


# Social Workers as Change-Makers: Reflecting on our Journeys toward Transformational Change

Sheri M McConnell, MSW, PhD, RSW

[smcconne@mun.ca](mailto:smcconne@mun.ca)

Memorial University, School of Social Work

(part 1)



As we gather together from far and wide in this virtual room, we recognize and honour the many Indigenous Nations and Peoples in the lands and territories on which we live.

I am joining you from St John's, NL, on the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk.

The island of Newfoundland is the traditional territory of the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq, and Labrador is the ancestral homelands of the Innu of Nitassinan, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, and the Inuit of NunatuKavut.

I invite you to introduce yourself and acknowledge the Peoples on whose land you are located - in the chat.

# Social Workers as Change-Makers: Reflecting on our Journeys toward Transformational Change

Our conversation.

Who am I?

What do I bring to this conversation? What qualifies me to talk about transformational change?

How I envision our time together today.





# How I envision our time together today

Laying the foundation - personal & professional change

Reflecting on our journeys - change within

Break

Enacting change with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Reflecting on our journeys - co-creating change

Break

Speaking out for decolonization and reconciliation

Reflecting on our journeys - speaking up, speaking out

Moving forward in our journeys



# Laying the Foundation

## Personal & Professional Transformative Change

I am not an expert – everything that I talk about today I have learned through experience – in working on myself and in co-creating change.

I suggest some key themes – what I currently believe works (everything changes) – I have learned as much about what does not work as I have about what works (two sides of same coin).

When I speak of personal and professional change – the same learnings apply to broader change – it may look different (scale).

What I say may or may not fit for you (now or ever) – take what fits, leave the rest.



# We all are related – We are relational beings

- most change does not happen in isolation – we make change in and through relationships
- we cannot see the full picture – we need people who share commonalities - and we need people who bring diverse experiences and perspectives and ways of knowing & being
- we all have blind spots – we need people who see us - who speak truths to challenge us to step outside our comfort zone
- we need people who are kind and respectful and honest and brave – and we learn from people who are not

# We are spiritual beings

It is essential that we care for all parts of our selves – our minds, bodies, emotions, spirits.

My three core beliefs – grounded in faith and hope:

- I am ok – I will not be given more than I can handle
- I have what I need to get through this (if not, I can find it)
- I can make change in who I am and how I am in the world and in relation with others - we all are capable of change

It does not matter if these are “true” – by believing them, I manifest them in my life.



# Feeding our souls


- It is essential that we “feed our souls” – find what brings us joy – what stirs up our passion – and do it – regularly
- Work is important – caring for others is important – social change is important – and, as social workers, we often over-commit and over-extend and over-work
- Some of us over-indulge (food, alcohol, drugs, things)
- Rarely do we over-play or over-relax or over-‘do nothing’
- We need to make choices – where and when we can – based on what feeds our soul (and what does not)





# Gratitude & Forgiveness

- ▶ we are honoured and blessed when we bear witness to and participate in change – in ourselves, in others, at a broader level – it is magical, sacred, and not to be taken for granted
- ▶ when we forgive ourselves and forgive others – we open ourselves to growth and change
- ▶ resentment and shame and blame do not facilitate growth – they keep us stuck - they block change – they close us off to genuine relationships (with ourselves and others) – they are ways of hurting ourselves and each other



# Practicing humility – becoming teachable

- when we practice humility – we open ourselves to learning and becoming teachable
- when we are humble – we acknowledge our mistakes and embrace the resulting teachable moments – as an essential part of moving forward and making change
- when we make mistakes – or behave in hurtful ways - we apologize, take responsibility, clean up our messes, learn the lessons, do it differently
- we get on with doing what needs doing - rather than getting stuck in our guilt, shame, and complacency



# We are responsible for ourselves & our decisions

- we are responsible for the choices and decisions we make
- we are responsible for how we choose to be in relationship and in the world
- we are not responsible for what others do or say
- we are responsible for how we respond or if we react - we give up our power when we indulge in shame and blame
- we are role-models – people learn from how we live and how we treat people - more so than what we say about how to be

# Compassion and kindness

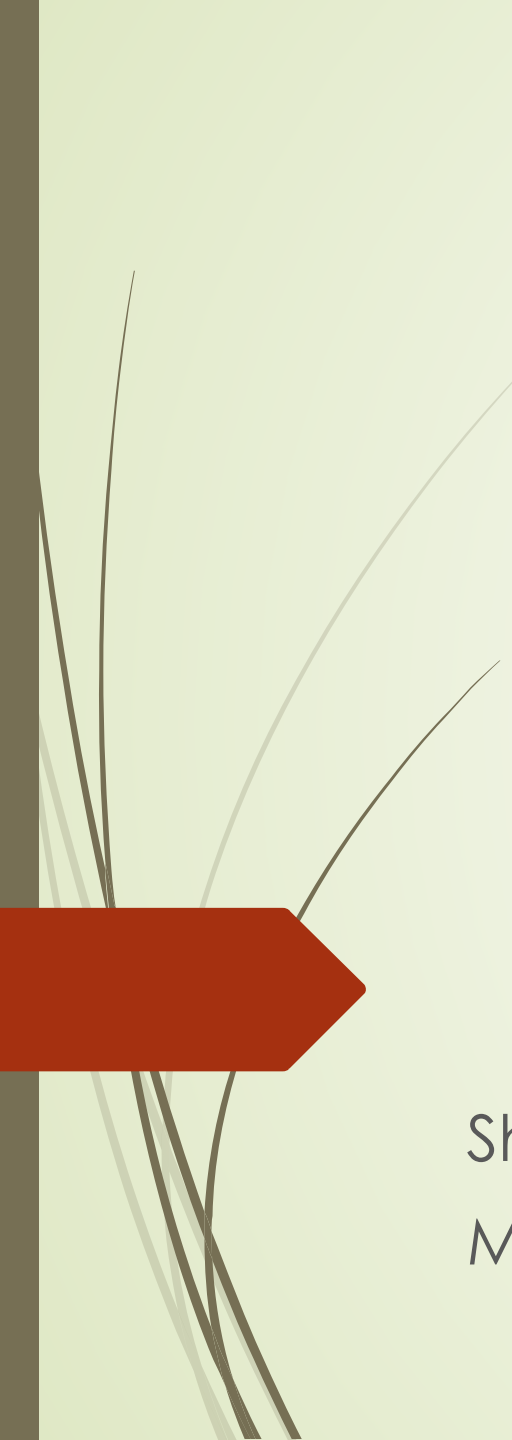
- when we are compassionate and loving – to ourselves and to each other – the world is a kinder, gentler place
- none of us are perfect. We need to be compassionate with ourselves and each other – knowing that, at times, we bring our wounded selves to the forefront – and act from that hurting place. There is no healing in reacting - or in being mean or punishing or shaming or blaming
- when we feel ourselves going off track or falling into old patterns or getting caught up in stuff or getting wound up - we can shift our energy

*Stop. Step away. Breathe. Ground. Centre.*



# Reflecting on our journeys – Change within

- *Where are you in/on your journey of transformation?*
- *How do these ideas resonate with your journey of personal and professional transformation/change?*
- *Name one thing that fits for you – and how you might choose to integrate it going forward.*
- *What feeds your soul? How do you feed your soul?*
- *What is the next step on your journey?*



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# Co-creating transformative change – Camp Eclipse

Since 2009, Planned Parenthood NL's Camp Eclipse, an intensive, life altering four day leadership retreat, has connected 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and allies with each other - and with mentors (aged 25+) who represent a range of sexual and gender diversity.

Campers (16-24) and youth leaders (18-24) are at a crossroads, transitioning from youth to adults, dealing with the cis/heteronormativity and homo/transphobia of daily living.

All community members experience some degree of personal transformation – which often they carry home into their family, peer group, school, workplace, and social environments.





Through their participation in a variety of workshops and activities, campers, youth leaders, and mentors develop and enhance leadership skills and knowledge of 2SLGBTQIA+ history, activism, sexual health, healthy coping strategies, and other matters related to sexual and gender diversity.

The nature of the workshops, co-facilitated by mentors and youth leaders, varies from year to year, while maintaining a focus on leadership, personal growth, activism, and advocacy.

Action methods, choir, improv, gaming, variety show, and other participatory activities build community, explore issues, develop leadership, encourage personal growth, and invite people to step out of their comfort zone.



## A brief history of Camp Eclipse – Social workers and others co-creating magic

- 2009 – PPNL executive director - funding for queer youth
- over dinner, he and his partner and two friends dreamed of what to do with the money – decided on a leadership retreat in nature (camp for youth) (3 SW, 2M-2F, 2Q-2A, all cis)
- originally partnered with another queer youth camp – it was not a good fit – borrowed some of their ideas and created some of our own
- Camp No Name – Camp Eclipse: Out in the Woods

Camp Eclipse video - the experience and the impact of camp.

"It is the most understanding and magical place on Earth. Magical, like Disney World, but for queers, and not so far away!"



# Impact of Camp Eclipse – Acceptance

- “You will never belong anywhere as much as you belong here; love is so strong.”
- “People really do want to love and take care of each other, when given a safe space to do so.”
- “I am me, and though it gets hard sometimes, I always will be me and there are people who will love me for it”
- “Acceptance is overwhelming. Simply put.”
- “I am loved”
- “I learned how to accept myself and others around me, and also be the best person I could be. Camp was definitely the best thing that ever happened to me.”

# Impact of Camp Eclipse - Support

- "It's ok to have feelings and to find a form of expression."
- "Having someone to hold onto me when I felt I would cry."
- "There is support out there, you just have to reach for it."
- "Pain, anger, confusion, and resentment were the only feelings I felt towards myself and others heading into Camp. Walking out - my head held high - those changed to feelings of self acceptance, hope, love, and happiness."
- "I am going to be okay no matter what because I have a community, an amazing, strong community that I know will always be there for me."
- "We gained a community, a sense of belonging, a family, and that matters so much."

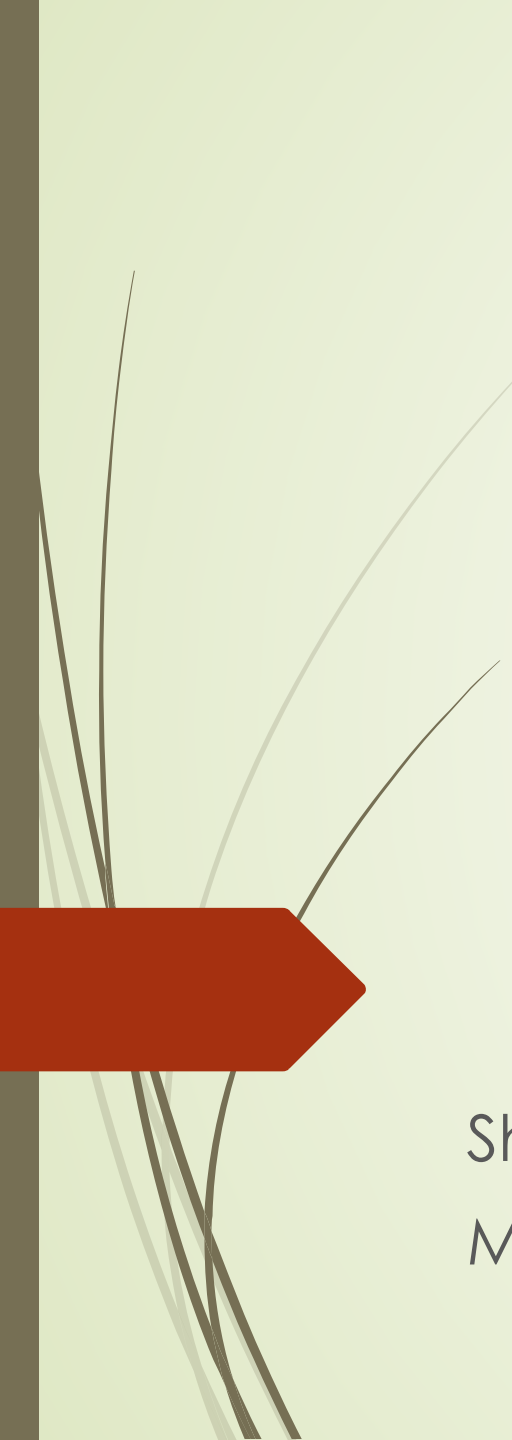
# Impact of Camp Eclipse – Taking change out

- “It’s a place where great change happens, where fabulous people gain confidence and lose inhibitions and shyness.”
- “This camp is the first place I have been able to be truly out and visible all at once.”
- “I can actually accomplish things that I want and help make the change I want to see happen. I learned about my own fragility, vulnerability and strength.”
- “I learned to make no assumptions about people and advocate even harder for what I believe in.”
- "I helped empower youth to try and succeed at things they were once told they were no good at. I think that might be the best thing I've ever done."



## Reflecting on our journeys – Co-creating change

- *How does the Camp Eclipse experience resonate with your journey of co-creating transformational change?*
- *Name one thing that fits for you – and how you might choose to integrate it going forward.*
- *What role do you play in co-creating transformational change in your agency, neighbourhood, community?*
- *How do you use your social location and privilege to support people making change?*
- *What is the next step on your journey?*



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## *For Settlers Who Say That They Support Decolonization ... But Wish It Weren't So Hard*

- This spoken word piece is modelled after Pat Parker's 1970s poem, *For The Straight Folks Who Don't Mind Gays, But Wish They Weren't So Blatant*.
- This piece is intended to challenge settlers' beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and, most importantly, privilege.
- It was written for settlers by a settler - because we, as settlers, need to take responsibility for cleaning up our messes and doing things differently.



# Reflecting on our journeys – Speaking up, speaking out

- *How these ideas resonate with your journey toward decolonization and reconciliation?*
- *Name one thing that fits for you – and how you might choose to integrate it going forward.*
- *What role do you play in speaking up and speaking out? Do you speak for - with - on behalf of - together?*
- *How do you use your social location and privilege to support people in raising their voices and speaking their truths?*
- *What is the next step on your journey?*



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead





## Moving forward in our journeys

*Thank you for inviting me to join you today – and to the organizers who made it all possible.*

*Thank you for your time, your energy, your attention, and your reflections.*

*Any questions, comments, thoughts, ideas?*

*Sheri McConnell*

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