. So it's going to be a good day, going to be a good session. So welcome, everybody. We have 162 people with us. I'll get started as people continue to join.

Hello, everybody. My name is Emily Walker, she/her. And I am a senior policy analyst at the Manitoba Accessibility Office. Welcome to our webinar today, it's held in honour of Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, and it's entitled "Sharing Our Stories: A Conversation on Accessibility, Indigenous Identity and Community." I'm very honoured to present three incredible speakers. I know we were advertising two speakers, but we've had a last-minute addition so I think it's going to be an even more fulfilling conversation today, so speakers who will be sharing their lived experience with us today.

As we're getting started, if you have technical difficulties, you can contact our office. This information is in the chat, so you can check there, mao@gov.mb.ca or by phone 204-945-7613, and folks can assist you there. This webinar is also being recorded. We'll have the recording and the transcript posted on our website accessibilityMB.ca in the coming weeks. So I just want to recognize all the folks on the call right now, we're at 168 people attending us from many places across Turtle Island and beyond. We gather here virtually in a spirit of respect and learning. So I, Emily, am a white disabled settler and I'm joining you from Treaty One territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples and the homeland of the Metis Nation. A bit about myself, my parents were newcomers from England and Wales, and we were welcomed here with all the privilege of being from Britain, so I've definitely benefited from that. I try to act on reconciliation and strive not to take lightly our family's colonial legacy. I give thanks today for the land, the air, as well as the water that's sourced from Shoal Lake Forty-First Nation, and I really invite everyone here today who might not know about the history of land to look into the history of the land that you are on by visiting nativeland.ca. These lands have been cared for and protected by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. So for the last ten years, Indigenous Disability Awareness Month

has been a time to celebrate identity, strength and community. At the Manitoba Accessibility Office, we recognize how disability and Indigeneity can intersect and how systems of oppression like ableism, racism, colonialism, they continue to create barriers. So, indeed, Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island face additional barriers due to intergenerational trauma, the violence of colonization, systemic harm and the environmental impact that can affect land, water and health. So this month, we honour the knowledge, leadership and lived experience and hopefully beyond just this month, but this month, we are making this our priority for sure, to honour this lived experience or the experiences of Indigenous Peoples with disabilities. We acknowledge, too, that the word "disability" is meant to have a broad, inclusive meaning, and it may not always be used or reflective in Indigenous languages, culture or world views. Instead, we invite everyone to see the gifts and strengths that each person brings.

So now I'd like to share greetings from the Honourable Nahanni Fontaine, Minister responsible for Accessibility.

Minister Fontaine: Aaniin, everyone. I'm pleased to officially acknowledge November as Indigenous Disability Awareness Month. This is not just a recognition but also a responsibility to our relatives living with disabilities whose voices and gifts and leadership are essential to the strength, dignity and sovereignty of our nations. As the Minister responsible for Accessibility and as an Indigenous woman, this work is deeply personal to me. Our government is committed to walking the path of reconciliation, not merely through words but through tangible, sustained action. We know Indigenous Peoples experience disabilities at a much higher rate than non-Indigenous Canadians. One in three First Nations and Metis Peoples live with disabilities. These are not just numbers. These are our loved ones. And too often, they face discrimination barriers rooted in colonization, racism and decades of exclusion, making it harder for folks to access services and participate fully in society. Indigenous Peoples with disabilities have had to fight to be seen, to be heard, and to be treated with dignity. Indigenous Disability Awareness Month is a time to honour the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples with disabilities. It's a time to acknowledge the barriers that persist and to celebrate the strength and resilience that thrive in spite of them, as we work towards a barrier-free society. Indigenous Peoples with disabilities are leaders, language protectors, artists and changemakers. They remind us that disability is not a limitation, it is part of the rich diversity and sacred teachings within our nations. Our government is committed to building an inclusive and accessible Manitoba, one that honours Indigenous sovereignty, upholds human rights and ensures full participation in every aspect of life. Indigenous Disability Awareness Month is a call to action for all of us to support Indigenous-led solutions and culturally grounded services for Indigenous Peoples with disabilities. So today, we raise our voices in solidarity, and we recommit ourselves to a future where no one is left behind, where accessibility is justice, and justice is reconciliation and action.

Today's webinar titled "Sharing Our Stories: A Conversation on Accessibility, Indigenous Identity and Community," is an opportunity to learn, to reflect and to grow together. We are honoured to hear from two powerful Indigenous women, so let us work together to make Manitoba an accessible province for everyone, to ensure no one is left behind. Miigwech to the Manitoba Accessibility Office for organizing this gathering and for all of the amazing work that you folks do. Miigwech to everyone in attendance for showing up, for listening, and for committing to this work of advancing accessibility and justice for Indigenous Peoples living with disabilities. Miigwech.

Emily Walker: Thank you, Minister. So now I'd like to introduce our three speakers. So I'll read all three of their bios and, again, Christian wasn't part of the initial promo for this so Christian is also here today, along with Shaneen and Frances. So first, I'd like to introduce my friend Elder Frances Sinclair-Kaspick, a proud Cree woman from Peguis First Nation Treaty One territory in Manitoba. Frances carries the teachings of resilience and strength from her lived experience as a congenital amputee, born without hands and with small feet. As a young girl, she moved from a wheelchair to walking with two below the knee prosthetics. Her lived experience has shaped a lifelong commitment to advocacy and inclusion for Indigenous Peoples with disabilities. Frances retired in 2018 after 36 years of service with the Province of Manitoba. Congratulations, Frances. That's quite a long commitment. She is the founder of Red Rainbow Woman and an independent author of "the Mountain Within," a memoir sharing her journey of overcoming barriers. She is now writing her second book, which she told me a little bit about today, and continues to speak on Indigenous ability topics offering hope and inspiring inclusion. Her advocacy work spans decades. Frances formed the Aboriginal disabled self-help group in 2006 to create pathways for education employment. She has led national campaigns promoting disability inclusion, worked with the Canada Arts Council to advance equity and accessibility, and continues to bring Indigenous voices forward in creative ways. Recently, she led the Turtle Island project, “Celebrating Indigenous Resilience and Reconciliation” and wrote lyrics for the song "Open the Door" in 2025. In recognition of her life-long contributions, this June, Frances was honoured as an Elder and inducted into the Circle of Honour at Keeping the Fires Burning Gathering. Her work reflects the spirit of perseverance, creativity and leadership, always guided by the vision of inclusion and thriving Indigenous communities. Welcome, Frances. Always a pleasure to learn from you. So welcome here today.

Next, I would like to welcome Shaneen Robinson, a Cree and Gitxsan multi-award-winning broadcaster with nearly 25 years in Canadian media. Shaneen worked at CTV News Winnipeg as a daily news reporter where her stories aired nationally and internationally. She worked as an announcer in various roles on NCI FM, including midday host, community events reporter and host of “Friends" on Friday. Having been mentored by the late great Ray St. Germain in the beginning of her broadcasting career, she spent nearly two decades with the station off and on throughout her many years in television. For nearly ten years, Shaneen worked as the correspondent for "APTN National News" where she garnered much attention for her award-winning series about

the sacred Sundance. Above and beyond her hundreds of stories, including investigative pieces about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, child welfare and residential school survivors, she is very proud of her final journalistic work with the network "Breaching the Sacred," a 22 minute in depth story exploring the tragic reality of Indigenous women living with addictions and using while pregnant. Leading up to her journalistic career, she was very honoured to win first place for the Canadian Aboriginal Writing Challenge for her play “Notay Kiskintamowin, Wanting to Know." The same year, she was named a National Aboriginal Role Model by the Governor General of Canada and graduated from the University of Winnipeg, where she founded the Indigenous course requirement and is also recognized as a notable alumni. I'm also an alumni, Shaneen. That's amazing to hear. Most recently, Shaneen has gotten back into radio since February 2024 working at CFNR in Terrace, BC, and CJWE in Calgary, Alberta, where she now resides. Shaneen aspires to continue working with Indigenous elders, youth, women and artists sharing their stories. Shaneen's most important role in life is at home with her husband Martin and her three sons Sampson, Merrick and Miller. Welcome, Shaneen. We're really honoured to have you today. Welcome back to Winnipeg kind of.

Shaneen Robinson: Thank you, Emily. Nice to be back, or virtually.

Emily Walker: Virtually, yeah.

So as I mentioned, we also had a last-minute addition to our program for today. We're so grateful to have Christian Swan join us in this discussion. So Christian is a proud member of Lake Manitoba First Nation, FN 271. His journey reflects strength, resilience, and the teachings of community. In March 2024, Christian faced a life changing moment when he lost his leg due to gangrene. This sudden event led to homelessness and mental health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic when programs and supports were limited. Guided by determination and the spirit of learning, Christian educated himself about diabetes and found resources for amputees through organizations like War Amps and Easter Seals. These experiences opened new paths and inspired him to share his story to help others with a similar journey. Christian's advocacy began decades ago. In 1971, after the murder of his grandparents, he witnessed the deep impact of intergenerational trauma and began speaking out for justice. Over the years, he has walked to Ottawa and around Lake Manitoba to raise awareness about flooding and other injustices affecting Indigenous communities. He also ran for Chief in his home community. Christian has served as an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper at Mount Carmel Clinic, leading sharing circles, medicine teachings and cultural workshops. With a background in political science and law from Algoma University, he worked as a professor's assistant supporting university courses and organizing powwows. Today, Christian continues to use his voice to advocate for Indigenous rights, cultural teachings, ceremony and awareness for MMIWG2S carrying forward the teachings of kinship, inclusion and responsibility. Welcome, Christian. We're so happy that you could join us last minute.

Christian Swan: Miigwech. Thank you for having me.

Emily Walker: so now this is the good part, we're done hearing me talk. I'm going to ask each of you to share a bit of your story, and I'm going to go away from the zoom. I'm still here, you just won't see me anymore, sick of hearing me. So for those listening, if you have questions for the presenters, please write them in the Q&A box and we will get to them at the end if there's time. So Frances, why don't you go first.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: Okay, thank you very much for that wonderful introduction, Emily. So it is my honour, I'm very honoured to acknowledge, to speak and acknowledge and give recognition to this month's Indigenous Disability Awareness Month. And I'm very happy we are the 7th province across Canada to be recognized and so that was great, that we're recognized from November of 2021. So November is an important month to me and many others of Indigenous, under the umbrella of Indigenous, to acknowledge the disability awareness month of November, and inclusion of our disability heritage. So I grew up in a large, caring family of eight, and I was raised in a very humble home but my grandmother. And she really strongly encouraged me and gave me guidance and was very persistent right from young that I am going to make it in the world, that I'm going to, I'm going to do more than what is expected of me. And from young, I didn't really realize what that all meant.

So the City of Winnipeg, I began public school. So kind of it started there because I began public school and they didn't want me there. They said, oh, no, because back in the day, I'm an Elder, so they wanted me to be at home homeschooled. But anyhow, my grandmother was very insistent that I be in a public school so from kindergarten to grade three, I was in a public school. I also just want to say that we were raised in a very, very humble home. And a single parent she was, and she raised me. So then from the City of Winnipeg, a public school, because of my walking that was affecting me as I started getting a little older, so grade three, from grade three, four, five and six, I went to a segregated school for only disabilities. And then came grade six, 1969 or '68, the policy changed for all disability students to go to public schools now, and transportation was provided and so forth for us to be transported to these accessible schools at that time. So I went back to public school from grade seven and I graduated from grant park high school. So right from there, immediately was my strong point of I wanted to work. So I started immediately looking for some employment. And I really didn't know what I could do because, you know, I didn't know what could I possibly do. So some of the jobs that I picked were physically unrealistic to me and then I realized, okay, this is not working. So I started looking for jobs I was capable of doing, which was sit down jobs at desks. And then from there, I continually progressed and moved along to various couple various other jobs and employment and then I got into the Province of Manitoba where I retired at 2018.

So the Province of Manitoba, I arrived in 1982. I was 25 years old. And I got in on my own recognition at that time because I already had eight years in the private industry of employment. So I'm very grateful to live a gratifying, accomplished life. So I'm really,

really grateful, is all I can really say really because I come from, like I say, humble beginnings and I didn't realize how far that I was going to get in life and so here I am. So the employment world in the employment world, once I did get into the employment world, and I was so happy to be employed, I faced much discrimination and with my determination, I helped, I was helped to thrive with my determination. And then I also kept in contact with other disabilities that were in the employment field. And so they would keep encouraging me too, and I knew that. I come from a humble beginning, that I can't go back, I have to keep moving forward.

So again, I'm grateful because the Indigenous disabilities are the highest population in Canada, so I'm one of a few that have really thrived. So my lived experience of better inclusion to achieve into society is education is so important.

And to follow and it would be great to follow the Indigenous disabled from start to high school. So, as soon as the Indigenous disability begin kindergarten, then let's start already following and tracing them because, from my experience and meeting up with a lot of the group that I am a member of, this would prevent high school dropouts. Seems to be, once they get to grade ten, around there, that we have a high rate of high school dropouts among the Indigenous of disabilities. So I would encourage to prevent the high schools to encourage for college and universities. Also, the other aspect is job training and build skills. So improving hiring practises is so important and essential to remove barriers in places of employment. And then also there are hidden disabilities where there's no physical signs and I guess it would be up to them to be forward about what their invisible ability is. And, you know, and also, from my experience, I feel, you know, like it's important, it should showcase the Indigenous disability achievers in our communities through media and such, you know, showcase us so it becomes more and more, you know, normal and regular that we're seeing in the public eye that, oh, yeah, okay, you know, they're doing they're doing well, we're doing well. We need to be showing that.

So it was clear to me through my years of employment from young already, there 20 years and all the way up to even now, it was clear to me that the group I am a member of, the Indigenous disability group was slipping through the cracks of many agencies and speaking at an engagement of my views is where my voice was heard. So I started speaking out. I thought, okay, how do we get the message out there from somebody like myself? And one of the persons that heard me was Marileen Bartlett from CHARD, its Indigenous employment, so what better place to form a group in 2006, which I called the Aboriginal Disabled Self-Help group. And what we did, when we formed the group, along with Marileen and she just followed what I had my input, she hired three Indigenous social workers of disabilities, each of them each of these three were academic, they had their degrees and they were social workers and so we knew that it was important for at least one of the ones we're going to hire that they spoke an Indigenous language which was Cree. So forming the group meetings and listening to each individual that would come at our group meetings, we listened with understanding

because we knew, we've gone through it as well, of discrimination and so forth and disrespect. And we listened with respect to the people's various concerns because we all had addressed issues that we had to overcome in our ability body.

So ongoing I would say that, again, I have to emphasize that education is very important for our group and then to be encouraged to follow our group and why is the drop-out rate so high, you know, and training is important. And then so training, education and training, and then the element sorry, the key element would be to be employed, employed so that you can be inclusive for a better society and, you know, live a happier and happier life.

So again, November, this month 2025 November Disability Awareness Month, we are proud to be recognized for our values, our talents, our skills, our achievements, contributions, our worth. And its great appreciation to the many amazing supporters working diligently towards highlighting Indigenous Disability Month. And I just want to say that the way I advocate, I find easier for me because I've gone to so many meetings over the years and so many speaking engagements, is through my writing, like creativity writing and, you know, through getting the book done.

I did a play back in '98. And right now on YouTube, there is one called that I did to do with prosthetics, the opportunity of how to get into this area of working for our nation, for Indigenous nations to students from grade 11 and 12 to have the option, if they would like to be a prosthetic technician and, you know, and there's also areas, too, like Sign Language and wheelchair services and any of our ability areas where our indigenous students are not really being directed into. So that's another one I want to speak on. And then most currently, I'm still waiting for the music video to be on YouTube called "Open the Door." I wrote the lyrics and I, through a grant through the Manitoba Arts Council, I was able to get this video produced and it's got a few disabilities in I couldn't cover it all but in the video, and again, I'm stressing in this video education, socialization, employment, and socialization, I want to go back, for inclusion because we're not always included. And employment, and then spiritual space where many of our Indigenous people aren't included in those spaces. And I want to say one thing lastly, to get started on this music video was Shaneen, Shaneen Robinson actually, I spoke with her and that's how I actually got going thanks to her. So Miigwech. And thank you for being able to speak on this important month. Thank you. Miigwech.

Shaneen Robinson: Thank you, Frances. I guess I'll just carry on now.

I know that Emily's kind of just watching from her office now. And thank you to all the folks that are joining from wherever you may be. And I just want to say thank you, Frances. I met you when I was a little girl, when my mom was struggling with a disability actually at the time when she had a chronic illness. And I know that you and her worked on some stuff when I was a young lady. I've always looked up to you and always been so grateful for your teaching so thank you so much, Frances, for sharing some of your story today. And I just want to say [speaking Indigenous language]. My name is

Shaneen Robinson Desjarlais. I'm in Calgary, Alberta right now where I've been living for about nine, ten months. It's been a crazy couple of years. I'm very honoured to come and be a part of the honouring of the Indigenous Disability Awareness Month. I think it's so important.

I remember, Frances, when I was a little girl, when I was about five or six, my mom was diagnosed with a chronic illness that made her life living with a disability and, you know, it wasn't easy growing up seeing, you know, your mom at a young age living with that disability. So I remember some of the things that I'd have to do to help when I was a little girl, to help get her out the door. And my mom struggled with losing her federal government job because of her disability, being an Indigenous woman, not having anybody to advocate for her and, you know, that could have been a job that she could have retired from and nobody was there to advocate for her at the time in order for her to carry on with that federal government job after she was in remission. So growing up, seeing that, and just travelling a lot in my life to northern communities and different communities and seeing the inaccessibility our people have, especially in remote and northern communities also when we have children born with disabilities and our elders living with disabilities, somehow the majority of us in life, if we are lucky enough to grow to be elders, will live with a disability some time in our life. And I think to be forward-thinking, Manitoba, the other provinces that are recognizing this month, we need to be thinking about that. I'm a mother, I have three sons that are in hockey. They're 11 and almost 7 and 4. And I'm lucky enough to have a healthy, active husband, and my life has been hit with disability recently over the last few years.

So as a young woman in school, college, university, I struggled. I've always struggled. I've just recently been diagnosed and medicated for my ADHD that 've lived with my whole life which I didn't know was a disability. With learning, you know, going to, like I said, in elementary school and in college, university, was always so hard for me. It was extremely stressful, overwhelming at times, and I just thought that it was I wasn't smart, but it wasn't that. It was just that I struggled with the constant craziness of adhd and any of you that live with adhd know how hard it can be sometimes to focus and to get your tasks done so growing up with that and learning about it now as an adult, I'm really trying to understand and I understand now all of the struggles that I had growing up and being in post secondary education, and my work environments and how that was a struggle as well.

More recently, in the past decade or so, I've suffered from a number of health issues. Right now I'm living with a chronic disease. I've been recently diagnosed with a disease called C3GN, it is a very rare kidney disorder. I just about lost my life a couple of months ago; I was in the hospital for about a month and a half. I've been out now for about a month and a half and learning to live my life as a mother with a chronic disease, but with that, I was also born with a thing called hip dysplasia, so my hips weren't developed properly when I was born. I had to wear a hip brace for the first year of my life. And so now that I've had children, I'm older, I'm in that official auntie age of your early 40s, my

body is kind of falling apart and my hip was dislocating in and out and now I'm living with no cartilage on my right hip. I'm awaiting a hip replacement but because of my kidney disease, I can't do that. So I'm living in a wheelchair now and walker for the past eight months or so. And it all hit about, it will be two years in April, where I started getting very severe health issues. My body started breaking down, now living with a disability, and I've always been cognizant of this world that is so unaccommodating for people with disabilities.

I broke my leg when I was in university and had to spend a winter with a broken leg. So I remember thinking at the time how lucky I was to have an able body while in university because I had a friend at the time who was in a wheelchair as well. Sorry, I got a little helper here, my little helpers. Thank you. I'm on a video, okay? Two minutes. But this is my little guy, and this is my youngest one, I don't know if you can see him, this is Miller. He's four and he didn't have preschool today. But it's just been a real struggle and reminding myself as a mother that living with a disability doesn't mean that my life is over. And I look to people like Frances and my mother and many of my relatives who have been living with disabilities that, you know, that we can overcome our disabilities in a good way but we also have to have partners like the governments, like the different workplaces and to help to make this world more accommodating for our people with disabilities, whether that's a mental disability, a physical disability, even a spiritual disability. As Indigenous people, you know, our spirits are wounded and we need to have spaces for us to heal those spiritual disabilities also, you know. And to have the understanding that many of us are unique, you know. And now that I'm living with this disability, I see everywhere I go, like the homes aren't accommodating, shopping centres, medical centres even, the hip and knee clinic where I had to go to find out about my hip replacement, you have to walk through this big building downtown. It's ridiculous. People aren't, we're talking about, you know, construction, people that are creating these buildings and businesspeople that are thinking, think about the elders, think about our people with disabilities, you know, our people on the streets, our homeless community that Christian is going to speak about, you see our people struggling in the winter with their wheelchairs, and it's just not fair that this world is created for people that have able bodies. And our people with disabilities should be able to travel. I'm an avid traveller; I love to travel. Since I've had this disability and this wheelchair, I can't go anywhere that is easy, easily done, you know, and then you're looked at as a nuisance because you need help to make it to the gate at the airport because I can't walk right now more than from here to the bathroom, I can't walk unassisted without my walker. So it's new to me, it's a new world I'm navigating but I'm thankful my mind has always seen it. I'm not ignorant to the world we live in because I've grown up seeing many people struggle and, you know, the racism that we face in those disabilities also, the lack of love and, you know, compassion in medical settings, in the hospital, that's something that I've seen a lot of as an Indigenous woman with my health issues where, you're not in that much pain where I'm literally walking bone on bone on my hip and can't walk and being told I'm only looking for pain medication. So those are the things that we face. When I know that if I was, you know, a non-

Indigenous person, that that wouldn't happen. I'd be looked at with compassion and love. This woman is in pain, there's something wrong.

In 2020, I was pregnant with my little guy. I was only 15 weeks along, and I had to have an open surgery where they removed my right ovary. And there's so many times where I've ended up in the hospital because of illness, chronic illness and all that stuff. So there's that incident. And then in 2022, I had a bout of diverticulitis where I almost lost my intestines. I had to go back to four different hospitals in Winnipeg because they did not believe me that I was in pain. They couldn't find out what was wrong with me. They did some tests, and I almost lost all my intestines because they thought I was there for pain medication, that I was faking the pain in my side. So I mean, those are the things. The medical racism that we face is still a reality in every province in this country.

So as part of Disability Awareness Month, Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, I would love for our leadership, our Chiefs, our MLAs, everybody, and I know that our current government in Manitoba is adamant about doing more when it comes to disabilities for all Manitobans which I think is great. I'm not so lucky living in the province I am right now to have the amazing things that are happening in Manitoba, but I just pray that our leadership continues to advocate because we see our people our people that are already living with addiction issues, our people that are already living with poverty, our Elders, that aren't receiving the basic human rights that we deserve to have accessibility at every access point, whether that be going to the hospital, getting whatever it is, I just, living with this disability is new to me. I'm learning. It's hard. And people that have lived their whole lives with these disabilities are, and it's not a disability, I mean look at Frances, how much she's done with her life despite what we call a disability. And so that fight and that strength we have, and we just need our leadership and our communities to be our allies and advocates in helping us along with our disabilities. So that's all I have to say on my part. Like I said, it's new, but I'm honoured to be a part of this event today. And thankful for the teachings that I've been given to I guess survive this disability right now and fight every day, because it's depressing. It's hard when you live in a world that does not accommodate your needs, right? And because it's so new to me, it's still fresh and emotional and hard as a mother that I can't do what I could do even a year ago with my babies. And they're little hockey guys. I can't very well just go into the hockey rink every Friday, Saturday and Sunday or even their practises every night because there's big old ramps and stairs and, you know, it has to be a big thing every time I go to a game. So there's just those little things we got to think about, too. Thank you so much for giving me my time. I'll pass it over to Christian. I haven't seen you for a long time there, brother.

Christian Swan: Miigwech, Shaneen. Miigwech, Frances, for what is shared today. It's a learning experience for a lot of people that don't understand what the person may be going through psychologically, mentally. It's very challenging at times when you look at the programs and services that were there and that were gutted during the time of COVID. We look at spaces that we encounter, whether it's public space, living quarters,

the ability to overcome is what I deal with, what I struggle with. I was just employed working as a youth practitioner sharing some of the things that I've learned over time with battling with drugs and addiction, becoming homeless, homelessness and understanding what a safe space is within the home. I fell down as I lost my leg at the place where I was living, the reserve, there was no ramp and I was being rushed into the house so I knew then and there that it was a safety concern and being able to help myself so I took myself out of the reserve and moved to the city where I became homeless. And that was probably one of the hardest things that I had to deal with. My sister took me in as a boarder and then there was the construction of the prosthetic leg. As the leg was being built, I developed a breakdown and then I had to learn more about what it takes caring for the skin in terms of the sweat glands that happen in the leg and the feet. So it's been a learning experience, understanding that there are certain types of things that a person with diabetes shouldn't be wearing, proper socks, so that's one aspect of losing the leg. And then being told that I lost lots of white blood cells, so the doctors kept asking me to quit smoking cigarettes and that was another stepping stone that I had to overcome so with that happening, the foot kept getting sick and ending up in the hospital three times. Third visit to the hospital is where they really pounded me with quitting smoking. Then I just came to terms with it and told them, okay, I'll give it a shot, and just like that, I gave up the smoking. And then I started realizing that the taste buds could taste the sweetness and the foods that we eat so that was part of understanding that I had a role to play in my health, and then understanding that proper exercise and lots of water and proper intakes of different types of foods would help regulate the blood sugar levels and then the other part of all of this was understanding the historical traumas of when a mother's carrying a baby and the trauma of abuse that happens within the home does affect the person's abilities of overcoming diabetes, the pre cancer cells that are happening while the mother's pregnant and then they talk about blood memory. So a lot of the blood memory comes back and destructs. I cannot say enough about how stress affects us in different ways mentally, physically, spiritually. It's very overwhelming to take it all in, as we're still learning more and more about the different kinds of sicknesses that are there. Our programs and services were discontinued as a result of COVID-19, but as Indigenous people, we have lived through the epidemic once before when we had to get a pass from the Indian agent to leave the reserve so with that being said, the covid also gave us the ability to coping with being allowed into certain places. They put a lot of pressure on people to get the needle, and then other diseases came from it. When that was happening, my family strongly advised not to get the COVID shot and how it would affect our health. It was a rush process and then with that being said, the COVID did shape the way that we adapt. The money that was put out there to serve addictions teams, people got addicted, alcoholism was a big part. And then you look at rules that follow with houses affects homelessness so when we look at the great big picture, we play roles in different things, different outcomes, how we educate, how we understand that the living spaces aren't accessible for everyone. When you go into buildings, is there wheelchair access, if people should encounter those while engaging in the complications of a sickness. So the sickness is

very, very hard to deal with. Like if a person shuts down and where do they go for that support? A lot of the story sharing helps others understand that there's places, there's people that went through very similar situation so when that happens, where do we access this information? So with that being said, it was all learning, educating myself on type 1 diabetes, type 2, understanding how the organs worked, liver, kidneys, the pancreas, how it detoxifies the sugar levels, the glucose. Then understanding how heart and stroke plays a part in the circulation of blood and then understanding how dialysis works, how kidney failure happens, it's very eye opening like when you see your loved ones go through it or you're going through it that education is always important to understanding what kind of foods you could eat, how to properly care for yourself, how you regularly check up on your limbs, make sure that they're intact and that everything is working as it should. It's scary at times but it's all part of that what do you do, how do you find this help, where do you turn to, asking questions, calling the health links and when to go into the hospital, how to navigate that safe space when you're in a hospital, what the doctors tell you. Like I don't believe they have to amputate as high as they did when I was going through it. Like I said, COVID was happening, family wasn't around to help me with what I was going through so when that was happening, I felt like I was cheated a little bit. But then I came to terms with everything and just handled everything the best that I could and tried not to dwell on the wrong things and eventually, yeah, things started falling in place. The leg got better. Then I was able to learn how to walk. When I first got the leg, my sister had locked me out of the house so that's a thing that I promised myself that I would learn how to walk. It hurt to put on the leg so when that was going on, that I didn't hang on to the wrong feelings and this one elderly man who was learning to walk, I decided I wanted those things, so all of a sudden, I started walking without a cane on my second visit and things fell in place. And then finding the proper supports started coming so I started sharing this information online on my social media and then when those things are happening, people would reach out to me, asking me for information of when it's time to go in and so forth. So I've helped many people that were going through similar situations and just trying to do the best that I could do to help assist with the abilities, because we all have that unique ability to help one another and looking at that public space, there's not enough space for a person encountering a loss of limbs, being in a wheelchair. If someone's going through dialysis, where they could access that area that handles a situation like that in the northern community. Lots of times, people have to re assess their life and where they're going to live, so there's lots to take in. And I've always tried my best to reach out to government agencies due to lack of funding, lack of support. With being on EI, I was not getting the proper funding, so a lot of that funding didn't come right away, that took a couple years, and still, that made it harder to live with the rising cost of food to eating healthy. So there's many challenges, many barriers.

I'm always there to try my best to help advocate on behalf of people that lived with the disabilities, someone that is suffering with mental disorders. I've been denied access for handicapped transit and like to getting the licence back was another part of the puzzle, having to go see this doctor, that doctor, having to pay out of pocket, it's like I don't

know how I did it, but somehow, I managed. And if I had to struggle from month-to-month, that was always that I would regain part of my life back because that's the hardest part, is to regaining that part of your life back when you lose a limb. And it's scary, it's one of the scariest journeys I've ever been on, like how I share how it was shared in my biography that my grandma was murdered in '71, and it just makes sense to how addictions and alcoholism plays a part in how Indigenous people cope. Then you look at the anger management, and you look at the mental health, it affects us in different ways and takes a long time to learn that we have certain roles we play in our healing journey. And that's the best I could do, find share how to not hang on to that negative energy. We also need cultural spaces for our people that are in wheelchairs and whatnot, how do we get them into the sweat lodge, how do we get them into the sharing circles, so they are able to share some of what they need to get out because it affects us all in different ways. You look at how do we get our people that are using crutches, canes, wheelchairs, so it's a complex world that we live in and how do we start opening those conversations, how do we start engaging our people? When you go on an airplane plane, for instance, what was shared was how our security will make you do certain things while lining up to board a plane, they'll take your walking devices and get you to sit in a different seat, use that metal detector to detect the areas where you set off the alarm and then they don't really help you, you know, in those terms, like you're basically helping yourself if you're travelling alone. I've travelled alone many times and that's what I found, is they want to take my walking stick and then now I have to walk without a walking stick. The walking stick is very beneficial, just like a cane would be, and it helps with the balance, balance your mobility issues. And, yeah, so it's a long process and it's very disheartening when people say they care.

I was never a hugger but eventually, in time, I got spiritually connected with the culture again and I was open to hugging and those reasons why I wasn't open to hugging is because I suffered abuse and I had to forgive and let go of those things and then the trust again, trust people because a lot of the times, it delays where we're going in life if we are hanging on to the wrong things, so healing happens in many different ways. And all I could say is my prayers go out to everyone that suffers, whether they're going through a disability. A lot of times people suffer with sickness in their heart because they don't think clearly, their heart's poisoned with different desires and different needs and different wants and a person that suffers with disabilities is usually one that will more than likely help the next person because they understand the struggle, and they just have that openness with who they are. So yeah, that's what I understand about a person living with a disability, is there has to be an openness, an openness when we look at how much of our culture was taken through colonization and look at our two spirit people, they say that they were our medicine people at one point and the knowledge that they share in progressing how much further we need to go in having that openness with different teachings and the different teachings also teach us that we have the ability to learn how to be better human beings to one another. So yeah, I'm pretty sure that these conversations will open doors and shed light and because those people sitting behind the offices, help them understand what it is that a person goes

through, how it affects them on a daily level. And when you look at the charter of rights, you look at the mobility issues and the...

Emily Walker: Okay, I think he's frozen. Christian, thank you so much for that. Once you pop back on, we'll let you finish up. You were kind of cutting out there for a second, Christian.

Christian Swan: oh, sorry.

Emily Walker: Yeah. You were kind of cutting out there for a second. But thank you so much. We're going to do some closing statements also so there's a couple of questions, if you don't mind, we're going to go into the questions.

Christian Swan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Emily Walker: Thank you, Christian, so much for your words. We really appreciate that. There's a couple of questions in the Q&A. So we have a question for Frances. For Mrs. Kaspick, what do you think has gotten better for Indigenous people with disabilities since you were growing up and has anything gotten worse? Don't forget to unmute. Frances, you've got to unmute.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: What has gotten better? Is that the question, sorry, Shaneen.

Shaneen Robinson: Yeah, what has gotten better since you were a child and what has gotten worse?

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: Okay. So what has gotten better is that public schools of all abilities students are intermingled in public school, so that's, I think that's important, that's better. And also that here in the city, I don't know how it is in rural areas, some rural areas are okay but not all of them are of our communities, where we have transportation provided for us if you can get on, you know. And I've been, well, it start we had handi transit so when it first came to open up in 19, I think it was 74, so I was already like the tenth passenger and so that's gotten better today. And so that's really good. What hasn't gotten better is the education part. That's a big deal for me. Because there's our homeless, look at our homeless there, and going over the years, growing up, I was immersed in the disability world and I never really came across very many Indigenous of the disabilities until like the last, what, 20 years, and now there's just a landslide of not just physical but mental health as well and so we really I feel like the missing parts of the puzzle is the education, the training and employment, but also a bigger part is like I've gone to a lot of ceremonies of our cultural and traditional ceremonies over the years since I was in my 20s, and because I could drive and I worked and I had money to, and I'm pretty mobile, that even though I am a congenital amputee, very rare do we have our Indigenous disabilities at these cultural events for us anywhere, like at our so anyhow, I feel that could be a big improvement in all those areas. And as Christian was saying earlier, we need to have a building that has an accessible parking lot and where we can have our ceremonies indoors because half the

year is winter. And sweat lodges, sure they're great, but you can't get every ability person in a sweat lodge, you just cannot do it. It's just because of the various types of abilities and so it would being great to have our own building that would be utilized by so many people also to do with university students, that they would come in for training and how to work with us and talk with us and so forth. So that's what could be much better in today's society. And also to highlight, like here we are, the three of us, highlight more of us that are making it, that are struggling to get through the challenges that have come our way and how did we get through those challenges so hear our voices. So highlight us. Start looking at, you know, and starting in the school system to encourage those kids to not be drop-outs. That's another reason, why are they dropping out when they get to grade ten? So anyhow, I hope I answered that.

Emily Walker: Thank you so much, Frances. We have a couple more questions in the Q&A area here. The next question is for housing providers like Ten Ten Sinclair housing inc., what specific culturally informed strategies or accommodations can we implement beyond standard accessibility measures to create a more positive and welcoming cultural environment for our tenants who are Indigenous persons with disabilities? Are there particular resources, grants, community partnerships or design considerations you recommend to better honour their heritage and promote a stronger sense of belonging? So I think that all of us could probably answer a little bit of that. Frances, I'll start with you.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: Okay. Well, myself, I was young, and I was like couching surfing near the end of my last year of high school and I was determined to finish my school so after that, I stabilized actually at Ten Ten Sinclair because even though I come from a big family, I really didn't have a solid place to live. So they helped me out a lot and, over the years, when I see one of the things, again, from my understanding of what I'm being asked of, is that there could be more introductions of like there is a program that I'm involved with, it's called TIP, so it's a Colonization, three hours of colonization, moving forward up to here we are today. It's not really based on disability, but it would give staff, and it would give the tenants involved to come in and listen in and then and learn and so we need more of that in our culture. And we need more like we do this I just don't even have it on hand right now, but anyways, a fellow, his name is Clayton Sandy, so we do this, here it is, Turtle Island, we do this with universities of Manitoba students, lawyers, all kinds. I don't know if you can see that properly. But it's Turtle Island, Clayton Sandy is the name. And it's really very informative and another thing, too, okay, so we're talking about accessibility with units. We need more when they're building units, to start building with accessibility. I know right here in my home that I own, we built our home because I couldn't find an accessible home, like accessible house, and any of the new homes that were out there, they did not build with accessibility in mind, so it would have cost more money, so we thought we might as well already build with accessibility in mind. I do live in nice wide hallways, there's no stairs, and my house is accessibility-built for my needs. So we need more of that. We need more understanding, too, of the designers. So one of my recommendations would be to

the architect, but not just any architect. Architects that have us in mind and are not just there for the money. They're there because they're going to build, you know, buildings with simplicity. It doesn't have to be fancy. And maybe get a physiotherapist involved or one of the therapists involved to work along with the architect and then if there's some changes to be made to already structural buildings in homes. Look at that. Like there was a building here on Morley and Osborne and it was Indigenous building community bought it but there was no elevator in it so I know I put the word out there that why what about the disability who would like to move into that building? And another thing that I want to mention is that, okay, so away from that is just on the shelters, you know. I don't know how accessible certain areas are in that building, but it could be improved on. There's lots of areas I'm going to be speaking on that December 1st, Christian and I are going to speak on the homelessness. So that's another big area. It just breaks my heart to see all this homeless of disabilities up on the downtown area and on the main street area, and just across Canada. And another thing, anywhere in the world where there is Indigenous, our people are the ones of the Indigenous of the disability world are lacking. It's the same. It's the same wherever there's Indigenous, what's ever here is over there.

Shaneen Robinson: Thank you, Frances. As far as the question about 1010 Sinclair and other places for indigenous folks with disabilities, I guess, there's something that I've noticed, like I said I haven't lived with a disability for a long time, I'm still learning, that sense of loneliness and that feeling of just depression and, you know, anxiety because it's new and like I'm sure you went through that too, Christian, with your amputation, like it's new, right, and just to have those resources in-house would be great maybe for the mental health side of it, spiritual side of it, whether there's an Elder on site that's available once, you know, to the residents. I don't know if that's something that's already there. But just the mental health side of it. Even like Frances was talking about, the physio, like to have that in house might be great. Like I said, the loneliness, like a lot of our people living with disabilities live in, if they are lucky enough to get accessible housing, it's for single families, but our Indigenous families are still reclaiming our sense of family, right? So we want space where our children can visit, our grandchildren can visit, our grandparents can visit, things like that. So to keep in mind that sense of family when building as well I think is super important. What about you, Christian?

Christian Swan: I live in a building where it's wheelchair accessible. There's an elevator and then I could roam around my unit with the wheelchair so a lot of times when I come home, I'll take a leg off and just air out the leg and the fridge and the stove and the sink is all wheelchair accessible so you could do your cooking, your meal preps, your dishes. The thing that you brought up with having staff on site, now that, I think, would be very beneficial, you know, in terms of the loneliness that comes along with this. It's very lonely at times if you don't have family that could make it out to your neck of the woods. I just secured housing in the Transcona region, and my family all lives in the core neighbourhood so for them to come all the way there is a little bit of a challenge. And like having a spiritual person living on site would bring together a

different sense of belonging and then it helps with that mental health support so, yeah, I agree with a lot of what you guys both shared.

Emily Walker: Thank you Christian. Keeping an eye on the time too, we only have about ten minutes left. I think there's one more question in the Q&A that I'm going to answer. There's a couple in here. I think this is a great one. Let's see here. There's some thank-you' s in there as well so thank you, everybody, for your comments. What should settlers with disabilities do or stop doing to decolonize accessibility and create more solidarity? I think that's a great question. Frances, I'll toss that to you first.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: Okay. So sorry, can you repeat that?

Emily Walker: I just had it. What should settlers with disabilities do or stop doing to decolonize accessibility and create more solidarity?

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: Well, again, I think that we need, as Indigenous people, like to pull together with the settlers or with whoever would like to be in with our group of sharing circle, start there. And also with a very knowledgeable speaker, even like Christian himself or somebody who's got the understanding of the ability world. And because to do with the colonization and so forth back there, you know, like our people, I feel, in my lifetime, and I'm an Elder, I feel our people, our nation are only maybe getting now in the last little while of understanding of our plight, of our what it takes to thrive and move forward. And if we're going to be going to do a traditional cultural training and understanding, that's another thing I wanted to mention is that our spiritual conductors, there needs to be there needs to be what? There needs to be they need training. They need training because, again, they don't understand all abilities. I'll give an example, for example, just maybe I'm off the mark. But anyways, for example, in a sweat lodge, there's one fella, he was just newly diagnosed with he would have seizures, epilepsy, so he was good enough to be up front and tell the conductor and the conductor said, no, you know what, we don't know if it's in the dark and there, we don't know, we need to put you in one of the doorways so he was fine with that. And then another one that I know with diabetes is he already had one foot amputated so when he was in the sweat lodge, he didn't feel that a spark went on to that foot, and it burned so badly, he couldn't see in the dark and feel it, so he had to have that foot amputated, so these kinds of things our conductors need to have that understanding and experience and we need to put together so that we can all work together, move forward as a group of people, better understanding. I hope I answered that okay.

Shaneen Robinson: Yeah, I agree. And I think that just for settler folks with disabilities, we're already allies because we're struggling with the same things and it's just like anything in life, it's human empathy for one another and just trying to keep an open mind to try to learn our unique ways of doing things but also just basic human respect. And I think that goes not only to settlers with disabilities but all people, you know, that we have unique needs as people with disabilities but even more unique

needs as folks with being Indigenous with disabilities. And some of us live our traditional ways. Some of us have grown up with the Christian ways. Some of us are, you know, scoop survivors that are coming home learning about our ways. Some of us have been adopted out or residential school survivors, all of us have unique history and story that we just need to and folks with disabilities, it's all unique. We all have our own stories to share and just being respected for that, I think, is the main, important thing that we're seen for our abilities also.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: can I just add one more thing? And I feel that we need to be at the board more. We need to be at the gatherings where we're going to be asked as invited guests to share just what we're doing today so that they that our ministers and so forth have a better understanding, I feel.

Shaneen Robinson: Absolutely. And you know what, I just wanted to share before we're done too that, you know, like I said with this health issue and living with a disability now over the past two years, I've always faced discrimination working with the media industry, right, being Indigenous and working in newsrooms where non-Indigenous people don't always see the world the way we see it, but particularly my last job that I had here in Calgary, which is an Indigenous organization, I was basically let go from my job because of this disability, which is a whole other story that I have to look into my human rights issues and possibly move forward with that because of my current disability not being able to walk and being wheelchair bound which only started once I took on this job here, they basically got rid of me because of my disability. So those are things that are happening and that, you know, is after moving across the country. And that takes food out of my children's mouths and that puts maybe induced this other illness where because of the stress. So I mean we're facing that every day, that one of us could get a disability from an accident in a second and not see it coming.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: And if I can add one more thing. And also, you know, lots of lots of Indigenous agencies I've been around to lots of different speaking events, and I would also ask, oh, do you have any disability staff on board? Very rare, that's another area, very rare where you're going to see us in their agencies.

Shaneen Robinson: Yeah, exactly. So I'd just like to thank everybody so much. All of the panellists, all of the organizers. And Emily being so patient and I know that you've been, you know, you have kids, and you've had health issues too but being patient with Frances and I and just keeping us on task and all of the folks that tuned in today, thank you so very much. And for the Manitoba Government for always supporting initiatives and particularly this very important month of recognizing Indigenous folks with disabilities. And any final comments, Christian or Frances?

Christian Swan: There's no such thing as a prosthetic for an amputated spirit is the thing that stands out for me. So a lot of what we share is the hurts that we have encountered over time and how we try to stay intact with who we are as spiritual people. Miigwech.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: I just want to say Miigwech. Thank you for honouring this month of Indigenous Disability Awareness Month across Canada. I really appreciate that I was able to have a voice to give some recognition. Miigwech.

Shaneen Robinson: (speaking Indigenous language) Thank you so much, Emily, Frances and Christian.

Emily Walker: Thank you, everybody. It was great. We're holding another webinar next week for International Day for People with Disabilities, and we really hope to see everyone there. But that was a great, great time.