

Dr. Lisa Archibald (00:01):

Welcome to the SAC Shining Lights S-LP Schools Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Lisa Archibald from Western University. As you know, many speech-language pathologists in Canada are employed in schools. Their job is to support children with communication disabilities in accessing the curriculum and achieving their academic and personal potential. It's a challenging job. So many schools, so many students, and not many S-LPs. Across the country, S-LPs are finding unique solutions to providing the best possible services to the students and school teams with whom they work. In this podcast, our guests describe their innovations in school-based speech-language pathology. Thanks for listening as we shine a light on some brilliant projects. Hello, and welcome to the SAC Shining Lights S-LP Schools Podcast. And here with me today is returning Chelsea Von Tol and her colleague, Kara Willie. Chelsea and Kara, welcome to the podcast today. Chelsea, would you reintroduce yourself to our listeners first, please?

Chelsea Van Tol (01:06):

Yep, sounds great. Very happy to be here. My name is Chelsea Van Tol. I'm a speech-language pathologist based out of Vancouver, and my role as an S-LP is travelling to rural and remote communities across BC. I'm currently sitting with one of my coworkers in Alert Bay right now participating in the podcast. And so I do really want to acknowledge today just the speech-language assistants that I get to work with and how much amazement that I have of the skills that they have gained over the years when I am only there for a very short period of time and how determined they are to provide the support to the kids in the best way that they possibly can. So yeah, really would like to give space to the speech-language assistants that I have in my very direct day-to-day.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (01:52):

Lovely. Thank you. And Kara, please introduce yourself.

Kara Willie (02:20):

[speaking in Kwak'wala] My name's Kara Willie. I come from Kingcome Inlet in Gilford Island. I'm Kwakwaka'wakw. We are residing on the northern part of Vancouver Island, so we're really grateful Chelsea comes all this way and keeps her connection with our school. I've been a special education assistant for 20 years. This is my 20th year in education. I'm a mother of three, and I raised my two boys in the school that I work in. Really grateful to have asked to become our school's S-LPA and grateful to have taken this journey with Chelsea. It's been exciting, and I'm really excited to see how this kind of just evolves and unrolls, and I'm just kind of excited to see the direction this is going in now. So I'm really grateful.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (03:23):

Thank you so much, Kara. So let's hear a little bit more about the work setting in which you work. Kara, we'll let you set the stage from your perspective there.

Kara Willie (03:33):

Okay. I'm working in the Nandez First Nation School. We are an independent school residing in Alert Bay, BC. Our school is really a community school. My mother taught here for 23 years, so that kind of laid the path for me to also teach here. My children have been raised here, and that goes along with a lot of my colleagues. We've helped to raise each other's children, some grandchildren, so we're all connected. So when we have that connection, I believe the teachings are a lot more in depth, a lot more understanding. Our staff is just one big family that we literally help raise each other's children. So we take a lot into consideration in doing that, and we do look at the child as the holistic self while teaching them. I think that's about it.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (04:49):

And so you mentioned in your introduction that you're the speech-language pathology assistant in the school and the only one, I think.

Kara Willie (04:56):

Yes.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (04:56):

Yeah. And you are providing support to children of all ages there?

Kara Willie (05:02):

Oh, yes. Kindergarten to grade seven. Our caseload right now I believe is at 23, 22, 23 students. Some students have actually gone away to a different school and they've come back and re-signed up with. We have a grade six student who re-signed up with speech and language because he's known Chelsea and I all these years since kindergarten. So having returning students is a blessing and they must trust us to want to come back and advocate for themselves the help that they need.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (05:40):

Yeah. Very nice. Yeah, that's great. All right, Chelsea, and the work setting from your perspective.

Chelsea Van Tol (05:46):

Yeah, so I spend two to three days, three to four times a year, just depending on the schedule of the school year and what that entails for them to recruit because they often have OT, art therapy, other professionals coming in. So it really depends on how much the school wants all of us here at the same time. We're trying to fit everybody in. And so then I will travel from Vancouver. And so I feel like it's kind of cool to know. I take the ferry and then you got to drive from. So from my house to the ferry is not very far, but then from the ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo is an hour and 45 minutes, and then you're driving all the way up to Port McNeill. And then from Port McNeill, it's an additional ferry to get to Alert Bay, and it's very beautiful.

(06:35):

Yeah, I definitely don't mind the trip, but it's one of those when getting a reference of how far are you travelling and you're doing this wild loop from one place. As the crow flies, I feel like it wouldn't take so long, but to get here it does take a little bit and it's well worth the trip. So then it is that timing of trying to figure out, trying to do a fall, winter, and spring visit so that we, because Kara and I try to do report cards with the school terms so that we can actually see what is going on. And so then trying to do the in-person is really nice because Zoom is great. We definitely have lived on Zoom in lots of ways, but it's just really nice when I can have that in-person to really get into more conversation with the kids than I find Zoom.

(07:17):

Just because I know the kids, Zoom is fine, but it's really nice to get the in-person check-ins. And so then Kara in the timelines in between will sometimes advocate for, "We need to check-in with this kid and I need some updates." And so then we'll set up Zoom in between. Sometimes it's just a conversation her and I will have of I feel confident in her skills to say, "We've mastered that sound, you've got the data to show it, and I'll move on to the next." And so having her here just makes progress happen for the kids in ways that I could never. Because when she was on maternity leave, I was trying to be virtual and it was great, but you need a person. Kids are awesome and they will try. I actually have this very vivid memory of being in the principal's office and kids transitioning themselves to me.

(08:04):

But then the one kid was, okay, I'm done, and the screen is then closed and nobody knew. I was like, "I don't know what to do now. I can't call this school and make that happen." But just that possibility of having an adult with the skills and then the carryover possibility makes it really easy in between. So I have many other schools that I do the support with, but yeah, Kara and I have been working together the longest and have dialled in our communication quite easily of when you need what and what do I need to do to support that too.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (08:30):

Yeah, lovely. And all of the ways that we're going to be talking about with regards to the importance of a community member. And we'll just at this moment just refer listeners to your previous podcast, Chelsea, where you talked a lot more about the logistics of the whole programme that you're involved in. But we're going to think today about how to take how you started out with the challenge of taking speech-language pathology and making it fit within the community that you were serving.

Chelsea Van Tol (09:05):

So I think from my perspective, it is that notion that us S-LPs really want to do as much as we can, but we only have so much time in a day. So when the needs are there and the communities were ready to have us as SLPs coming in, and then the community realising, oh, maybe we could do something more. And us as SLPs thinking, how could we support that to get training for those that might be willing and ready to be the support for us in the communities directly? Which led Kara to be one of those really wonderful people that took that challenge on.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (09:38):

Yes. Yeah. And so Kara, maybe you could talk about the training in the area of speech-language pathology assistant and how that fit with your thinking about supporting children's learning.

Kara Willie (09:56):

I think with the strategy of my programme I attended was a First Nations programme. So it was all geared towards understanding both languages, I guess. So we did a lot on focusing on First Nations language, First Nations background history, and how we, I don't know, make that connection, I guess, between. It is a connection between the modern world and history, I guess. And then just finding the path on how to. Finding the strengths of these children and then bringing them forward and just helping that child grow into good, positive human beings really.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (10:50):

Very nice. Thanks for that description for sure. And so Chelsea, I know just what you mean about the wanting to get a lot done of the SLP perspective. And how did you find the sweet spot for the work that you were going to do with Kara?

Chelsea Van Tol (11:10):

I think it's really impressive that maybe because we're similar age, maybe, I don't know, just the desire for the kids was very real as soon as I got to arrive to the school because every morning the school does a morning meeting where they learn the language, they revisit language that they've been learning, and then they sing and drum together. And so that was just the most powerful start as an outsider coming in. And then Kara making sure that we can orient ourselves to everything that's happening, but let's go see who's here today. So it is the urgency that I want to feel because I want to be helpful is then pause to be like,

"We got to go see who's here? What do we need to do? Who are we going to connect with? And where do we start?" And sometimes the kids find us and sometimes the adults find us, and sometimes we find whoever might be ready for us.

(11:57):

So I think just that certainty of Kara will guide my excitement and energy into being like, "Let's go find a direction that we need to be heading down." And then really that's the day-to-day that she was very quick to figure out with my recommendations of if you can see this kid every day of the week, that would be awesome. And then Kara working hard to build a schedule with her team to figure out when can these kids be supported and not interrupting or interrupt whichever was the balance of when the kids are having a hard time in gym, maybe that is a good time for Kara to be working with the kids. So yeah, I find Kara is very organised in the fall to figure out where do the kids need to be fit and when do we need to be supporting in the class and when do we need to be doing the pullout?

(12:48):

And then her whole team, even her principal is just supportive of knowing that she knows what she needs to do. She's just going to make that happen. So yeah, I would be curious from your perspective of what that orientation looks like to a school year and how you got to that point as well.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (13:07):

Yeah, so I'd be happy to hear about that as well. So how you're setting up your approach there.

Kara Willie (13:14):

So usually in September, because I've been here so long, I've been the one assessing the kids, doing their Read Well assessments for them and placing them into their groups. And because that's been ongoing for 17 years, I ordered the Read Well programme 17 years ago when I was pregnant with my son, and then we help to teach the teachers and the assistants how to go about the programme. So in understanding where the children are at and they're reading and understanding who needs the extra help, who's struggling, then that kind of sets us up for the year. And because this caseload has been ongoing for six, seven years now, we have a deep understanding of where kids are at and where we need to get them to be to feel successful. So my role is really flexible throughout the year, especially when it does come to the holistic sense of the child.

(14:27):

If children are grieving lost loved ones, we make time for that. So we observe the child first. How is their emotional mental wellbeing first before teaching? And once we get into the role, the rhythm of our schedule, once their schedule is set, it's really interesting. Our teachers are really flexible. What I've done was the teachers get to choose a section in the day that works with them that does not interrupt their reading groups or their cultural time and preferably not their PE time. So it is a little bit tricky to implement that and have it ongoing throughout the year.

(15:21):

So usually teachers will pick first thing in the morning before recess, and then the next chunk of the day is after recess and before lunch, and then we divide the afternoon up into two. So I take one class of kids at a time, and I used to just have a visual schedule of those children that would come to me. We used to work in the set visual schedule with the kids, but now when I go to their classroom, I do take the kids that they're either looking at me. We use a lot of nonverbal communication. They're looking at me, and if they're looking at me, that means they're ready to come. And I just simply call them with nonverbal communication.

(16:12):

So it's kind of evolved into that. Some children need the strict schedule to understand the pattern of the day. So my class after lunch, it's just the three kids from that class, they know their order one, three, and then I move on to the next class. So it helps. It really helps with my organisation of my binders. All my kids, their class binders are organised. So once I'm done with that class, I just simply put their binder away and I grab the next binder. So it really does help with my organising in my office and then in the classroom too, because some teachers wanted us on a strict schedule and some didn't, simply because they didn't want the kids missing that chunk of math. They didn't want them missing calendar time, or they didn't want them missing the exact same thing every day. So that's why it became flexible.

(17:16):

But within that hour, there's that flexibility. So now we don't have long meetings with the teachers. I don't have to have a long. They just tell me what part of the day works for them. Okay, you're in the schedule. So now it's become almost like the unwritten rules, and it's just a mutual understanding with our staff and our coworkers. They know they expect me there a certain time every day. I don't take the kids in a certain order.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (17:55):

I wonder if I can ask you just to speak a bit more. I like the description you gave about the nonverbal connection you're making with the children and that you're setting aside for emotional wellbeing. I'm not sure if that's my word or yours, but at the beginning, what is setting up good learning? I don't mean to put, I'm not sure if those are words you would use or not, but I think you're describing a bit of an approach to the time you're spending with those children. I wonder if you could speak some more about that.

Kara Willie (18:30):

So I usually go to a classroom and I observe. I'll observe who is there first. We know if kids are on certain spectrums and if they're. Sometimes you could read their nonverbal communication and they're just ready to leave the classroom.

(18:55):

So then I'll just nod my head, especially if that child is looking at me, I'll just nod my head and then they'll just come with me. If they're crying, if they're upset, sometimes they will come just for hugs, comfort. And so it's really a lot of observation and reading their nonverbal communication first. And now then they're starting to read my nonverbal communication and then they know it's okay and it's safe to leave the classroom. And the teachers, we talk about that too, and we debrief that. One of our students is so bright, he doesn't really need speech and language anymore. It's just he needs a break from the classroom when it gets overwhelming for him. So the teacher and I have talked about that and we're really aware of when his energy is starting to shift upwards and get a little bit intense. And before he has that explosion in the classroom, I'll take him out of the classroom and we'll just play a game to bring him down from that kind of energy elevating or escalating to become problematic.

(20:15):

So it has become a good understanding between me, myself, the teachers, the assistants, the child. So rather than that child causing problems in the classroom, we help deescalate that and we just take the child out and just have that one-on-one time with them.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (20:37):

What about -

Kara Willie (20:38):

Communication with the teachers too. Just clear communication with all of my coworkers through conversations at the end of the day or emails at the end of the day, and really keeping that positive connection with everybody in the school is really important when taking children out.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (20:59):

Yes. And when working with the child themselves, if you're working in one of your sessions individually, how are you making those times really work for that child in terms of their learning? How are you situating that learning within what you value as a community?

Kara Willie (21:25):

So we start off with our connections first. A lot of it is personal connections. So for example, if we have new children arriving here, I'll say, "Oh, I know your mother," or, "I know your grandmother." And we make those, or if we're related to each other, then those connections will be established first. And then you ask them, "What are you interested in? What do you like to do? What don't you like to do?" So we really learn their strengths and their weaknesses, and then they learn to start setting goals for themselves. And once they're aware that goals are set, then they feel motivated to come every day and reach their goals. If they're aware of data being taken, then maybe this time they got 50%, next time they want to get 75%. And then just becoming aware of their goals also helps their motivation and coming to the room because we do work in an office that is separate from all of their classrooms.

(22:37):

So sometimes if they're quiet or it's difficult to make that connection, we let them choose a friend and they bring a friend up. And even if we have to play games for four or five months to make that connection, we play games for four or five months to make that connection. A lot of our children need to feel safe, feel like they can trust the adults or their peers. So even reassuring children that they're in a safe place and that they're loved is the ultimate goal

(23:18):

That we have here.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (23:20):

Thank you.

Kara Willie (23:21):

I hope that answers that.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (23:24):

I want to hear a little bit more about the goals. Chelsea, I'm going to start with you here about our listeners will be familiar with some standard speech and language goals and how you're maybe considering those within the community or how that has maybe evolved along. And what kinds of goals are you addressing in the work that you're doing?

Chelsea Van Tol (23:51):

So yeah, in considering we're in a school, academic language is still what the school is hoping that we can support in most ways. Kara and I have talked lots about the success that the kids have in language and culture time in Kwak'wala. And so it is very much the academic language is the challenge. And so trying to figure out how do we target that? So sometimes Kara is supporting explicitly pronouns. Sometimes we are working on the L sound. It is really still speech-pathology, but we can speak to a few different times

where she's recruited vocabulary with target sounds in Kwak'wala because there's way more of them or they're different. And so then she is able and willing to incorporate that with into sessions. But it is because we are in the school and the school wants that kind of knowledge of how do we get this easier for them when the parents are just on board for them to be successful at school?

(24:47):

Because lots of the kids socially are doing quite well and then culturally doing quite well academically is the challenge. So yeah, it is a lot of just the same S-LP goals, but just Kara then trying to influence that support of do we need to bring it into Kwak'wala and how would we do that? And yeah, she's been teaching me lots of words. My vocabulary is still very poor, but she knows lots. And so then I can understand where the sounds are and the positions of the words. And so if we're working on articulation specifically, then we can figure out what are our targets within your sessions. So yeah, it still is very much being an S-LP and the training of doing the SELF five, the P3, whichever it needs to be. The GFT, Kara's very familiar with all of those assessments. And because this school is still connected to FNEESC, the IEPs need to have some standardised tests and FNEESC is familiar with those ones.

(25:44):

And so then that's where we would gravitate to in terms of the assessment piece as well. So that would be different than the rest of the country, I would say, but in BC anyways.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (25:54):

FNEESC is?

Chelsea Van Tol (25:56):

Yeah, so the First Nations Education Steering Committee. So they have supports that are provided to every First Nation school in the province. And so they have just different mandates that they have available for the schools to be provided just guidance. So for individual education plans, FNEESC as an organisation would be able to support, or historically, I don't actually know, I don't work with them anymore. And we haven't talked about this explicitly of just what supports they're providing. But historically, yeah, for teams that are trying to figure out what does a goal mean, whether it's speech and language, whether it's emotional regulation, any of those things. And if the school needed support, FNEESC is also there for that kind of guidance for the community and the school.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (26:44):

So Kara, can you talk a bit about how you bring connection with culture to this kind of speech and language goals that you're addressing with the students?

Kara Willie (26:57):

Yeah. It kind of started a few years ago when one of our students was struggling with the L sound. And because Chelsea has witnessed so much of our morning circles and our language events and our language, one day she's like, "Well, maybe try it in Kwak'wala." And so we did, and that student started getting her L sound in Kwak'wala rather than English.

(27:32):

And we did a little video of it and it was really neat. And we incorporated what that student liked, and it was the Among Us characters. And because our students know their colours in Kwak'wala, it just went hand in hand and it just kind of unfolded that way. And then most of our schools have the game sneaky snacky squirrel, I believe came from also. And that has colours and feelings. So I've played that game with the students in our language. I do help our cultural programme out a lot. So last year what we did was we even put all of our Kwak'wala songs on the computer and then we connected it to the smart board.

And we even had a ruler and it started off with myself pointing to the lyrics while the cultural teacher sang the songs. And the kids can sing the songs, but following with their eyes and rhythm really helped them.

(28:46):

And we stressed to the older kids how important it is to learn how to read Kwak'wala if you want to be a singer in our big houses. And with modern technology, a lot of our singers will email songs to the other singers. So we did that last year for about five or six months. Every class, well, the older classes had exposure to reading Kwak'wala because we didn't want to confuse the younger kids with their learning to read.

(29:21):

So I've done that. What else have we done with language and culture? We're pretty much just doing the same thing right now with learning a new song that we do at Morning Circle. Our principal also made the word, is it called a word wall?

Chelsea Van Tol (29:40):

The sound wall.

Kara Willie (29:40):

The sound wall, but with our Kwak'wala sounds. And then we used, but she had the English terminology with

Chelsea Van Tol (29:51):

The - With the bilabials.

Kara Willie (29:52):

Yeah, the billabial sounds. So the kids were learning that throughout the year. We just need a. Wall massive enough to have all of our letters because we have a lot more than English sounds.

(30:09):

So it's really neat incorporating our First Nations language into speech and language because for us as First Nations, people are becoming more aware of making their educational choices now on, do I want a career that helps my people or do I want a career that does not help the people? So for me, it was like, well, I could take the speech and language programme or I could take the Kwak'wala programme. So it's kind of weighing the pros and cons. So I'm really glad I took this programme to be able to incorporate Kwak'wala at the same time because our language along with most First Nations languages are already considered extinct. We are facing the time now where we're losing our last fluent elders. So in my lifetime, our children's lifetime, we're going to see the last fluent elder pass. So it really literally is up to us to keep our language alive and with helping the children articulate the language and teaching them where you place your tongue when you're making this specific sound is really crucial to saving our language also.

(31:38):

So I'm really glad this does go hand in hand with my cultural beliefs and teaching our children every day.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (31:49):

Yeah. And the academic vocabulary that you were talking about, Chelsea, are we seeing that also making connections with the community with the language? Are there opportunities for that?

Chelsea Van Tol (32:09):

I feel like I want to give this example of, and it's happened in more than one community where I'm doing the GFTA and I get to something and the kid says something and I was like, "That is a really interesting pattern that you just had." And Kara or any of the other SLAs was like, "That's in Kwak'wala or that's in Haida." And I was like, "Oh, what did they say?" It was like, "What did they say?" Trying to write it down and being like, "I understood, but I didn't understand." And so that vocabulary piece has been really neat that the kids are really excited to be learning. And so then I don't know what I would've thought if I wasn't corrected to know that that was a correct vocabulary term, but in the language that the kid is also learning at school. And so then within the academic language, I find it really fun in sessions with all of the SLAs that I work with, that there are many times that they will bring in Kwak'wala or Haida or whatever it is.

(33:01):

And it's just amazing because that's just the double whammy of getting to learn a word or a concept in both languages and how excited the kids get when they get to share it in either, but more so in Kwak'wala than in English. So I feel like that has been kind of a cool observation over time. There's still not enough things for me to know, but the kids are learning fast and ready. The Language Nest is a programme that's growing very much in Alert Bay. And so then that is just really neat to think of all the little ones that are going to be coming in over the next few years that I'm going to have to learn. We are going to have to figure out what does an articulation assessment look like if we need to do it? Because both languages are essentially, well, depending on the family, depends on Kwak'wala might be a priority over English now.

(33:52):

So yeah, that will be interesting as time goes on.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (33:55):

Yeah, for sure. That sounds very, very exciting.

Chelsea Van Tol (33:58):

Yeah.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (34:00):

Yeah, for sure. And so tell me a little bit more about the rhythm of the way that you're working together.

Chelsea Van Tol (34:10):

I find I am a fast talker and a fast-paced mover kind of, and Kara is a much calmer, steady pace of just everything. And so that's why the kids would find her as a safe space and a connection. And because from the very beginning of our professional relationship, because I was at the time we were working on a practicum, and so I really was her teacher. It was like we are doing this together. And so then her speaking of that to the kids, then it was just like, yeah, this is Chelsea. Kara's teacher. It just became a really cool way to present who I was instead. Speech-language pathologist is a very tricky understanding sometimes for kids especially until you start working on whatever you're working on. And then they really can understand, oh yeah, this is this lady that does sounds or makes me say lots of sentences or whatever it is.

(35:05):

So I found that early on that Kara had bridged that very quickly to the kids of this is why this lady is on the computer giving us feedback on Zoom. And so then the rhythm was very consistent. I come in with

my little bit of a tornado and Kara comes with her patience and ease. And I just feel like that seems to create a rhythm for the two of us. I don't know how right or not, but yeah.

Kara Willie (35:33):

Yeah, I think that's how I worded it was that Chelsea is my teacher. We check in with the children and Chelsea gives us the homework, and it's my job to help the kids complete their homework and their goals and follow through on that before Chelsea comes. So some children are just, it's May, June, some of them are just getting ready to just be done. I'm like, "Come on, we have two more things to do when you've completed your goal. Chelsea will be here next Monday and then she'll be so proud of you." And we have calendars. So when the children are done their session for the day, I remind them what day it is, what month, and they put their sticker on the calendar and then they're just proud to reflect back on their calendars and look at all their stickers and everything they've. And then just being able to choose, giving them the choice of games or do you want to type this homework?

(36:44):

Do you want to write this homework? What works best for you? Giving the children choices really helps in their leadership of learning. And once they are growing older and they've been in our programme for so long, they've become aware of what they struggle with, what they need help with, and that they're safe to ask us, "Can you help me with this?" And they're learning to advocate for themselves. They're learning to set their own goals once they get older. And it's so important that children understand goals and achieving those goals and being successful in life. And I think that's where we come in and they realise how well they are progressing when they reach their goals.

(37:41):

We have an awards day at the end of the year, and I don't give them awards for specific goals, but it's just a little acknowledgement at the end of the year. And they're really happy to. I've had all 22, 23 students stand on stage with me to receive, and they're proud. Even the oldest grade seven students, I'll go up and get my award for seeing Kara for the past six or seven years. It is little milestones that they achieve and we achieve together. They know we're a team. And our school, one of our mottoes is actually we hint which is let's learn together. And so it's really stated over and over again, me and Chelsea teach each other and we teach the children and we really are a team here with their teachers too because their teachers, we could talk with their teacher and the student and decide on what goals would be most beneficial for the year.

(38:47):

So yep, just working together as a team really helps.

Dr. Lisa Archibald (38:55):

Yeah. Something that strikes me about what you're talking about there, Kara, is an approach that is very inclusive. And so the children are happy to be a part of speech and language work with you. Coming out of the classroom doesn't sound like something that they feel worried about or they feel like their friends may notice. And I wonder if that's part of the community piece that's built all around you as it sounds like at the school.

Kara Willie (39:32):

Yeah, I think so. I think because I help in different departments in the school that I am visible and close to May and June, I really help in the cultural programme also. So they understand they get that help in that classroom and in here. And so if they're supposed to sing a song as a part of their cultural celebration, yeah, we can even bring them in here one-on-one. And that's also part of speech and language, but incorporating culture at the same time. So it is part of wearing different hats, I guess, helps rather than just

one hat sitting in one room waiting for the children. So yeah, just making yourself visible all over the school really does help.

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([40:27](#)):

Yeah, I like that, making yourself visible all over the school. That's really nice. Well, what are some challenges that you're still working away at there?

Kara Willie ([40:39](#)):

You want me to answer that first?

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([40:41](#)):

Yeah.

Kara Willie ([40:44](#)):

Attendance is always a constant challenge. After we went through COVID, health and sickness, some children's immune systems aren't as strong as other children's immune systems, especially if they're delegated with a certain special need,

([41:13](#)):

Then their immune system might not be as high as others. So that lack of attendance and lack of progress is what we just have to take into consideration. And some of our children, our coworkers are going through a lot of grief and loss. So if we understand where they are coming from, from the heart, if we understand that and gain their love and respect, then that's always, always going to be a challenge. Those problems will probably always exist. And whether we're here or not, those problems will always be here. But to be able to help the child just experience a better day, it kind of makes your connection deeper when you understand what the child needs. Some children need just love, comfort, hugs, and then they're ready to move on with their day. So just a lot of compassion, understanding can go a long way with your relationships and connections, especially with children.

([42:34](#)):

Because these communities, we're all connected one way or another. So when there is a loss, it doesn't just affect that immediate family. It affects their extended family. And because we're all connected here, we all really have an understanding of who needs what.

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([42:55](#)):

I really like that. The long-term perspective, this connection you have with the children that you see is really striking in what you're describing. And sometimes we get caught up in, we've got four sessions to get this done. But if you know you're connected with that child for years to come, then pausing doesn't feel quite so much of a problem. And that cycle of life piece, you can be attuned to that, I think.

Kara Willie ([43:27](#)):

Yeah. I've had my oldest students are 28 and 29 years old. I still get text messages, I get calls from previous students, and they still say, "I love you, Auntie." And once you get that auntie role, when you're called an auntie in First Nation schools, that's a term of endearment too. I'm not everybody's auntie, but it's definitely nice when you have even high school graduates come back to you and give you a hug and say, "It's nice to see you." And yeah, it really does set our children for life when they know they're genuinely loved at school.

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([44:12](#)):

Nice, nice. Chelsea, what's a piece of advice or what you found to be key in the success of work like you've been talking about today?

Chelsea Van Tol ([44:24](#)):

Yeah, I think the urgency is really just trying to hold your energy back of just knowing that you are here for a reason, but the reason is to understand why. And so it's very early for Kara to give insight to, "I am doing this because I think it's valuable." And so then it helps me to know, okay, there is value in what knowledge that we are both gaining of each other's skills and just as humans as well. But I think if we can, I feel like I said this in the last podcast, but I was like to really give ourselves grace of we don't need to be here and be urgent of we have 23 kids, I'm only here three days. It is urgent. We do have lots of check-ins that we may want to do, but it is just to allow that space to be part of the culture time in the morning and to have a conversation with the teacher or to hear about the kid that went fishing the other day and had a cool story about the eagle taking his bait kind of thing.

([45:25](#)):

Those are opportunities that I think are just really, really valuable to just allow that opportunity to exist, even though we have lots of things that we, as the person coming in, would like to accomplish and to understand.

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([45:41](#)):

Yeah, I love that. I love that you're here for a reason and the reason is to understand why. Take that time to develop that understanding. Seems like a really great piece of advice for what you're describing and the work really and in general.

Chelsea Van Tol ([46:01](#)):

Yeah.

([46:02](#)):

And I think Kara and I have talked lots about just the genuineness. It's hard to sometimes come to a place, either of us, of you are here and I am coming, but we have to be present and vulnerable to each other as well of just like, I don't know everything and you don't know everything and I don't know what you know. And how do we get to a point where we can just be honest and have conversations of, I'm not ready to learn that or I don't need that resource or those kinds of things. So I think we can give space to the people that we are working with to say, no, thank you. I'm not ready for that right now, or please give me one thing instead of 17, or whatever it might be. And I think that is a big part of being helpful doesn't mean it's quantity.

([46:47](#)):

It really can be that you provided one great recommendation for one kid out of the 23 on this visit, and Kara will take all the nitpicky things that I might've not intentionally stated or whatever, and then would run with different things. So we do end up with a framework for the kids when I depart, but it is very much getting that time and the relationships that she has with the kids that then she can figure out with them moving forward, how do we do this? What homeworks that Chelsea provided us? Yeah, how are we going to do it and what are we going to do?

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([47:18](#)):

Very nice. All right, well, let's wrap up here. Kara, what's some of the favourite things that you do outside of your workday?

Kara Willie ([47:29](#)):

Oh, I am raising my three children. My middle child will be graduating grade seven, so this'll be a little end of an era for him because I've always worked in his school. I've always been present for him every single day.

([47:52](#)):

My daughter is two years old. She is being raised in a language nest. So the sequence of her learning language is different from my boys growing up. They learned English first and then started incorporating Kwak'wala. But with my daughter now she's learning both languages at the same time. So we actually just went out on the land and we picked kumzuk with my daughter. So. And those were just red, yellow, and orange salmonberries. So she's really helping me get back out on the land, get out of the house, and just encouraging me to use our Bakum language over English. And it's encouraging her father and his side of the family are Nuu-chah-nulth. So it's really encouraging his Nuu-chah-nulth family to speak more to her in their language also. So language has really become kind of the centre of our family right now, and it's encouraging my boys to speak to their little sister, even if it's just small vocabulary words.

([49:22](#)):

That's probably it.

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([49:24](#)):

That's wonderful. Yeah, that sounds good.

([49:30](#)):

([49:30](#)):

Sounds very, very lovely. Well, Chelsea, how about you? A favourite outside of work activity?

Chelsea Van Tol ([49:36](#)):

Yeah, I think road trips, even though I spend some time on the road for work, I find road trips still are one of my most favourite things. So now that the seasons are really, really colourful out and about, yeah, I'm now trying to recruit my husband instead of just doing the work miles that yeah, some places around Vancouver that we haven't seen yet, especially. So yeah, that is the thing that I love the most. Yeah. Well,

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([50:03](#)):

There you go. Well, I guess you're in the right job then, Chelsea.

([50:07](#)):

Yeah. Well, I want to thank you both so very much for your conversation today and for sharing your work with me.

Chelsea Van Tol ([50:14](#)):

Yes,

Dr. Lisa Archibald ([50:15](#)):

Thank you. And with all of us. Thank you for listening to the SAC Shining Lights SLP Schools podcast. You can find all podcasts, transcripts, and links to the episode resources on the SAC website. That's at sac-oac.ca. If you'd like to be a guest on the podcast or you'd like to suggest a guest, please email the host, Lisa Archibald at larchiba@uwo.ca. That's L-A-R-C-H-I-B-A @uwo.ca. You can listen to our podcast on all of the major podcast servers. If you liked this episode, be sure to give it a thumbs up on your platform

and share it through your social media and other channels. Thank you for listening to the SAC Shining Lights SLP Schools Podcast. You can find all podcasts, transcripts, and links to the episode resources on the SAC website. That's at sac-oac.ca. If you'd like to be a guest on the podcast or you'd like to suggest a guest, please email the host, Lisa Archibald at larchaba@uwo.ca.

([52:04](#)):

That's L-A-R-C-H-I-B-A @uwo.ca. You can listen to our podcast on all of the major podcast servers. If you liked this episode, be sure to give it a thumbs up on your platform and share it through your social media and other channels.