



Gathering to Heal

2SLGBTQQIA+
Gender-Based Violence



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This report was produced by Jessy Dame Consulting (JDC) in partnership with MNBC.
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Acknowledgements

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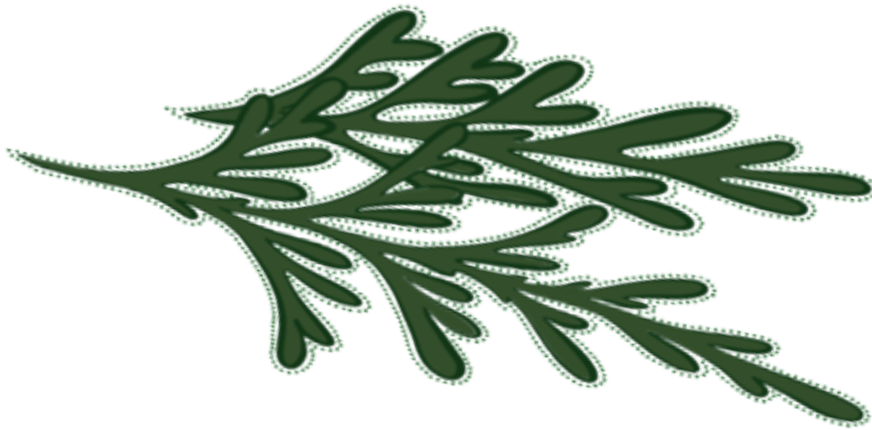


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Territorial Recognitions & Introduction

The Gathering to Heal: 2SLGBTQQIA+ Gender-Based Violence (GBV) event was held near one of the culturally significant sites of the ɫəkwəŋən People, at the entrance to Victoria Harbour, known as Songhees Point/p'áləc'əs. We extend our deepest gratitude to the ɫəkwəŋən People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. Together with the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples, they have stewarded the Land, Air, and Water together for thousands of years.



I would first like to acknowledge the land that this report was written included the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the ǵícəý (Katzie), xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Səmi'a:mu: (Semiahmoo), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō (Sto:lo), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

I, Jessy Dame, would also like to start this summary report with a self-introduction. First and foremost, I am a son, brother, uncle, and partner. I am also a very proud Two-Spirit, Métis, Certified Registered Nurse. My family is from Treaty 1 and 2, which is known today as Winnipeg and St Rose-du-lac. I want to share my deepest gratitude and love to all the participants who attended this event and the kookumak who hosted us in ceremony. Through community and capacity building events like this, we can work together to challenge gender-based violence and build a better future together.

Grounded with Kookumak

We spoke to the kookumak (grandmothers) after the gathering to hear their reflections.

We started off the gathering with the mind set of ki wiichihiitonaan (we take care of each other). When we come together, especially 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis people come together, that's exactly what we do - we take care of each other. This was witnessed and observed. We came together in November to learn, grow, and support each other in ceremony. We established that in circle, we are all equal and there is no hierarchy involved, just love, passion, and spirit. When we think about past historical moments that were taken away from us, we can also reflect on the fact that we have kept going and are moving the resurgence of Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ people forward. The young people coming up behind are benefiting from this.

The gathering in BC [Gathering to Heal], was a reinforcement of our belief in humanity. As the word spreads more and more people are connecting, connecting with spirit, connecting with each other. Over the two days, there was no hesitation in helping each other with sewing or beading or even counselling, helping each other while laughing and crying. We are no longer the ones hiding in the shadows - we are out, and within these spaces we are out front and that makes us feel good.

Kinanâskom'tin (Thank you).



Collaboration Between MNBC's Ministry of Mental Health & Harm Reduction and Ministry of Women & Gender Equity

The Ministry of Mental Health and Harm Reduction's (MoMH&HR) is working towards fully realized mental health and wellness for Métis people in BC. Through our Ministry, we advocate for culturally appropriate mental health and harm reduction programs and services at the national, provincial, and regional levels. We continue to highlight and address the gaps in existing services and advocate for changes needed to better foster the health, wellness, and resilience of Métis individuals and communities. Additionally, the mental health and harm reduction team provides support, education, and advocacy for Métis people and Métis Chartered Communities across BC.

As a growing Ministry, the Ministry of Mental Health and Harm Reduction strives to create whole-life, wraparound mental wellness initiatives – centered in community wisdom, and rooted in the idea of “culture as medicine”. Utilizing a whole-life approach to foster mental health and wellness for Métis individuals and Communities across all stages of life – from prenatal to end-of-life. We seek to develop and implement mental wellness programming that is grounded in Métis culture and Métis ways-of-knowing. In understanding and recognizing intersectionality, we honour the diversity of the Métis population across BC; a population that is inclusive of all age groups, gender identities, sexual orientations, and diverse abilities. As such, our work seeks to be inclusive and representative of Métis youth, adult, Elder, GBA+, diverse abilities, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ lenses.




The Ministry of Women and Gender Equity (MoWGE) uses an intersectional approach to elevate Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members by creating resources, programming, and services that promote wellness, security, and safety. MoWGE provides secretariat support for the Métis Women British Columbia (MWBC) Governance Council and the 2SLGBTQQIA+ Advisory Committee, who envision the direction for Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ in BC. MoWGE further supports the goals of MWBC Council and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Committee by developing and implementing strategies and recommendations brought forward.

Executive Summary

The Gathering to Heal: 2SLGBTQQIA+ Gender-Based Violence (GBV) took place on November 3-5, 2023 in Victoria, BC. The event had limited space for 24 Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ Métis in BC, that were above the ages of 18 years. Participants were invited to apply and represent the seven regions throughout the province. The kookumak Barbara Bruce and Charlotte Nolin supported in leading ceremony, holding us in circle and providing teachings. Through the attendees, we were able to bring a variety of experiences together in ceremony, grounded in relationality. This was a collaboration between the Ministry of Mental Health & Harm Reduction, and the Ministry of Women & Gender Equity. Several MNBC staff were present to support, help guide, and witness the conversation. We were welcomed into the space by a visiting hummingbird who provided lightness throughout the entire event.

The space was opened with prayers, love, and kindness. We started in circle together with food and open hearts. Through this we were able to speak our own truths and shared our love with others in the room. There was much discussion on histories of Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks, and the kookumak supported the conversations throughout the two days with groundings and blessings.





The questions that were used to support discussions included:

1. What are some of the strengths, resistances, and strategies for healing and survival that you have utilized?
2. What are the spaces, places, and moments where you feel seen, safe, and are part of your circle communities of care?
3. If you could design an ideal program to support Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin who experience GBV, what would it be?

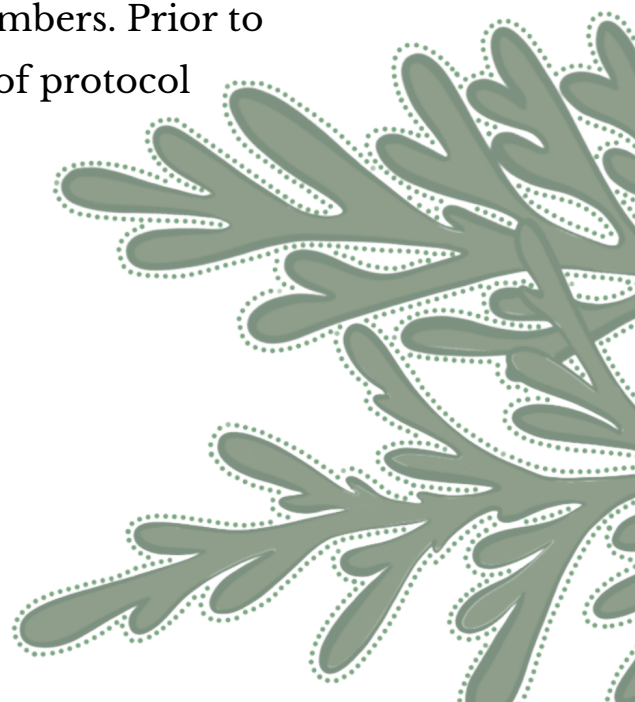
The major themes that emerged:

- Need for more spaces like Gathering to Heal created.
 - How to bring shared teachings back to our families.
 - How we use traditional Métis practices to heal and share story.
 - Being people of resistance and reformation.
 - The importance of humour and gratitude.
 - Safe and accessible spaces – chair, rooms, and food needs.
 - Want for space on the land and access to traditional foods.
 - Supporting each other to be able to speak uncomfortable truths in community.
- 



Based on the questions, discussions, and themes, five recommendations have been identified:

1. MNBC be further involved, accountable and show clear support for further 2SLGBTQQIA+ projects and gatherings.
2. MNBC support further dialogue within the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community and how to share space with our loved ones.
3. Highlight how 2SLGBTQQIA+ use traditional methods to heal and share story, which includes humor and gratitude.
4. Call to action to governments, organizations, and communities in support of 2SLGBTQQIA+ and as people of resistance and reformation.
5. MNBC wide create resources to support knowledge of ceremony for Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members. Prior to attending gatherings, promote education of protocol for ceremony for attendees.

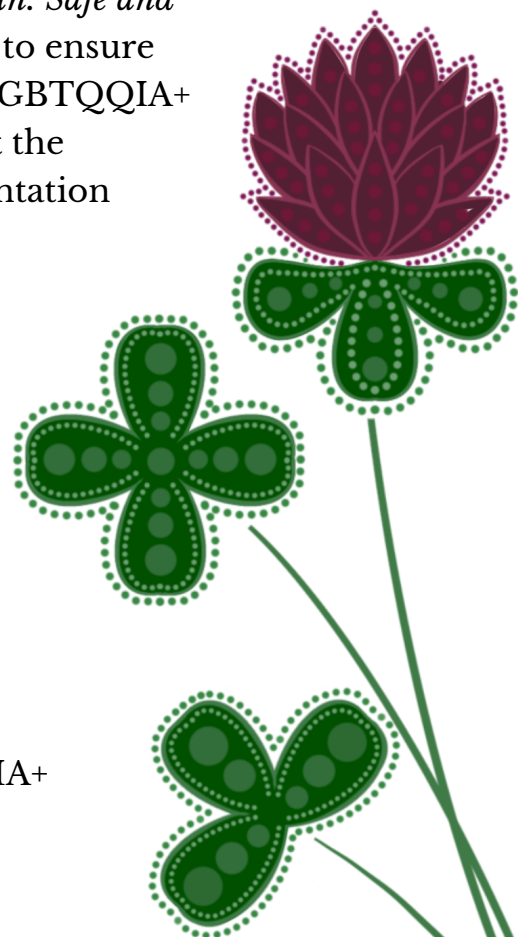


Background

The Gathering to Heal: 2SLGBTQQIA+ GBV was based on the next steps on what was learned from *Thanks for Listening: Witnessing Métis Women and Girls Experiences of Violence & Pathways to Healing* (Clark, et. al., 2021). This report was written for Métis Nation of British Columbia based on research that emerged from the Sashing Our Warriors campaign – centering voices of Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse relatives. A phase two of the project was recommended to engage Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals living in British Columbia in dialogues, talking circles, and interviews and in doing so centering their knowledge in any theories, research, policies, and programming that flows from this research.

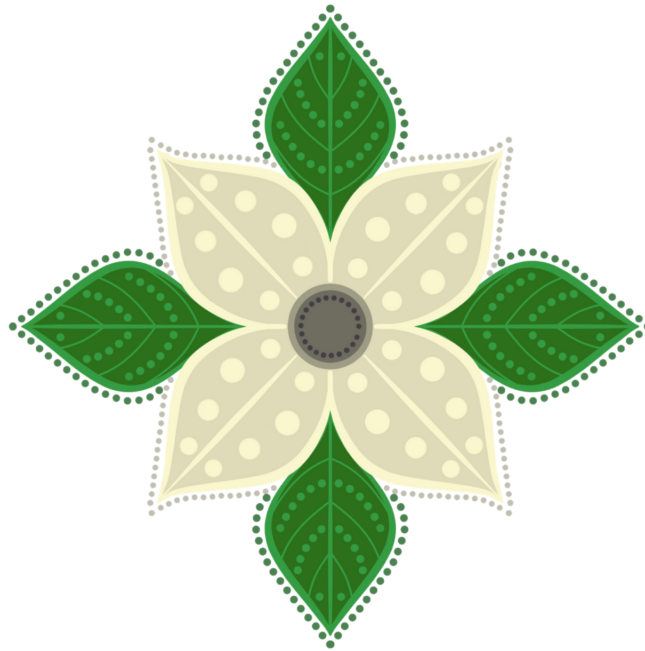
The gathering was part of MNBC's commitment to our Métis Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and all other sexual orientations and genders to feel safe, seen, and heard. In May 2023, MoWGE hosted a women's GBV gathering that was part of the engagement process that informed BC government's GBV *Action Plan: Safe and Supported*. Gathering to Heal: 2SLGBTQQIA+ GBV was to ensure a further focused engagement was held with Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members to elevate their voices to support the work MNBC does and further strengthen the implementation of Action Plan initiatives.

Through this report, we call to action to every community member to create safer spaces to uplift 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin at an interpersonal, familial, communal, provincial, and national level to stand beside us. Homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia is gender-based violence and we need to continue the education of our own communities to ensure that it is addressed for all peoples. Within the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community GBV can look like overt blatant forms of discrimination to the complete erasure of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Ensuring the active challenging of GBV for all communities is essential for its eradication.



Sacred Questions

Sacred questions were presented to the group in circle. Each section was hosted by a Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ community member who helped navigate the conversation. These questions were developed to further ensure trauma and resiliency informed practices were in place. All aspects of gathering were an offering, and nothing was mandatory to participate in. Participants had the ability to decide what would be best for them.



The questions that were used to support discussions included:

1. What are some of the strengths, resistances, and strategies for healing and survival that you have utilized?
2. What are the spaces, places, and moments where you feel seen, safe, and are part of your circle communities of care?
3. If you could design an ideal program to support Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin who experience GBV, what would it be?

Sacred Responses

Question 1

What are some of the strengths, resistances, strategies for healing and survival that you have utilized?

The group was able to discuss 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis histories, teachings, and share with an open heart. Within this section of the gathering the major themes identified were:

- History of 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis people,
- Connections that bring us strength, and
- Family centered knowledge exchange.

The history of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people was spoken to many times around the circle and with such pride and passion. It was clear that our existence is not new, and that we are now taking back the space and we have a place. Noting that being in space together makes us feel like ourselves and that we want to amplify the voices and crave to learn more individual Métis Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ stories. It is through these strong connections, that we can navigate the colonial structures of current day society.

The second major theme that came up during this conversation was the need for connections and that they bring us strength. It was noted that one area that gave strength was “trying to raise children that are proud of who they are and that through this we as 2SLGBTQQIA+ people can give the gift to say that we are still here”. Kids, family, kin, and kookumak were all relationships that are built through connection and provided further strength. Being able to witness the growth of the people we love is another area that provides hope and strength. Joy and ceremony were also identified as a major connection that gave participants strength. Family, both chosen and biological were clear topics that brought love motivation and strength, but it was also clear that there needs to be learning spaces for our relatives.

The final theme within questions one that was the importance of family centered knowledge exchange. The group spoke to the importance of 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific spaces, but also the need to create spaces where we can bring our relatives in to allow learning, healing, and shared joy. We discussed opportunities to bring teachings back to family and how we can support each other on their learning journey.

Question 2

What are the spaces, programs, moments where you feel witnessed, seen, safe, are part of your circle communities of care?

The group came together and spoke to which traditional practices has inspired us and how art has been used within the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. The major themes within the second section of the gathering were:

- Art,
- Resistance, and
- Humor.

Culture was discussed at many points during the two-day event, but it was very clear during this conversation how much it directly impacts our lives as 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. We discussed how art is used in our lives to express joy, love, and happiness, as well as pain, loss, and anger. Conversations around the importance of connection through culture and how art can be a very powerful tool to connection back with our stolen culture.

In circle, Métis artist Lynette La Fontaine shared their powerful story of love and expression through art. Lynette works incredibly hard on their artistic expressions and enthusiastically shared their art with our 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin. Within this conversation Lynette shared their si kom diloo (like water) moccasins and the beaded design they came up with inspired by the Michif Two-Spirit word bundle offered by Jacqueline Pelland.

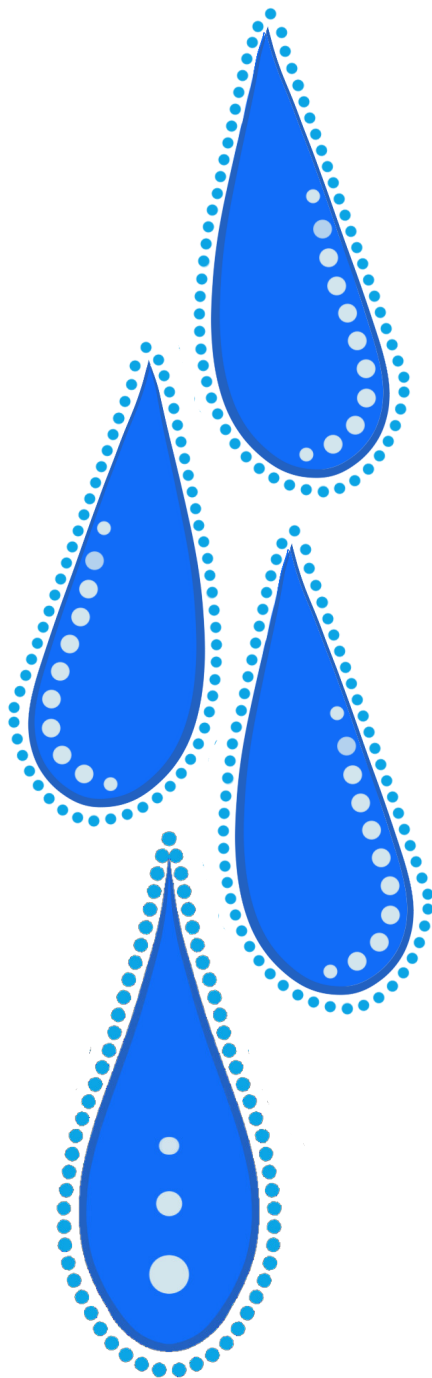


Figure 1: “si kom di loo (like water)” moccasins, 2023. Beading/Photo © Lynette La Fontaine, otipemisiwak artist. All copies must be attributed.

“I want to highlight; I am making 2S+ regalia for our community to take inspiration from. I want to share my designs and patterns with our community. As far as I know, there is no 2S+ specific regalia. I have been contemplating and having discussions in community on what 2S+ Michif regalia might look like. how can we re-imagine our own regalia? I am hoping for several completed 2S+ completed sets. I started on my first regalia set inspired from the Michif word bundle, si kom di loo (like water). The moccasins were my first completed pieces. I also have leggings and a shawl/vest in the works. I have since completed a medicine pouch for the regalia. A friend/cousin who is also Two-Spirit, contributed to the regalia set by making me a pair of fur backed earrings. Water is fluid. We are fluid as 2S+ people. I used clear beads to represent water. When we scoop water in our hands, it is clear. Yes, sometimes minerals make water other colours but usually water is clear. Often water looks blue from the reflection of the sky. So, I used 10 different clear beads and 3 different silver beads on blue velveteen to try my best to represent water. The designs are based on ancestor florals, and I am using contemporary and antique beads. The silver beads represent the sun and moon light reflecting on water. Water is medicine. We are medicine.”



Figure 2: "si kom di loo (like water)" 2023. Beading/Photo © Lynette LaFontaine, otipemisiwak artist. All copies must be attributed.



Throughout the entire event resistance was a major topic that came up during discussion. As stated above art is an act of resistance, as well as, voice, presence or absence, song, laughter, and crying. We honored that being in space together as 2SLGTQQIA+ kin during this event was an act of powerful resistance against colonial systems.

We as 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis people are people of resistance and reformation. Another element that was clear within the event was that humor is another tool of resistance. Humor is a very important tool for healing, release, and resistance within the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. Forms of humor are ways for us to express ourselves and release some of the harms we may have experienced in our lives. Laughter is such a powerful tool that can be used to cut tension or move forward in dark moments. We as 2SLGBTQQIA+ people understand and lean into being uncomfortable with the discomfort. This allows us to make light of situations and move forward together.

Question 3

If you could design an ideal program to support Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ kin who experience GBV, what would it be?

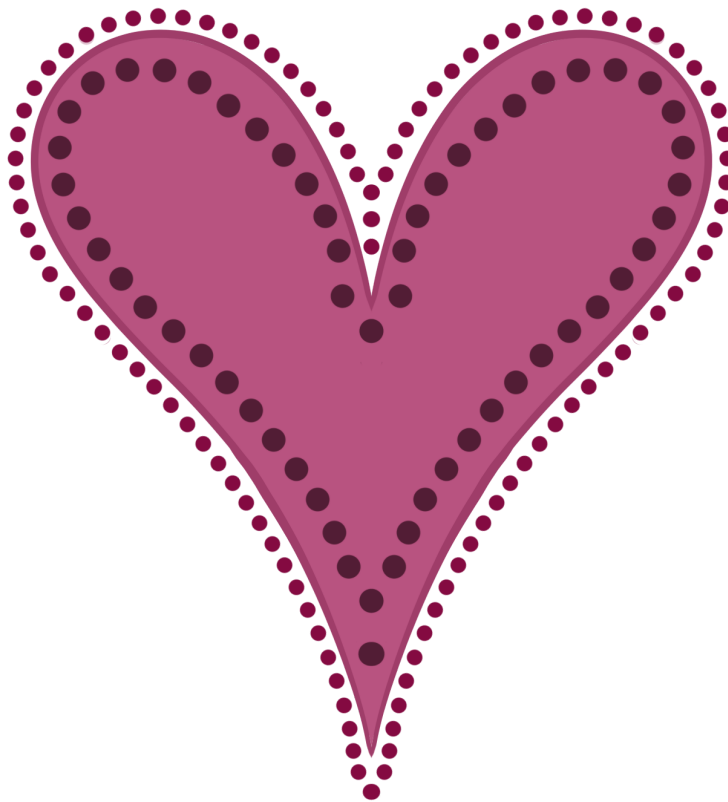
The group spoke about dreams of the future, what they wish they had in the past, and the importance of land-based learning. The major themes identified within the final section of the event were:

- Space,
- Food, and
- Land.

The importance of space cannot be understated. Where we gather and sit can set the tone for connection and what we share in circle. The importance of an accessible, safe, comfortable space needs to be front of mind when we are looking to create connections and build relations. There were conversations about the importance of smaller groups, windows to look out, soft cushions, comfortable chairs tea, and medicines. Space where we are not interrupted and where we could be in the garden and braiding sweetgrass together. Being in space together, allows us to be ourselves without further explaining our identity.

The second major theme that was discussed as a centre for support was food. Access to traditional foods in ceremony creates a connect to spirit and allows for us as 2SLGBTQQIA+ people to connect deeper. During gatherings or spaces, it is important to provide opportunities for dinner and times to connect outside of circle. This provides further time to connect with kin and share story. The final theme that was discussed through this question was the need to be on the land. There were moments outside with the plants and the animals and many participants felt a calm and were craving more time outside. Connections to land allow for a deeper connection with spirit, with ancestors, and each other. Sharing in the learning of the land is also another tool that provides opportunity for connection. Through these connections we can actively dismantle GBV.

In summary the event provided a clear space for connection, love, and learning. Through these times together, we as 2SLGBTQQIA+ people heal and gain strength from each other. This allows us to go back into a community with a bit more relief and refueling. We give thanks for the community members involved and MNBC for supporting this gathering. Gratitude is at the centre of 2SLGBTQQIA+ spaces, and we must ensure that this remains. We look forward to future gatherings and working with MNBC to ensure that we are accountable to the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community.



Recommendations

The report calls to action to MNBC, governments, organizations, and communities to support the five recommendations in this report. To see meaningful change and healing on an individual, communal, provincial, and federal level, this requires consistent, ongoing funding from our external partners to increase staff capacity and move these action items forward. This will further provide opportunity for the Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ community to do the self-reflexive work and lead these recommendations. The inclusion of 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members actively challenge gender-based violence.

1. MNBC be further involved, accountable, and show clear support for further 2SLGBTQQIA+ projects and gatherings.
2. MNBC support further dialogue within the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community and how to share space with our loved ones.
3. Highlight how 2SLGBTQQIA+ use traditional methods to heal and share story, which includes humor and gratitude.
4. Call to action to governments, organizations, and communities in support of 2SLGBTQQIA+ as people of resistance and reformation
5. MNBC create resources to support teachings around ceremony for Métis 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members. Prior to attending gatherings, promote education of protocol for ceremony for attendees.



Appendix 1

Questions Asked Outside of Circle

The following questions were written on posterboards and posted on the walls throughout the room and were left over the two days. Individuals were invited to answer all, some, and/or none of the questions. We hope the sharings can be used for future projects.

What do Métis - specific services mean to you?

- Wâhkôtowin/kinship and kîhoḱêwin/visiting
- Centered
- Culturally grounded
- Trauma informed
- A space where I don't need to validate my Indigeneity
- Basic understanding about who Métis people are as a distinct Nation, but also that we are kin with First Nations
- Métis delivered
- Ceremony and medicines integrated

What does community care look like?

- Inclusive
- Non-judgemental
- Accessibility
- Wâhkôtowin/kinship centered
- Compassion
- Co-created and participatory
- Accessible to all
- Authenticity
- Openness
- Asking folks how they would like us to show up for them

What gaps/barriers exist to accessing 2SLGBTQQIA+ gender-based violence supports?

- Locations: rural vs. urban
- Psychiatrist access and culturally relevant counsellors
- So many gaps! There needs to be 2S/trans inclusive supports across the continuum
- Counseling, groups, and cultural healing spaces are needed
- Bias within the system, being treated like otherness, or outsider by those providing support





How do we bring our communities into circle to share who we are as 2SLGBTQQIA+?

- Direct invitation
- Social gatherings
- Symbols, visuals, that identify inclusion and welcoming
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ to host a gathering of coming in and claiming the sacred fire

What are the spaces/programs/moments where you feel witnessed/seen/safe/are part of the circle community/ies of care?

- 2S+ Métis exclusive/specific events/program/services
- Culture and ceremony that is 2S+ inclusive and safe
- Echoing this (above) I love when my ways of dressing for ceremony are not gender policed
- Makes space for all of me to show up.

"How do we do good kinship with [messy] kin? - Dr. Max Liboiron

- Education
- Reconciliation
- Discussion
- Accountability and making amends
- Restorative justice
- Creating protective boundaries until there is a change to protect people targeted
- In relationships; in circle; with allies – Elder allies are the best!
 - Also, sometimes we don't because we can't and that is okay
- Show up authentic and with an open mind and heart
- Building relationships creates interconnection, deconstructs dichotomy
- Being visible in leadership roles within public to normalize integration



Appendix 2

It's Time for Two Spirit Reconciliation: A Call for 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis Equity and Inclusion Report

Individuals at the Gathering to Heal: 2SLGBTQQIA+ GBV event were asked to vote on their top priorities from the 105 recommendations from the It's Time for Two Spirit Reconciliation report (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Métis Nation Greater Victoria. (2023). *It's Time for Two Spirit Reconciliation: A Call for 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis Equity & Inclusion*.

It's Time for Two Spirit Reconciliation report (2023) is based on the findings of a Two Worlds, Two Spirits: Gathering the Circle of 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis in British Columbia, the first of its kind research and community-building project for 2SLGBTQQIA+ Métis community members in this province. The work was led by the Métis Nation of Greater Victoria, and supported by a variety of organizations, including the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Fraser Valley Métis Association, Métis Nation British Columbia, and Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak. Métis consultancy, Strategic Hobbs Insight, was contracted to complete this work.

Votes Received	Index	Themes & MNBC Related Ministries	Recommendations
17	2.6	Community Inclusion, Safety & Acceptance - MNC/MNBC	Host more 2SLGBTQQIA+ gatherings, including a national gathering
8	7.2	Cultural Wellness - MNC/MNBC	Host or provide support to host 2SLGBTQQIA+ ceremonies
6	2.12	Community Inclusion, Safety & Acceptance - MNC/MNBC	Develop a separate 2SLGBTQQIA+ Ministry independent of other Ministries
5	3.3	Governance & Representation - Board/AGM	Establish and support a Provincial 2SLGBTQQIA+ Council
5	5.6	Health & Health Authorities	Develop 2SLGBTQQIA+ culturally safe sensitivity training in medical schools, primary care, and secondary care networks
5	6.5	Mental Health & Harm Reduction	Offer 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific healing and wellness programs
5	4.5	Housing & Homelessness	Create 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific housing support programs
4	4.6	Housing & Homelessness	Provide advice/assistance to 2SLGBTQQIA+ groups to support land acquisition and development for projects and ceremonial space



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