

STORIES FROM THE LAND

THE HEART OF RELATIONSHIP WITH ZAHRA REMTULLA

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In every story that grows from or is influenced by the Land, there are roots - people, places, and moments that connect us. For Zahra Remtulla, relationships are at the very heart of the work. Her journey to support those in land-based and community-driven Indigenous education and stewardship initiatives is not through theory alone but alongside people. These people are the numerous mentors, colleagues, and community members who welcomed her in and showed her what it means to walk alongside others with respect, reciprocity, and care.

"The way I got into this work was through relationship," Zahra shares. "The women I worked with became like family. I learned through the way they supported Indigenous students and engaged with community - always grounded in respect and connection."

Zahra currently works with Nature United, a conservation organization that supports Indigenous-led conservation, collaborating with and supporting the strengthening of relationships between communities, youth, and partners involved in land-based programming. She also continues to hold a pivotal role in establishing and growing the YOLO Community, acting as both a connector and a storyteller as a means of linking communities and people together.

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From time spent in communities in British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Manitoba, Zahra emphasizes how real connection happens in shared experience, whether that's mountain biking with youth, waiting for the fog to lift or filleting salmon together on the dock. "Personal relationship as well as professional is really important to me, and there's a piece about feeling seen and connected, which I think is what most humans want and need."

At the heart of every strong relationship is a sense of authenticity - the feeling that people can show up as their full selves. Trust, respect, and care develop over time. Real connection is found in the laughter that breaks tension, in the willingness to listen with openness, and in the courage to speak honestly when things are difficult.

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When asked about her ‘green flags’ of a good relationship, Zahra calls on similar qualities of humour, trust and vulnerability. “It’s more of a feeling than a rational cognitive piece. And I love that. Because too much of my life is in my head, on my computer, and objective or rational.” For Zahra, relationships and connection helped to balance both the head and the heart that are valued in this work.

This relational way of being is also what shaped the early days of the YOLO Community Network (www.youthontheland.ca), a growing community of practice made up of people committed to youth, land-based learning, and community-driven programming. Relationships are what made it possible - each one in its own way helping to build something larger than any individual. Relationships are how things move forward. They’re the foundation of trust and the bridge between vision and action. When people feel connected and valued, they show up in ways that matter.



So how does one show up in good relationship?

Showing up means more than just being present, it’s about how we show up. It begins with humility, listening deeply, and caring enough to follow through. As Zahra reflects, “When you’re in good relationship, you can have the harder conversations...people can say ‘this isn’t working’ or ‘this doesn’t feel right.’” We may also be asked us to show up, not as roles or titles, but a deeper understanding of who we are as individuals. “You have to be grounded in yourself to be in good relationship with others. If your relationship with yourself isn’t in a good place, it’s really hard to show up in a good way with others. “



In a world that often rewards speed and productivity, Zahra’s experience and words are a reminder that progress and growth also come from slowing down enough to listen, to laugh, and to care. It’s in those moments, whether on the land or in conversation, that deep learning and transformation can take root.