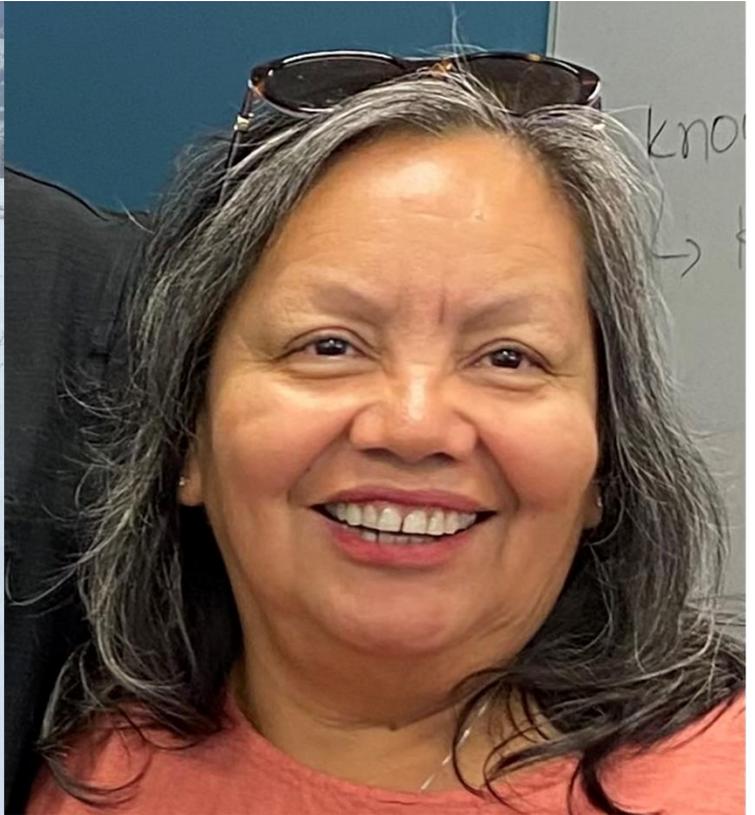


THE PATHFINDERS: Upper Nicola Band's Elder Carol McCauley and Cindy Tom-Lindley on getting involved as citizens



The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project is chatting with movers and shakers advancing First Nations' inherent right to self-government in Canada. Part Q&A and part F.A.Q., The Pathfinders features members of our project and others talking about why self-government matters to them and why it should matter to you.



It's not just chief and council. First Nations citizens and political leaders alike are taking back control over their nations from Canada and the Indian Act. Citizens with and without roles in administering the Indian Act are coming together to build their own systems of government outside it.

Elder Carol McCauley (pictured left) and Cindy Tom-Lindley (pictured right) of Upper Nicola Band are two of many citizens getting involved with self-government in their central British Columbia Syilx community. The duo helped Upper Nicola run its first [self-government workshops](#) with the [Centre for First Nations Governance](#). Since then, their nation joined as a formal partner in the SSHRC-funded [Rebuilding First Nations Governance](#) research project. Carol and Cindy's self governance journeys are both in motion. Now, they're encouraging other First Nations people to embark on their own.

In this edition of The Pathfinders: How learning about self-government can enrich both citizens and their communities; how citizens can get involved in First Nations self-government; how group discussion supports strong government and impactful learning; why Carol and Cindy support self-government.

Content warning: discussion of residential schools, child apprehension, poverty, drugs and alcohol

What motivated you to get involved with supporting your community's self-government efforts?

Carol: I first heard about the topic from our Chief and Council, probably about two years ago almost. They had announced this at a general band meeting. As a Syilx member, I thought this is something I'd be really interested in, as I was always interested in our Syilx government system anyways and wanted to learn more about it.

So they kept announcing it, and then they kept saying, "Okay, we're going to need some volunteers to do this work." They announced it again. Then I thought, "When are we going to get started on this exciting work?" And then finally, we did.

Cindy: I've always been involved with my community in some form or another for a very long time. I served the band as a councillor for 12 or 13 years, always working toward overcoming some of the issues that our community faces as a whole: the impacts of colonization, the impacts of residential school specifically, and any of the other issues.

Those are the things that impact our community today. We're still dealing with a lot of those issues. It was pointed out to me that my son is the first person in our family to not attend residential school. So that means me and my siblings, my mother and her siblings, my grandmother and her siblings all went to the Kamloops Residential School.

What has your community been doing to advance its right to govern itself?

Cindy: We've been having sessions to provide information to the community. That was probably my entry point, because they had asked me if I could help facilitate small groups. I had heard about it and that we were organizing and preparing meeting with the Centre for First Nations Governance.

So I went and participated. I just got more interested and absorbed into it with each session that we had.

What did those sessions uncover?

Carol: We did five sessions online, and that was the very beginning of it. And then we did three more community engagement sessions for discussing the [Five Pillars of Effective Governance](#): the people, the land, the laws, governing structures, and resources.

When we did it the second time with the in-person community engagement, that was so exciting. We were with the people, and we were able to really engage in dialogue with our community. I learned so much from doing this, and our people did as well. I believe that we ended up with a sort of core group of community members who came to all these sessions.

One of the most important things that I gathered from this was just how important our Syilx governance is to us. If we are to transition out of the Indian Act, we better know what our Syilx governance is first. So I think that was very, very important.

Can you describe what it's like to shift out of that "Indian Act mindset" and begin thinking about your community as a nation of its own, governed for and by its people?

Cindy: That's really exciting. It's scary from some of the feedback that I've had from people: like how are we going to do this? We still have so many social issues. We still have drugs and alcohol in our community, child apprehension and unemployment, social income assistance—all of those issues are still within our community.

But the exciting thing is that we can get away from the Indian Act, and we can begin making our own decisions. And some of them may not be right. But it's us making decisions for ourselves, and we're no longer wards of the government.

I think that's one of the key points. One of the things that really stood out in the community consultation process is that people were so upset and angry, we had to have extra sessions and extra time. Because when we covered the discussions about all of the colonizing policies—the first Indian Act, the [Gradual Enfranchisement Act](#), all of those things that came mainly from Sir John A. MacDonald—our community members became very emotional, upset, and angry.

I think for some of our community members, that was probably the first time they had heard the full overview of history and all of the things that our people have lived through and survived through.

Carol: I think our community is a knowledge network for all things under those five pillars. Some of us are experts on some of those five pillars. It was really nice to bring the community together and share that knowledge. As a result of that, I know what our Syilx governance is now.

In fact, you can't wait to have your self-government in place. I think it's going to be a lot of freedom. It's going to take a lot of work still, but at least I have a vision. At least some of our people now have a vision. So it's not so scary.

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RFNG's Amsey Maracle on youth leadership and why First Nations self governance matters

"I think a lot of the youth today are waking up to the history of colonization, and they're not accepting of it. They know what they've been robbed of, and they're not wanting to live under the Indian Act for another generation."



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How do you personally approach learning about inherent rights and self-government?

Carol: I was always interested in this way back in the day, and I just never had the opportunity to really awaken my self governance. And I think, now that I have a framework in my head for it that really helps me understand kind of where we were, where we are now, and where we can go. It's like a roadmap. It's like a pathway that we can take. And so I'm really excited about taking that pathway with our community. And I enjoy talking about it.

What is your advice to everyday citizens who want to get involved with inherent rights self-government?

Cindy: In our Okanagan Syilx way, we have a process called the nᑦawqᑎwix^w process. It welcomes people. It's a long-standing process for decision-making, planning, and coming up with ideas for the community. It's based on one of our [captikwł](#), one of our stories from the Okanagan Nation.

I make nᑦawqᑎwix^w a part of what I do to welcome people: not to be judgmental or angry, but welcome people to this process and welcome them to talking about our future. We're taking our future into our hands, and we are going to make decisions for ourselves, because we're the ones that are the best and most qualified to make those decisions.

I would be very happy with anyone that comes in to join and support the process. If they have not had any former political leadership experience, I would say good because you don't need that. Our process is our way, and everyone's got a skill. Everyone's got knowledge, and we all contribute to the community process.

Why should the average First Nations person care about the inherent right to self-government?

Cindy: I think our people should care about and do care about creating a better future for our children, our grandchildren, and those yet to come. If we think about how our ancestors conducted themselves, that's what they did to ensure that we were here today. They set up processes, including the spiritual aspect.

Carol: I guess the biggest thing is, you can exercise your jurisdiction and authority under the inherent right. Under the Indian Act we have no jurisdiction or authority.

It's like a freedom out of the regime of the Indian Act. We're an awesome people. We are a beautiful people. My captik^{wł} stories and my nřawqñwix^w process and [Four Food Chiefs](#) told me. That defines me. That's who I really am.

What are your hopes for the future of Upper Nicola?

Cindy: My hopes are that our people continue to become healthier, because this journey requires for us to have dealt with some of our own issues in order for us to step forward and be able to help our community members. More and more people are becoming healthier and have a vision of a better future. I consider that to be one of the impacts of all of the trauma that we have encountered. There's a sense of hopelessness. The Indian Act ties us to a sense of hopelessness.

When we can think about creating a future that's more positive or healthy, following our own ways and our own teachings, our own laws and protocols, then we would be creating a better future.

Carol: I really hope that once we have a really good foundation in our community, we can exercise our jurisdiction and authority even more. We can have a government-to-government relationship with the provincial and federal governments and other entities. We will be able to look at our land with respect to the idea that we don't manage our land but the land manages us. Inherent rights is a different lens, and I hope our people will continue to learn it, to understand it and put it into action

Interviews for The Pathfinders have been edited for length and clarity. Written by [Ben Sylvestre](#) with editorial oversight from Elder Carol McCauley and Cindy Tom-Lindley (interviewed separately). [The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project](#) is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.



**More questions?
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