

Episode Title: Ruth Cameron and Kyle Arsenault Part II: Intersectionality and Community

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Sarah Cozzarin: Hello and welcome to hear our stories, a podcast by the City of Waterloo museum for the people of KW. Sarah Harkamal, and Julia are your host as we explore the 2SLGBTQIA+ and queer community of the City of Waterloo and KW area. Today we have myself, Sarah taking the hosting seat and Julia listening in on tech.

Julia Barclay: Hello listeners, just jumping in here to give you all a content description of this episode. In this episode, there are discussions of homophobia faced in the workplace and from family. The impact of religion on these experiences is also discussed. A guest's experiences with racism are also mentioned. If this is something you might have difficulty listening to, we encourage you to tune in to the next episode of the Hear Our Stories podcast and explore the links in the description of this episode.

SC: We begin every episode with a land acknowledgement to express gratitude and show respect for the land and the indigenous peoples of the past and present that have resided here.

Acknowledging the land is an indigenous practice that is just one small part of dismantling colonial world views, an ongoing process that we, your hosts must be mindful of as students and partners of colonial institutions in a virtual and physical environment, it is important to acknowledge the land we and our supporting organizations each reside on.

SC: The settler City of Waterloo, home to the City of Waterloo Museum. And many of our participants is situated on the traditional Land of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral Peoples. The settler township of Centre Wellington, home of Julia is within the traditional lands of the Attawandaron or Neutral Nation, the Huron-Wendat, and the Grand River Metis Council. The land was negotiated as part of Treaty 3 of 1784, and treaty 19, 1818, signed by the Mississaugas of the Credit, First Nation. Both Central Wellington and KW are on land originally set aside for the people of the Six Nations of the Grand River under the Haldimand proclamation of 1784.

SC: The settler City of Guelph, home of Sarah is part of between the lakes purchase and is the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Anishinaabe Peoples. The Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples have unique long-standing and ongoing relationships with the land and each other, the Attawandaron people are also recognized as part of the archeological record.

SC: The settler cities of Etobicoke, home to Harkamal, and Toronto, home to the University of Toronto, are part of the Toronto Purchase Treaty Number 13 of 1805. It is the traditional Land of the Huron-Wendat, Seneca and Mississaugas of credit. Etobicoke, known as Adobeegook, the “Place of the Alders” in the Michi Saagiig language is situated along the Humber River watershed, which historically provided an integral connection between Lake Ontario and the Lake Simcoe Georgian Bay regions of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. All of these lands are a part of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, this treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee, bound them to share in this territory and protect

the land in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect. So we would like to extend our gratitude again to the Indigenous peoples with whom we share all of these lands today, and in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect, we hope that all of our listeners will do the same as they listen to the stories shared on this podcast.

SC: Thank you.

SC: So for the next question, this is for Kyle, we mentioned in your introduction that you focus on providing resources to homeless population in a healing atmosphere with ACCKWA. Can you tell us a little bit about that and how that's done and why this atmosphere is so important for the community?

Kyle Arsenault: It's really important for the community because we're usually the first line of resources we're the front line of anything that's happening to them, and we honestly, we just treat them like a human being when they go through those doors. We ask them how their day has been, and we put the first. We're very client focused, and we ask them what they need, sometimes it could be from tent to I wanna see, possibly, a nurse practitioner, and we can refer them to those resources. And all they have to do is give us their first name and that's it, and they can go and speak with a nurse practitioner about what they wanna talk about with that nurse in private. Also other services we can... If we can refer to other organizations, so we have other organizations that we are partnered with that we can connect them with, so if they wanted to get into possibly counseling, we have Lutherwood, we can provide that too, and give them kind of a referral, so they can... And we also have people that come by, Lutherwood comes by, and they sit down with them... I believe it's Monday, Wednesday, Friday, where they can go and speak with them one-on-one for our time that we're open. That's kind of like the healing atmosphere that we provide, we make sure it's a safe space and just treat everyone's opinion... like if they have anything they wanna put forward, then we'll see what we can do about it.

SC: Awesome, thank you so much for sharing that. And for also doing that very, very important and necessary work. For Ruth, how has your academic and professional work with the External Implementation Steering Committee, Ontario Black Youth Action Plan, Ontario's Advisory Committee on HIV and AIDS and your fellowships impacted the work that you do with ACCKWA? And can you describe a little bit of your role as well?

Ruth Cameron: Yeah, I can... So I'm the Executive Director, so I'm not really the person doing that direct service work with the folks...

-5 MINUTES -

RC: Who are coming to see us. I think that what Kyle described that happens at our drop-in in Cambridge is a really important aspect of our work, really trying to make a one-stop shop where a whole bunch of different services exist, and people don't have to jump through a lot of barriers to get some basic needs met. I think that, for me, you described a whole lot of committee level work that I'm on. What I try to do is bring needs and the way things are experienced at a direct service level, to committees that might not be involved in direct service work and academic work that isn't necessarily engaged in direct service work, and then the other thing I try to do is use

evidence that sometimes is academic evidence and bring that to my direct service work. So, really trying to translate one into the other. So, I think about things like my day job, what I try to do is use a lot of evidence that I might spend time generating myself, or evidence that I have managed to research and bring together to try and advocate for needs in the communities.

RC: For me, it feels like at academic tables or leadership tables where we're not discussing direct service work, I've been able to bring some of the lived realities of doing direct service work and the needs to those spaces. And then in direct service spaces, when I'm advocating for new services or improved services, I feel like I've been able to bring either research that we've generated or outside research to lend strength to our requests for more resources to do work with marginalized communities. In that sense, I think that this lends itself a lot to the kind of advocacy and organizing that's had to happen in queer communities all along, right? It's not like anybody said, "Oh, we're gonna do services for you now," or "We recognize you have needs now," it has had to be community all along saying, These are real needs and concerns that you need to address, that has been what has gotten recognition or any services that have been created, realizing there's unique needs and queer communities.

SC: Awesome. While working at ACCKWA, are there any achievements that either of you have been involved in that you are proud of?

RC: I think that in particular for me, it has been about expanding services. So, having clinics. There are too many folks who are still experiencing AIDS-phobia, queerphobia, transphobia, when they are just trying to get healthcare. So, regular primary health care, "I need to go for some tests," "I think that this cold I have is a little bit more serious," "I think I sprayed something." In the course of all of those regular everyday health care interactions, experiencing transphobia or homophobia, or AIDS-phobia, where people say "I can't help you, your needs are too specialized," and people are like, "literally, I need you to check out my cold and let me know if it's more serious than I think it is." Just being able to hopefully help some people, 'cause it's never enough, get access to services that they are supposed to have access to. It's an important part of dignity

KA: For me, what I'm proud of... Is that almost every day I'm at placement I'm always connecting with somebody. I'm connecting with, they could be someone from a different agency or it could be even a client, and I take that to great value, that I'm being in someone's life, I'm being... Connecting with someone spiritually and being with them at that moment. Trying to help them with what they need. Another achievement that I did was I created an Indigenous brochure of resources around the KW area. So, if anyone is Indigenous or identifies as Indigenous, they can get at those resources and they can get those spaces. So those are a couple of things I'm proud of.

SC: Awesome, what would be your favorite part of working at AACKWA?

RC: I like doing what I do and being able to be my whole self at work. So, I like working with a really diverse group of people who also care about services and supports and day-to-day connections for the really diverse group of communities that we work with. Being able to be

passionate about the work that I'm doing, but connect with this really diverse team as well is important to me. It's a really queer work space, and I like that.

KA: I just feel like it's almost the welcome space where...

-10 MINUTES-

KA: I can just be myself, and it makes me feel comfortable for the first time in a long time that... I was uncomfortable of who I am, and this space that ACCKWA has given me, the comfort of going into the main office and being able... to be... And it's just... It's been a really good experience.

RC: I don't know about you, Kyle, but for me, I get... What happens to me when I show up in different spaces in the community, is people either engage with me as, here is Ruth, she is a Black person and she will talk to us about issues of race and racism. Or, here is Ruth, she is a queer person, and she will talk about issues of queer inequality, and I'm like... at no point am I either black and exclusively black or queer, and exclusively queer. I am a whole person, every single space that I go to, and I'm able to talk about those things and other things as well that aren't about my personal experience, because I spend a lot of time talking to other people about their experiences as well. Not to speak on their behalf, but I make a point of talking to people from a broad range of experiences in hopes that I can always think about who's not able to make it into the room, and I can bring those issues into the room...

KA: 100%, I feel that way. The same way. It's just, there's so many issues to even cover, and starting off with that, I always feel like I'm always missing one or the other, and that's why we need so many voices, and sometimes it's just... I'm going into the room, it's just like, it's hard, it's difficult. 'Cause I can give... What I've experienced in life or I can give what my friends experience or what my partner is going through... My partner identifies as Indigenous and two-spirited, and he is having a difficult time because sometimes in Indigenous spaces, they don't take the two-spirit into consideration. And he always feels like he was always getting left out. So, there's just a huge broad of issues that are still happening in our day-to-day lives and... I guess hopefully we can see more shine to it.

RC: I know that for me, when I think about my queerness, I think about... I'm not gonna get the quote correct from Bell Hooks about being at odds with all mainstream frameworks as your queer lens, but yeah, that works for me. And if you're someone who is at odds with most mainstream frameworks and assumptions, that means you can think differently about your whole world, from the most personal aspects of it and the fun aspects of it, to the most serious issue-driven aspects of it. And that could be a gift. As you travel around in the world...

KA: Yeah.

RC: Yeah.

KA: I just feel like also just going into it more, I remember just going into more fashion, more make-up and stuff when I was just a little younger, and I remember it was always a label of... It's

always feminine stuff, and you can't go in that realm, it's blocked off. I was always told. I do remember the first time going out there, I was nervous or shaking, and so till this day, I still do shake. I just feel weird about the situation and I have to start accepting more of myself and what I'm interested in, and what I want. I remember going into thrift stores and getting weird look when I'm in the women's section and look at cardigan because I think they're cute or there's something cute or whatever it could be, and I still get those weird looks of people being like, "Why is he here" or "Why is this person in this realm," and we're just so used to this patriarchy. You have men, sadly, where they were still back in the 80s, and we haven't adjusted yet. We have to adjust to new things and new change.

RC: Yeah, no, I think that queering stuff is a gift. I want to think about that and have that be a part of my... I don't know my mantra going about in the world, yeah. The unique way that comes together for me, or the unique way it comes together for somebody else, those are gifts. We can take around with us everywhere we go.

SC: Thank you for sharing that. You guys, throughout the podcast, have shared some of the hardships of the community work and also of your personal lives. What kind of self-care do you implement into your routines to refresh yourself and... Replenish your capacity to do this type of work. It's hard, it's hard work. What do you do to help yourself?

RC: I try to think about breaks in doing the work and always sharing in the work. I would rather do all of this in partnership as much as possible. I think that that's important. I think that so much of queer communities involves histories of organizing, not working individually...

-15 MINUTES-

RC: So I think about those things.

KA: Being in social work, there's two things, There's burnout, and there's compassion fatigue, that a lot of people take in. And with the burnout right now, we're seeing a lot of high risk of our co-workers get burnt out because sometimes it's hard to give self-care and we have to always remind ourselves that we have to take care of ourselves before taking care of other people. And I go home and whatever you can do. Sometimes it's even taking a shower or even reading a book. Just take that self-care that you need to go, time away from what you need and replenish all the hardship. With compassion fatigue it's hard because we truly hurt for our clients. We see how hard it is, and I see how hard... I see some of these clients and I wanna do so much more, but at the same time, it's their decision and their choice, I can't push them in a direction, I have to guide them to that direction. But I have to be more client-focused and I have to be... What do they wanna do? So I have to remind myself of that and remind myself to take care of myself.

RC: Another thing that I think about a lot is our capacity for joy. These last few years are unprecedented, it goes without saying, and I have to remind myself of the collective attention that we have focused in the past upon just creating joyful spaces. And that there's a need to continue to do this throughout this time and going forward as well. So, I try to think about that for myself as an individual, but I also have that desire for that to continue to happen in our... I'll say communities, as opposed to us being one large, huge community. It's important for us to

remember that and it's hard to remember it right now, when we're all trying to make it through. We always were trying to make it through, and we still found ways and places to make time for joy, so we have to continue it regardless of what else is going on.

RC: Something that, before I came to Waterloo Region to work, something that I thought was interesting was that there seemed to be one, a kind of a Rainbow Coalition, and I'd heard about... It just seemed like they had really long-standing queer student groups, like at the universities, I know that in any community, those things ebb and flow, sometimes they're really active. Sometimes they're really not, but it seemed like there was- unlike Hamilton where I'm from, with more stops and starts, it seems like there have been long-standing queer organizations. Now, I'm the first person to critique 'cause I was one of the people who came up with the critique, those organizations serve mainstream white queers. They weren't serving really low-income white queers and they weren't serving like a BI-POC community by any means, but they still existed. Whereas in Hamilton, even that level of stability hadn't necessarily existed that there have been periods of time where there wasn't any visible queer force over the last few decades.

SC: There has been a very devoted population for these community groups, and I think that's really... Really wonderful. I haven't lived in KW for about four years now. I was there for school, I'm a past Golden Hawk as well, and yeah, at least when I was there, I wasn't aware of any of these organizations, and it's only actually through this project that I've become aware of it, and it makes me really wonder about all the other organizations that I'm not... Queer organizations I'm not aware of in Guelph and the community that I live in,. And there's a lot in KW, which is really great to see, but unfortunately, I just wasn't even aware of them until recently.

RC: There are people in this community who's been really vocal and years passed about the racism in queer community that happened just as I was starting to arrive in the community, so I didn't know the individuals who did it, but I knew that it had been very recent prior to my arrival in the community. It's funny though, it's... What happens more is it's just an erasure that happens, so I literally... I was in a conversation one day with the Mayor of Kitchener, and I was explaining to him that he needed to do better on anti-racism, and he said, there's other issues we need to focus on too, Ruth. He's like, "the LGBTQ community is facing inequality," and I looked at him and I was like, "Really?"... And he was like, "Yeah," and I was like, "You're clueless. I'm a queer activist in this community, but you can't think that I could possibly be queer as well as Black." The ACB network is a queer-led organization, but nobody ever thinks about engaging with the ACB Network as a career organization, not everybody there is queer...

-20 MINUTES-

RC: But it's a queer-led organization and people don't engage with it that way because of... They only think about it as doing issues related to anti-black racism and nothing else.

KA: They put people into their own boxes, unfortunately.

RC: Exactly!

KA: I remember just being just a guy, being a male, but when I put make-up on and everything, I'm immediately devalued as male and immediately taken as a woman sometimes when I put my make-up on. And it's just like, why? I still can have these values, but they don't see that unfortunately, when it comes to conversations...

RC: You can only be one thing at a time,

KA: Unfortunately!

RC: Right? You can only be one thing at a time...

SC: Yeah, it's hard for people to see people as 3D beings. They seem to have a very 2D perception.

RC: Absolutely.

SC: Thank you for sharing that. For folks who are listening and that want to help out and volunteer or work with ACCKWA, how can they be getting involved and help out in their day-to-day lives?

RC: People who are interested in getting involved with ACCKWA in terms of volunteering, can email volunteer at ACCKWA dot com, so that's a volunteer at A-C-C-K-W-A dot com to find out about volunteer opportunities. If people were interested in helping in other ways, can go to the donate button on our website to find out ways in which they can support us in that fashion. The other thing that I think is hugely important at side of these pieces is just plain old community building. We're at this moment, in a really tough time where there is a number of different kinds of backlash happening all at once. There's upsurge in racism, that's happening. And there is a queer backlash in particular, backlash against trans folks that's happening right now. We have to be mindful in our interactions when we're hearing people speak about harmful things, so we have an opportunity to make sure that that is not shared on a public platform. What can we do about challenging attitudes to create safer communities for people to exist in. People are experiencing harm right now because of this backlash, and we want... As part of our ongoing work, one of the starting points is just safer welcoming and inclusive communities. It is connected to the much more focused work that we're doing around HIV AIDS support prevention, education and services.

KA: When I think about getting involved, I think the first thing that comes to mind is to remind ourselves of the privileges that we have and start to look at what we can do to build upon that and look into a deeper meaning almost of ourselves. So, there's like, I know there's a lot of self-help books out there that can look into your identity or social location, and you can start looking at what are some of these things I have to take in consideration when I approach or when we are connecting to, say, someone who's... Who is homeless or who is experiencing homeless[ness], we have to be mindful as well. And we just have to remind yourself like, where they're at and that they have suffered all this trauma and stuff, and not to look down on them, and even just to acknowledge that they are there and they exist is even just a head start of what's

going on there? And I feel like just getting involved or donating or just helping on the community and try to make it almost a more safer community is the best one can do.

SC: Thank you so much for providing that information for our listeners. Now, we've had this trend within the podcast so far of books, and everyone seems to have some recommendations about... relevant to their work. Is there any relevant books you can recommend to our listeners who want to learn more about the type of work that AACKWA does?

RC: Not really, to be honest with you, there aren't a lot of books that really kinda talk about the historical social lens of HIV in Canada, it's a big hole, unfortunately. That particular kind of lens, and there's a lot of US stuff I can think about, and there's even US stuff, I can think about specific to gay men or specific to black women when it comes to HIV, but when it comes to Canada, the only thing I can think of right now is something of a title I can't remember, but it's a queer history that's partially speak HIV, it's not focused on HIV.

KA: Yeah, it's been difficult. I've been trying to find books out there and it's been hard to find anything that's been Canadian sourced and HIV and AIDS, so I've had a difficult time finding those, but at the moment, I can't really recommend any books on the top of my head.

-25 MINUTES-

SC: No problem. Thank you for letting us know about that. That is an unfortunate hole that we have... Do you guys have any recommendations for books that you like to read in your leisure time?

RC: I haven't read for fun in so long. Oh my god.

SC: I struggle with that as well.

KA: I have too many... I'm looking at my bookshelf. And I'm like, "Oh God, can I donate them all?"

RC: Again, I'd have to think about it. You're pointing something out to me.

SC: I just got back into reading after many years of not doing it, and it actually felt so good to read a book for fun again...

RC: Right?

SC: Yeah.

RC: Yeah.

KA: Some books that I do in my pleasure reading after I narrow down my list of 50, to like, three...

SC: We'll take 50! It's okay, you can provide us with the list

KA: I just finished the Crooked Kingdom and Six of Crows. That was really my two favorite books about pretty much... It's like a Netflix series right now called Shadow and Bones. So, it's been really good, and I just restarted this old book called [Raith Through] with my partner, so he got a book and I gotta book and we've been reading it together, and it's just about how there's no gender pretty much in the society and how there's this new species of this world. So it's kind of interesting to see how this- how it kinda goes and there's some magic involved, and it's been really good.

SC: Can I just say that is the cutest thing ever that you guys are reading a book together?

KA: Couple goals!

RC: Just gonna take a couple goals... That's very sweet.

KA: It's, yeah, it's been good. It's been a struggle 'cause I can't pronounce a half the words and like, I don't know what this means. I need the Google definition.

SC: Well, good for you for challenging yourself in reading. I was told by a teacher, and I understand that they are doing this from a learning perspective, it was like elementary school, I think it was grade two, they said... They said "If you open up book and within the first couple of pages, you can't read five words, you shouldn't be reading that book, it's too hard for you." And I'm like, "That's a weird thing to say to a child, not to read a hard book."

KA: You just gotta challenge yourself and keep going forward.

SC: Yeah!

RC: I was gonna say... isn't "read what you want" a better instruction to give a kid?

SC: It would have been... It probably would have been way better instruction or say, "just ask someone what the word means, just ask for help or go Google it or look it up, go to a dictionary!"

KA: Maybe as an audio book or something,

SC: Yeah!

KA: To like to help you read along. I don't know. There's so many resources out there. If reading is a struggle. You can always work around it. That's what I've learned.

SC: Well, those are other questions that I have. Thank you both Kyle and with so much for such an amazing episode this was so insightful and so awesome to hear about and have this awesome conversation with you guys so thank you so much for doing the podcast and doing it together as

well you guys had such great conversations and worked so well off each other so thank you so much for participating and being with us at Hear Our Stories. So, thank you very much.

RC: Thank you

KA: Thank you so much!

JB: Hello, Hear Our Stories listeners, thank you so much for tuning in to part two of our episode with Ruth and Kyle. We will now resume our bi-weekly release schedule, so we'll see you in two weeks for the next episode of the Hear Our Stories podcast. While you're waiting, please check out the description of this episode for local organizations and groups related to this episode's content where you can lend your support and give a follow! You can also go to the City of Waterloo Museum's website at waterloo.ca/museum to explore the virtual exhibit of this podcast series that features some extra bonus content! You can also follow the museum on Instagram and Facebook @waterloomuseum for updates on each episode's release. Thanks for listening and we'll "Hear" you all in two weeks!

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