

MIR CENTRE ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023





Gary Burns, Patrick Checknita (CBT, Columbia Power), Pat Field, Jennie Barron, Elyza Jantzen (Heritage Credit Union), Doug Evaneshen (Heritage Credit Union), Denis Kleine

Message from the Chair

The world needs peace, and we need it now. With the continuation of the devastating war being waged by Putin against Ukraine, a rise in deadly violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, increases in hate crimes and polarization, and the worst wildfire year on record threatening many parts of Canada, there is no end of work to be done. But peacemakers, educators, activists and community builders are a strong and persistent lot. When we come together, we affirm not only the necessity of this work, but the deep gratification that comes from dedicating ourselves to lofty goals like peace and justice, as elusive as they may sometimes be.

This past year, we have organized thought-provoking lectures about conflicts that are far away when measured in miles, yet very close to home by the measure of the heart. We have promoted deeper appreciation for the long-standing Sinixt presence on this land, and celebrated the more recent history of the Kootenay 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We have hosted peace cafés and films that helped build community through play and through caring for each other. We have fostered skill development by offering courses in nonviolent communication and unarmed civilian peacekeeping—not just here in the Kootenays but in Burundi (East Africa) as well! Through

grants and scholarships, we have supported students to pursue their interests in peace and justice studies. And as we have continued to research polarization, we have found our hearts warmed by the strong interest of community members in learning how to cultivate the skills to have courageous dialogues that can bridge our deepest divides.

At our 15th-anniversary celebrations in September, we unveiled the newly refurbished Conversation Bench, and reminded ourselves of what it symbolizes. The plaque reads, *“The bench is aptly named; while it encourages visitors to sit facing in opposite directions, a large tunnel joins the two seating areas ensuring that a connection between the opposing views is never lost. In fact, a person can slide from one view to another without ever leaving the bench.”* Let that bench be a symbol for how we might aspire to relate to one another—accepting our differences without losing connection.

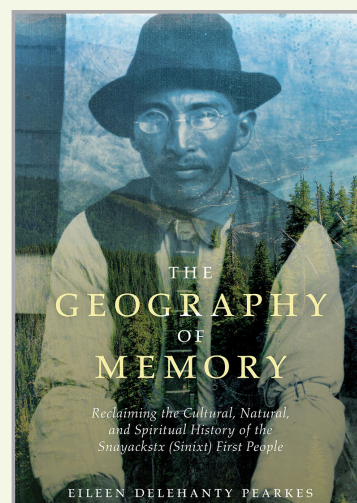


Jennie Barron, Chair
August 2023



The Geography of Memory: Reclaiming the Cultural, Natural and Spiritual History of the Snayackstx (Sinixt) First People

On October 26, 2022, the Mir Centre hosted Snayackstx (Sinixt) cultural facilitator Shelly Boyd and author Eileen Delehanty-Pearkes for lively discussion and readings from the 20th-anniversary edition of *The Geography of Memory*. This updated volume about the Snayackstx (Sinixt) First People includes the voices of many contemporary Sinixt people, expanded maps, illustrations and photographs, an inside view of the landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision, *R. v. Desautel*, and new details about tribal efforts to reintroduce ocean salmon to the upper Columbia River region. Haven't read it yet? What are you waiting for?



Announcing the Nathan & Anna Fund

Last year, the Mir Centre became the grateful recipient of a very generous donation intended to further our peace and reconciliation efforts by supporting projects and initiatives that promote and advance Indigenous and Doukhorbor values.

The Endowment Agreement reads, in part: *"The fund is a resource for projects furthering reconciliation, peace-building, pacifism, truth-telling, and strengthening community relationships. [R]econciliation and peace-building [are] a function of the deep culture of place, shaped by the land and the intertwining stories of people who live on and move across that land.... These intertwining stories have involved acts of colonization, oppression, and forced assimilation, and profound heritages of relational justice and lived pacifist thought.... Education is a possible pathway to reconciliation, facilitating opportunities for learning, unlearning, relationship-building, and action."*

The Mir Advisory Council, guided by its Indigenous and Doukhorbor members, will invite proposals, then review, recommend and evaluate projects to be carried out by Selkirk College students, staff, faculty, or some combination thereof. We look forward to seeing what exciting projects this fund makes possible, and we express our profound thanks to the donors, who wish to remain anonymous.

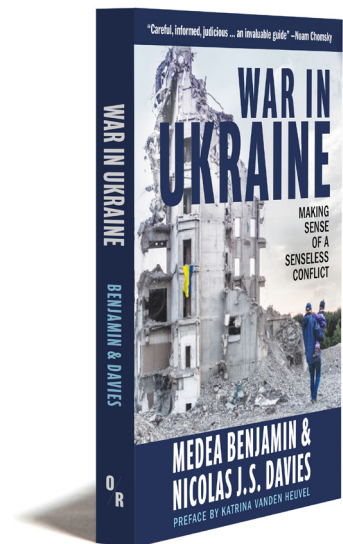


Mir Lecture: Medea Benjamin

WAR IN UKRAINE: MAKING SENSE OF A SENSELESS CONFLICT

On November 15, 2022 internationally renowned peace activist and author Medea Benjamin spoke to an attentive crowd at the Brilliant Cultural Centre. The co-founder of Code Pink: Women for Peace, Benjamin has been on the forefront of the peace movement in the United States for almost 50 years. She shared from her new book, *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless War*, co-authored by Nicolas J.S. Davies.

Going beyond the headlines to call out the US and other Western nations—as well as the lucrative arms industry—for their contributions to the conflict, she did not excuse Russia’s illegal invasion, nor Putin’s inhumane acts of aggression. Instead, she argued for all efforts to be made to reach a negotiated settlement that might address the underlying causes of tension and insecurity and bring an end to this vicious war.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION: CONTINUE TO EDUCATE, SUPPORT AND PROMOTE NONVIOLENCE AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Mir Lecture: Postcards from Palestine

On May 11, 2023 at the Mir Centre in Castlegar and May 12, 2023 at the Shambhala Music & Performance Hall in Nelson, award-winning local photographer and journalist Louis Bockner shared his powerful images and poignant journal writings from his recent trip to Palestine. The event also featured a moving collaborative artistic performance by local poet Zaynab Mohammed and local musician Bessie Wapp, which drew on the heritages of each—Palestinian/Lebanese and Eastern European Jew, respectively.

To give context to the program, there was a brief presentation about the history of anti-Semitism and why it is not the same as anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel. The presentation was given by Sid Shniad of Independent Jewish Voices Canada, a Jewish-Canadian organization that envisions a just peace in Palestine and Israel based on equality and human rights.



The event was a fundraiser for Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) Hebron, and raised almost \$1,800 to support their work in Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping/Protection.

It was also the first Mir Lecture to employ our newly-acquired livestreaming equipment, which will help us share our programming with people in the more distant parts of our service area in the years to come. We offer our sincere thanks to the funders who helped us purchase this equipment, including Steller Vista Credit Union, the Regional Districts of Central Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary, and the Selkirk College Foundation.

Many thanks also to our technicians, John Tucker, Terry Brennan and Adam Thomas.

FUNDERS OF LIVESTREAMING EQUIPMENT



L-R: Louis holding his postcards; Louis, Zaynab and Bessie; Sid Shniad



Skills Training: Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping (UCP)

UCP TRAINING, BURUNDI



From November 21–26, 2022, the Mir Centre offered a UCP training in Bujumbura, Burundi, with 18 participants, in conjunction with Quaker Peace Teams and Nonviolent Peaceforce. It was the second time we have offered such a training in Burundi, and this time, previous course participants Parfaite Ntahuba and Louis Pasteur Nizigiyimana, served as instructors. Past

graduates of our training have gone on to paid work in various African nations with UCP organizations, and as volunteers in election monitoring in Burundi.

UCP TRAINING, NELSON

In late June, 2023, we conducted a UCP training in Nelson, with 16 participants, who were interested in addressing local issues where groups are polarized or where vulnerable groups are at risk due to threats of violence. The training was offered by Randy Janzen and Madelyn MacKay.

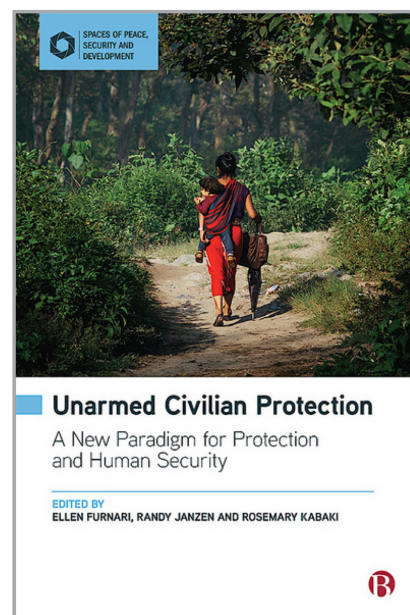


GLOBAL GATHERING

On October 8–12 2023, there will be a global gathering of educators, researchers and practitioners of UCP in Geneva, Switzerland. This is the largest gathering ever, to bring people together to share ideas, practices and research. Selkirk College has been invited to participate, represented by former Mir Chair, Dr. Randy Janzen.

NEW BOOK

In July, 2023, the book *Unarmed Civilian Protection: A New Paradigm in Protection and Human Security* (Bristol University Press) was released, featuring authors from six continents. The book is co-edited by Randy Janzen. The Mir Centre is lucky to have Randy continuing to work (in his retirement) as our associate, colleague, and inspiration.

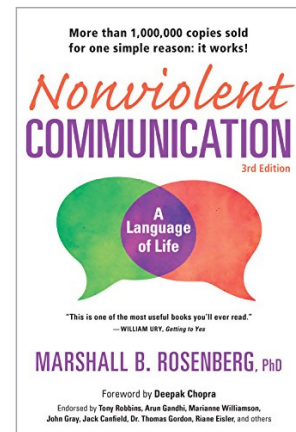


STRATEGIC DIRECTION: CONTINUE TO EDUCATE, SUPPORT AND PROMOTE
NONVIOLENCE AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Skills Training: Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

From April 29–May 1, 2023 we offered a three-day NVC course based on the life's work of Dr. Marshall Rosenberg. Nonviolent communication teaches you to:

- Make observations of situations and experiences without judgement or blame
- Identify and talk about your feelings and those of others
- Identify and talk about what your needs or values are, as well as help others discover their needs and values
- Make requests of others to help you meet your needs or offer to help someone else meet their needs
- Listen more deeply, and in a different way
- Approach your anger, and that of others, from a new angle

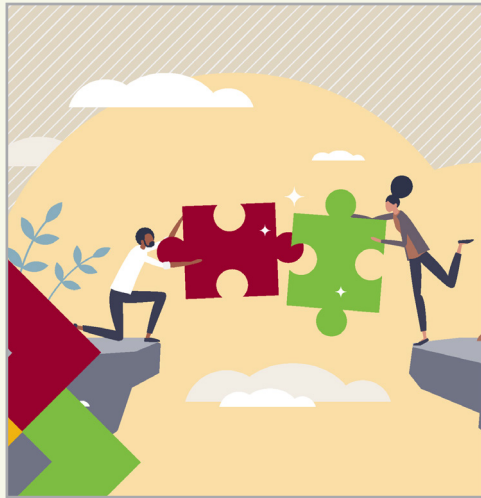


Skillfully taught by instructor Holly Hume, the course was such a success that we have already committed to offering it again, from October 13–15, 2023, at the Mir Centre.



L-R: Participants from NVC course; Instructor Holly Hume

Courageous Dialogues: Moving Beyond Polarization



This was the second year of our three-year applied research project, *Courageous Dialogues: Moving Beyond Polarization*. After familiarizing ourselves with the literature, it was time to invite community members to join us in learning about polarization. To that end, we recruited over 100 people, organized seven **community learning circles** and met once a week for five weeks to deliver an introduction to overcoming polarization.

Participants were very engaged in learning and many chose to continue to a second phase of the project: the **Deep Dive**. This phase entails participatory research, which means that participants become co-researchers with us, exploring resources (books, guides, videos, podcasts, websites, webinars, short courses, etc.) and reporting back on what they find most helpful for their own learning and growth. This phase of the project will continue through to December 2023.

Since the project began, media coverage has included:

- Capilano University's story [How courageous conversations can help bring back civil discourse](#) featuring research team members Diana Twiss and Jane Agyeman
- Vancouver Community College's story [New VCC research aims to bridge social divides in a polarizing world](#) featuring team member Andrea Korens
- An interview on [Kootenay Morning](#) (Kootenay Coop Radio) featuring Project Director, Jennie Barron
- A live taping of [CBC's Daybreak South with Chris Walker](#), which included a panel on dissent in the Kootenays featuring Jennie Barron

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: PROMOTE DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Over the course of the year, we gave many presentations:

- Mir Peace Café (Castlegar): October 6, 2022
- Peace & Justice Studies Association (PJSA) (Ohio, USA): October 14, 2022
- Continuing Education and Training Association of BC Fall members meeting (online): October 28, 2022
- Selkirk Innovates Lunch & Learn (Castlegar): November 3, 2022
- Vancouver Community College Teaching & Learning Symposium (Vancouver): March 31, 2023
- Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments (AKBLG) Annual Conference – Strong Together (Cranbrook): April 21, 2023
- Capilano University Centre for Teaching Excellence Symposium (North Vancouver): May 2, 2023
- Heterodox Academy (online): May 26, 2023
- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy: Learning for Life (Kimberley): May 31, 2023
- Continuing Education and Training Association of BC (Naramata): June 7, 2023

From our explorations in Year Two, we have compiled a short guide featuring our favourite resources for overcoming polarization in various contexts—within ourselves, in interpersonal interactions with another person or a small group (e.g., family, workplace, friends), leadership (e.g., teaching, group facilitation, organizational leadership), and the public square (advocacy, journalism, community relations, and citizen-government relations, etc.).

[Check out our project page](#) and take your own deep dive into our most exciting discoveries.

To follow or get involved in this work, please email [Leeza Perehudoff](mailto:lperehudoff@selkirk.ca) at lperehudoff@selkirk.ca.

POST-SECONDARY PARTNERS



NON-PROFIT PARTNERS





Peace Café: Building Empowered Community Through Play



On February 23, 2023, at the Mir Centre, award-winning game designer Avery Alder gave a fascinating and insightful presentation about how role-playing games can foster stories, play, empowerment and community. Participants then sat down together to play a session of Avery's game *The Quiet Year*. Avery says, "Creating and sharing

stories is for everyone, and it's part of what it means to be human... . Roleplaying games are an opportunity to create stories together through play. They allow us to explore possible worlds, and in turn learn more about our own." *The Quiet Year* is available for purchase online and can now be borrowed from the Selkirk College library.

Peace Café: Disrupting Disinformation

HOW THE MORAL PANIC AROUND DRAG STORY TIME IS MANUFACTURED, AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

On June 8, 2023 local educator, Aaron Korbacher, gave a presentation about the origins of the recent surge in online disinformation related to trans and queer people, and what we can do to disrupt it. The free online event was attended by nearly 50 people, united by concern for family, friends, and all those who are feeling targeted by this wave of intolerance.



Natasha Edmunds of Neighbours United then shared the approach known as deep canvassing—a strategy to overcome fear and bridge divides by listening deeply, connecting with empathy and promoting learning in non-judgemental ways. The presentations were followed by an engaging question-and-answer session.

Film: *Queering the Interior*

On March 2 and 3, 2023 the Selkirk College 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Alliance and Castlegar Pride partnered with the Mir Centre to host two screenings of *Queering the Interior*, a brilliant locally made film directed by Amy Bohigian and produced by the Nelson Museum, Archives & Gallery. *Queering the Interior* profiles the people and moments that defined the queer community in the Kootenays while paying tribute to their legacy of activism, which paved the way for a diverse and robust local 2SLGBTQIA+ population today.



Screenings were held at the Mir Centre and at the Castle Theatre in downtown Castlegar. Both were followed by a panel discussion with the director and local trans and queer voices. We thank the Kootenay Savings Credit Union, the Selkirk College School of University Arts & Sciences (UAS), and the Castlegar Sunrise Rotary Club for helping to fund this event.

EVENT SPONSORS:



FILM FUNDED BY:



Funded by the Government of
Canada's New Horizons for
Seniors Program

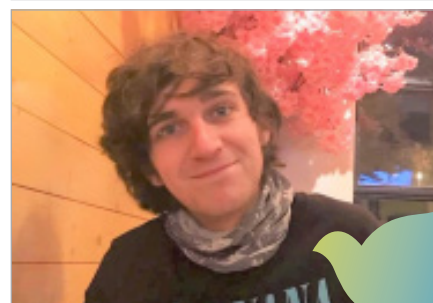


Film: *Love in the Time of Fentanyl*

On April 6, 2023 at the Mir Centre, we screened *Love in the Time of Fentanyl*, a film about how a group of drug users and their allies in Vancouver's Downtown East Side came together to create a renegade overdose prevention site (OPS), saving lives and supporting each other through burnout and grief.

Student Savannah Rieberger worked with the Mir chair to organize the event as a service learning project for her Leadership for Peace course. The event was also in honour of Aubrey Michalofsky, a former Selkirk College student in the Law & Justice Studies Program who passed away tragically in August 2022 from toxic drugs.

Following the screening, we held an online discussion with Aubrey's mom, Jessica Michalofsky, an advocate for harm reduction through safer supply, and Ronnie Grigg, a harm reduction worker featured in the film. We remember with sadness that more than six people die every day in BC due to toxic drugs and that these deaths are preventable.



Aubrey Michalofsky

Student Awards



SUMMER HEWITT

MYLER WILKINSON SCHOLARSHIP

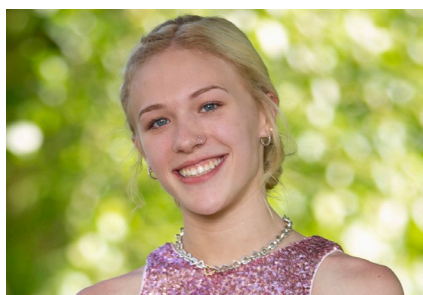
AWARDED TO SUMMER HEWITT

This award is given to a student with a high grade point average who demonstrates passion and commitment to the field of peace studies.

ALEX P. RELKOFF SCHOLARSHIP

AWARDED TO KIERRA KINCH AND SUMMER HEWITT

This award goes to a student who is entering their second year of Peace & Justice Studies.



KIERRA KINCH

MAURILIA COC MACS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

AWARDED TO KIERRA KINCH

This scholarship, established by Randy Janzen and Mary Ann Morris, commemorates a little girl in Guatemala who dreamed of learning to read and write. It supports the opportunity for others who want to study and learn more about building cultures of peace.



PAYTON MAFFIOLI

PEACE & HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

AWARDED TO PAYTON MAFFIOLI

In recognition of Doukhobor and Tolstoyan ideals, the Peace & Human Rights Award promotes the ideals of peace, international and local unity, and the dignity of work and service on behalf of humanity. The award is given in memory of those who once lived on the Mir Centre lands—Indigenous Peoples and Doukhobors.

Student Information Session: Grooving on Peace & Justice

On February 10, student Haley Sluyter organized a free event at the Mir Centre for her fellow Peace & Justice Studies students to share information about scholarships, travel opportunities, school programs, skills courses and jobs in the field. This was her own independent initiative, building on service learning work she had done last year while taking Leadership for Peace, and supported by the Mir Centre for Peace.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION: INCREASE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE MIR CENTRE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

WE OFFER OUR DEEPEST THANKS TO THE ARTISTS, PRESENTERS, FUNDERS, DONORS, AND EVENT CO-SPONSORS WHO MADE THIS YEAR'S ACTIVITIES POSSIBLE:

Aaron Korbacher	Kamala Melzack	Savannah Rieberger
Adam Thomas	Kenyon & Co.	School of University Arts & Sciences (UAS)
Amy Bohigian	Kootenay Savings Credit Union	Selkirk College Foundation
Avery Alder	Liana Zwick	Selkirk Vintners
Bessie Wapp	Lisa Gates	Shelly Boyd
Bob Hall	Louis Bockner	Sid Shniad
Castlegar Pride	Louis Pasteur Nizigiyimana	Skye Peterson
Castlegar Sunrise Rotary Club	Madelyn MacKay	Spencer Legebokoff
Claire Philipson	Marion Girard	Steller Vista Credit Union
Columbia Basin Trust	Mary Ann Morris	Stephenie Hendricks
Columbia Power	Medea Benjamin	Structurlam
Darren Davidson	Natasha Edmunds	Shana Rablah
Denis Kleine	Nelson Museum Archives & Gallery (NMAG)	Sumika Motoki
Dianne Biin	Nonviolent Peaceforce	Todd Kettner
Donna Drover	Parfaite Ntahuba	Tyler Ballam
Eileen Delehanty-Pearkes	Pat Field	Terry Brennan
Gary Burns	Paul Rodriguez	Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ
Haley Sluyter	Randy Janzen	Zaynab Mohammed
Hannah Hadikin	Regional District of Central Kootenay	
Heritage Credit Union	Regional District of Kootenay Boundary	
Holly Hume	Rod Fayant	
Jessica Michalofsky	Ronnie Grigg	
JJ Verigin		
John Tucker		
Joyce Buckler		

Every attempt has been made to ensure completeness, however, we apologize for any errors or omissions.

Notice of Passing: Fred Makortoff

NOVEMBER 25, 1944 – APRIL 12, 2023

Fred was a dedicated and long-standing member of the Mir Advisory Council and supporter of the Mir Centre from the beginning. Born in Nelson, Fred grew up first in Shoreacres and then—after being apprehended by the RCMP—at the New Denver residential school for Doukhobor children, where he was held for five long years away from his family.

Fred served his community in numerous ways while also having a distinguished career working for School District 8, founding Tri-Mak Consulting, and overseeing the construction of hospitals and schools. He loved singing and was a lifelong learner, studying in Thailand and Russia to earn a Masters in Conflict Analysis and a Diploma in Mediation.

He was especially committed to reconciliation between the Sons of Freedom children and the BC government that committed such injustices against them. Fred made a difference on this Earth and will truly be missed.



Farewell and thank you, Linda Wilkinson!

In September 2022, we paid tribute to the Mir Centre’s co-founder Linda Wilkinson, who stepped down from the Mir Advisory Council after more than 20 years of dedication to the Mir Centre for Peace. Along with her late husband, Myler Wilkinson, Linda had a dream for the Mir Centre and worked tirelessly to bring it into being—sharing a compelling vision, rallying supporters, obtaining significant funds, and guiding the restoration work to transform the traditional communal Doukhobor house into the beautiful centre we enjoy today.

Thanks to Linda and Myler’s work, we have not only the Mir Centre for Peace, but a flourishing Peace Studies Program within the School of University Arts & Sciences, and many inspired students who have gone on to make a difference in the world. Linda, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: INCREASE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE MIR CENTRE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS



This year, the Mir Centre celebrated our 15th-anniversary with a gathering of volunteers, staff, supporters, and friends. We unveiled the beautifully restored Conversation Bench in the company of the original artists, Pat Field and Denis Kleine, who also undertook the restoration.

We are most grateful to the funders who sponsored this work:



We also thanked our dedicated members of the Mir Advisory Council and Working Circles with hand-made gifts generously donated by local artist and former Selkirk College instructor Denis Kleine. So many thanks—we couldn't do it without you!

Team Mir

CHAIR, MIR CENTRE FOR PEACE: Jennie Barron

DEAN, MIR CENTRE FOR PEACE: Allison Alder

MIR CENTRE ASSISTANT: Marya Skrypiczajko

MIR CENTRE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: Caroline Barabonow/Laura Nessman

ADVISORY COUNCIL AND/OR WORKING CIRCLE MEMBERS:

Aaron Korbacher, Allison Alder, Angus Graeme, Bronwyn Krause, Dianne Biin, Duff Sutherland, Fred Makortoff, Gerry Rempel, JJ Verigin, Jos Sharp, Leah Lychowyd, Linda Merlo, Maggie Matear, Morag Carter, Noah Cannon, Pablo Pastor, Peter Wood, Rhys Andrews, Sarah James and Shana Rablah

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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