



Stories Connect Us

**BCAFN 2022 WOMEN, GENDER
DIVERSE AND 2SLGBTQQIA+
PEOPLE'S DIALOGUE SESSIONS**

**BC Assembly of First Nations
April 26-27, 2022 and June 23, 2022**



Introduction

Introduction

Dear Chiefs, Elders, Leaders, Grassroot Advocates, and Community Members,

On behalf of the BC Assembly of First Nations we present the report of the 2022 Women, 2SLGBTQIA+, and Gender Diverse Dialogue Sessions. The themes of the sessions this year were, Stories Connect Us, and We All Have a Sacred Role.

We are grateful for the rich dialogue and diversity of perspectives that contributed to these sessions. We will do our best to carry forward the recommendations and priorities identified through this dialogue, and work to support First Nations communities to do the same.

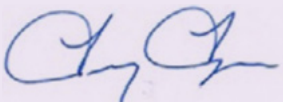
We hope these sessions serve as a place to gain strength and connection, and are a support to you in your roles and the good work that you do.

A number of individuals were instrumental in advising the 2022 Dialogue Sessions. I would like to thank our Planning Advisory Committee for providing a diverse set of perspectives and expertise from each of their regions. Each of you worked tirelessly to ensure no one was left behind in this process. A sincere thank you to our Co-Chairs, Elders and support people, moderators and presenters, graphic recorder, tech team, and all the staff who worked behind the scenes.

Sincerely,



Louisa Housty-Jones, BCAFN Women's Representative



Regional Chief Terry Teegee



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Background

Background

Indigenous women from the BC region, met for the first Women's Dialogue Session hosted by the BCAFN on March 16-17, 2017 on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people, and on November 1-2, 2017 on the traditional territory of the Sts'ailes. The purpose of the sessions was to bring together First Nations women in leadership to discuss challenges, successes, and strategies to support and enhance the wellbeing and development of ourselves and our communities. During these sessions, a Women's Declaration was developed and later supported by the BC Chiefs-in-Assembly via resolution.

Another Dialogue Session was held on January 24, 2020, on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people. Our second Dialogue Session built on the Declaration from 2017, supported our community members, and gave us strength to thrive in the political, business, family, and community contexts we live and engage in. During this Dialogue Session, important conversations emerged about the importance of including people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, those experiencing homelessness, those experiencing addictions, and youth in our work. A 2020 iteration of the Declaration was developed based on this feedback, and was supported by the BC Chiefs-in-Assembly via resolution.

Our third Dialogue sessions were held virtually in 2021 on April 13, 14, 15, and 22, 2021, and revolved around the themes of gender identity, allyship, self-care, wellness, and reclaiming our distinct roles and responsibilities. The 2021 sessions were titled the "Women and 2SLGBTQIA+ People's Dialogue Sessions", in an effort to uphold the diversity of unique identities, including diverse genders and sexualities.

These sessions brought us to this year's BCAFN Women's, Gender Diverse and 2SLGBTQIA+ People's Dialogue Sessions.





On Day 1, we explored the theme, **Stories Connect Us: Storytelling, Inter-connection, and Reclamation.**

This session held space for First Nations women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in BC to come together, share our experiences, and gain strength, inspiration, and insight. BCAFN also provided an update on the strategic action plan to implement the Indigenous Women and 2SLGBTQIA+ People's Declaration.



On Day 2, we explored the theme, **Everyone Has a Sacred Role: Allyship.**

This session will cultivated space for First Nations men who are not part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to hear the priorities of First Nations women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Together, we discussed how men can be allies, and how First Nations people can work towards positive change in a holistic way.



On Day 3, we explored the theme, **Listen and Take Action.** At this session, we presented the 2022 Dialogue Session report and discussed key take-aways and recommendations from the Session. In doing so, we hope to foster an understanding of -and action on- First Nations women and 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences and priorities.

Day 1: Stories Connect us

Our opening protocol ensured we began the day in a good way and set expectations for respectful and inclusive dialogue. Those who set the stage included:

Day 1

CO-CHAIR CHASTITY DAVIS-ALPHONSE

Chastity Davis-Alphonse is a mixed heritage woman of First Nations and European descent. She is a proud member of the Tla'amin Nation and married into the Tsilhqot'in Nation. Chastity is sole proprietor to her own award-winning consulting business.

Chastity shared her excitement to continue her involvement in Women, Gender Diverse and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Dialogue Sessions, as her involvement in the field spans over a decade. This work includes leading Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis Plus (IGBA+) in Canada, working to weave Indigenous women's lenses into their daily practices, including Impact Assessment processes, policies, and procedures. Chastity is also the creator and visionary of "Deyen – An Invitation to Transform" – one of the only online learning platforms in the world that centres the wisdom, knowledge, and lived experiences of the original Matriarchs of the lands often called Canada.

CO-CHAIR JEREMY JONES

Jeremy Jones has roots within the Coast Salish peoples and some that stretch as far as Ditidaht in the Nuu-chah-nulth tribes. They are from Nanoose First Nation on Vancouver Island. They were brought up with traditional knowledge from their village and surrounding nations, knowledge which they use to take care of people in a way that encompasses their emotional and spiritual needs.



Participants are welcomed by Debra Sparrow, Musqueam First Nation



Jeremy works as a resolution health support worker / 2SLGBTQIA+ liaison for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS). Their role is to provide workshops to help educate folks about Indigenous history, provide emotional and spiritual support, and to walk with our people in a good way.

Jeremy shared a teaching with everyone about the longhouse. As a youth, they would always notice a nail hanging above the door going into the ceremony; at the time they deemed it 'embarrassing' because the construction looked unfinished. One day, they asked their father about it and learned that the nail had a purpose: it was to hang anything on that won't serve us as we enter into the longhouse. Jeremy encouraged everyone to leave anything behind that would not serve them over the coming days of the Dialogue Sessions.

PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chastity thanked the planning advisory committee for their hard work in putting this together. When the committee members gathered, their vision was to uplift, inspire and uncover the joy in all of us. They felt this was especially needed after the past two years of isolation. At the same time, they wanted to hold space for challenging topics, stories and situations that run parallel in our lives. The members of the committee felt it was important to explore stories, bring them forward, and navigate them together.

ELDER GERTIE PIERRE

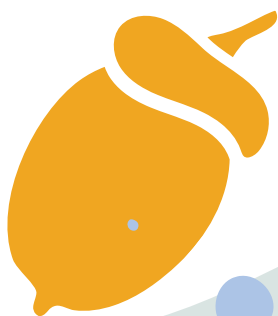
Gertie (traditional name i yal-xwemat) provided wellness support and is a trauma-informed social worker for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS). She is a motivational speaker across the lower mainland who gives support on suicides and losses. She is passionate about decolonizing the prevention of systemic violence against Indigenous women, girls, men, boys, and 2SLGBTQ+ people. Gertie comes from the shíshálh Nation.

BRITTANY CLARK-WAKEFIELD

Brittany provided wellness support and is a Mental Health Clinician (B.A. PSYC, SOC) for the Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS). Brittany is also the co-creator of CSFS Nanki Nezulne (Our Two Spirits) Adult (18+) LGBTQ2+ Health and Wellness Services. Brittany self-identifies as a Queer woman and is dedicated towards advocating for equity and inclusivity of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community within her personal and professional platforms.

MICHELLE BUCHHOLZ

Michelle provided graphic recording and is a Wet'suwet'en woman raised on Wet'suwet'en territory. She holds a Master's of Public Policy from SFU and has a background in community safety and anti-violence practices, anti-racism, qualitative research, and Indigenous research methodologies. Her graphic recording work is a form of witnessing, similar to how witnesses are called in feast (potlatch) halls. She uses place and land based imagery in her work, and has been present for BCAFN's Women, Gender Diverse and 2SLGBTQIA+ Dialogue Sessions since they began in 2017.



BCAFN WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVE **LOUISA HOUSTY-JONES**

Louisa Housty-Jones comes from the Heiltsuk Nation, and was elected by the BC Chiefs-in-Assembly as BCAFN's Women's Representative in 2018. Her role is to support First Nations women and families across British Columbia and bring their priorities forward.

Louisa delivered a welcome address to the participants, stating that "the BCAFN Women's, Gender Diverse and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People's Dialogue Sessions are an opportunity for us to engage and hold space for inclusive dialogue that will uphold the diversity of our communities, and focus on your priorities".

Interactive Icebreaker

We created space to share some of our stories with one another, by asking participants to discuss the following questions with each other:

What name do you go by?

- Do you have a traditional name or nickname you would like to share?
- What does your name mean?
- Is there a story behind how you got your name?

Who do you feel connected to?

- Who are your ancestors?
- Who do you look to for inspiration?
- Who supports you?

What lands are you connected to?

- What lands are your ancestors from if you know and/or would like to share?
- What lands raised you?
- What lands do you live on now?



BCAFN First Nations Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People's Declaration Action Plan Update

BCAFN Women's Representative Louisa Housty-Jones and BCAFN Senior Policy Analyst Sarah Froese provided an update on progress to develop a First Nations Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People's Strategic Action Plan.

In 2020 the BCAFN Chiefs in Assembly supported the Declaration and the creation of this Strategic Action Plan through Resolution 11/2020.

DECLARATION ACTION PLAN

DRAFT GUIDING VISION:

Women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals have the right to live free from violence, to live fully, and have wellbeing. We have a vision for holistic wellness that encompasses individuals, families, communities, territories, the environment, and political relationships. This will only be accomplished once women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people are restored to their rightful place and their human rights are upheld through concrete action. Women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people must be empowered to lead this change, and fulfill their sacred responsibilities.

DECLARATION ACTION PLAN

DRAFT PRINCIPLES:

1. Self-Determination and Leadership

- First Nations women, girls, Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2S and LGBTQQIA+) individuals possess inherent value, strength, and agency. Healing, reconciliation, and restoration can happen when women, girls, and gender diverse people are restored to their rightful place.
- Support and respect for women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people are intrinsic to the values of our unique First Nations cultures and laws.

2. Collaboration and Partnership

- We will support each other, and vow to connect with one another when we need support.
- We commit to bringing each other into the circle, to be inclusive, because we know we are stronger together than apart.
- We will continue to build our networks to ensure we have the support we need to achieve our goals.



3. Holistic Action

- Reconciliation and decolonization will not be achieved until our traditional way of life, our languages and cultures are revitalized and thriving.
- Until our inherent rights to our lands and resources are recognized.
- Until our rights to self-determination are recognized and implemented.
- And until the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of our peoples are restored, not just in words, but in actions.

4. Culture

- We acknowledge that we are here because of the strength of our diverse cultures, traditions and teachings of our ancestors, which have sustained our people since time immemorial.
- Reconciliation and decolonization will not be achieved until our traditional way of life, our languages and cultures are revitalized and thriving.
- We are as strong and resilient as mighty cedar trees; we move with what is going on, but we are always rooted in our culture and will stand strong.
- We commit to fostering and upholding Indigenous knowledge, as we know this knowledge enables us to care for one another in a good way.

5. Healing and Hope

- In the face of these realities, we have hope. We look to those around us who are on their healing journey and gain courage from their strength. We are encouraged by those who have stood in the gap to bring positive change. We are inspired by each generation, and in particular our young people, who carry forward our tremendous vision for the future.
- We have the right to health and wellness, and a responsibility to ensure the health and wellness of our children and of our families.
- We have our hands and hearts on the community. We commit to fostering healthy homes, communities, natural environments, and spaces to go where our children and families feel safe, secure and loved.



**POLICY & ADVOCACY
REVIEW
and Dialogue**

The Strategy Should Also Include:

- Securing funds for the implementation of activities within the strategy.
- Working with like-minded organizations.
- A review of all BCAFN policies and advocacy initiatives to ensure they are inclusive of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.
- A review of all BCAFN policies to ensure they promote an organization that is free from gendered and lateral violence.
- Ongoing action and advocacy to implement the 231 Calls for Justice and the Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people-led development of a National Action Plan.
- Advocacy for timely and efficient registration for those newly entitled to status pursuant to amendments to the Indian Act coming into force on August 15, 2019.
- A plan to hold regional Women's Dialogue Sessions.
- Strategic initiatives regarding sexual assault supports, justice, and support for grassroots organizations and community-based initiatives.
- A plan to support the full and equitable participation of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in political roles and in the workforce.

The BCAFN First Nations Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People's Strategic Action Plan is not to be confused with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plans. This is a plan to implement the recommendations from previous Dialogue Sessions in a strategic and coordinated way.

- The Potential Focus of the Strategy will be to Action the Declaration based on existing recommendations.
- We all know that there are many regional and national level reports that have yet to be meaningfully and fully implemented, so we hope this plan can support that.
- We want to ensure this work emphasizes coordination and does not duplicate other work that is going on, and is as impactful as possible.
- We hope to inform this work through an environmental scan with First Nations governments, organizations, and women's councils about what current work is happening.
- We do not want to repeat the engagement that has already happened, but still provide enough opportunities for input and feedback.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS:

4 phases:

1. Foundational Engagement
2. Pre-Engagement, Scan, Framework and 1st Draft
3. 2nd Draft and Engagement
4. Final Draft and Seek Endorsement.

Each phase includes crucial opportunities for feedback and accountability.

BCAFN will elect a regional 2SLGBTQQIA+ representative to the newly established national AFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Council in fall of 2022, so we look forward to the leadership of that individual as we continue to develop this Strategy when they come on board.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to respond to the following questions. The responses are recorded below:

1. How broad or targeted should the BCAFN's First Nations Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People's Strategic Action Plan be to be most impactful and not duplicative?

- Use trauma informed practices
- Harm reduction framework
- Disability justice framework
- Centre lived experiences
- Disabled communities
- Trans/2S/Gender Diverse
- Youth & elders
- Create a 2SLGBTQQIA+ Council that recommends and creates policy
- Deaf and hard of hearing
- Sex workers
- Develop a group to train Deaf and hard of hearing to become elders
- Work with Deaf and hard of hearing youth
- We need to have greater focus on women and girls rather than the broad strokes that the national inquiry did. Genocide is against everyone, and does not focus on Indigenous women and girls.
- Some duplication is okay; it demonstrates how these are important to various organisations
- Put a call out for partnerships
- Involve leadership
- It should be whatever we want it to be - Is it duplication or is it echoing what other organizations are also advocating for?
- If we know of other strategic actions, include them
- Could be specific to different large areas of topics
- As broad as it has to be. Accountability is seriously lacking in virtually every aspect of our lives from birth. Ministries, hospitals, schools, foster care, policing, judicial system, the whole 9 yards. Every one of these entities need to be held accountable and change needs to be made in their policies and laws....all of them...
- Do not duplicate, hire a coordinator that is aware of current programming duplication
- Sharing of information and the collaboration with other governing bodies and organizations. Often this seems to be the issue of too many fronts for one topic confuses the process and creates division. invite nations, organizations and the People to collaborate creating one living document that can be universal in ensuring actions come to pass and our people are protected and supported.
- Enhancing health care equity with Indigenous Women & 2SLBTQQIA+ populations: evidence-based strategies from the society.

2. *What should we focus on or include?*

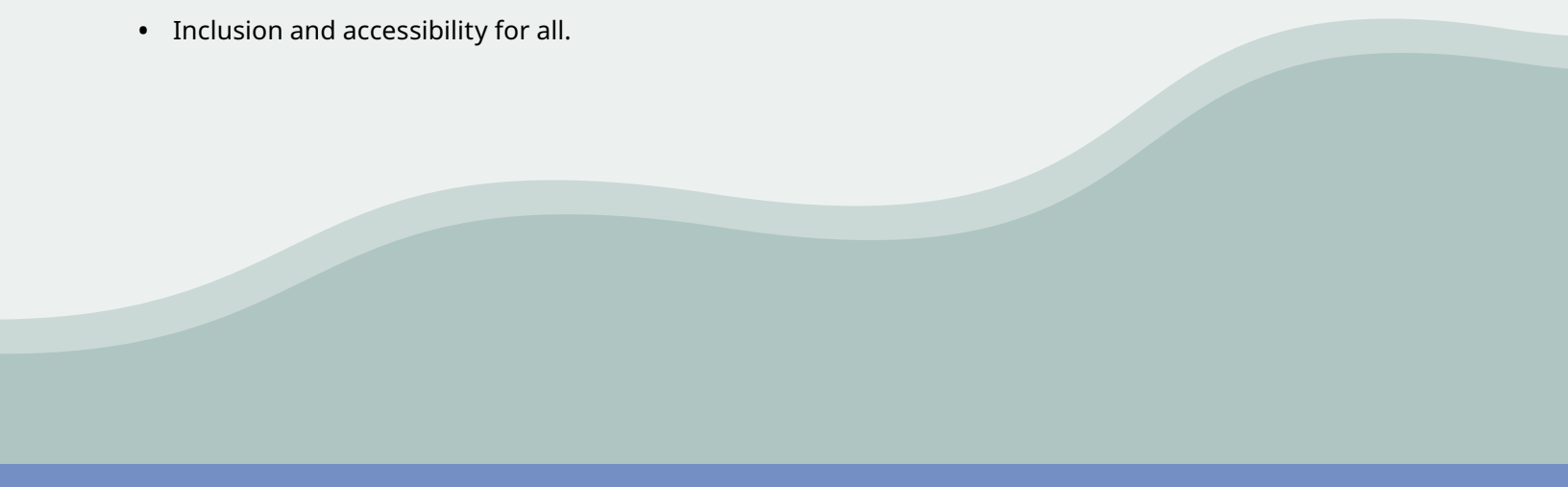
- Audism.
- Ableism.
- Cis-sexism.
- Toxic masculinity.
- Relationships with Black and other marginalized communities.
- Address whiteness and white supremacy.
- Oppression.
- Racism.
- Nepotism.
- Cronyism.
- Lateral violence.
- Intersectionality.
- Respect.
- Inclusion and Diversity.
- Indigenous HIV/AIDS support.
- 1: The triggers the conversations may cause.
- 2: The teaching of healthy relationships.
- 3: Effective Communication and Boundary setting.
- 4: Equality is in understanding unity.
- 5: Humility we are all equal, nothing above, nothing below, not greater, not less than.
- Education of our children, and families.
- We really need to focus on healthy healing in order to move forward in a positive way. Divide and conquer techniques are working very well and lateral violence is at an all time high. Our people need to know that we are all together in this to end this genocide by killing our women. They need to know that we have one of the most unique DNAs in the world, we need to protect that.
- The diverse experiences growing up with and without culture.
- Issue of healthcare workers not being supportive, importance of medicines and supportive networks.
- That language is inclusive.
- To address the links between gender inequity and health.
- To ensure that 2SLBTQQIA+ and Women's health needs at every stage of their lives are fully considered.
- To facilitate the implementation of gender mainstreaming in health and mental health.
- Invite Elders and youth to the BCAFN Action Plan.



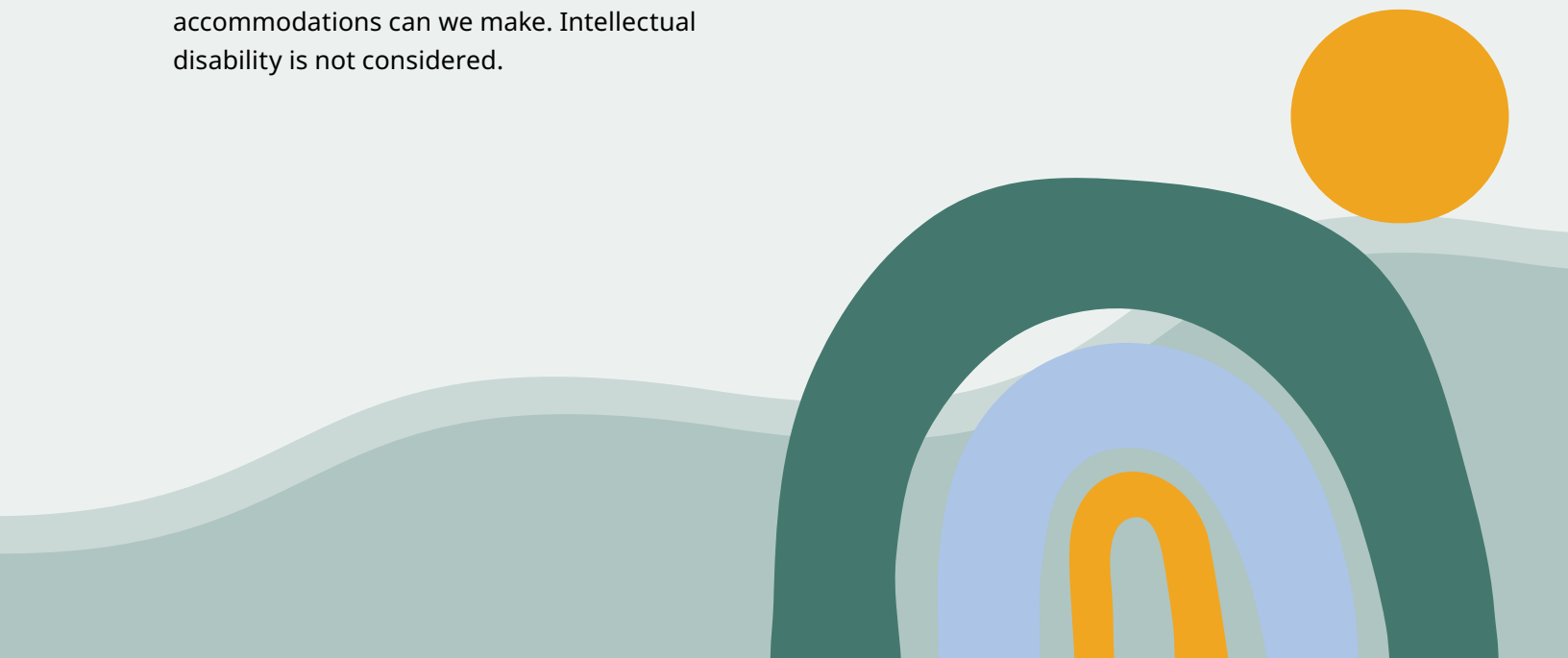
3. Does the draft version reflect your vision for holistic wellness?

- Yes and no.... cultural teachings should be focused on morals and values, beliefs that are people live by and should be enforced throughout every document, ceremony and support. Live it, walk it, if you believe it!
- Partial. Needs more community input.
- Somewhat.
- Land based healing.
- Yes (2).
- Not sure/not comment (2).
- No.
- Role models for Indigenous people.
- Address cis-toxic masculinity.
- Address cis-sexism.
- Able-bodiedness.
- Nothing about us without us.

4. What do you think the purpose of the Strategic Action Plan should be?

- Strategic plans are often policy documents that gather dust on shelves; they should be “living documents’ that are open to adjustments.
 - First Nations need to be supported to implement the Strategic Action Plan at the community level.
 - Inclusion.
 - The community members who are most disenfranchised should be involved in the creation process, not just consultants.
 - Communities can be engaged through circles, councils and advisories.
 - Make UNDRIP changes for those with disabilities.
 - Deaf and hard of hearing community members need to know their full rights, and have full access to their cultures and languages.
 - Inclusion and accessibility for all.
 - We need concrete, tangible and measurable action plans to reclaim our matriarchal traditions.
 - Policy should be done in a different way from government- focus on Indigenous ways of doing policy. It should include a mix of visuals, text and imagery so all community members can understand it.
 - Increase inclusivity.
 - It needs to hear from the lived experience and community they reside in.
 - Focus on changing attitudes and language in our communities. The old boys club used to run our communities, so now with focus on 2SLGBTQQIA+ and women in particular, we should focus on gender equity and acceptance in our communities.
- 


- To create a place, be it community, province, country that celebrates each individual.
- How to go about implementing all the recommendations that have been made, by the families of victims of violence, in the past two decades. Start holding accountable those in power who have failed their fiduciary duties by not enforcing or implementing any of these recommendations. We also need to ensure that the implementation of any of these recommendations remains in effect indefinitely. The band aid fixes are not working. To stop systemic racism you need systemic solutions.
- Decolonize the process of inclusion, awareness, and education.
- Bring awareness and create programs and safe houses.
- Inclusion - abilities, disabilities and gifts more generally need to be included. 2S inclusion is part of this, but disability is also part of this. Indigenous people across Canada don't have a word for this. What we look at is circle teachings - nobody is above or below, we are all side by side and we all have a fit to bring to our community. But an unfortunate side effect is we don't have language to discuss this so we inadvertently don't pay attention or address barriers. A lot of people are aware of physical accessibility, but sight, hearing, what kind of accommodations can we make. Intellectual disability is not considered.
- Sovereignty - We all come from different nations and we need to recognize and articulate this within the collective. Recognize and honour the decision makers and matriarchs. We need to build capacity and set a foundation.
- Autonomy – this is about people making their own decisions about their bodies. Some indigenous women don't have this. Where we birth, access birth control, abortions, birth and postpartum, care. If we don't have this it can get in the way of our social mobility, and is a barrier to transmission of shared roles. This messes up the structure of mom and baby relations, family, community, nations. Choice needs to be underpinned and highlighted. Colonization and inequity start here.
- Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ rights.
- Giving visibility and support to the Strategic Action Plan at all levels.
- Supporting the collection on the Gender Based Plus.
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ and Women's Health.
- Gender diverse equity in all aspects of health.



5. *How can we ensure an inclusive process, where everyone who wants to participate can?*

- Actions, not just words.
- Be open to feedback and adjust accordingly.
- Get to know one another by interacting and learning sign language.
- Need to provide ASL and closed captioning to ensure everyone's access.
- Representation of all marginalized communities.
- Safe spaces for women.
- Create a "discussion table" for community members to speak regularly.
- Reaching out to youth groups and schools - why aren't youth a focus in these discussions?
- Ongoing report outs and time for feedback.
- Funding for others to go to Events and See through that ~ The Elders are okay and made it home safely and Stuff to get the Support if it was triggered by past Trauma!!!
- Have a variety of ways to have input for the ones that can not come forward to talk.
- Contact the families. They all know what is needed in their prospective communities.
- Invite all indigenous nations.
- Share, share, share information and ask to share the more information out the better understanding and the easier to gather to move forward.
- Learn from experts in the field.
- Engage in thought provoking discussion.
- Gain insight and ideas to benefit their work, professional development and from real-life experiences.

6. *Are there additional principles we should include?*

- HIV/AIDS framework.
 - Disability justice framework.
 - Anti-Racism and equity.
 - Respect each other.
 - Inclusion.
 - The Great Dene (Athabaskan) Laws and the seven Grandfather teachings should be a part of all things.
 - Raise awareness about the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) known as Bill C-81 that would be a good start with an Accessible British Columbia Act (ABCA) known as Bill 6.
 - To ensure that Indigenous Deaf and Hard of hearing Women & 2SLBTQQIA+ are fully considered.
- 

Reclaiming Space in Male-Dominated Sectors

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session was to share experiences of working in male-dominated sectors – what is working, and what is needed to ensure First Nations women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are safe, empowered, and experience equity in these workplaces and related educational opportunities.

WHAT WE HEARD

Denise Williams

Denise Williams joined the event virtually from Tsleil-Waututh territory, and comes from Cowichan and British ancestry. She has reached her tenth year at the First Nations Technology Council. She has been given a large mandate, to ensure that all First Nations are given sustainable, affordable and equitable access to connected technologies, including the internet, spectrum sovereignty, and Indigenous participation in technology and innovation sectors. The First Nations Technology Council is known for their digital skills development work, and has trained 3000 people through their programs. Denise's interest is in working to uphold Indigenous peoples' voices in the conversation of building our digital society, as well as integrating our values, and being upheld as rightful leaders in technology.

Moderator:

Louisa Housty-Jones, BCAFN Women's Representative, Heiltsuk Nation Councillor, and Captain

Presenters:

Melissa Moses, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Women's Representative and owner of Nicola Valley Muay Thai

Denise Williams, CEO, BC First Nations Technology Council

Denise grew up in a logging camp on Haida Gwaii territory. Her father was a residential school survivor, who experienced a lot of responsibility, hardship, racism and physical violence. It was difficult to have witnessed his journey, though she felt fortunate to receive his undivided attention as an only child. She learned to exercise her voice from a young age.

She decided to pursue an MBA from Simon Fraser University, which was a male dominated space. She's usually been the only young person, woman and Indigenous woman in educational and professional spaces. She struggled with anxiety and panic attacks (symptoms of racial oppression and intergenerational trauma), which made it difficult to take up her rightful space. She experienced outward racism, sexism and microaggressions. Despite these things, she learned to stay resilient, positive, and show up every day in love.

Being able to change systems has been the greatest honour of Denise's life, both professionally and personally. After ten years in the space, there are many things on her mind; especially how she can serve talented community members and give them a voice.

Melissa Moses

Melissa Moses is the women's representative for the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), and is the first Indigenous woman to be certified in Thailand as a Muay Thai instructor for both the U.S and Canada. She is also the owner of Nicola Valley Muay Thai and Self Defence. She joined the event virtually from Nlaka'pamux and Sylix territory, and is a proud member of the Lower Nicola Indian Band.

Melissa was the only baby girl in her family. She is seven and ten years younger than her siblings, and grew up as a tomboy. She's trained in martial arts since she was eight years old, and has played many sports throughout her life. At eighteen, she followed in her brothers' footsteps and became a firefighter. While in her position, she often heard "What happens on the fireline stays on the fireline"; a phrase she now recognizes did little to protect the women on her team. When she reported a sexual assault which had happened to her at work, she was fired for speaking out.

Following that, she moved to Hawaii and began working for an American, male-dominated, disaster relief company. When she was sexually assaulted a second time, she didn't plan to report, but after encouragement from her partner, she did. This time, the situation was handled properly, and she stayed working for the company for years afterward.

Melissa later changed careers, and became a scuba diving instructor and hyperbaric chamber operator. At the dive shop where she worked, she was told by a male instructor that she should consider a recreational diving program instead. When she asked why, he said, "You're too pretty to become a commercial diver". Years later, she found out that this supervisor was spreading the same message to other women who were interested in becoming commercial divers.

Later, she moved on to working on yachts. She wanted to be a deckhand in the yachting industry. A colleague told her "If you want to do that, you can never become a stewardess, because if you do, any captain who looks at your resume will only ever see you as a deckhand". If you wanted to do a man's job, you had to stick it out and overcome it. Melissa did, and ended up conducting over 2500 dives in her career. She hopes to see more Indigenous youth and women join the industry.

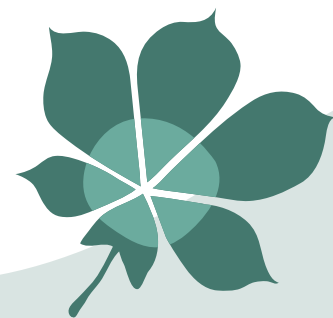
When the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S+ was making its way through Canada, Melissa wanted to be a part of the solution. She got back into the martial arts industry she had grown up with, and soon realized it was also a male dominated industry. She was intimidated, but wanted to take up space there to encourage other women to partake. Now, she owns her own studio, where she is the chief instructor. Still today, she attends work meetings where everyone but her is a man.

About her career trajectory, Melissa shared,

“We're making a difference, and we need to be there. Women are speaking up and finding their voices today. Soon, it'll be men and women of equal numbers working in these sectors”.

Louisa Housty-Jones

Louisa also shared some of her story. She went salmon fishing a few years ago on a boat, and later became captain. She now runs a boat for a spawn on kelp fishery, and her daughters are her crew. When she worked last summer on a seine boat with five men, she found the industry misogynistic. That's why she felt it was important to dialogue and gather strength on this topic.



DISCUSSION

Use of Indigenous Languages and Technology

A participant questioned whether the use of technology might facilitate an ongoing transition towards colonized terms instead of using our Indigenous languages. They are interested in working with our languages and calling our technologies “communication bundles”.

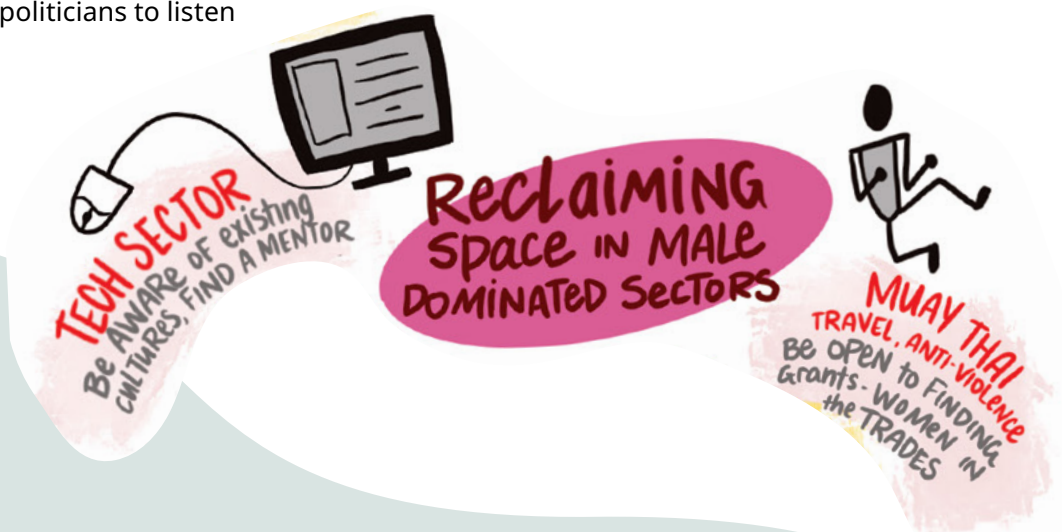
In response Denise Williams shared that there is much to consider about how these technologies integrate into our communities, not just now, but seven generations into the future. These technologies are new, and unfortunately we cannot opt in or out; at some point, we have to interact with these technologies. However, she believes strongly that while technologies built to this point do not reflect our languages, that we can build a path forward that does. The First Nations Technology Council is working on this through its first Digital Equity Strategy.

Denise used to spend time knocking on the doors of government officials, mostly privileged white men in their fifties and sixties. “A lot of their comments to me were things like ‘What a nice bag, my daughter likes purses from that company’. It was awkward, difficult and offensive, to face that while trying to defend the rights of First Nations people. We want to be respected not just for who we are, but for what we are saying. The Digital Equity Strategy was important to me to build our own tables and invite politicians to listen to our agenda”

How First Nations People Are Treated While Working in the United States Compared to Canada

Growing up on reserve and watching movies, Melissa Moses always wanted to travel. She was able to go and work without a green card because of the Jay Treaty. She found that in the United States, she was approached with curiosity because many Americans had never met someone like her before. They teased her about her accent sometimes, and were always curious to see her documentation. Despite those things, she felt that the Americans she met wanted to know more about Indigenous people, and encouraged any youth listening to get out there.

One participant commented that many Sixties Scoop survivors live as First Nations people in the United States. To that, Melissa acknowledged their presence, and said “The ones I have met wish they had more access to their traditions, and are doing the best they can”. While she didn’t meet many Sixties Scoop survivors in her line of work, she felt that seeing other cultures that are alive there inspired her to get more in touch with her own community’s language and traditions.



Advice for Indigenous Youth, Women and Gender Diverse People Looking to Break Into the Trades

Denise described the technology sector as the fastest growing, highest paying, and most diverse sector. At the same time, she also recognized the tech industry’s overarching culture of employees needing to fit in with the company’s brand. The Two-Spirit people and women she’s met have told her they often feel isolated in their work environment.

In order to deal with these challenges, Denise shared the following pieces of advice:

- Be aware that the technology sector has these challenges.
- Build a support network with whom you can ask questions along the way.
- Look after yourself and your own mental health, and find someone willing to walk along with you.
- Find a mentor.
- Practice honesty, truth and courage in your decisions about who you want to be and who you want to be around.

Denise firmly believes that,

“Telling our radical truths will change these sectors for the better”.

Denise WILLIAMS
 BUILDING our OWN SYSTEMS & PLATFORMS to AVOID assimilation IN TECHNOLOGY

MELISSA MOSES
 We are NAVIGATING MANY CULTURES IN THIS WORLD

Melissa knows from firsthand experience that there’s so much opportunity for women in trades. She highlighted Thompson River University and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology’s program called women in trades. Describing it, she said, “They can come into your community and introduce mini versions of trades for women and girls to try out, and ones they’ve chosen, they can be sponsored into the specific training they’ve chosen. There are grants available as well, as incentive to continue the trades”.

When Melissa took advantage of these opportunities, she met many women already in the industry, and became emotional hearing how these women overcame what they did to be able to sit on unions for their communities. She believes that women are pioneering in the trades, and making changes in the industry to create safe spaces.

Final Remarks (Louisa Housty-Jones)

Louisa thanked everyone for participating in this important discussion, and especially Melissa and Denise for sharing their experiences. She explained that she felt in her heart that we needed to bring this to the surface, and continue to use our voices to educate and bring awareness to this issue.



RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKEAWAYS:

From the experiences shared by Denise Williams, Melissa Moses, Louisa Housty-Jones and the discussion we can gather the following encouragements and recommendations:

1. It is crucial for Indigenous women and gender diverse people to take up space in male dominated industries. Women and gender diverse people are needed and wanted in the technology sector and in trades.
2. We can be inspired and strengthened by individuals who have gone before us.
3. Discrimination and sexism in the workplace are an ongoing and serious issue.
4. It is important to surround yourself with mentors and supports. These can help you navigate your way and provide support if you are mistreated at work. Practice honesty, truth and courage.
5. While many technologies built to this point do not reflect Indigenous languages, we can build a path forward that does.
6. The technology sector is younger and more diverse than other sectors, but has a culture of needing to fit in; to overcome that, we need Indigenous people in the industry to build support networks, find mentors, and share their radical truths.



There is a Deep
HISTORY to this
DIALOGUE
2017 to NOW



Reclaiming Safety and Inclusion in Politics and Advocacy

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session was to share experiences and generate recommendations for how all governments and organizations – especially First Nations governments, can uphold safety and inclusion in political life and through their laws and policies.

WHAT WE HEARD

Harlan Pruden

Harlan, who is Two-Spirit themselves, began by sharing a Two Spirit prophecy they heard that says that healing cannot happen in First Nations communities until Two-Spirit people are brought back into the circle.

Harlan then introduced First Nations policies and protocols. Policies and laws are where “the rubber meets the road”; something we know as First Nations people, because our protocols and procedures have sustained us until today. Since they are our ways of knowing and being, Indigenous protocols, laws and policies have the potential to support our work for better tomorrows. Harlan noted that as a Nehiyô guest on this territory, their ways and protocols come second to those of the Coast Salish Nations who tolerate their presence.

Moderator:

Harlan Pruden (Nehiyô/First Nations Cree),
Indigenous Knowledge Translation Lead, Chee Mamuk, BC Centre for Disease Control

Presenters:

Joyce Cooper, Ts’iqi Dechen Jedilhtan (Women’s Council) of the Tsilhqot’in National Government representative

Martin Morberg, Two-Spirit Program
Coordinator, Community Based Research Centre

Chief Councillor Linda Innes, Gitxaala Nation

Part of Harlan Pruden’s Nehiyô worldview is that all knowledge is relational. It becomes difficult to oppress others once you see the fullness they bring to the table. Relationships inform our advocacy and protocols, and translate them to policies and laws.



Reclaiming
Safety & Inclusion
in Politics & Advocacy

Without relationships, there is no possibility of knowledge. There is sacred space that dwells within and between all of us; because of this, spaces such as the Dialogue Sessions are a necessity to share stories, songs, and who we are as Indigenous people, so we can have frank, open and honest dialogues.

Finally, Harlan commented that stories have sustained us and continue to remind us who we are; they are the source of our protocols and sacred laws. For that reason, we have to share space for them to be heard.

Joyce Cooper

Joyce Cooper deeply understands the struggles First Nations peoples have faced as a residential school survivor. She comes from a long line of matriarchal women, and as a sixth generation leader, she has the responsibility of knowing her language and carrying the songs handed down to her from both sides of her family. She ended up in politics to serve her family, and has spent most of her life in leadership roles.

She has been taught since childhood that everyone is equal, and no one is to be left out. Now, Joyce is working to embed this teaching into her community's women's council, and incorporate policies for her nation that are inclusive of everyone. Joyce knows that developing First Nations led policy involves pulling apart the meaning behind the legends they know; this is a process that needs to involve everyone. First Nations women will need full support from men in leadership roles in order to have equality.

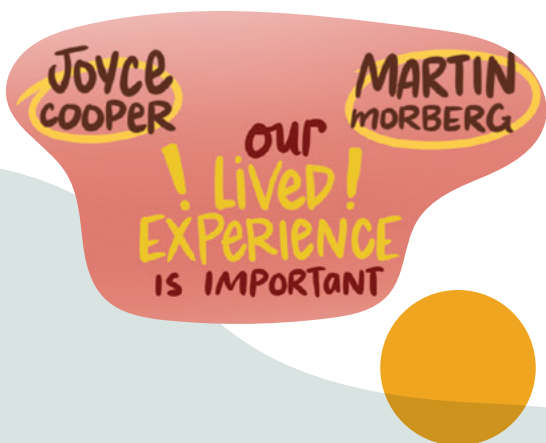
Martin Morberg

Martin Morberg is a proud Two Spirit individual and a guest on these territories from the Yukon. They raise their hands in a good way to Indigenous women and girls, as they have been Martin's greatest supporters and allies.

Much of the work Martin Morberg has done in their life has been trying to resist hierarchies. Under the *Indian Act*, leaders enforce policies by telling First Nations communities what is wrong with them, and then presenting their solutions; it is not an inclusive means of governance, and it is harmful to community members. Having worked in the grassroots for a long time, Martin has an alternative approach, one that does not miss out on community wisdom. They suggest working from the ground up by doing the following:

- Creating inclusive spaces.
- Following cultural protocol.
- Involving Indigenous knowledge keepers who integrate cultural practices.
- Building relationships with those involved in the process.
- Collectively gathering voices.
- Identifying strengths, culture, leaders, and wisdom in community.
- Creating partnerships.
- Consulting with community members on an individual basis.

Martin noted that "Indigenous people are the experts of their own community". Gathering this expert wisdom takes time, which is why tight schedules and deadlines don't work well in First Nations communities.



Martin Morberg recognized it is exhausting to constantly challenge colonial structures. In contrast, Indigenous specific spaces where you are able to connect with culture in relationship with others can bring us nourishment. Last summer, they attended a Two-Spirit gathering which started with an introduction ceremony with a traditional staff, where everyone introduced who they were and where they were from, set their intention for the gathering, and was acknowledged by everyone. They would hit the floor with the staff as if to say "I am a part of this circle". This Two-Spirit group went back and forth between the ceremony and the conference. There were sweat lodges, talking circles, access to medicines and elders; things that made a big difference in how deeply everyone was able to relate to one another.

Morberg has also unfortunately been in many spaces where the focus has been put on engaging solely with academics; doing so erases the knowledge, gifts and wisdom in community. They recalled the time a Two-Spirit Health Legislation Act was passing through the legislature in Alberta, and the emphasis in discussions was being put solely on the doctors present. One of the doctors got up and handed the microphone to everyone in the room, so that they all got a chance to speak. It was an act of humility, love and compassion. Lived knowledge has the potential to be a driving force for policies, legislation, etc. Morberg believes that "No actions should be taken about us without us".

Chief Linda Innes

Chief Linda Innes of the Gitxaala nation got involved in the leadership of her community because "the personal is political". Initially having gone to university to study social work, Chief Innes changed her life trajectory after taking a class in social policy. In that class, she was asked how policy affected her; as the only Indigenous person present, her list was long. Being an Indigenous woman, Chief Innes felt that space was never created for her to be present in institutions. She had to work really hard to create space for herself. Now, she works to represent her people more than the laws and policies which were created by the Indian Act. She challenges anyone working with her to think outside the Indian Affairs box.

Chief Linda Innes shared gratitude for her education, as it was a big tool that helped her move into the position she is in now. She sees stories as her community's natural inheritance, and the root of their knowledge and wisdom. She applies a critical lens to UNDRIP and DRIPA implementation, and wonders: Is the government's plan in alignment with our plans?



LINDA
INNES

EMPOWER COMMUNITY

THESE SPACES
were NOT
created FOR
Me...
(Elected Chief)



DISCUSSION

Colonialism and Separation in Our Communities

Matriarchs were almost done away with because of colonization. When women were placed before the colonizers, they would say “Where is the Chief?” knowing that it was women who were leading the communities. Two-spirit individuals were upheld as being more powerful than normal people are, because of their power to see what community needs are. Joyce Cooper believes that we must go back to what it is we were as people, taking in everyone and not just specific groups.

When Joyce Cooper was growing up, she learned that each of us had a role and responsibility in the family and community. Each community member’s role was identified from the day we started speaking our mind, and they were placed in roles that best suited them. That has been taken from First Nations communities, and is slowly being introduced back. One way her community is doing so is through a traditional values gathering, where they gather as much knowledge as they can from the elders left in her community. They pair elder and youth together, and have others present to record and transcribe. She feels that taking a closer look at models like that has the power to bring together communities.

Lateral Violence in First Nations Communities

Hurt and harm in community can come from lateral violence and misinterpretations. One participant shared that they have heard lies about gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, lies that they know are wrong. They feel that as First Nations people, we harm each other because we were taught well on how to harm each other.

Harlan agreed that we must call into the room ‘red on red’ violence. They noted that those who elevate, and gain leadership and get a following, are attacked. They want to see a conference or public discourse that not only identifies what is lateral violence, but also, what the tools and protocols are. They said “We need to invoke our sacred teachings, and respond with lateral kindness. We need tools to do that”.



Indian Act Harms

One participant requested to have a frank and open discussion about the *Indian Act* and the harm it has caused for hundreds of years. As legislation, it has furthered their isolation; they feel oppressed by the white, people who speak, those who sign, and Indigenous people. Disability is part of an intersectional experience, but colonization has created so many hoops to jump through in order for disabled people to have their needs met. When community members are not aware of what barriers there are, they inadvertently exclude people from spaces. This is Indigenous land, and yet Indigenous people are put “in a bucket”. They said they “don’t want the Indian Act anymore”, and believe it is time to come up with something different.



Harlan Pruden (Nehiyô/First Nations Cree) moderates a panel. Harlan is with the BCCDC’s Chee Mamuk, Indigenous Public Health Program.

Harlan responded that more than ever, First Nations people must remember the sacred teachings of who they are. There is such great medicine in that simple, powerful and healing act. Harlan believes that:

“For us to breathe life and walk our sacred teachings is the ultimate act of resistance. For us not to do this would mean that colonization has won and made us forget who we are.”

Harlan puts this into practice by trying their best to embody, to know, to sing their sacred teachings on a daily basis.

- Wisdom, to cherish all knowledge.
- Love, to know peace.
- Respect, to honour all of creation.
- Courage, to face foes with integrity.
- Honesty, with themselves and the world.
- Humility, to know themselves as a part of the sacred world.
- Truth, to know all these things and teachings.

A final comment was made by a participant about the need to draw attention to the issue around male violence. They know that in their community and others, there is a prevalence of male violence against women, girls, gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. More safe spaces, shelters, and transitions are needed, as is more focus on this issue so it can be addressed.

RESIST
the Hierchies
ie, the INDIAN ACT
chief & Council

RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKE-AWAYS

We gathered the following recommendations from the words of Harlan Pruden, Joyce Cooper, Martin Morberg, Chief Linda Innes, and the discussion that followed:

1. It is important for guests to respect the ways and protocols of host nations first and foremost.
2. Everyone is equal, and no one should be left out in our communities. We need to embed this teaching in our policies and governance.
3. For healing to happen in First Nations communities, Two-Spirit people must be brought back into the circle.
4. Doing the following things helps us to more deeply engage with our communities, and ensure everyone is included:
 - Creating inclusive spaces.
 - Following cultural protocol.
 - Involving Indigenous knowledge keepers who integrate cultural practices.
 - Building relationships with those involved in the process.
 - Collectively gathering voices.
 - Identifying strengths, culture, leaders, and wisdom in community.
 - Creating partnerships.
 - Consulting with community members on an individual basis.
5. Thinking outside the box of the Indian Act is important for finding solutions.
6. When it comes to UNDRIP and DRIPA implementation, we should be critical and ask if the government's plan aligns with our communities' plans?
7. Having ceremonies present at our conferences makes a big difference in how deeply we are able to relate to one another. Traditional values gatherings are an example to learn from and replicate across communities.
8. Nothing about us without us.
9. We need a public discourse to identify what lateral violence is, as well as what tools and protocols we have available to address it.
10. We must make ourselves aware of barriers that exist, so that we do not inadvertently exclude people from our spaces.
11. We need more focus on the issue of male violence against women, girls, gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, so that we can address it.
12. Pairing elders and youth, along with note takers, is an effective way to transmit cultural knowledge and values.



“The O Show” Documentary Screening

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session was to explore the theme of intersectionality, inspiration, and identity through the screening of “The O Show”

WHAT WE HEARD

Participants were invited to watch a screening of the new documentary, The O Show, featuring Orene Askew.

The documentary began with Orene sharing about her connection to music. Indigenous people are taught young that the beat of the drum is the womb, your mother’s heartbeat. People can’t deny good music when they hear it. Orene has always had a passion for music growing up because her mom had Motown and vinyl records around. It is her outlet for everything going on in the world. In her studio or at a gig, music is her place to disappear for an hour or two. It brings her relaxation, comfort, and an ability to connect with others and make them happy.

Orene’s presence is an extraordinary gift, one that engages anyone she’s around. She uses her gift to serve her community, because “giving back to our communities is the right thing to do”. She gets this from her grandmother, who would always say “pay me later” or “this is on the house” to the kids who visited her shop without the means to pay for their food. As an Afro-Indigenous Two-Spirit person Orene believes that the Creator chose her to step up and represent those who are Black, Indigenous and 2S.

Presenters:

Orene Askew, also known as DJ O Show

Sharad Kharé, Director of “The O Show”

She often hears “I don’t see colour” or “we live in one world”, and while she understands the sentiment, she doesn’t agree with it. Instead, she thinks that if anything, we should see colour, so we can celebrate, elevate, and understand it. She enjoys sharing her experiences with others so that they know not to repeat the same mistakes; something she considers “relearning a structure we were taught”. Teaching and mentoring youth particularly excites her, because the youth now are the first generation who aren’t jaded. She’s been taught her whole life from the elders who chose to mentor her; now she gives to those who will one day take care of her.

A COUNCILLOR
A DJ/MUSICIAN
& ACTIVIST

SHARING MY STORY
LOCALLY & INTERNATIONALLY

WINNING
AWARDS!

There is much work to be done to preserve the elders' stories who are still here with us. The elders have told stories since time immemorial; Orene has been fortunate to have listened to legends and stories since she was born. She sees these as an art form. One that comes so naturally to Indigenous peoples, she says, that "we do it without even thinking about it".

Orene is an up and comer throughout the Squamish Nation. She's always shone, though perhaps hasn't always known it; or at least, hasn't always known how to put it out there. She certainly does now. Now when she wins something, her whole community merges together.

This applies not only to her career as a DJ, but to her time as a Councillor for Squamish Nation. When she got in, it was a huge opportunity to make change in her community. People always asked, "How are you so positive?", to which Orene responded, "I'm from the first generation that didn't go to residential school. My mind and heart aren't so jaded".

About her identity, she says, "I'm a DJ and a politician, quite the mix there. But most importantly, I'm Afro-Indigenous". Orene began attending Vancouver's Black Lives Matter rallies in 2016. She finds that in Canada, racism is hidden in systems, such as education and healthcare. It also appears through microaggressions; so many of which Orene has experienced that she sometimes finds herself numb to them.

She described one example that happened to her in a grocery store. In line behind her, she could feel someone playing with her braids. She looked back and asked, "Excuse me?", to which the woman replied "It's so nice". Describing how the experience felt, Orene said "I am not a pet!". Despite having gone through this and many other experiences, Orene's goal is not to make others feel guilty; it's to make them have more compassion for other people.

Orene came out as a teenager. Friends and family describe her as a leader for having gone through that at such a young age. Orene found the experience of trying to identify herself and not seeing that around her difficult. When she had the term 2S (Two-Spirit) explained to her, she finally felt she had one that represented her.

There are many unique communities Orene represents by being herself, powerfully outspoken. There are many aspects of herself that she's willing to share. When recording her first song, she put her all into it; the things she had gone through, both past and present. She talked about her mother's experiences attending residential school. She also discussed contemporary issues with the *Indian Act*, such as the fact it provides her with a "barcode" from the Canadian government to "prove" her identity. She called the track "Conflicted", which is a reference to being conflicted with all these things she is. About the title, she said, "It's not me that's conflicted, it's the world who's conflicted with me".

To summarize this incredible person: Orene is a politician, a musician, a DJ and a civil rights activist; one who stands up for her heritage, her cultures and her sexuality. What an example to us all.



"PEOPLE SMILE WITH
their  EYES AT ME."
"I LOVE BEING A
PERFORMER!"



STAYING POSITIVE
CARE FOR YOURSELF
& YOUR MENTAL
HEALTH

DISCUSSION

The Making of The O Show

After viewing the documentary Orene kicked off the discussion by sharing her reflections on the film: “Doing this film, I had Sharad and his crew follow me around for a few months to my speaking, DJ gigs and protests. They captured my three spirits perfectly. Having them at these events made me feel as though my intersections are being called to the bar.”

Sharad replied, “I didn’t have to set a narrative for this documentary. This was just a glimpse of a glorious person’s life. We have started submitting this film to film festivals, and winning ‘best documentary’ awards. That’s when I knew this story was not just local, but an international global phenomenon”. Orene, stunned, said, “I had no idea my story was going to have that effect on so many people”.

Sharad shared that the DJ O show documentary recently won an award at the Squamish International Film Festival. He said, “When you hear Orene’s music or watch her perform, you can’t help but stomp your feet, dance a little, and rise”. Making people dance is worth a million dollars to Orene, because people smile with their eyes at her. If she won the lottery, she would still be doing this because she has so much fun making people’s night.

Storyhive is releasing the DJ O Show Documentary in August. Orene has a website, www.djoshow.com, where she can be contacted in the meantime. Sharad can also arrange to bring this film to closed events.

What’s Next For Orene

Orene just finished campaigns with the White Caps and Foot Locker. The Canucks keep asking her to DJ for them, which she sometimes has to turn down. She’ll be releasing her first song on Indigenous Peoples Day.

When Orene is asked “What’s new?”, she always has a list. It encourages Sharad to keep going and do more. At the same time, there were days while filming that she would say “Sharad, don’t call me, I need a rest day”. Everyone could benefit from an approach like that.

Orene is also receiving her traditional Squamish name soon, at the age of 39. The name is over 200 years old, and is being brought back from the spirit world for the occasion.

Sharad commended Orene for putting pen to paper and writing about her life. A lot of people are passionate, and have not been able to turn that into a career. He suggested that participants keep supporting creatives in their own communities, so they can continue blooming and inspiring others.



Orene and Sharad discuss the upcoming release of “The O Show” documentary

2SLGBTQQIA+ Mentorship and Representation

One participant commented that those in the 2SMMIWG advocacy space often forget the people who inspire us, and forget to look for mentors. They commented that they were happy that Orene has been able to find those mentors in the community, and to become one herself. Orene pointed out that the “cast” of her film is all women. Sharad shared why he did this: “When I see strong women, creating and representing, I think they need to be acknowledged and shared”.

Staying Positive and Optimistic

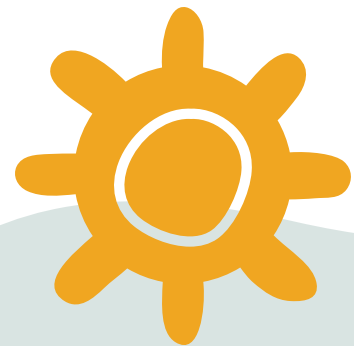
Orene finds that humans often have to go through something bad to realize they deserve something better. For her, that happened in 2012. Her neighbours started a house fire, and the only thing she grabbed on my way out was my laptop and turntables. The creator lit a fire under her. Since that day, her attitude has been “Your life could be worse”. She takes care of her mental health and sees a counsellor. She does things and is around people who make her happy. She also finds physical activity and music helpful.

Regalia

Orene’s regalia was made by a friend. Her other piece is at the Yoko Ono exhibit, because Yoko Ono wanted artists from the three host nations to submit art pieces.

Advice for Creating Safe Spaces for BIPOC and 2SLGBTQQIA+

Orene recently took decolonization training, and found it amazing. She recommends it to anyone, because we all need it. She believes that in order for things to change for BIPOC people, they need to be at the table. Sometimes she is the only BIPOC and 2S person at the table. She recognizes that representation is badly needed, and encourages anyone who is BIPOC and 2SLGBTQQIA+ to get involved.



RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKE-AWAYS

We gathered the following recommendations from the words of Orene Askew, Sharad Kharé, and the discussion:

1. Giving back to our communities is the right thing to do and mentorship can make waves in many lives.
2. Creating safe spaces and ensuring the representation of 2SLGBTQQIA+ and BIPOC people is important.
3. Representing nuance and intersectionality in media is important.
4. There is much work to be done in order to be able to carry the stories forward of the elders who are still here with us.
5. We all need rest days and practices to care for ourselves in order to sustain our work.
6. We were encouraged to support creatives in our communities.
7. We all need decolonizing.

Reclaiming our Languages and Cultures – Experiences in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session was for First Nations who are part of the deaf and hard of hearing community, and the broader First Nations community, to dialogue and share experiences regarding:

1. The importance of language and culture for the deaf and hard of hearing community.
2. The impact of residential schools on this community.
3. How current systems can be more inclusive and supportive in relation to the First Nations deaf and hard of hearing community.

Moderator:

Dr. Percy Lezard (they, them, theirs) Assistant Professor, Indigenous Studies Program, Wilfred Laurier University

Presenters:

Marsha Irelanda, Oneida Nation
Paula Wesley, Semá:th | Tsimshian

WHAT WE HEARD

Percy Lezard

Percy Lezard began by identifying who they were, and sharing their traditional name. In their family, hereditary chiefs are chosen from the families. Percy was chosen to be firekeeper for the next generation. Percy is a 2S trans disabled scholar who defended their thesis after 13 academic years. Their work centres on how to support folks who have experienced gender-based violence. They are here today because they believe American Sign Language (ASL) creates a space to meet in relationality, and because they see BCAFN as an organization which embodies the principle of “for us by us”.

For a long time, Indigenous communities were taught that to be Two-Spirit was a sin, that being critical and asking questions is wrong, and that being different (disabled) was wrong. Finding a way out of colonization needs to include different ways of thinking and being. Percy Lezard stated, “Without us, there is no circle. Without us, there is way forward. Without us, we are still broken nations”.



As an example of bridging this gap Percy shared that one of their relatives adds signs into teaching their spoken language to their community's young ones. Percy also shared their experience of how a group of sign language speakers and learners quickly created a sign that meant Two-Spirit. They said,

“If those who sign can find ways to bring 2S people into the room with cultural safety, in a trauma informed way, and create a brave space in mere seconds, this means that conditions can be created that allow all of us to be brave in who we are.”

Percy concluded by stating that “Deaf and hard of hearing people know what’s best for them”. They shared that it’s important that interpreters be Indigenous, so that they have a nuanced understanding of cultural protocols. Decision makers also need to think more about the cultural safety of the interpreters they hire in order to create inclusive, brave spaces for all of us.

Marsha Ireland

Marsha Ireland (Oneida name Teyuhuhtakwe), is from the turtle clan. She is an advocate, a leader, and an educator who hopes to expose others to her culture and history. She is deaf, and a key leader in the revitalization and creation of Oneida Sign Language. She advocated for Oneida Sign Language to be recognized in the community as their sign language. Her goal is to preserve it, and for all members to be valued as equal in her community.

Marsha Ireland pointed out that her great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were strong in their cultural beliefs, and her community looked up to them. Elders a long time ago didn’t see Deafness as a barrier, and still passed down stories. Now, she is trying to do the same, but feels there is a disconnect; the youth in her community know of the spoken language, but do not understand Oneida Sign Language (OSL). Marsha finds that the colonization she experienced is hard to let go of. It affected her and the way she communicates with her family. She struggles, because interpreters use ASL, not Oneida sign language. She wants to break barriers and educate, so we can bridge that gap. Thankfully, she finds that OSL is still present in the sweat lodge.

Marsha shared some of the key values reflected in Oneida language and culture such as honouring each other, and contrasted this with English, which has intruded upon the Oneida language. Marsha wants everyone to feel whole in their identities and feels that language is a powerful tool to do so.

Marsha highlighted that the systems that include Indigenous Deaf folks are often highly colonized, so sometimes the person trying to educate gets a lot of resistance. Most interpreters are white and privileged; more interpreters who are Black, Indigenous and people of colour are desperately needed. Additionally, mental health should be at the forefront. So much of our culture which sustains Indigenous peoples has been forgotten; Hearing people need to pass on the education and knowledge they have access to.

INCLUDING
People with
DISABILITIES
in OUR
COMMUNITIES

ACCESS to:
FIRST NATIONS
CULTURE MUST
BE AVAILABLE to
the DEAF + HARD OF
HEARING COMMUNITY
MEMBERS

OUR
INDIGENOUS
LANGUAGES

SIGN LANGUAGE &
hand Movements
were INCLUDED
in our Traditional
LANGUAGES



Paula Wesley

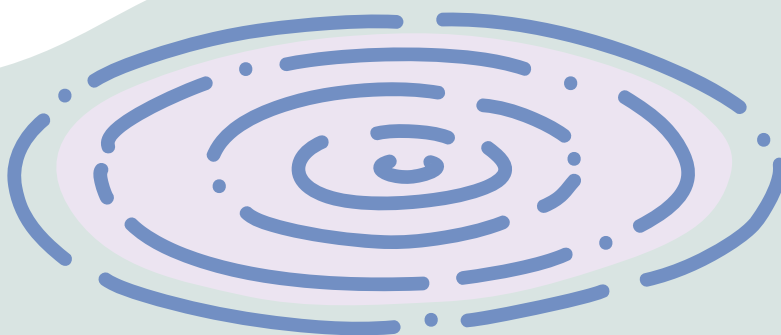
Paula grew up participating in cultural events, such as dancing, songs, feasts, learning the Sm'algayax language, and harvesting traditional foods. Her grandfather was a Tsimshian carver, and her grandmother is an XwelmeXw weaver. For the past two years, she has studied First Nations fine arts at Coast Mountain College in Terrace, BC.

Growing up, Paula didn't think of herself as Deaf. She was a First Nations person first, a woman second, and a Deaf person third. This is because she came from a long line of strong matriarchs and generations of chiefs who ensured she was included. When Paula went to residential school, she found herself stripped from her culture and identity. However, while she was away, her grandmother sent her a letter letting her know she couldn't forget who she was, and not to let the school take that away from her.

Paula learned to understand her Deaf identity within the white school system. However, she couldn't divide her identity into chunks of who she was. They are all there, in her blood. There's no way to separate that from herself. Now as an adult, Paula understands that we need to change these systems, to embrace intersectional identities, and to feel whole within them. Only then will we enable our elders who are Deaf, hard of hearing or disabled to take their spot within our communities. Paula's goal is to change the system of oppression Indigenous peoples have been living in for over 150 years. She believes it is time we let go of that, take back our own communities, turn what happened to us into a positive experience, and heal.

Paula believes that we need to work within the system we're living in, sitting at the table with white people to share Indigenous perspectives and cultures with them. She wants to see all intersections of identity come together to these conversations, and support relationality through passing down stories from our elders. If she had not had the opportunity to learn ASL or her parents' guidance to encourage her communication skills, Paula shared that her language, culture and identity would have been deprived. She believes that every Indigenous Deaf and Hard of Hearing child and youth should have the opportunity to recognize their own identity, understand their roots, culture and cherish communication in sign language with families and communities. Further, because so many elders have hearing loss, she knows that access to sign languages would benefit everyone in many ways.

Paula recognized that those from marginalized backgrounds are constantly giving parts of themselves away to educate people. Advocating for inclusivity, funding, and accessibility can take so much out of you. Therefore, it cannot be just Indigenous peoples, or 2S, or Deaf people, taking on this fight. It is so important for allies to demonstrate what they care about with their actions.





DISCUSSION

Developing Oneida Sign Language

Over the years, Marsha and her partner have thought a lot about developing Oneida sign language, and have taken many of their signs from the natural world. They have 600+ words so far, and a long way to go. They used to not allow interpreters in the longhouse, but Marsha and others needed it. Now they are allowed in. They fought hard to be inclusive, and in doing that they built a sign language for ourselves so no one would be left out.

Marsha and her partner went to Parliament and presented on Indigenous sign language, and were able to pass a bill recognizing it as equal to other sign languages. Marsha never thought something like this would happen - evidence of how far we have come. People who don't see or know her are going to eventually find out about her.

Indigenous Interpreters in British Columbia

One participant asked if there is a list of Indigenous interpreters people can reach out to to include in our gatherings to be more inclusive. Paula answered that there are two Indigenous interpreters in BC. However, more Indigenous people need to be encouraged to go and learn sign language. Vancouver Community College is a great place to start learning.

Marsha went to George Brown College, where she advocated for more interpreters. A lot of people withdrew from classes, and she realized this was because the program has a video screening process, and they didn't want to see Indigenous people. She told her college about this. One person, an Ojibway teacher, was thinking of becoming an interpreter. She hopes for more representation soon.



RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKE-AWAYS

From the experiences shared by Percy, Paula, Marsha, and the discussion we can gather the following recommendations:

1. It is time we let go of colonization, take back our own communities, turn what happened to us into a strength, and heal. The inclusion of everyone (2S, Deaf and hard of hearing, disabled, etc.) is a central part of this.
2. Access to culture and mentorship for the deaf and hard of hearing community is an important part of identity formation.
3. Because so many elders have hearing loss, access to sign languages would benefit everyone.
4. Conditions can be created that allow all of us to be brave in who we are through approaches that are culturally safe and trauma-informed.
5. Allies need to demonstrate what they care about with their actions.
6. Hearing people need to pass on the education and knowledge they have access to.
7. Deaf and hard of hearing people know what's best for them and have valuable teachings to share with those who are not deaf and hard of hearing.
8. We need to encourage and enable more Indigenous people to learn sign language.
9. There is a need to revitalize Indigenous Sign Languages.
10. There is a need to dismantle systemic barriers to participation in a wide range of community activities and services.

Keynote Speaker Nicola Campbell:

Stories Connect Us

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session was to explore the power of narrative and build capacity for transformational storytelling.

WHAT WE HEARD

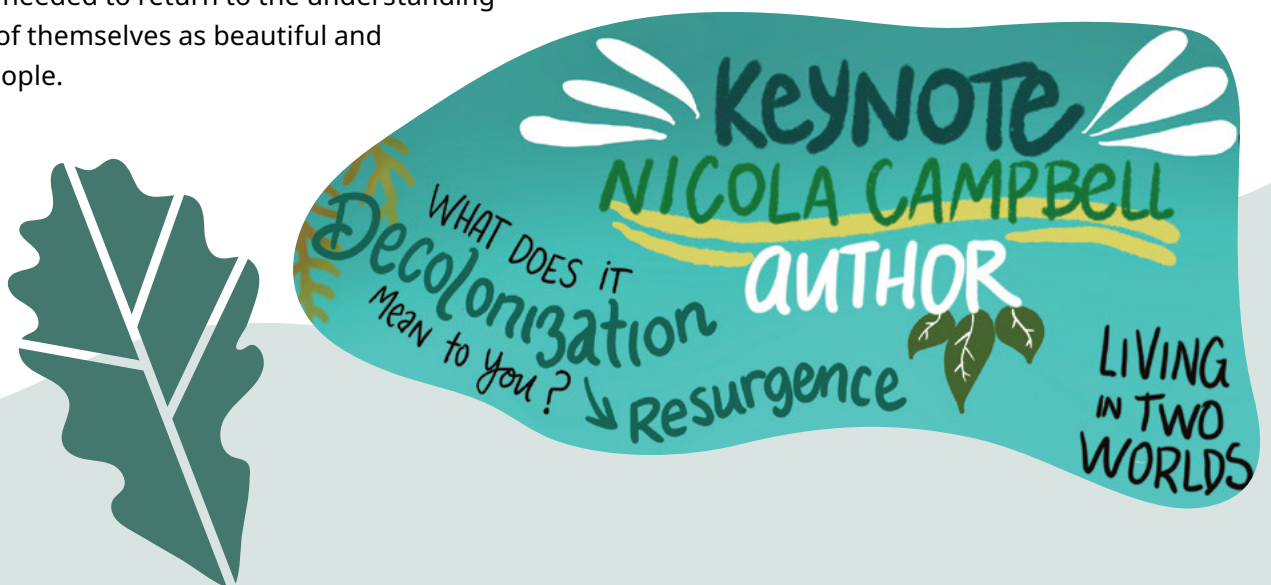
Nicola began by sharing about her writing journey thus far; she has published six books, five of which are children's picture books, and one of which is a memoir of poetry and stories. Her work has recently been nominated for the coveted Jim Deva B.C. Books Prize. She also finished her first year as a faculty member, teaching at UFV in the English and Indigenous Studies departments. Something she's had to navigate through these processes is balancing "our own ways of being and learning and teaching and the way of the institution".

Her first two books were centred around the Indian residential school system. At the time, she was in university, interested in learning where the challenges her family was dealing with had stemmed from, and what would be needed to return to the understanding they once had of themselves as beautiful and empowered people.

The residential school system had stripped Nicola's family "of our cultural and spiritual knowledge and practices and ways of being".

She reflected on her experiences attending youth conferences, and the teachings passed down by her elders onto her. They said to her:

“Today our youth live in two worlds. Our traditional way and that of white society. If you choose to go away to learn, then do that, but always return. If you are scared to take risks, then be scared and do it anyway. Be stubborn, be persistent, have faith, have reverence, and above all, have compassion”.



Nicola did go away to school. She was afraid to fail. She did fail. In math, history, and English - the colonizer's language. She wanted to quit. But whenever she came close to doing so, she remembered that the blood flowing through her was the same blood of her ancestors, sacred grandmothers and grandfathers, those who never gave up. Even when her loved ones were buried in mass graves. Even when the children were stolen, they persevered. She remembered that this resilience existed within her.

With time, she rooted herself in her traditional homelands, grounded herself in her culture, and nurtured herself with her elders' teachings, ceremonies, and languages. She raised her arms in strength and humility, woven within the skills and education of today's society. Season to season, she walked in both worlds, weathering storms, praying, cultivating knowledge, and fertilizing seeds in honour of her elders.

Nicola mastered herself. She gained control of her future. She did this knowing it was "time to lift those blankets of despair. Put it all away. Generations of suffering, grief, rage, suicide, violence; we need to stop reliving and recreating genocide". Nicola believes that we are the true transforming generation; the ones who will put shame aside to remember, relearn, and re-awaken ancient traditional practices. In doing so, she believes we help our elders heal and transform their sorrow into strength. Healing happens generations forward and back.

Nicola then explained her perspective on resurgence; it's about "returning to our culture and picking up those pieces and putting them back together, and reweaving ourselves as strong and empowered people". When we give sacred memories, traditional practices, knowledge and education forward to future generations, we are claiming that right to resurgence.

The ways we were taught are different from those of a non-Indigenous society. Our ways are about,

“*having that true, deep love and respect for all things, and for all people, and for all beings, and not just here in this realm, but in the spiritual and ancestral realms too and everywhere we go*”.

This deep love and respect for all things pours out over all living creatures, big and small. Even snakes! Nicola shared that when she sees them on the trails she walks, she chooses to recognize them as another living creature, rather than something to be fearful of. Being connected to living things has brought her recognition of the sustenance of traditional foods; she knows now that they feed not just the stomach but the spirit, "healing at the centre of our very being".

Many BC First Nations are people sustained by rivers, so it is frightening to see what is happening with sockeye salmon. For that reason, Nicola ensures that salmon is a present theme in her literature; she wants to remind her readers how sacred traditional food is for First Nations communities.

Moving on to the topic of love, Nicola pointed out that when the colonizers arrived, love was the first thing they took away. The residential school system replaced Indigenous love with their hurt and shame. Therefore, reclamation looks like unconditionally "loving ourselves, our loved ones and younger generations, no matter what". This is especially proven by our allyship with our 2SLGBTQIA+ kin; they need unconditional love to understand how valued and truly important they are to our communities.



Standing by our kin and protecting them with our hands, feet and voices is activism in practice. This activism might look like “rabble rousing” to the non-Indigenous world; in reality, love is at the centre of it all. It’s important to create safe spaces in ourselves, and make it clear to those in our communities that they are safe with us.



Nicola closed her keynote speech with a statement of gratitude for the ancestors. She shared “Their courage to survive ensured our culture and traditions will always be shared with future generations”. Nicola chooses to honour the elders by embracing what makes her Indigenous- running, paddling canoes, dancing and playing. When she needs to remember her promises to past and future generations, she stands like a cedar tree, and raises her hands to the sky.



RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKE-AWAYS

From Nicola’s powerful keynote, we can gather the following recommendations:

1. If you choose to go away to learn, then do that, but always stay connected to your community.
2. To persevere through western institutions, we must root ourselves in our traditional homelands, ground ourselves in our cultures, and nurture ourselves with our elders’ teachings, ceremonies, and languages.
3. It is time to heal intergenerational trauma; we must do so to stop reliving and recreating the genocide committed against us.
4. Healing ourselves helps our elders heal and transform their sorrow into strength.
5. When we give sacred memories, traditional practices, knowledge and education forward to future generations, we reclaim our right to resurgence.
6. Traditional foods heal the centre of our very being, and must be protected.
7. Love is at the centre of our activism, and is how we create safety for ourselves and others.
8. Our 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin need unconditional love to understand how valued and truly important they are to our communities.
9. Storytelling is a powerful way to share knowledge and bring focus to what we value.

Day 2: Everyone Has a Sacred Role

Day 2 of the Dialogue Sessions revolved around the theme, “Everyone Has a Sacred Role” as we explored the importance of allyship, what it looks like, and the respective roles everyone in our communities has to play in working for justice, equity, and wellbeing. This conversation upheld the holistic nature of our communities, and traditional teachings that speak to this topic.

Day 2

“Each and every one of you, your voice is important. You not only come here as an individual, but you bring your families; you bring your communities with you, and so we really believe that everyone has a sacred role, especially in this circle and in these dialogue sessions...”

- Chastity Davis-Alphonse, Co-Chair

REGIONAL CHIEF TERRY TEEGEE

Regional Chief Terry Teegee provided opening remarks, reflecting on the fact that this was BCAFN’s first hybrid meeting. He asked everyone to remember those we have lost over the last couple of years. He reflected on the fact that we are all related and all know people who were lost to COVID-19.



Regional Chief Teegee thanked everyone for joining this important dialogue. He shared that the colonial mindset creates divisions based on gender and religion, but that that is not our way. We each hold our own diversity, and when we come together we see those we are related to, and who are fighting for justice. He shared the names of those in his family who have been lost to violence.

“... and that’s just me - those that are related to me. I can’t believe - I can’t fathom that... So this is why it’s important to have these types of sessions. Not only for having a space; everybody deserves a space to speak. And everyone deserves justice, including all my relatives who aren’t here, but have gone to the spirit world.”

Regional Chief Teegee acknowledged Louisa, BCAFN Women’s Representative, and the work that First Nations are doing in British Columbia, which is often looked to at the national level as an example.

LOUISA HOUSTY-JONES, BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS WOMEN’S REPRESENTATIVE

Louisa provided an overview of the first day of the forum, and expressed her anticipation of the ongoing dialogue and potential to work together for positive change.



BCAFN Women’s Representative Louisa Housty-Jones provides opening remarks



Safety and Leadership in our Communities

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session was to explore and honour examples of how communities are working to enhance the leadership, safety, and wellbeing of First Nations women, gender diverse, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people and well as explore the role that Indigenous men and boys have in supporting the rights, safety, and wellbeing of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Moderator:

Chastity Davis-Alphonse and Jeremy Jones

Presenters:

Chief Marilyn Slett, Heiltsuk Nation

Gladys Radek, family member and Highway of Tears advocate

Stephanie Papik, Moosehide Campaign

Brenda Wilson, family member, BC Family Information Liaison Unit

WHAT WE HEARD

Chief Councillor Marilyn Slett

Chief Councillor Slett shared that our women are the social fabric of our communities. They're the backbone of our communities, along with our knowledge keepers. The colonial interruption was responsible for removing women from their roles, and we've been on this journey of reclamation of our inherent roles in our community. The Heiltsuk Nation's work began a few years ago with the development of the Heiltsuk Women's Declaration. The Declaration is important not only because of its content, but because it brings women together and creates an opportunity for dialogue.

Most recently, the Heiltsuk established the Mnuyaqs Council, or Women's Council as part of their governance structure, and added them as a signatory to the Heiltsuk Declaration of Title and Rights.



“Heiltsuk women are the same today as they were generations ago - self-reliant, hardworking, and resourceful... We need to go back and honour who we are,” says Waterfall, a Heiltsuk knowledge-keeper and educator, who is also a former councillor for the Heiltsuk Tribal Band Council. When Waterfall’s daughters were growing up, she knew she had to prepare them for their rites of passage, but the right way to do things wasn’t always accessible or clear. Community members spoke to Elders, she says, because they realized each person carries bits and pieces of knowledge.

“We started piecing it all together,” explains Waterfall. “It was a process of empowering people to claim their cultural knowledge.” She says the men were fishermen and often away for long periods of time, so women kept up governance tasks, and pieced together mortuary customs and practices, rites of passage protocol, and feast and potlatch practices. Due to their experience upholding these responsibilities, half of the tribal council became women. “It was logical and brilliant,” says Waterfall. “Our women were elected in the early 1950s—the first generation of elected officials. Today, the majority of Heiltsuk tribal councillors are women.”

Last year the Heiltsuk Joint Leadership passed a resolution to address sexualized violence:

“*Haítzaqv Joint Leadership resolves to address sexualized violence as a priority issue. All measures, strategies, and resources are to be committed to addressing the impacts of sexual violence in our community. The Haítzaqv community deserves safety. We commit to breaking the cycle of sexual abuse and assault, in our community. We commit to a trauma informed and victim/survivor centred community approach.*”

With this commitment from leadership, resources have been allocated and job descriptions are being developed so that the Nation can develop the human resources capacity they will need to implement their vision.

Chief Councillor Slett reflected on early work the Heiltsuk Nation is doing regarding reintegration of those who have committed violence, as well as taking victim-centred approaches. She remarked that this is not easy work and that it does not happen quickly. They are also bringing in others with expertise in this area to help support the community.

Gladys Radek

Gladys introduced herself as the co-founder of Walk for Justice (2008-2011) and Tears for Justice. She did these walks across the country for missing and murdered women with other family members. Her niece, Tamara Lynn Chipman, disappeared from Prince Rupert on September 21, 2005. Gladys reflected on the difficult truth that so many other women had gone missing. She’s met thousands of family members who have shared their stories with her.

“*When she went missing it kind of tore a hole in my heart when I realized that there was so many other women that had gone missing or had been murdered.*”

The 2006 Symposium for families sticks out in her mind, because the way it was organized truly gave voice to the families. The 33 recommendations from that gathering were put together by the families in order to protect our children and the next generations.



Gladys Radek speaks about her advocacy for missing and murdered Indigenous people.

After the Symposium, the families waited for the government to step up. We now know that there are over 3,000 recommendations related to this issue, but the government is failing us in implementation.

Gladys shared that she believes she can be a more effective voice for the families by remaining at the grassroots level, rather than being within government or an organization. For example, the walks they organized were all by donation and were an initiative of the families. During these walks they called for a national inquiry into MMIWG, which later became a reality.

While the National Inquiry was held, the government did not allow the inquiry enough time and they have not followed through.

Gladys called for further work to address colonial dispossession and systemic racialized and gendered violence. Indigenous women are still going missing, and men and boys are being targeted as well. This constitutes a war on Indigenous peoples, the first peoples of this land. Women are life givers - and we all need each other. We need to be together, and for our women to stop being stolen.

Gladys raised the crucial issue that men continue to committ sexual violence against Indigenous women, including Indigenous men. There needs to be accountability.

“*Women are the backbone of our society. We’re not punching bags. We’re not there to be abused. We’re there to give life, to nurture, and to teach. That’s our job. That’s our role.*”

As a concrete recommendation, Gladys highlighted the need for forensic training and equipment for nurses to be able to respond to sexual assaults.

Gladys shared about several promising initiatives, including the Unearthing Justices Partnership, which received federal funding to develop a website that will profile around 500 grassroots organizations and models of support and resource development by the families and communities working on MMIWG2S+.

The objective is to build upon and support existing work, facilitate connections, and build a digital infrastructure to support this work.

“*Not only have families and grassroots advocates been calling for justice, they have been cultivating justice across the land by building constellations of resources and support. Not only do these initiatives show the vast skills and strengths that already existed indigenous communities, they also reflect on the many facets of what justice is and needs.*”
- Gladys Radek

Gladys also introduced the House of the Moon, an online cohort based training initiative that seeks to build capacity for Indigenous women to facilitate programs for safety in our communities - on topics ranging from policing to food sovereignty.

Stephanie Papik

Stephanie honoured those gathered with a moment of silence and commended the work and agency of First Nations and Indigenous women.

Stephanie first became involved with the Moosehide Campaign through the Indigenous Youth Internship Program (formerly the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program). Since then she has delivered workshops and served as a witness during protocol and ceremony. She is currently on secondment with the Moosehide Campaign from the BC public service.



Stephanie Papik shares about her work with the Moosehide Campaign within the BC Public Service.

Stephanie related the origins of the Moosehide Campaign: Founder, Raven Lacerte was moose hunting with her dad, and was frustrated about the fact that RCMP ask those going out on the land to keep an eye out for remnants of clothing and human remains. "This should not be part of our ceremony". They decided to take action, and turned the hide of their first moose into 20,000 small squares. When you wear the pin with this square it represents a personal commitment to standing up against violence. It is especially geared towards inviting men and boys to join the anti-violence movement in a personal way. The campaign is now in its 11th year, and 300,000 people across Canada have made the pledge and participate in the annual Moosehide Campaign Day through fasting and ceremony, including the Government of BC.

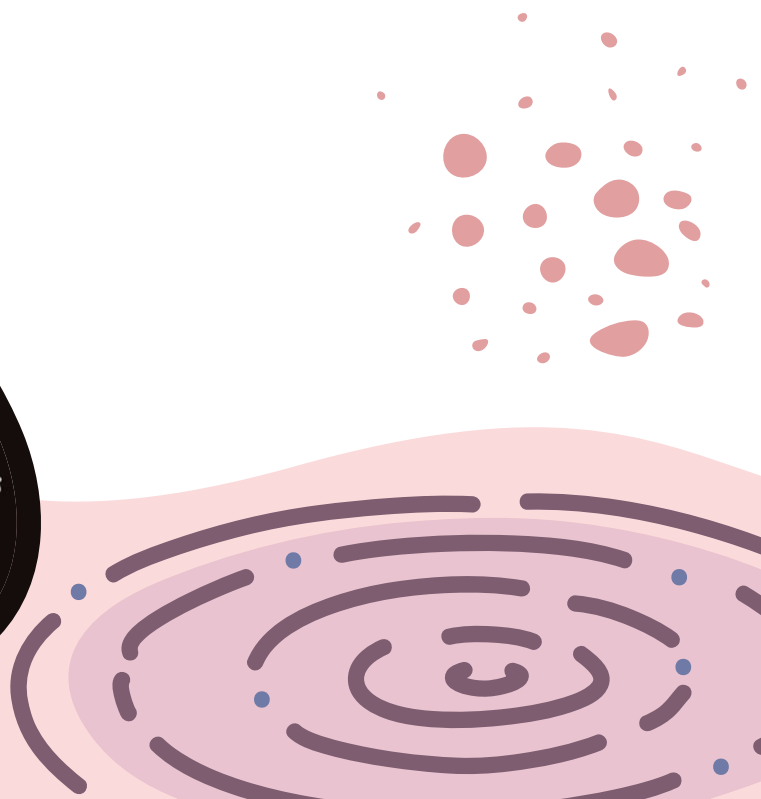
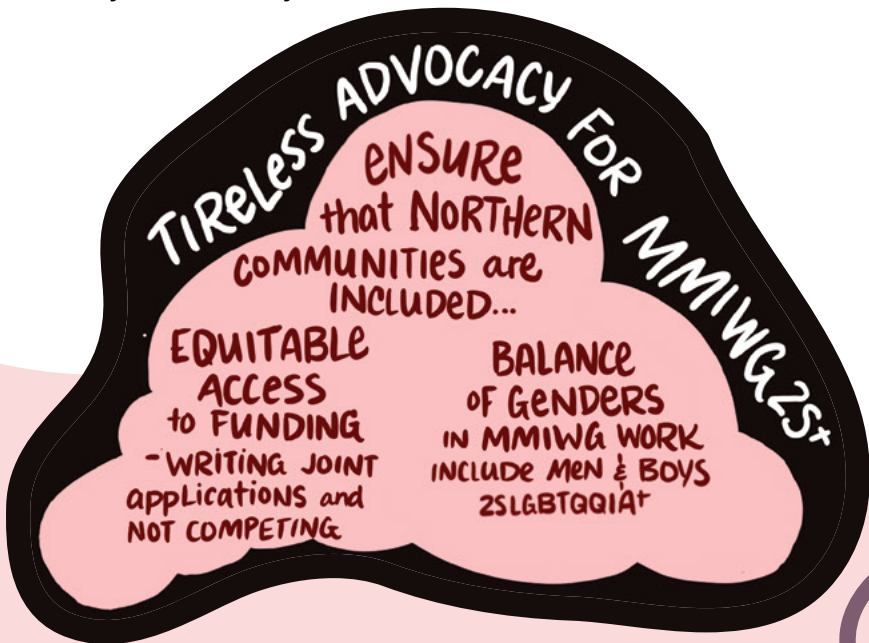
Stephanie shared hopes for continuing her work amongst the public service to educate, inspire, and build peoples' capacity for cultural sensitivity and humility so that they can step into difficult areas of work in a good way. Self-care is an important part of this. We must look to our own self-care to be able to help others, much like how we are instructed to put our own oxygen masks first in an airplane, and then assist others. We need to learn our own biases and blind spots, so that our good intentions don't cause additional harm. Mindfulness is key, and can look many different ways.

Brenda Wilson-John

Brenda thanked everyone for the opportunity to share about the work that is happening in the north along the Highway of Tears. Brenda shared that she is the sister of Ramona Lisa Wilson, who went missing and was murdered when she was 16 years old.

Brenda shared how it is so difficult to believe that she is gone, and she related the many injustices and racism they suffered from the RCMP and community. She explained that her and her mom had to sell crafts in order to raise funds for the search. Brenda reflected that there have been lots of advancements in supports since that time, but acknowledged that they are still in development.

Each year Brenda's family does a walk for Ramona, and to support other families with missing or murdered loved ones. Others see how they walk together, and start other walks in their small communities, inviting one another. Brenda is encouraged to see many young people now grown up and taking leadership in bringing awareness to this issue. Brenda shared how her son joined Gladys in one of her walks in honour of his auntie. He was inspired to do this as a way to contribute.



In 2016 Brenda did a cleansing the highway walk because so many people wanted to walk. This was also the 10 year anniversary of the Highway of Tears Symposium. At first there was not a lot of support for the walk, but it grew. Out of this walk came a book called the Highway of Tears by Jessica McDiarmid. They talked to family members as they went from town to town to gather the truth. It is a difficult book to read, so Brenda advised folks to reach out for supports if they decide to read it.

Brenda also served as the Highway of Tears Coordinator with Carrier Sekani Family Services. They did lots of work to reach out to families during the National Inquiry. Oftentimes, the north is excluded, so it was important to ensure families knew what was happening. Brenda doesn't serve in this role anymore, but she continues to work with the families and many organizations because she believes collaboration is important. This can help reduce duplication, and instead support partnerships. Brenda reflected on the raising of the memorial totem pole and how she was informed of it as part of the protocol of that monument. There is lots of work that happens to ensure the families are involved in initiatives like this, they have to be involved.

Brenda then invited Teddy Antoine, a support worker with the Family Information Liaison Unit, to the stage to share and noted that he is the only male FILU support worker across Canada. It is so important to have a male presence and balance, and ensure we can address the issue of missing men and boys, and the fact that men and boys have missing and murdered family members. We have a strong network of people that are working together and we are starting to include men, boys, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, so everyone is being represented. Teddy introduced himself and shared his own families' story of loss. He reflected on the injustice of the situation and the lack of support and involvement of men.

He challenged us, "Where are all the men?" He shared about the role that men have to stand with women, and how previously we were never separated by gender. Everyone was invited. Two-Spirit people had a place as medicine and spiritual people. Separation came with the Indian Residential Schools.

Conclusion

After these presentations, participants engaged in plenary dialogue, an Introductory Icebreaker and World Cafe style discussions, where participants rotated between discussing several questions. The dialogue and recommendations that occurred during these sessions are recorded below.





DISCUSSION

Need to Address Gangs and Youth Engagement

Some women go missing at the hands of our own community members, those that are involved in gangs. There needs to be spaces for youth, and leadership needs to direct their attention towards youth. Some are becoming involved with gangs at quite a young age.

Bringing educational resources and conversations into schools can be an effective preventative measure. Youth are engaged and want to prevent this too. They are willing to talk about violence and abuse. They are engaged in being allies, for example, being an ally for Two Spirit people.

Appreciation and Readiness for Difficult Conversations and Work

There was a deep appreciation and recognition of the powerful discussion being had. Participants shared how they were inspired by the incredible speakers and others gathered. There was a special admiration of the grassroots approach and the challenging work that these leaders do.

There was the recognition that work needs to be done to help prepare people for difficult conversations, and that sometimes dedicated spaces may be required. When we have spaces where we include everyone, we should still be cognizant of representation, and ensure we have a diverse mix of voices.

Participants mentioned that they hope they can bring this type of conversation back to their communities in a good way.

Need for Collaboration, and Involvement of Men

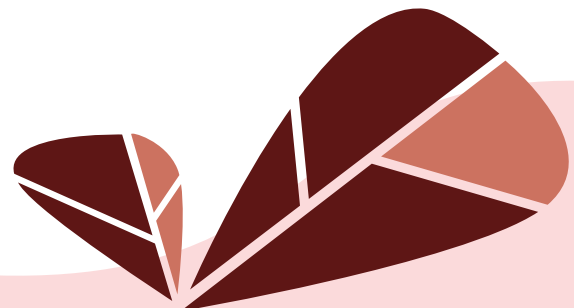
Participants expressed that it is important for more men to be involved in these conversations. It was acknowledged that we do have families where men are highly involved and that there also needs to be supports for men.

It is also important for organizations who are working for the same goal of supporting families to be working together.

Need to address toxic drug supply and support front-line workers

First Nations have experienced disproportionate harm. First Nations leadership should be engaged in the class action lawsuit that the BC government has launched against pharmaceutical companies. Other actions needed, include providing healing support and centres, especially for youth, and including those that are dedicated for women to create safe spaces.

Participants shared that there is a lack of supports in the downtown eastside for front line workers who respond to traumatic events, including numerous deaths due to the toxic drug supply. Workers in the downtown eastside need the support of elders, cedar brushes and sweat lodges.



Need for Immediate, Transformative Action on the Calls for Justice

There is concern that the Calls for Justice are not being implemented quickly enough. People are seeking greater levels of advocacy and concrete action. Family members spoke of how the fact of their loved one's murder or going missing is never far from their day to day life - they feel it every day and are reminded through social media, court processes, etc.

In this work, representation is crucial. For example, there is concern that women's voices are not being represented in BC Police Act reform work, and that current justice related work doesn't engage deeply enough with those who have been directly impacted. These are crucial opportunities for transformational change.

A recommendation was made to establish a provincial women's council forum, which includes families, to help advance issues related to violence and promote accountability. A participant shared that when we want to lift up our relatives we can't continue to perpetuate the systems that were meant to wipe us out, stating that they were for abolition and that the courts were never intended to bring justice.

Additional key areas for action include gendered violence by police and the impacts of the extractive resource industry.

2SLGBTQQIA+ People, Language, and Global Connections

Participants mentioned that the documentation and looking at the timeline regarding Two Spirit people is crucial in understanding that homophobia and sexism was brought over on the boats by the colonizers. First Nations languages are inclusive and gender neutral. It is English that is gendered. They called for us to commit to using inclusive language. This can happen in many ways, for example, using the acronym MMIR for "missing and murdered Indigenous relatives".

We were encouraged that our work can assist Indigenous peoples across the world. This was especially noted in the case of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ report that was drafted for the National Action Plan on MMIWG2S+, which is the first of its kind. All of our interventions are needed, we all need to be there.

In closing, we were reminded that there is a need for healing through ceremony and the need to address stigma. Some of what we are dealing with still has stigma, and some is able to be held in ceremony as a way to heal.

Police Brutality
and MAN CAMPS
are a THREAT to OUR
COMMUNITIES

WE HOLD
OUR HANDS
up to you doing
the WORK IN OUR
COMMUNITIES!





RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKE-AWAYS

From the experiences shared by Chief Councillor Slett, Gladys, Stephanie, Brenda, and the discussion we can gather the following recommendations:

1. We need to approach conversations and work in a holistic way, not divided. We should all work together, yet still create dedicated safe spaces as desired/needed.
2. Initiatives like “Declarations” can be a way to convene dialogue and bring people together for action.
3. The reclamation of women’s roles includes that pertaining to governance. We need to honour who we are. This can also involve honouring those who are life givers. In practice, commitments in writing from leadership can help rally resources and capacity to support this type of work.
4. It is important to take time and be careful with work regarding violence, and bring in additional expertise as needed given the sensitivity and complexity.
5. When it comes to MMIWG2S+, it is important that organized initiatives give voice to the families.
6. We could also start referring to this issue as MMIR or MMIP - “missing and murdered relatives” or “missing and murdered persons”.
7. There are already so many recommendations that the government has yet to implement. This implementation should occur in partnership with the grassroots. There was a desire for more institutional hearings during the National Inquiry, so perhaps that speaks to the role that these organizations could have in ongoing work.
8. There are many examples of grassroots work that could be supported – they show us the strengths we have and what justice is and what it needs. They also highlight the importance of capacity building, connection, training, and self-care.
9. While there has been some progress in relation to supports for families, there are still many gaps and families are still being mistreated by police.
10. When there is work related to MMIWG2S+ or MMIP it is very important that all the information is communicated out to the families. Families should also be supported to hold their own walks and events.
11. In all of this work collaboration is important. This can help reduce duplication, and instead support partnerships.
12. There is a need to address gang involvement and work with youth to prevent involvement and violence.
13. Difficult conversations such as this are important. When we take these conversations back to our communities and roles there is work that needs to be done to prepare people for difficult conversations.
14. More men need to be engaged in the work of preventing and addressing violence.
15. There must be more accountability and support for those experiencing the first-hand effects of the toxic drug supply and opioid crisis.
16. It is crucial that women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are represented in Police Act reform work.
17. A recommendation was made to establish a provincial women’s council forum, which includes families, to help advance issues related to violence and promote accountability.
18. Key areas for action include gendered violence by police and the impacts of the extractive resource industry.
19. It is important to use gender neutral and inclusive language and further explore what this looks like in our First Nations languages.
20. There are opportunities to share our learnings internationally, and vice versa.

Introductory Icebreaker

Participants gathered in small groups or reflected individually on the following questions:

Who am I?

What is on my heart?

How do I cultivate safety for myself and others?

How do I approach discussions and issues? For example, do I prioritize and gravitate towards action, tradition and stories, relationships, innovation, multiple, or others?



World Cafe Roundtable

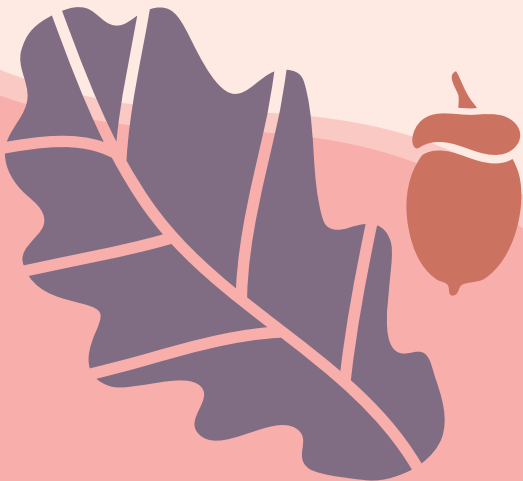
Participants discussed the following questions in small groups and recorded their responses.

1. *What are the historic ways and cultural practices that honoured and supported women, Two-Spirit, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and what does this look like in our context today?*

- We have not honoured our cultural practices.
- We need our Two-Spirit teachings and to allow teaching and practice.
- Acknowledge the experience of those who are HIV+.
- Acknowledge without judgment.
- Have a Two-Spirit elder or elderships—Two-Spirit were honoured as those who could both hunt and cook, who were both masculine and feminine. Women were honoured as lifegivers, matriarchs, and teachers. Women were looked to as leaders. We had matriarchal societies. Now, we're divided. Our 2SLGBTQQIA+ are overlooked and ostracized. We must be included in all matters. We need action.
- The context today - our youth are confused and don't have our teachings, hence the many labels that have arisen. We are a non-gendered society. Education and acceptance are the keys.
- Make space at community powwows/ ceremonies for Two-Spirit.
- Stories are coming out now about our women— This is the role of the women. This is the role of our men. This is the role of our Two-Spirit. This shows the equality among all the roles of everyone.
- There was such a balance in our old ways.
- Prior to contact with European colonisers, Two-Spirit people existed among many Indigenous nations and often held special roles in their communities. There is evidence that in over two thirds of the 200 Indigenous languages spoken in North America, there were terms used to identify individuals who were neither men nor women. Indigenous views on sexuality were not rooted in heteronormativity. Research and oral histories reflect the widespread respect and honour for Two-Spirit people. Within many First Nation cultures, the roles of Two-Spirit people carried unique responsibilities that were vital to their communities' well being and survival. Some important roles that Two-Spirit people held were as teachers, knowledge keepers, healers, herbalists, child minders, spiritual leaders, interpreters, mediators and artists.
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ describes their sexual identity as a 'braiding of two worlds'—"...this identity and their culture and their way of making a space, land, and ceremony for that identity. They also frame gender identities as the "...forward moving momentum for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people."
- It is not in place, or practiced, the colonization process has abolished our true nature of processes.
- We do not honour the two spirited fully.
- I don't know that it does but in my experience there are children being honoured by their families in their authentic identities.
- Every nation, community, valued its members. Every individual held a role.

2. What do our traditional stories tell us about violence prevention or emotional health in our communities?

- Our traditional stories tell us that there was no violence. We lived in harmony because: everyone played a role in the community; looked after and protected one another by ensuring food security and safety, and supported with household tasks; emotionally, physically, and spiritually were well balanced and equal.
- Grandmother and grandfather, aunts, uncles, and parents took part in raising a child.
- Have a safe place to go.
- Use true stories to teach/help others.
- We always have to repeat other trips. They say hi before an entry of other people's land.
- History tells us of the violence towards Aboriginal people.
- Reference to the graves found in Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc and shame on the Canadian government.
- Need to remove gangs.
- Our traditional stories is where a place for Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people to share their wisdom, their cultural heritage, their beliefs, and the challenges that they face. It is also for groups who work to help First Nation peoples to bring a voice to their needs and offer ways that you can get involved.
- The purpose of the traditional stories is to open our hearts and minds to cultures who have treasured our planet and could share with us insights that we can use to become more connected with nature and each other. BCAFN hopes that you will be inspired, informed and intrigued.
- That there is a process for everything and if we are listeners we will come to understand a way of life.
- We need to sit down and address the abuse, all forms.
- Gives us perspective to bring us back to our roots and culture.
- Kalagas.
- That Indigenous peoples have their own traditional and cultural ways of knowing with regards to violence and emotional health, though impacted by colonialism.



3. What training, education, and/or capacity building is needed in our communities so we can work toward justice, equity, and inclusion?

- We need a safe space to help connect with family, community, and services.
- Educated peers willing to step up so we can work towards justice, a committee of people in the community.
- Presentations in schools, preschool, colleges, universities, government, and prenatal units on the issue of MMIWG2S+, Men and Boys, and the Indian Residential Schools.
- Elders need to be utilized more to teach cultural values.
- Celebrate successes with community.
- Culturally specific advocacy and support.
- Bringing you into spaces for youth and recognition of shared leadership.
- Connecting elders and youth.
- Grief - how to help the community deal with this?
- Land based teachings.
- Communal decision-making on where funds go.
- Infrastructure for treatment centres/healing, etc.
- Get rid of LNG.
- Naloxone training for all ages.
- Meeting our communities where they are at.
- Nurturing and building on our strengths.
- Our own cultural counselors.
- Lateral violence.
- Drug and alcohol counseling.
- Create a First Nation 2SLGBTQIA+ and women-led interactive and experiential training model.
- Provide First Nation women and 2SLGBTQIA+ support in improving our community by educating and participation, increasing leadership in various sectors, and preventing and eliminating gender-based violence.
- Relationship building, cultural identity and effective communication coupled with cultural and traditional practices .
- We must work with two spirited education groups to decolonize the stigma.
- Anti-racism training.
- Look and gather our healthy elders to share and teach.

THERE IS NO WORD
FOR DISABILITY IN
OUR LANGUAGES
INCLUSION OF ALL OF
OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

PEACE
OF MIND AND
PEACE OF HEART
COMES FROM SPIRIT

4. **What can women, girls, gender diverse, Two-Spirit, boys, and men do to ensure safety and wellbeing for everyone in our communities? What are our respective roles?**

- Cultural teachings for everyone.
- Educate our youth and elders about gender diversity.
- Create safety guidelines for the community.
- Create a safe place, such as a centre, for youth and Two-Spirit people.
- Start a group for the safety of gender diverse people.
- Education and awareness month for children/ youth and adults/elders.
- Circle of meeting or being heard.
- Unlearning colonial standards.
- They tried to eradicate us but we are still here!
- Reclaim our cultural roles.
- Bear Clan patrols everywhere.
- Cultural context for Intergenerational trauma/ resilience and appropriate culturally safe supports.
- Continued development of our own infrastructure.
- Harm reduction.
- Peer-led support.
- Offer counseling to members.
- Bring back culture.
- Educate on lateral violence.
- Kindness.
- Understanding.
- Going back to our roots/culture.
- Teaching self-defense.
- Pride in identity.
- Strong family and community connections.
- Learning/keeping language.
- Ceremony.
- Teaching pre-contact ways as well as post-contact context for the present.
- Mohawk warriors.
- Women, girls, gender diverse, Two-Spirit, boys and men can create a grounded safety from and within First Nation peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. First Nation worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.
- Men are protectors: their role is to be loving, kind, caring and respectful in all that they do. When reflected in that process they are heads of our land community and protect each other, women and children from harm of any sort. women are caregivers, disciplinaries, they are compassionate and teach the essence of togetherness as one people. under the protection of men. Two-Spirited are healers, visionaries, the ones that give good direction and are protected and guided by both men and women.
- We must protect them!
- Communities need to be more inclusive in protecting them.
- Have their voices held up...listen...and help in the healing so there is safety when we speak.



5. **What are the roles of our different forms of leadership (elected Chief and Council, hereditary/traditional leadership, elders, matriarchs, grassroots, community members, and front line workers)?**

- It takes everyone understanding shared knowledge.
- Guiding and protecting.
- Advocacy.
- Being supportive.
- Build a health community, including mental health.
- Education.
- Listen!
- Communication.
- Make yourself available.
- Be approachable.
- Build trust with community.
- Work collectively, not individually.
- Inclusion and equality for all.
- Honest recognition of hierarchy, creating a women's council.
- Provide accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing so they can be included!
- Sweat lodge holder to educate all genders.
- Be determined to lead and don't let your guard down.
- Follow the medicine wheel teaching!
- Everyone needs to learn/listen to community together with the same goal to build a healthy community.
- Work from the spirit, don't let leadership change your values/culture, etc. Don't work for your pocket.
- Front line workers are in a war zone, and this doesn't compare to the experience of elected chiefs.
- There should be background checks into leadership.
- The ancient way of being is giving everyone a sense of belonging.
- Nisgaa: elders oversee the elected body. They can stop the council if they are not looking out for the best interest of the people. They are very vocal and hold the council accountable. Councils are visionaries.
- It is important for communities to have not only wellness plans, but healing plans.
- Elected chief and council - Band councils were introduced with the Indian Act in 1876 as part of Canada's attempt to erase Indigenous law. Elected chief and council get paid to do their job and negotiate with the Government levels and businesses.
- Hereditary chief/traditional leadership - Each House chief is responsible for stewarding his or her House territory. Together, all House chiefs are responsible for First Nations traditional territory.
- Traditional leaders stress the importance of leadership working to amplify the voices of the First Nation Peoples in the community.
- Elders - Our elders are people recognized in their community as having gained in-depth, expert knowledge of the traditions, culture, teachings, ceremonies, language, or other aspects of their Nation, AND, by the consensus of the community, are allowed to pass on that knowledge (as they see fit, and according to traditional protocols).



- Traditional teachers - Traditional teachers are community members with specific knowledge of how to conduct a ceremony (e.g., naming ceremony, full-moon ceremony, sweat lodge ceremony, etc.), how to make a traditional art or food (e.g., tanning, quillwork, beading, etc.), or other important cultural practices, and are able to share these with others.
- Knowledge keepers - Knowledge keepers differ from traditional teachers insofar as their knowledge includes stories, songs, history, spiritual or traditional teachings, and other significant aspects of cultural traditions. Some knowledge keepers (for example, medicine people) occupy specific roles that have existed in their Nations since time immemorial.
- First Nation fluent speakers - First Nation languages, and many communities are returning to the use of titles in their original languages because their meanings are not easily translated into Western languages.
- Matriarch - First Nations are matrilineal, meaning that descent - wealth, power, and inheritance - were passed on through the mother. First Nation People must aid in the full restoration of the backbone of our nations which are our grandmothers and our mothers. Our Matriarchs have autonomy, agency, power once again. Not power over men or others, but transformative power, which grows from respect for self and equity with others, in their diversity of identity, experience and ability.
- Grassroots - To me, grassroots activism is non-institutionalized organizing carried by ordinary people and operates in solitary with other struggles and with all oppressed people.
- Community members - First nation describe any group of people native to a specific region. In other words, it refers to people who lived there before colonists or settlers arrived, defined new borders, and began to occupy the land. Another note, support members also are a part of our life and they take care of our Elders and people with disabilities. ASL interpreters are our lifeline and communicate with the community as they are also considered a part of the community and they are also professional interpreters.
- Front line workers - Our aunties & uncles are physicians, midwives, birth workers, harm reduction workers, crisis workers, addiction workers, community outreach workers, and medical learners. With the Health centres, First Nation offer primary care clinics for pediatric and psychiatry care. They are the backbone of our health care system.
- Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman and/or 2SLGBTQIA+ person from a minority group... tries to navigate the main crossing in the Native world...The main highway is "racism road". One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street... They have to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many SCRATCHING THE SURFACE: DEMOCRACY, TRADITIONS, GENDER layered blanket of oppression.
- This is a very important point when we discuss issues of citizenship and belonging, because so much of the discussion on these issues, inspired by identity politics, attempts to homogenize the differential meanings of such identity notions such as Indigenous or women and 2SLGBTQIA+. We must understand the roles in our First Nation community.



- Chief and Councils are a colonized form of governance and in today's world are needed to address community issues, protect lands, and ensure a voice at the world table. Hereditary and traditional leaders are the foundation of our true order. They have the control and say over all things pertaining to our people's needs and ways, they enforce and ensure the safety of the people, land and water (earth). Elders are the knowledge keepers and teachers of morals and values a way of living life. matriarchs are head of family lines they ensure the unit abides by the law of the land and people. Grassroots are all who posse the blood of the ancestors and carry forward the beliefs and traditions, Community members are the formulation of the colonization of reservations, those that live together in the community (often don't consider the membership as a whole) membership is the colonization process in which our people were forced into separation of one another through Reserves. Front line workers are those that do the work, in everything they do it for the betterment of the people they service, often unnoticed, underpaid and overworked. Culturally it took a community of frontline workers to ensure safety and sustainability for all. :)

- Hereditary/traditional is being left out of the mainstream Indian Act chief and counsel system.
- To work together with the whole community. To learn about their community members opposed to judging them. Our people are all so talented, gifted, intelligent and respectful people, considering what we all have faced for the past 500 plus years. Considering what we have been through we deserve to be recognized as proud aboriginal people from whichever perspective communities we come from. They say it takes a community to raise a child...go ahead... prove it.....
- This could be a whole book...
- To model healthy individuals
- The community has roles for each of us and that men do need to step it up more to be safe, and acknowledge the accountability required to be traditional men. That not all men are enemies. There are allies amongst the women, girls, and youth.

IT'S EMPOWERING to
HEAR WE ALL CARE...

GRASSROOTS
WORKERS are HOLDING
up our PEOPLE...

WE NEED HELP
SUPPORTING OUR
PEOPLE with the
OPIOID CRISIS

BE INTENTIONAL
WITH LOVE

ADVOCATE FOR OUR
RELATIVES IN THE DTES

HOUSING
CRISIS

HEALTH+
MENTAL
HEALTH

WORLD CAFE REPORT BACK AND DISCUSSION

Decolonization, Inclusion, and Representation

Participants spoke about the need to decolonize ourselves, because so many of our diseases are connected to colonialism. They encouraged us to deeper into our values and to reconcile with ourselves.

One of these values is inclusion. We need to understand inclusion and practice it with everyone, all the time.

“*We are all one. If we treated every single person in our lives that way; if we treated Mother Earth that way, the environment that way, the animals that way... how different our lives would be.*
- Forum Participant

People shared that our origin stories point to inclusion—there are so many origin stories and all of them are true. This reflects the fact that we all have a place in ceremony and in community. We also spoke about the importance of language, and that our work regarding inclusion should be based in our teachings.

“*Some of this terminology is coming from young people, some of it is dormant in our bloodlines... There is complexity with language and labels. Remember to walk gently, respect our diverse experiences and laws. We don't need to understand fully, but we don't want to misrepresent.*
- Co-Chair

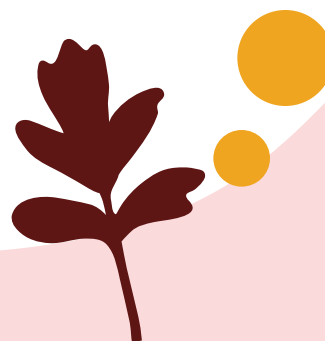
There were several ideas on how experience, teachings and laws can be brought forward and passed down. One pathway is mentorship, especially mentorship by elders. People are ready to mentor and there is a need for young people to be immersed in culture and teachings from birth. This is how children know who they are. We also see a desire among young people to be mentored—they are asking questions and watching. So many who don't have mentorship are lost. This is especially challenging for those in the child welfare system.

Another application emerged in terms of governance: We need to cultivate respect for women like we used to have. A participant shared that they were taught that the women in their community held a higher power. No movement was made without the matriarchs. Spending time speaking with like-minded, passionate individuals is seen as another way to be uplifted and further work aligned with our values. Participants also mentioned the value of formal education. Education is key when it comes to social and justice work.

“*I applaud everyone who is pursuing the fields that inspire you to be the person you want to be.*
- Forum Participant

Participants discussed the complexities of different forms of leadership, reckoning with the fact that leaders, however prominent, are only human- they can't be everywhere at once but they do their best. At the same participants acknowledged that work that happens behind the scenes, often by grassroots and frontline workers is often under-appreciated and not well-recognized or supported. At the end of the day, we need diverse forms of leadership.

A participant recommended the establishment of a First Nations women's table regarding the National Action Plan. This table could prioritize the participation of women who are primarily focused on implementing the Calls for Justice. While this group could be supported by Chiefs, it was recognized that Chiefs have a broad array of responsibilities. There was a desire to have Chiefs support First Nations women to have autonomous representation.



Participants shared that our vision for the future should reflect the need for powerful women's representation. This topic also involved discussion regarding the role of elected chiefs, and the fact that women remain underrepresented in this type of leadership role. Given the perspective that elected chiefs hold power, including financial resources, the ability to travel, and their ability to influence policy, this was seen as a key area to increase representation.

In addition to unlearning colonialism, participants shared that we need to unlearn patriarchy. Patriarchy is seen by some as the number one issue hindering the advancement of women's priorities. As part of this conversation a man shared that in his opinion men in leadership need to take a step back and allow the space to be led from women. It's not just education and decolonization, but creating that space too. He believes that the time for women to lead is now. The ongoing issue of lateral violence was also seen as connected to patriarchy and colonization, and something that requires more attention.

The need to ensure inclusion, accessibility, communication with the deaf and hard of hearing community also arose as part of this discussion. Colonization has meant that many in the deaf and hard of hearing community are pushed to the side, and not acknowledged as potential leaders. This makes it difficult for individuals in this community to step forward into leadership roles. To help decolonize and remove barriers it is critical to ensure that there are opportunities for those who are deaf and hard of hearing to learn about our cultures and languages, and not be deprived of opportunities for communication and services. When we don't do this, we come from a place of privilege.

Systemic Racism, Wellness, and Funding

Participants shared many ongoing challenges that impact their day to day wellbeing and safety, including racism and systemic discrimination related to housing, transportation, the toxic drug supply and healthcare.

Regarding what communities themselves can do about these issues, one participant recommended that each community should have a wellness and healing plan to support those experiencing trauma and discuss how we can address them together. A particular recommendation was also made to have policies and programs that support non-binary folks, especially for youth.

Another related issue is financial resourcing. Issues related to the use of funds by non-governmental organizations were noted, as were gaps in service delivery such as the need for 24/7 safe spaces, and issues with people getting recruited into gangs and sex trafficking outside shelters when they get turned away. Participants emphasized the importance of money going to the right place and the right people. They noted that there is often lots of competition and scarcity of funding, which is not good. Some participants shared how they try to partner and collaborate rather than compete in these situations. However, the overall scarcity of resources is still a very difficult situation to manage given the depth and range of needs.



RECOMMENDATIONS/KEY TAKE-AWAYS

From this discussion we can gather the following recommendations:

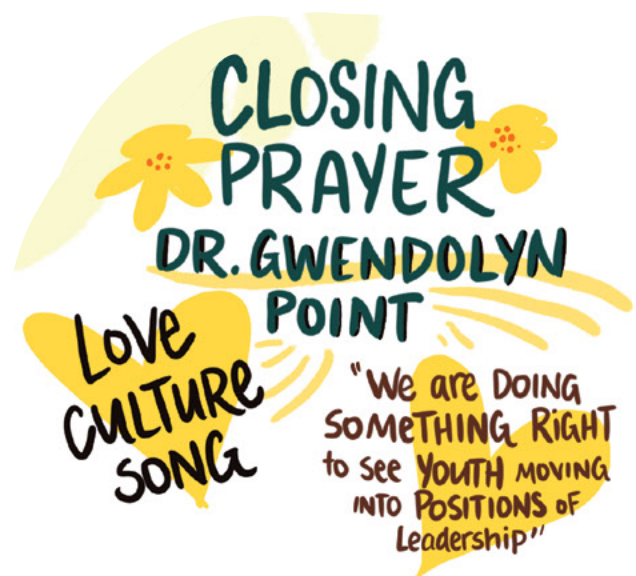
1. The value of inclusion is found in our origin stories, traditional languages, and cultures, which are living and evolving.
2. Creating opportunities for mentorship is important, especially for children in care.
3. There is a need to increase the representation of women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in leadership, decision-making, and governance, in particular, in elected leadership.
4. It is important to lift up and support the respective roles that diverse forms of leadership have.
5. A participant recommended the establishment of a First Nations women's table regarding the National Action Plan. This table could prioritize the participation of women who are primarily focused on implementing the Calls for Justice.
6. In addition to addressing colonialism, we need to address patriarchy.
7. The need to ensure inclusion, accessibility, communication with the deaf and hard of hearing community.
8. More accountability and transparency is needed regarding the allocation of government funding.
9. Funding for basic services like shelters and organizations that address gender-based violence remains much too scarce and program-based. Sufficient and sustainable, ongoing funding is needed.
10. First Nations women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people continue to experience many ongoing challenges that impact their day-to-day wellbeing and safety, including racism and systemic discrimination related to housing, transportation, the toxic drug supply and healthcare.
11. Each community should have a wellness and healing plan to support those experiencing trauma and discuss how we can address them together.
12. Communities should have policies and programs that support non-binary folks, especially for youth.
13. 24/7 safe spaces are needed.

CLOSING PROTOCOL

Louisa Housty-Jones, BCAFN Women's Representative offered closing remarks, thanking everyone for joining in this dialogue, and expressing appreciation for how we were able to engage with some difficult topics with love and courage.

She encouraged those gathered, saying that when we come together we are powerful and can overcome the most challenging circumstances. She also expressed her interest in ongoing collaboration.

Dr. Gwendolyn Point closed the Dialogue Sessions by reminding us that peace of mind and peace of heart comes from spirit.



Day 3: Listen And Take Action (Virtual)

Dr. Point opened the session by sharing that there is much going on, both in her home community, in her nation, and around the world. When she looks around, she realizes how fortunate we are. Though our families and communities struggle every day because of the realities of being First Nations, as a result of our leadership, we have been given a better life every generation. She shared a prayer to send special blessings to leaders, as well as a Sto:lo song that brought participants' hearts and minds together to carry on the work in a good way.

Day 3

Chief McLeod thanked the knowledge keeper for bringing calmness to everyone participating in the discussions, as well as to Louisa for facilitating. He introduced himself as the Chief of the Upper Nicola Indian Band, and welcomed everyone into the session.

Louisa Housty-Jones introduced herself and the theme of the day's session: Listen and Take Action. Louisa, Sarah Froese Kakish and Taylor Arnt presented key highlights from the draft Stories Connect Us report. A broad range of experiences and issues were identified. We heard that this Strategic Action Plan should focus on being impactful, and ensuring that existing recommendations are implemented, while not leaving anyone behind.

Following this, Planning Advisory Committee members Paula Wesley, Taylor Behn and Jazmine Smith joined Louisa for a panel discussion and Q&A.



Louisa thanked everyone for their introductions, then asked the first panel question:

“What is an immediate area/priority for government and non-governmental organizations to focus on?”

Paula Wesley noted that it’s important to improve access to communications for Deaf and hard of hearing people because research about women and gender-diverse people often does not include them. She also recognized that we need to look at these issues in a culturally safe and appropriate way, getting our local governments to provide these supports and training.

Morgan Behn felt it was most important to focus on mental health, advisory committees and having priorities laid out. She feels that more conversations

like this need to be happening, and groups like the Planning Advisory Committee need to be talking to governments.

Jazmine Smith wants more suicide awareness and prevention. Being so isolated, her community is cut off from the world. Many that come out as trans, gay or lesbian die by suicide. While it’s a touchy subject, she thinks working on this would be huge in her community.

Louisa moved on to the second panel question.

“After the Dialogue Sessions, what comes next for you: How were you impacted and what will you take back to your role(s)?”

Paula Wesley gained insight from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and in the process, learned how to better support them. She learned from her own family and the Deaf and hard of hearing community to be sensitive about respecting marginalized groups and include their voices. She believes the first step toward setting up a better model is changing attitudes, which will then change behaviors and structures.

It is often very difficult for First Nations Deaf people to access people they can communicate with; this impacts the identity and culture that they are able to access. Paula believes that it is important that we pay more attention to the isolation experienced by First Nations Deaf people.

The diversity within the Dialogue Sessions has helped her to understand that our wisdom, our leadership, our feelings and actions make us who we are, and

push us forward on a journey of listening to each other. By working together, we can collaboratively solve our issues and get creative about how to get the things that we deserve.

After the Dialogue Sessions, Paula is looking to engage with different levels of government: federal, provincial, and her own local government, telling them things she has learned in hopes that they will listen to her. She also plans to reach out to agencies and organizations that can better support her goals.

Morgan Behn’s role is to be a mother first and foremost, so she plans to teach the things she learned at the Dialogue Sessions at home. She believes we need to align our work with our teachings and ceremonies because of the deeper understanding it can provide us. She plans to keep being a part of these conversations and committees in any way she can.



Jazmine Smith loved how everyone came together. Everyone had so much knowledge to share, and she felt it was amazing to learn from Paula, Gwendolyn, Morgan and Orene's perspectives. She also asked: what is the outcome of these Dialogue Sessions?

DISCUSSION

The session then moved to a plenary question and answer session. One participant highlighted that Trans Care BC has a website with many Two-Spirit training and resources. They also commented that many government and non-government organizations are siloed off, meaning a lot of the information doesn't get transmitted to other areas. They recommended that First Nations set the tone, policy, template and expectations for what needs to be done, and that other organizations fall in line.

Another participant asked, how can we expect unhoused women in the DTES to unpack the stigma they have, and include trans women so that they can feel safe in shelters and organizational spaces?

Jazmine responded that those looking for support can contact her at @transcendencebeauty on Instagram.

A third participant commented that they raise their hands up to the diversity and many 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks in attendance. They commented that they hope BCAFN does not fail them, because it was generous of their community members to offer solutions for how the BCAFN can better help and include them.

Louisa Housty-Jones noted that we came together to be able to bring the issues up and start recognizing them, and start educating the rest of the world. Her hope is that everybody will continue to stand together and take actions on these issues of concern that came forth in the report.

They shared that as an Indigenous, trans, Two-Spirit and disabled person, they are an example of exceptionalism in the academic world. "I shouldn't be one of two people nationally who are a Director or Chair that has an Indigenous identity, a trans identity, a Two-Spirit identity and a disability," they commented, "We need to ensure that there are multiple folks here that are part of succession planning, and supported by the institutions to thrive, and not just be another token".

They started a Sylix Indigiqueer council because they saw a gap for the experiences of 2SLGBTQQIA+ Sylix people in the interior. They sent letters to all Okanagan nation alliances, including the Colville Confederated Tribe, to say that 2SLGBTQQIA+ Sylix people want to stop being excluded from particular service delivery. They believe it's time to decolonize, stop excluding 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin from the circle, and go beyond 2SLGBTQQIA+ 101 courses. Further, they believe we need to start putting power and decision making back in the hands of 2SLGBTQQIA+, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and people with disabilities. Everyone needs to be trained on how to be culturally safe, and trauma informed.



“The future is Two-Spirit and trans”, they said. “If anything about land and water defenders, about the DTES, has shown us that those people are showing us the way forward, they have continued to be patient and generous with us”. They emphasized that we cannot leave the work done through the Dialogue Sessions gathering dust on a shelf; rather, brave spaces need to be created to support and raise all community members up.

Louisa responded that the BCAFN has promised to be accountable, inclusive and transparent. She appreciated hearing the gaps, she said, because that has the potential to make everyone come together and become stronger.

Paula commented that she finds it helpful to know that in the present day, there are still a lot of heavy things happening. She believes it’s important that we share and have challenging conversations in order to break down barriers. She’s had ten Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in the DTES have contacted her about things going on there, and the mental health issues that come up quite often are really stark. It’s important to recognize, share information and ensure we support each other through it all.

Sarah thanked the panelists and participants for both offering their contributions, and extending a challenge to BCAFN to take action on the work laid out in the Dialogue Sessions. BCAFN staff and leadership take honoring the generosity, wisdom, experiences and priorities that folks have shared with them seriously. This looks like:

- Ensuring priorities and experience remain front and center in advocacy work we do with the provincial and federal government.
- Working in sectors like policing and justice, healthcare, and economic development in partnership with First Nations organizations.

- Communicating and channeling what is heard at these sessions to other BCAFN conversations to ensure they are integrated.
- Writing a yearly Dialogue Session report to raise awareness of what’s been talked about and what the priorities are at each session.
- Sharing the yearly Dialogue Session report broadly to the public and BCAFN Chiefs in Assembly to ensure community leaders are aware of the recommendations and dialogue.
- Creating resources to better enable community leadership to implement the things talked about at Dialogue Sessions.
- Coming together and gaining strength to shift and evolve the discourse around these issues, because that flows into how we talk about policy, law and systemic change.

Sarah emphasized that the contributions made in the Dialogue Sessions flows in many veins of BCAFN’s work. She shared that her and Louisa are always happy to hear from people about how we can move this work forward together.

Louisa thanked Paula, Morgan and Jazmine for the day’s rich discussion. She commented that BCAFN would continue to finalize the event report and look to next steps based on the discussions that were had at the three Dialogue Sessions. Dr. Gwendolyn Point closed the Dialogue Session off in prayer.





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