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HOST: For many of us, this week marks a full year of social isolation. Urged to stay home and keep our in-person interactions to a minimum we continue to rely on technology to stay connected. Some research even shows that isolation is just as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Now that we have all experienced 365 days of isolation and the loneliness that comes with it, why would we ever purposely impose such hardship on other people and how do we create a society where everyone belongs? Kim Samuel has some ideas. She taught the first-ever university course on social isolation and social connectedness.

KIM SAMUEL: You are not alone. You belong. He gets better three simple sentences that have the power to profoundly and positively impact diverse peoples experiencing a huge range of challenges. This was the finding of a Stanford university social psychology study that resulted in the so-called belonging intervention, a simple premise and an even simpler method. Storytelling, connecting different groups through sharing stories, generating incredible results. Good evening. My name is Kim Samuel. The sustenance we draw knowing we are not alone is what I want to talk about tonight. My mission is building the bonds of belonging. Not because it is something pleasant or nice to do, but because I believe that belonging is a human right. Not a need, but a right. I believe that repairing and renewing human connectedness is one of the greatest challenges of our time. It may sound paradoxical in our digital age where we're seemingly connected round the clock yet more and more.

We hear reports of people feeling alone and cut off a feeling I metaphorically describe as sitting alone at the bottom of a well, we see it in cities where people spend more time in their cars or on their screens and less time getting to know their neighbours. We see loneliness skyrocketing among older people and surge among younger ones too. Just last month, the Atlantic profiled his shocking rise in teenage depression and anxiety linked directly to smartphones and the retreat of teens from real social interactions. We see it here in Canada, the refugees we have been proud to welcome, and also share the struggles of searching for identity, for hope or missing everything. They were forced to flee, including happiness. You see, as human beings, we are social creatures. We rely on others to help us thrive and grow. And when we are deprived of meaningful relationships, it literally makes us sick our cells and flame, our hormones, misfire, our immune systems. Weaken studies have concluded that isolation is as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

This is a silent epidemic and a barrier to economic growth because when society sends a person or a group of people, well, the message that they do not belong. It makes them feel less valued, less, significant, less human, and nobody should



ever be made to feel then yet to paraphrase Leonard Cohen, there is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. When social bonds are strong connectedness and feelings of belonging, catalyse progress by building belonging at the heart of every endeavour, we can all contribute to the way. And by the way, we only belong. If we belong together now, way back in the last century, when I was in school, the three cars that were really important were reading, writing, and arithmetic. Please ignore for a moment that only one of those actually begins with the letter R but now I see an additional three RS, respect, recognition and reciprocity together.

They build. That's what I envision as the three pillars of a social connectedness framework. And moreover, they begin to help us to give life to, and to live the human right to belong. The first pillar respect me is that right? New ideas and programmes must begin with active listening, where every voice in the community has the point of listening. Isn't simply to simply the thighs with those in pain or those who are suffering. The point is that strategies embedded in listening awareness and solidarity are the best way to build cohesion and connection and to bring communities together too often. Those with the best of intentions, try to impose their own solutions from outside. It reminds me of a story about seven young Scouts who proudly reported, how they had helped a nine year old woman across the road. That's great said their troop leader, but why did it take seven Scouts? And one scout bravely stepped forward and said, well, she didn't want to go.

Instead of

Trying to lead from the front, we must get behind communities themselves because overcoming isolation is always done with and not for operating from a foundation of mutual respect helps reinforce the second pillar recognition, helping a community uplift itself begins with honouring its worth. Typically programmes focus on a community's problems or gaps, which can reinforce a sense of dependence deficiency or despair, but recognition leads us to search for its strengths and to build on them together. Connectedness is always a two way street in reaching out to others. We are touched as well. Pillar number three is embracing the critical value of reciprocity. Embracing reciprocity leads to solutions and interventions that generate multiple benefits because they strive not simply to address one sector or one group, but rather to reinforce linkages, take this approach, exciting possibilities emerged for community driven, sustainable solutions that draw critical connections for every member of community.

Through engagement between groups. We foster empathy that in turn will lead to new ideas and strengthen support here in Canada, as we reflect on 150 years,



there was an opportunity and an imperative to reach much further and to finally and fully listen, especially here. And especially now I believe ancient wisdom will light a pathway to a more connected future. Through respect recognition and reciprocity. We can embrace the reality that we are the same human family. We can look to traditional wisdom sidewalk as expressed by new channel that's peoples, which means we are all one. We are connected. The sentiments sum up a new paradigm that we all need to reflect upon in our own lives and in plans and policies for the future. One way forward enlightened by this deep listening can ensure that we remember there is no them. There was always an only ever us Rosanna dear child, a remarkable Creek poet has shared the round dance is not over until the circle is complete until all the people are dancing as one, it is in this spirit. We can all champion and ultimately realise the human right to belong. As Margaret Atwood wrote, we need each other's breathing, warmth. Surviving is the only war we can afford. I cannot say it any better than that. Thank you very much for your time and for your listening.

HOST: Kim Samuel is a professor at McGill University, policy advisor at Oxford University and President of the Samuel Family Foundation. And she's one of the more than 800 brilliant Canadians who have walked, wheeled, and web-cammed into the virtual stage at The Walrus Talks.

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