

National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls

RECLAIMING POWER AND PLACE

THE FINAL REPORT
OF THE NATIONAL INQUIRY
INTO MISSING AND
MURDERED INDIGENOUS
WOMEN AND GIRLS

Volume 1b



Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Volume 1b



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The Saa-Ust Centre, for the star blanket community art piece
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Healing Families, Communities, and Nations

In Section 3 of the *Final Report*, we come full circle, returning to many of the ideas, teachings and concepts offered by so many witnesses insisting on the need for self-determined, distinctive, and needs-based solutions that work to combat violence by addressing healing. Throughout the Truth-Gathering Process, the concept of “cultural safety” has emerged as a foundational principle of wellness. The National Inquiry maintains that engaging in culturally safe healing helps each person strengthen their connections with themselves, their families and their communities or Nations.

In addition, in their testimonies, family members and survivors from Métis, First Nations, Inuit and 2SLGBTQIA communities identified many programs and policies that have been healing for them and that have helped, in many cases, to break the cycle of violence. We have highlighted many of them in short segments throughout this section of the *Final Report*. These practices and insights offer concrete examples of the types of supports that have been helpful and transformative for them in the past, and which may be healing for others in the future. They also speak to overall principles of best practice that can and should be used by other programs and institutions to guide their work with Indigenous Peoples.

Solving the crisis and promoting healing in the lives of Indigenous people isn’t easy, but these interventions can transform lives. However, it requires an important commitment to long-term positive outcomes. While so many



witnesses cited the importance of healing in their lives, they also pointed out that many Indigenous people don't have access to healing services, or can't access services for the time they need to heal. True healing at all levels requires long-term and engaged support.

This section of the *Final Report* is also about understanding the kind of actions that move society beyond commemoration and toward social justice. The National Inquiry characterizes these kinds of actions, which aim to support commemoration for the purposes of social change, as calling forth. Within the Truth-Gathering Process, witnesses from distinctive Indigenous communities offered examples of commemoration and calling forth in their own lives. For many, a central component of commemoration was making sure that their loved ones were not forgotten, so that their losses could serve as reminders to all of society about the importance of keeping women and girls safe, and about the fact that, as the National Inquiry has asserted many times, “our women and girls are sacred.” Beyond creating change for future generations, many witnesses also testified to the idea that their loved ones' experiences provided strength – were called forth – as a way to contribute to reclaiming power and place in the present. The lessons their loved ones taught them in life are still with them in death, giving families direction and strength moving forward.

Ultimately, the most important part of healing and wellness, commemoration, and calling forth, is acting on the solutions provided to ending violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. The final chapter of this report, which precedes its recommendations, highlights a series of four Guided Dialogue sessions aimed at identifying needs-based recommendations for distinctive Indigenous groups.

Facilitated in partnership with Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, the Guided Dialogues brought together front-line service providers and community organizers to explore distinctive perspectives and best practices. We engaged in these dialogues to deepen our knowledge of systemic gaps and weaknesses, identify best practices and suggest specific recommendations for change through the lenses of culture, health, security and justice. They were not aimed at gathering individual testimony, but instead aimed to bring together front-line service providers, organizers and people with lived experience, Elders, academics and outreach support to share perspectives related to their own backgrounds within specific Inuit, Métis, 2SLGBTQQIA and Quebec contexts.

Overwhelmingly, participants identified racism as being at the heart of the colonial structure, representing a core cause for the violence faced by Indigenous communities. At the same time, participants highlighted intersecting experiences of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, discrimination against marginalized populations such as sex workers, people engaged in substance use, people who are homeless, or based on their intersectional identities as Indigenous groups with many distinctive experiences and perspectives.



Through a discussion of their own experiences and themes, participants also identified a number of core principles that can increase the effectiveness of support services for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. These core principles are:

- valuing wellness as wholeness, with a holistic understanding of safety and well-being, caring for mental, emotional, spiritual and physical needs;
- using an interdisciplinary, systemic approach to coordinating services, rather than “silos” or forcing programs to compete against each other for funding;
- understanding the importance of cultural safety and integrating Indigenous values and traditions in social services;
- ongoing, mandatory training to equip front-line workers and management with the education necessary to engage with Indigenous communities in culturally safe ways; and
- being able to build long-term, trusting relationships with service providers, including social workers, health care professionals and law enforcement, with continuity of care.

Overall, the guided dialogue sessions sought to bridge the experiences the National Inquiry heard about in other parts of the Truth-Gathering Process with a better understanding of the context within which these experiences took place. Bringing together front-line service providers, along with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, provided a bridge that animated our approach to transforming experiences into actionable, impactful recommendations. We thank the participants for their candor, their passion, and their ongoing commitment to improving safety for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Ultimately, this section of the *Final Report* is about raising up. Healing principles that family members and survivors articulated over and over again were centred in building strength, lifting others, and doing so in a spirit of respect and of connection. These same principles animate the recommendations that provide a blueprint for action; necessary steps to take, from all levels and from all sectors, to keep First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people safe.



Wellness and Healing

Introduction: Safety, Healing, and Strength

In testimonies heard by the National Inquiry in the Truth-Gathering Process, many witnesses tied moving forward after the loss of a loved one to the important process of healing. The insights gained during the Truth-Gathering Process regarding personal, family, and community healing reveal important truths about the ways in which we might imagine solutions to end violence, beginning with healing. These truths are directly linked to the pathways that maintain that violence, identified within this report:

- intergenerational and multigenerational trauma;
- social and economic marginalization;
- maintaining the status quo and lack of institutional will; and
- ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

In addition, the National Inquiry's own approaches to healing inform the solutions we put forward, in terms of the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice. Specifically, four foundational concepts ground our supportive approach to healing and wellness: dignity, family participation, peer support, and cultural safety, which includes access to traditional healing. These concepts link directly to many of the testimonies heard. The National Inquiry's vision for healing and wellness is to contribute to an empowering experience, preserve dignity, show love and kindness, and inspire hope.

This chapter focuses on those testimonies related to healing and wellness, and on those practices, programs, and policies identified as healing and restorative within the context of the National Inquiry and beyond. More than healing itself, these practices and insights can offer important pathways for addressing violence now and into the future.



At different hearings, members of the National Family Advisory Circle shared important messages of loss, healing, and resilience. Pictured here: Norma Jacobs, National Family Advisory Circle (NFAC).

We begin with exploring healing in the context of the individual, the family, and communities, including brief examinations of programs and

services directly cited within the evidentiary record as having contributed to safety, healing, or strength. Then, we examine the National Inquiry's own support services for principles raised and lessons learned, to emphasize the need for culturally specific, self-determined, and holistic strategies to combat violence and discrimination, and to build hope.

Healing Self and Family: Beginning the Journey

For many people, the first step toward healing is beginning to learn to talk about the pain and trauma they experienced first-hand, or the trauma inflicted by losing a loved one.

Elaine D. explained that testifying about her sister was the first step on her journey, even though it happened decades after her loss. As she expressed:

So much time has elapsed. And many years has gone by without me trying to think about it. And I just hope that other people get to talk about people that have come and gone in their lives. And to rekindle the memories that made them so special. Because time has such a terrible habit of removing or easing that pain. And to deny the pain is tragic. I think you really have to talk about it, and I've never been that kind of a person. And I can see now after all the years of people telling me that I should talk about it, that they are probably right.... Thank you for allowing me to be here.¹



In Regina, Saskatchewan, members of the National Family Advisory Circle (NFAC) speak to the public audience. NFAC members have worked to support each other through the sometimes difficult process of hearing the truths that, for them as family members and survivors, are very close to their own hearts.

Many of the testimonies we heard from survivors and family members in relation to healing directly engaged the need to begin to heal from the trauma of colonization, of exploitation, of violence, and of hurt. There were also key moments where that healing began. For some, this journey began based on a personal decision to move forward. Monique F. H. described how she was living at a women's shelter, injecting and drinking every day, and found herself on and off the street. Having been sexually abused as a child and engaged in violent relationships throughout her life, Monique made the decision, at her stepfather's urging, to rejoin her family in Halifax. As she explained, the moment that she made the decision to do so was transformational.

So I phoned one of the pawnshop guys that I knew, because with my life I knew a lot of people, and I asked him, I said, "Come and buy everything ... that I have, and get me a ticket to Halifax." And he did. He took all my stuff and he gave me a ticket. I know that I did not have anything worth any kind of money, but I think he seen something – the potential of me living a different life and he gave me the break that I needed.²

That encounter, and the person's decision to buy her possessions to provide her with a ticket out of Saskatchewan, made a difference. Monique eventually became an HIV advocate for women and a social worker. She currently works for CAAN, the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network.

"THAT KIND OF LOVE IN THAT KIND OF ENVIRONMENT, YOU'D BE SURPRISED WHAT YOU COULD DO. I HAD CHANGED MY WHOLE ENVIRONMENT. I HAD CHANGED ALL OF MY FRIENDS. I CHOSE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT ENERGY, AND WHAT PEOPLE I LET IN MY CIRCLE, AND AROUND MY HOUSE, AND MY FAMILY, AND MY CHILDREN. BECAUSE OF WHAT I WENT THROUGH, I PROTECTED THOSE CHILDREN.... THAT MADE ME HAPPY."

Stephanie H.



Many witnesses also expressed how other encounters, or people in their lives, were instrumental to healing and to transforming their experiences. In Monique's case, she described both her stepfather and her eventual husband as important men in her life who helped her to change. As she described, her stepfather and her mother had travelled from Halifax to Saskatoon to visit her in the women's shelter before Monique had decided to return home: "My stepfather told me ... that he wasn't going to leave without me because he knew that I was in a bad place. He knew I wasn't taking care of myself. He knew that I was using drugs. I was – by then full-blown injecting. Drinking every day. Putting myself at high risk for everything." Eventually, as she explained, "and as time went on, for that month, I realized that I needed to get away from there."³

Monique also explained how the move – getting out of there – facilitated her meeting her current husband. She met him because they worked together, and he helped her through a very difficult time when she didn't have her children. He continues to support her through her rough times and when she is triggered, such as when she gave a talk about her own life in Halifax and couldn't get out of bed for days. She said, "He helped me see the strength inside of me that I didn't know I had."⁴ She is very grateful for her husband, with whom she has four children.

As these powerful examples show, the help of others in the healing journey is an important feature of many testimonies heard by the National Inquiry.

For Monique, as well as for others, part of the key to healing was changing the circumstances in which she lived. Stephanie H., who described a pact she made with her husband to get sober together, also talked about the importance of changing the environment in her life, and how that led her to being able to raise her children.

That kind of love in that kind of environment, you'd be surprised what you could do. I had changed my whole environment. I had changed all of my friends. I chose to be responsible for what energy, and what people I let in my circle, and around my house, and my family, and my children. Because of what I went through, I protected those children.... That made me happy.⁵

Healing through family was a prominent theme in the testimonies. For many, even appearing before the National Inquiry was a feat of courage they credited to their families. As Adrienne B. asserted, "I just have to say first off, that the strength I have to do this comes from my family."⁶ Courtney B. affirmed, "I'm really grateful that my family is able to come together.... We're going to speak the truth, we're going to share our story, and we're going to stand with each other each step of the way."⁷



Lu'ma Native Housing Society

Lu'ma Native Housing Society provides affordable and secure housing for Indigenous families and individuals with low and moderate incomes in Vancouver and across British Columbia. The society owns and operates just under 500 units of housing. It also helps Indigenous people who are moving into cities from their home communities.

Though Lu'ma Native Housing Society's main focus is on providing housing, it has expanded its services to address a variety of needs in different Indigenous communities.^I

In her testimony, Barb L. described some of these services.

I belong to a fabulous organization now, and they have opened a medical clinic. So they started with housing, it's Lu'ma Native Housing. We started with housing, and then now we have all these subsections of ... the gaps that are being created around Vancouver. So my program is, you know, helping the youth that are aging out of care, and we have a medical centre as well. That medical centre practises both Western medicine and our traditional medicine. So we have healing rooms, we have Elders, and anybody in the city has access to that. So that makes me proud. That's a great place to be and take care of yourself in all areas, so it's good.^{II}

Many family members and survivors identified that young people, especially those transitioning out of care or moving into the city for the first time, need more support to make sure they are not targeted by those who would exploit them.

As Barb described, the society has taken this challenge on by providing mentorship and housing for youth aging out of foster care to prevent them from being exploited or becoming homeless. This program aims to prepare youth for adulthood by empowering them and connecting them with their communities as well as their culture. It provides flexible and youth-driven programs to address their needs in real time in a holistic and Indigenous-led way.

I "Lu'ma Native Housing Society."

II Barb L. (Heiltsuk/Nisga'a First Nations), Part 1, Statement Volume 360, Richmond, BC, p. 15.



Atira Women's Resource Centre

The Atira Women's Resource Centre is a not-for-profit organization established to provide resources for women and children affected by violence in the greater Vancouver metropolitan area.^I

Atira is focused on advocacy designed to end all forms of gendered violence. As such, Atira is structured around four key themes: inclusive feminism, being women-centred, harm reduction, and innovation. Atira's work is informed by the interconnectivity of women's experiences of oppressive institutions, including sexism and colonialism.

Some important programs include the establishment of both long-term and transitional housing and shelter programs in Surrey, Burnaby, and Vancouver, as well as homelessness-prevention programs, which include rent supplements, in Vancouver and Surrey. Atira also engages in outreach to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Elders and women affected by violence, primarily in the Surrey and White Rock communities. Additionally, Atira provides legal advocacy in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. This program was set up to help low-income women with free legal assistance in a safe and confidential women-only space.

Maura G. is a survivor of many forms of violence who received essential support from Atira when she needed it most. After she left her abusive husband, she spent four years in family court, fighting to get

custody of their son. This was an extremely difficult time, but, Maura said, "I'm lucky though that I had support that never let me give up when there were so many days that I said I couldn't do it anymore. Atira would send staff on their own time to personally support and advocate for me in court."^{II} She added later, "Atira's a phenomenal organization, BWSS [Battered Women's Support Services] is a phenomenal organization, thank God. Thank God these things exist because ... the change is coming, but there's a lot that has to change."^{III}

Atira also runs the Family Project, an initiative to provide support for children who have witnessed abuse, in addition to parenting support. Through individual and group counselling, the Family Project seeks to provide support for children and youth and help them understand their emotions and the dynamics of violence against women.

Organizations like these do critical work in supporting Indigenous families. However, chronic underfunding and overdemand are pushing Indigenous organizations across Canada to their limits.

I "Atira Women's Resource Society."

II Maura G. (Tulita Band), Part 1, Statement Volume 359, Richmond, BC, p. 20.

III Maura G. (Tulita Band), Part 1, Statement Volume 359, Richmond, BC, p. 31.



Anti-exploitation Training with the Manitoba Hotel Association

The Manitoba Hotel Association (MHA) is a not-for-profit corporation established in 1927 and mandated to promote the interests of the hotel industry in Manitoba, as well as to provide a system to deal collaboratively with issues that affect members. Importantly, the MHA has endeavoured to engage in a campaign to help stop child sexual exploitation under the guidance of Manitoba's Tracia's Trust.^I

Established in 2002 by the Manitoba government's Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, Tracia's Trust is the framework for Manitoba's Sexual Exploitation Strategy. This strategy is coordinated through the Department of Families in partnership with other government departments and agencies, as well as with private partnerships. The framework is structured around key initiatives in the areas of prevention, intervention, legislation, coordination, research, and evaluation. At the heart of this framework has been a collaborative approach to addressing sexual exploitation.^{II}

Since 2010, the Manitoba government has partnered with the MHA to promote a campaign to help hotel staff in preventing child sexual exploitation. The province has worked with the MHA to train hotel staff

on how to spot some of the warning signs of sexual exploitation, and how to report suspicious behaviour to the relevant authorities. Recognizing that hotels are a space often used in sexual exploitation, the MHA campaign is aimed at providing front-line workers with information they can use to spot unsafe situations and to respond appropriately.^{III}

Former human trafficking survivor Alaya M. shared about the Manitoba Hotel Association's training in identifying exploitation and human trafficking as one of many aspects that must go into a counter-exploitation strategy. Most importantly, she shared, is inviting survivors to sit with executives at boardroom tables to ensure that key policy decisions on exploitation aren't made without the voices of survivors themselves.

I "Manitoba Hotel Association."

II Manitoba, "Tracia's Trust."

III Manitoba, "Manitoba Government to Work with Hotels to Combat Child Sexual Exploitation"; Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, "FPT Justice Framework."



The Mount Waddington Mental Health and Substance Use Centre

Formerly called Port Hardy Mental Health and Substance Use Services, the Mount Waddington Mental Health and Substance Use Centre is based in the northernmost part of Vancouver Island. This centre provides a wide range of services, including counselling, detox provision, street outreach teams, and supported living for adults aged 19 and over who identify needs regarding substance use, mental health, and trauma.

The Mount Waddington/Port Hardy centre currently has about 20 full-time staff providing services to approximately 500 persons per year. Their offices are located in Port Hardy and Port McNeill in the traditional territories of the Kwakwaka'wakw and Namgis Nations. Approximately 30% of the persons identify as being of Indigenous ancestry.^I

Mona S. (Wuikinuxv) is a residential school survivor who shared with the National Inquiry about her own experiences and about the death of her daughter, Michelle. Mona shared her experience of being at the Mount Waddington Mental Health and Substance Use Centre.

When I was in the hospital detoxing, I think for the second time, one of the workers, Shane Thomas, he came to me and he was just very genuine. I thought he was just – you know, I kind of, like, dismissed anybody that was trying to help me. They're just all bureaucratic, you know. And I said, "Well, if you're listening," I says, "I really like fruit." And the next day he walks in with a big bag of fruit. And that was, like, okay.

And then ... it was a slow process. But he pointed me in different directions within Port Hardy to help me in those times, made sure I got to my appointments, made sure I had enough food in my fridge, checked up on how I was, you know. And things – I had a good support system in the very, very beginning that was very valuable, you know. And I started to find myself and be able to accept the help. And that was a big thing was accepting the help.^{II}

Mona has been sober for eight years. Today, Shane Thomas is proud to have Mona as a colleague at the Mount Waddington Mental Health and Substance Use Centre, where she works as a community health representative at Wuikinuxv First Nation.^{III}

I Shane Thomas, Practice Lead, Mental Health and Substance Use, Mount Waddington Region, Island Health, personal telephone communication to Lisa Koperqualuk, March 1, 2019.

II Mona S. (Wuikinuxv Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 98, Vancouver, BC, p. 36.

III Shane Thomas, Practice Lead, Mental Health and Substance Use, Mount Waddington Region, Island Health, personal telephone communication to Lisa Koperqualuk, March 1, 2019.



The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre & H.O.M.E.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Ma Mawi) is an organization that offers a variety of services to Indigenous people in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Its programming includes services for Indigenous youth, Indigenous children in care, and the wider urban Indigenous community. "Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata" means "We all work together to help one another" in Anishinaabemowin.

Ma Mawi delivers several programs for young Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people who have been or continue to be sexually exploited. It operates a safe house in Winnipeg for Indigenous women who are interested in leaving the sex trade. Ma Mawi also operates the H.O.M.E. (Hands of Mother Earth) rural healing lodge. H.O.M.E. was established to provide a safe space for healing services for sexually exploited Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people between the ages of 13 to 17.^I

Diane Redsky, front-line worker and executive director of Ma Mawi, explained that its programming for survivors of sexual exploitation is driven by the survivors themselves.

And so, all of the work that we've ever done at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, particularly with the safe house and with our rural healing lodge, is the women themselves will tell us what it is that needs to be within programming. So when we developed every one of our resources, it has been done in consultation with the people who will benefit from that service.

And so when we developed both the safe house and Hands of Mother Earth, we had an experien-

tial, a survivor group, and within that survivor group, we always make sure that there are transgender, Two-Spirited women that are involved in the decision making and planning what the resource is going to look like and what needs to be in there. And that is a critical and vital step in any kind of program development, any kind of resource development that is going to be done, particularly when it comes to trauma-inform[ed] services."^{II}

Many of the staff working at Ma Mawi's programs have lived experience of sexual exploitation. Christine Dumaine, a woman who stayed at a safe house operated by Ma Mawi as a teenager, explained the importance of having mentors with lived experience to mentor her.

When I look back to what had the most impact in my healing, I have to say that having mentors with lived experience was the most helpful. I lived in other homes where the staff had no clue what I was experiencing and had no idea how to help lessen my risk. They would use terms such as "you shouldn't be prostituting yourself," which made me feel a lot of shame and pushed me away to isolation even further."^{III}

I "Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre."

II Diane Redsky (Shoal Lake 40 First Nation), Mixed Parts 2 & 3, Public Volume 18, St. John's, NL, p. 206.

III Christine Dumaine (Lake St. Martin First Nation), Part 2, Public Volume 3, Calgary, AB, p. 149.



Families of the Heart

For witnesses who testified, finding love and support in those who assembled with them in the most difficult of circumstances, and especially through family, was important. Amena E. found the strength to begin healing through the support of her family, whom she described as

patient with me through rough times. They let me know my self-worth, show me that I can be strong through whatever life throws at me, and let me know that it's important to voice my opinion and let my voice be heard.... I found strength through my friends, who have given me a shoulder to cry, and a person to vent to. And being able to laugh until we're crying because we're – because of silly jokes. Through therapeutic late-night drives, and talks, and then letting me break out of my shell and feel comfortable in my own skin. And the endless love they continue to show me on a regular basis, especially on the bad days. Thank you.⁸

The National Inquiry also heard about other kinds of families – families of the heart – who were instrumental in providing both healing and safe spaces to those looking for ways to heal. Alisha R. talked about relocating to Edmonton, where she didn't have any family, and the importance she placed on creating one there. As she explained, “I thought, like, if I don't have any family, then I'm going to have to, like, reach out to the community. So, I've just been reaching a lot. And then, you know, every once in a while, somebody grabs your hand.”⁹

Those who grabbed someone's hand were often close friends. As Harriet L. shared:

The little symbol that I have for my healing is butterflies. Me and my friend have a love of butterflies because we both have lost daughters and it's a sign for us that, you know, they're okay. They're up in heaven and they're soaring freely, fluttering their – their wings and they're in the best place, you know, that they could ever be. And we share – me and my – my friend share the love of butterflies because of our daughters and we both like the colour purple and that helps us together in – in our grief. And we can share even without talking, so it's – it's good to have those friends.¹⁰

Micah A. discussed the support coming from her community in Igloolik after the death of her daughter: “A lot of people in Igloolik have supported me.... I am very thankful to them. And the Elders there and my friends in Igloolik would come and visit as Inuit do. I am very thankful. They used to tell me, ‘You're going to be able to smile one of these days.’ I couldn't believe them.”¹¹ As Micah's story reveals, these families and communities are crucial for many people as an important means of support, particularly in communities.



Participating in the National Inquiry, for some witnesses, was an important way to identify and to strengthen the community around the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. As Anni P. expressed:

Coming here has been so healing for me, so healing. Being around all these beautiful Indigenous people has filled me up, has given me even more strength ... when I think about how we can heal, like I just see how we love and support each other here ... and I think, man, if we could ever just come together and start supporting each other, start lifting each other up like we do here.... If we could bring this home to our reserves, we would be even more unstoppable than we are now.¹²

Anni's comments speak to the important strength to be found in community, and in identity, as a means to begin the healing journey.

"THE LITTLE SYMBOL THAT I HAVE FOR MY HEALING IS BUTTERFLIES. ME AND MY FRIEND HAVE A LOVE OF BUTTERFLIES BECAUSE WE BOTH HAVE LOST DAUGHTERS AND IT'S A SIGN FOR US THAT, YOU KNOW, THEY'RE OKAY. THEY'RE UP IN HEAVEN AND THEY'RE SOARING FREELY, FLUTTERING THEIR – THEIR WINGS AND THEY'RE IN THE BEST PLACE, YOU KNOW, THAT THEY COULD EVER BE. AND WE SHARE – ME AND MY – MY FRIEND SHARE THE LOVE OF BUTTERFLIES BECAUSE OF OUR DAUGHTERS AND WE BOTH LIKE THE COLOUR PURPLE AND THAT HELPS US TOGETHER IN – IN OUR GRIEF. AND WE CAN SHARE EVEN WITHOUT TALKING, SO IT'S – IT'S GOOD TO HAVE THOSE FRIENDS."

Harriet L.



Grandma's House

Grandma's House was a safe house for sex workers founded by sex-trade activist and the first openly transgender politician in Canada, Jamie L. H., who shared about Grandma's House in her testimony to the National Inquiry.

Grandma's House was created as a refuge for sex workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside following the disappearance and murders of women in the area in the late 1990s by serial killer Robert Pickton. For Jamie L. H., the goal was to

provide support to women, transwomen, Two-Spirited people involved in life on the street in the Downtown Eastside [We] provided peer counselling, we provided a library, we had vitamins and minerals, we tried to have, you know, snacks available. We had computer classes, we put out a newsletter called "On the Stroll," and some of the women would write for that. And you know, they'd write about maybe makeup and just, you know, things that were useful.... It provided support.^I

Grandma's House was funded by angel donors Jacqui Cohen of the Army & Navy discount chain and Cynnie Woodward of Woodward's Family stores, as well as by the provincial and city governments.^{II} However, Grandma's House soon came under fire from the Vancouver police. Jamie explained:

They said that we shouldn't be in that location, it wasn't properly zoned. Of course, if you know landlords, the Downtown Eastside, they are not going to upgrade the buildings. And so, the City was trying to force us to relocate, right into the heart of what I call the Downtown Eastside Killing Fields, where Pickton roamed. And it was in a back alley, it was near the Waldorf Hotel; very deserted industrial area.^{III}

Later on, they received threatening phone calls when they finally moved to a new location. The police did nothing to help them, and instead released the safe house's address and phone number, making the safe house vulnerable to predators and protestors alike. Grandma's House was eventually shut down after Jamie was charged with running a bawdy house. However, she argued that the charges were unconstitutional, and they were eventually dropped.

Stories like these show that even though 2SLGBTQQIA people are consistently targeted for violence, they can encounter significant barriers to safety from the very institutions meant to protect them.

I Jamie L. H. (Indigenous/Irish), Part 1, Public Volume 78, Vancouver, BC, pp. 26-27.

II Harris, "The Unrepentant Whore."

III Jamie L. H. (Indigenous/Irish), Part 1, Public Volume 78, Vancouver, BC, p. 27.



The Indigenous Women's Healing Centre

The Indigenous Women's Healing Centre (IWHC), formerly known as the Native Women's Transition Centre Inc., supports Indigenous women and mothers recovering from "family violence, addictions, intergenerational issues and institutionalization."^I

Since 1979, the IWHC has provided a safe place for over 20,000 women and their children. IWHC grounds their programs in traditional Indigenous values and cultures in order to "heal the generational scars of colonialism and residential schools," and to provide stability in the lives of women and their children.^{II}

IWHC operates three distinct sites in Winnipeg, Manitoba, that focus on different aspects of the healing process: North Star Lodge, Memengwaa Place, and Kihwi Iskewock (Eagle Women) Lodge.

North Star Lodge focuses on long-term safe housing for Indigenous women and their children, and provides 24/7 care and support in a 21-person "extended family environment."^{III} The resident women are encouraged to engage with one another as a community to empower themselves and learn together. The lodge offers a number of in-house programs including case management and one-on-one counselling.

Memengwaa Place is a long-term residential facility specifically for women and children who are healing from family violence. Memengwaa provides traditional teachings in a supportive environment, including smudging, sweats, Sundance, fasting, vision quests, and medicine picking, and access to Elders is a fundamental part of Memengwaa's program.^{IV}

Kihwi Iskewock (Eagle Women) Lodge is an innovative residential program that provides transitional housing for Indigenous women recently released from correctional institutions. Kihwi Iskewock is designed to provide traditionally based support in order

to help women "reclaim their place, their strength, their children and their lives."^V The lodge offers a variety of programs to support women in their reintegration, including family reunification, trauma counselling, and employment development.

At all three centres, the IWHC frames healing holistically around strengthening Indigenous women and families. This is a fundamentally different approach from that of most non-Indigenous-led services. As Edna H. told the Inquiry:

I think we've failed as a society.... We need to change some of the rules and how we do things. And that doesn't mean building more jails ... [but] maybe making changes where they actually strengthen families and they actually provide real support and service.... We need to look at that and make those changes. Otherwise, we're just going to continue to have to grow these industries. Because that's really all it is, is it's an industry.^{VI}

I "Indigenous Women's Healing Centre."

II "Indigenous Women's Healing Centre – Services."

III "Indigenous Women's Healing Centre – North Star Lodge."

IV "Indigenous Women's Healing Centre – Memengwaa Place."

V "Indigenous Women's Healing Centre – Eagle Women's Lodge."

VI Edna H. (Aseniwuche Winewak Nation), Statement Volume 526, Nanaimo, BC, p. 22.



Dilico Anishinabek Family Care

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care provides a variety of services to support the well-being of Anishinabek Peoples. It was created in 1986 as a way to transfer some control over child welfare services to Anishinabek bands in the Thunder Bay area of northern Ontario. Dilico's main office is in the Fort William First Nation near Thunder Bay, with district offices in Whitesand First Nation, Pic Mobert First Nation, Longlac, and Nipigon. There are 13 First Nations communities within Dilico's service area.

Over time, Dilico Anishinabek Family Care has expanded to deliver a wider range of programming, including health, mental health, and addictions services. Dilico offers a voluntary residential addictions treatment program. It also delivers several post-treatment support services, including group therapy and housing support.

Darlene G. is an intergenerational residential school survivor from Annapolis Valley First Nation in Nova Scotia, whose mother died when she was 12. She told the Inquiry that Dilico played an important part in her first overcoming her addictions. She explained that Dilico's emphasis on culture was part of what made it so effective.

I'm grateful today to say that I'll be four months sober by the grace of my Creator.... I went to the Anishinaabe people, Dilico treatment centre. Where I found my spirituality again and strength was through the Elders, the teachings, being able to go in and grieve the way that I should have been able to grieve as a child. But I was 52 years old when I finally got to grieve with an Elder.^I

Many of Dilico's services incorporate Anishinaabe culture, values, and traditional practices. To do so, it uses Elders, traditional healers, ceremonies, sweat lodges, feasts, a traditional parenting program, and a drum singing and teachings program.^{II}

I Darlene G. (Mi'kmaq), Part 1, Public Volume 18, Membertou, NS, p. 57.

II "Dilico Anishinabek Family Care."

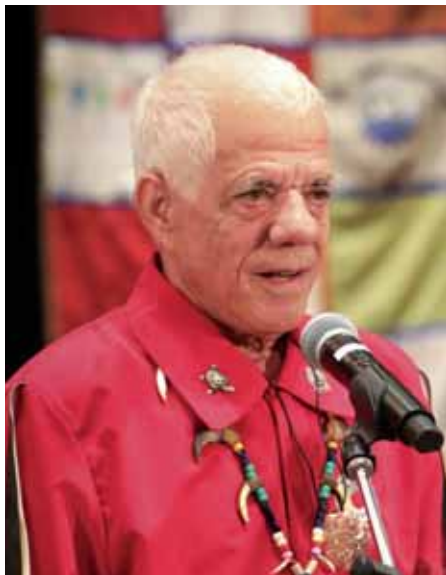


Ceremonial and Traditional Knowledge

Finding healing and, ultimately, happiness though personal healing was a deeply personal experience for many witnesses; the ability to start this journey depended, in many cases, on the kinds of support available. In many examples, people looked first to ceremony and to traditional knowledge to find the pathway to healing. Within this, traditional teachings and working with Elders were particularly important, as well as attending and participating in ceremonies.

Summarizing important themes he heard through the testimonies, in an address to the Commissioners, Treaty 6 Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild stated:

[There's] the sacred teaching of love. Love. And then throughout the hearings, we heard stories about first they said, I hate myself, I hate that I'm brown-skinned or I'm Indian, I'm ashamed of myself; but then things turned. They changed, and in my view, in my opinion, the truth and reconciliation journey also changed on those days; when a woman came in front of us and said, you know, I can get up in the morning now, and I look myself in the mirror, and I say to myself, I love you, I couldn't do that before. We heard about the loss of parental skills because of residential school with many and that discovery of the courage to say that again. People said, you know, for the first time I can now turn to my spouse or my partner and say to them, I love you. For the first time now, I can say to my children – couldn't do this before – I love you.... These are teachings that we must go back to, old people said.¹³



In Quebec City, Elder Roland Sioui addresses the audience.

The importance of these resources and teachings was evident throughout Métis, First Nations, and Inuit testimonies.

Part of the reason for reliance on teachings and Elders is the idea of cultural safety and connection to identity as a necessary component of healing. Kirby B. explained how ceremonies have been an indispensable part of finding healing and safety: “A ceremonial lodge, which is a Sundance lodge, this is part of where my healing came about. I had to follow through on myself. I had to find my way. This is part of regrowing and reconnecting to my identity.”¹⁴



As an Inuk member of the family of Loretta Saunders shared, cultural traditions with respect to healing can also be helpful to members of a different community or Nation.

I mentioned earlier that I went to a treatment centre, Mi'kmaq centre, and they ... had a very holistic approach in terms of addressing like your four aspects and working with you on different – different levels of your aspects, and really incorporating ceremony. And while sweat lodges and stuff aren't my traditional like, my ancestor's ceremonies, they – they still really helped me.¹⁵

As Shae-Lynn Noskys, who testified at the National Inquiry's Youth Panel in Vancouver, recalled:

It wasn't until I was in high school that I learned how to smudge. And it was my Aboriginal Mental Health clinician that took me to my first few sweats. As I learned about the culture I'd been denied as a child, I felt as if I was unlocking a whole piece of my identity that I was never aware I had. What I was being taught felt inherently right within me, it positively affected my mental health, and every youth deserves to feel that exact same way.¹⁶



In Winnipeg, Manitoba, Shannon Paul offers a traditional song while using a hand drum at the National Inquiry's child welfare hearings. This is an important way to underscore the importance of connection and healing through culture.

Marilou S., who believes her sister was murdered, explained:

One time, the Native Women's Association had a healing weekend for us.... [T]he Native Centre in Hamilton let us use their facilities for a whole weekend and so my husband Dan and I brought our medicines in, and we were smudging the family down, and were having a circle so we could talk all about it, you know, so all – the rest of my living brothers and sisters came to that. And so that really helped us a lot.¹⁷



Métis, First Nations and Inuit witnesses cited the need to view cultural care as an important part of the healing continuum. As Leona Star reflected during the Community Initiatives Panel on Indigenous Determinants of Well-being:

Oftentimes, when we think of wellness or interventions within the health care system and trying to bring that forward, we often think of, “Oh, we need more investment into the hospitals. We need more investment into certain programming.” However, it really fails to really recognize those things in our communities that have always carried us through.¹⁸

Monique F. H. explained that, although ceremonies can be tools for healing, they have also been used in some ways to exclude. Working with women who are HIV positive, Monique is employed by the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN), and points out how her organization made a point of bringing transwomen into the women’s circle. As she explained,

I don’t hear people all the time acknowledging them. At CAAN what we did was we invited the transwomen into our circle, into our women’s circle because we wanted them to feel like they belonged because they do belong with us. And that was a really powerful ceremony when we invited them into our circle.¹⁹

The importance of being able to engage in ceremony and in cultural practices was cited from Métis, First Nations, Inuit and 2SLGBTQQIA perspectives as an important way to heal. Ensuring access to these supports for all Indigenous people who need them, as well as for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in particular, is of vital importance for the journey forward.

“OFTENTIMES, WHEN WE THINK OF WELLNESS OR INTERVENTIONS WITHIN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM AND TRYING TO BRING THAT FORWARD, WE OFTEN THINK OF, “OH, WE NEED MORE INVESTMENT INTO THE HOSPITALS. WE NEED MORE INVESTMENT INTO CERTAIN PROGRAMMING.” HOWEVER, IT REALLY FAILS TO REALLY RECOGNIZE THOSE THINGS IN OUR COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE ALWAYS CARRIED US THROUGH.”

Leona Star



Circles for Reconciliation

Circles for Reconciliation is an initiative created as a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action. It aims at building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to enable them to learn from each other and move forward in reconciliation.^I

The Circles for Reconciliation format involves small grassroots gatherings across the country, on a weekly or biweekly basis, which engage in discussion circles guided by the Seven Sacred Teachings of the Anishinaabe: love, honesty, respect, truth, humility, courage, and wisdom. Groups of eight to 10 people make a commitment to meet for 10 sessions for 75 minutes and discuss topics such as the meaning of land for Indigenous Peoples, Nation-to-Nation partnerships, residential schools, and intergenerational trauma. The participants share in the circle using a talking stick and strive to achieve equality of all participants through patience and courtesy.

In her testimony to the National Inquiry, Anni P. described these talking circles as a positive way for non-Indigenous people to dispel their misconceptions about Indigenous Peoples and build more respectful relationships.

There's a ... circle I sit in. The circle is for reconciliation that was started in Penticton. And, again, there's more non-Indigenous people wanting to come and learn. And, there's a format online,

circlesforreconciliation.ca, so we decided to try it. What does this feel like? And we went through a few weeks of – so there's information on there and it talks about residential school and MMIW [missing and murdered Indigenous women] and – you know, many, many different things. We were talking about these things.

And, I'm one Indigenous person, and then there's one other Indigenous person that shows up every once in a while, but it's mostly, again, non-Indigenous people that are wanting this information.

And so, we were done at the end of our six or eight or 10 weeks that we were going to run – it was just a basic information ... just [to] get them started and looking. And we were going to have a final meeting, and okay, that's it, we've gone through the thing. And, all of them said, no, we don't want to end this. Can we keep going? They want to know more. Can we stick together? Can we continue to make change somehow? So, again, I see more hope.^{II}

I "Circles for Reconciliation."

II Anni P. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 80, Vancouver, BC, pp. 29-30.



The Arctic Rose Foundation

The Arctic Rose Foundation^I was created by Inuk recording artist and Knowledge Keeper Susan Aglukark to address many challenges faced by Northerners, especially children and youth, including poverty, addiction, trauma, and abuse. Susan shared about the work of the foundation in a panel at the Institutional & Expert/Knowledge Keeper Hearing in Winnipeg, MB.

Susan started this foundation as a result of her own lived experience as the survivor of child abuse. She began working on anti-violence campaigns and projects in the North in the late 1990s and early 2000s as her singer/songwriter career was taking off, and repeatedly tried to do this work in partnership with the Nunavut government. However, after being turned down several times, she finally created the Arctic Rose Foundation on her own.

The Arctic Rose Foundation promotes healing in Arctic communities through the arts by way of art therapy, music therapy, and literacy development. It delivers a variety of programming in spaces that are culturally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically safe.

One such program is the Creative Cultural Reflections program, which was piloted in 2018. Susan Aglukark describes it as a “program that provides youth with a much needed creative outlet and helps them to get in touch with their region’s cultural and historical communities, families and stories through research.”^{II}

This research is approached as an art form that is both therapeutic as well as a tool for learning about Indigenous traditional ways of life in the North. The foundation also offers after-school programs where children and youth can channel their creativity into beading, drawing, and painting, as well as other artistic activities.

One of the most exciting aspects of the foundation’s work, according to Susan, is that it has taught her that:

The government does not have all the answers.... At some point, we are going to have to engage as a people and find other ways and resources to contribute to solutions in control. And so, it has become an exciting project for us, the foundation work, because it is work, writing, exploration, research, facilitating for Inuit by Inuit. Organically as victims to help victims.... We are identifying the culture crisis, [and] developing programs to address the culture crisis from our lived experience.”^{III}

I “The Arctic Rose Foundation.”

II Greer, “Aglukark brings therapy.”

III Susan Aglukark (Inuit, Arviat), Mixed Parts 2 & 3, Public Volume 12, Winnipeg, MB, p. 226.



Eyaa-Keen Healing Centre

Winnipeg's Eyaa-Keen Healing Centre seeks to provide Indigenous people with an environment in which to heal that centres historic traumas and their impacts on Indigenous communities. "Eyaa-keen" is an Ojibway term that translates to "being self or being natural," which is an important concept at the heart of the programs offered through the healing centre.^I

Annie B. is an Inuk survivor of residential school and sexual violence who shared in the National Inquiry's Truth-Gathering Process. She is also a businesswoman living in Winnipeg, and sells traditional Inuit clothing she makes by hand. Despite the fact that Eyaa-Keen is not an Inuit organization, Annie received help from them for eight years to help her cope with the abuses in her life.^{II}

Eyaa-Keen provides a focus on what is known as Historic Trauma Transmission (HTT), which describes the cumulative emotional and psychological impacts of settler colonialism across generations.

The effects of European colonization have been expressed through five key areas of impact: physical, economic, cultural, social, and psychological. Eyaa-Keen attempts to centre the experience of the stress of these historic traumas and the way in which they have been normalized in cultural expressions and expectations of multiple generations, and how these impact the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Eyaa-Keen is focused on specific healing related to residential school survivors (and those affected by residential schools); victims of crime, including families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; as well as all others in need of mental health support through traditional healing.

Eyaa-Keen engages traditional Indigenous approaches to therapy to strengthen the spiritual aspect of the healing process. Programs include a cultural support program, a resolution support worker program for residential school survivors, as well as Indigenous Behaviour Trauma Specialist programs. Individuals may work with an Elder, a resolution health support worker, or a behavioural health specialist, or a combination of all three.

One of Eyaa-Keen's programs, called My Good Life, is designed specifically for the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The goals of My Good Life are to address grief and loss, offer culturally appropriate means to honour loved ones, and provide families with support through small group gatherings. In doing so, My Good Life works to help family members and survivors move forward.

I "Eyaa-Keen Healing Centre Inc."

II Annie B. (Inuit, Pangnirtung), Part 1, Public Volume 16, Winnipeg, MB, pp. 15-18.



Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society

Tsow-Tun Le Lum, or “Helping House,” is a registered non-profit healing centre in Lantzville on Vancouver Island, located on land leased from Nanoose Bay First Nation. Tsow-Tun is one of 10 residential treatment centres in British Columbia that is funded by the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program.

Tsow-Tun provides programming designed to help people with their addictions and substance abuse, while supporting survivors of historical and intergenerational trauma and residential schools. Tsow-Tun is also an approved Community Residential Facility for the Correctional Service Canada. The society’s stated mission is to “strengthen the ability of First Nations people to live healthy, happy lives and to have pride in their native identity.”^I

Currently, the society offers programs for substance abuse (Thuy Na Mut), trauma (Kwunatsustul), grief and loss (Honouring Grief), and codependency (Paddle Your Own Canoe). Tsow-Tun also provides emotional support for survivors of residential schools and their families. Each program is designed for Indigenous Peoples, and focuses on reclaiming a sense of Indigenous pride.

R.P., of the Tl’azt’én First Nation, described the many forms of abuse and assault she suffered to the National Inquiry, including how residential school and addictions affected her family, and how she was

eventually able to take control of her life. In particular, she pointed to how much the Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society helped her.

It’s the best trauma treatment. It was awesome. Yes ... I knew something was wrong with me. I knew that my life wasn’t right, I knew that there was things that should be different, but I didn’t know how to fix any of it because I never seen it any other way, so how could I fix something that I never saw? ... So, when I went to trauma treatment, they showed me myself. They showed me, *me*. And, from that point on, my life was different.”^{II}

R.P. currently shares her story with community groups to let others in similar situations know that they are not alone. She noted that sometimes the groups ask her how she survived that amount of trauma and she answers “I don’t know.” She does know that she is who she is today because of everything she’s been through, which includes the healing she has claimed for herself.

I “Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society.”

II R.P. (Tl’azt’én First Nation), Part 1, Statement Volume 380, Vancouver, BC, pp. 86-87.



The Tukisigiavik Society and Ilisaqsivik Society

Several Inuit communities have advocated for and established resource and support centres for families over the years. Two projects in particular have been successful in Inuit Nunangat.

The Tukisigiavik Society was established two decades ago as the result of a community consultation on homelessness and marginalization. Around the same time, in 1997, the Ilisaqsivik Society was created as a community-based organization to promote community wellness in Kangiqtugaapik/Clyde River, Nunavut. Since then, both of these societies have been running social and cultural programs for all Inuit, young and old, helping families with their health and well-being.

Elisapi Aningmiqu, an Inuk woman from Iqaluit, shared at the National Inquiry's Hearing on Colonial Violence how the Tukisigiavik Society plays a very important role in helping families connect with their cultural roots. Among other things, the Tukisigiavik Society's programs work with people who are homeless, single parents, or widows who may no longer have husbands who would traditionally bring them out on the land. The society helps them experience *maqainniq*, going out on the land, to help bring about a sense of well-being, self-esteem, resilience, and dignity. As Elisapi said:

I feel that it is very important to teach children the positive surroundings that we have in our homeland. So, I would hire local hunter guides to take us out, and we would pitch tents and be

camping out there.... I remember, a long time ago now, when we first started, one Elder, she got in a canoe, she said, "This is the first time I've been on a canoe since my husband died." And her husband had been dead for some 20 years.^I

Many Inuit who left their families to continue their studies down south had also lost cultural skills and knowledge. In response, the Tukisigiavik Society set up teaching programs to bring back *kamik* (skin boot) making to Inuit women who had not had that opportunity during their youth.

In Kangiqtugaapik/Clyde River, the Ilisaqsivik Society purchased a building and established the Community Family Resource Centre. Their programs are focused on education, health and nutrition, cultural activities, and counselling, along with the participation and leadership of Inuit Elders. An example is their mental health and counselling program, which provides counselling based on a combination of Western and Inuit knowledge and practices, including land-based counselling and healing workshops. The society also provides training to Inuit to become counsellors and support workers in child welfare, health centres, schools, addictions programs, mental health, and more.^{II}

I Elder Elisapi Davidee Aningmiqu (Inuit, Lake Harbour/Iqaluit), Mixed Parts 2 & 3, Public Volume 1, Iqaluit, NU, pp. 13–14.

II "Ilisaqsivik."



In Quebec City, Quebec, Elder Rebecca Veevee lights the qulliq as a way to open the hearings. Many who lit the qulliq and tended it for the duration of the hearings also shared how important it is to Inuit values and beliefs, and how the care of the qulliq relates to other elements of their lives.

“It’s just a work in progress”: Finding Other Outlets for Healing

Beyond ceremony and traditional knowledge, witnesses cited many other outlets as pathways to healing that also engaged elements of community building.

In Maliotenam, Quebec, Andrée V. explained how a ceremony and march were held in the community in the memory of her loved one: “They put her picture in the community hall.... They put flowers in there and then ... lanterns. But often I meet one of her friends again. Some of her friends became my friends. They also created a Facebook page in her memory too. Then there are still people who will write on her Facebook.”²⁰

Other forms of healing also engaged connection based in community and relationship. For instance, as Natalie G. shared, in relation to the death of her mother:

I have a project going on at my mom’s house, which I bought her home, and it’s about healing because there was a lot of people that said... “I never had closure.” They were used to popping in and having tea, *luski* [traditional Mi’kmaw bread].... Her little wood stove goes. There’s a pot of tea.... There’s – you know, I have red dresses to signify the missing and murdered women and children.²¹

In addition, and as Natalie’s project involves, witnesses cited the importance of giving back as an element of healing. As Matthew W. shared, in response to the question of what keeps him going: “We give back. We go do community things, like get bannock and give to the community, help prepare food for homeless people, and ceremony.... Giving back, I would say, is most important.”²² For Alisha R., whose mother, Laura, was murdered, giving back is a way to honour her mother and heal herself. As she shared candidly:



Being bad is easy and, like, being an ass is easy, and being mean to people and, like, all that stuff; that's easy. It's a lot harder to, like, go out of your way for somebody and, like, just genuinely mean it. You don't have to gain anything. And, like, I don't know. I try to do the stuff and I think about, like, what she would want. Or, I ask her for guidance and, like, little things like that.²³



In Calgary, Alberta, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs shows this banner during its closing submissions.

For some witnesses, engaging with others and helping others as a part of healing takes place in groups of women, working together. Rachel W. suffered abuse at home and was sexually exploited as a youth. She struggled with addictions and within violent relationships, and is now working on her recovery in her own life and through helping others. As she explained, “I give thanks every day and gratitude for being where I am.... So, each day I encounter, silently I am thankful, and it's just a work in progress. It's constant. Constant.”²⁴

“I GIVE THANKS EVERY DAY AND GRATITUDE FOR BEING WHERE I AM.... SO, EACH DAY I ENCOUNTER, SILENTLY I AM THANKFUL, AND IT'S JUST A WORK IN PROGRESS. IT'S CONSTANT. CONSTANT.”

Rachel W.

Kim C.-M. explained she is part of an organization called AnânauKatiget Tumingit, which means “all our mothers' footprints.” AnânauKatiget Tumingit works with women “developing their leadership skills, tackling, you know, some of the really difficult, hard issues that they have to deal with in the communities.... [We do this work] in honour of our mothers and our grandmothers and those strong leader women from our communities who came before us and taught us so much.”²⁵ It is focused on violence prevention and run by a volunteer board.



The Survivors Totem Pole

The Survivors Totem Pole was raised in Pigeon Park in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) on unceded Coast Salish territory on November 5, 2016. It is a grassroots public art project created as a symbol of resistance, persistence, and inclusion by master Haida carver, activist for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and National Inquiry Grandmother Bernie Williams (Gull Kitt Jaad), along with three apprentices.ⁱ

The Survivors Totem Pole is 27 feet (8.2 metres) tall and was carved out of a 1,000-year-old cedar tree from Haida Gwaii. The project took five years to realize and was funded in part by the Vancouver Park Board, as well as through a Kickstarter campaign run by the DTES-based Sacred Circle Society.

At the raising ceremony, Bernie told the media, "We are fighting for our dignity, homes and cultures and this Survivors Totem Pole is a symbol of that."ⁱⁱ The totem pole represents the various peoples who live in the DTES, including Indigenous, Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Filipino, Latin American, and 2SLGBTQQIA people affected by human rights struggles and historical wrongs in the area. It honours their survival from colonialism, gentrification, poverty, and racism, and now serves as a symbol of transformation, protection, and renewed community.

Several hundred people attended the public raising of the Survivors Totem Pole, which was raised in a potlatch ceremony according to Coast Salish and Haida protocols, in Pigeon Park, an important gathering place in the DTES. The raising of the pole served as an acknowledgement of reconciliation, and the crowd drummed and sang in celebration of community survival, resilience, and healing.

Bernie realized only after the event that the day they raised the Survivors Totem Pole was also another important date: "My mother died November 5, 1977. Who would have believed, you know, 40 years later I would raise the Survivors Totem Pole on her very date that I didn't even know."ⁱⁱⁱ



The Survivors Totem Pole. Facebook, Totem Poles of Vancouver Public Group, December 4, 2017, Vancouver, BC. No copyright infringement intended.

- I Pawson, "Survivors Totem Pole."
- II Ibid.
- III Bernie W. (Haida/Nuu-chah-nulth/Coast Salish), Part 1, Public Volume 115, Vancouver, BC, p. 26.



The Red Shawl Campaign

The Red Shawl Campaign at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) is part of a month-long awareness movement to bring attention to the issues surrounding missing and murdered Indigenous women. Started by UNB Elder-in-Residence Imelda Perley, it has been held every October since 2014.

The Red Shawl Campaign combines advocacy and healing for the community. Throughout October, red shawls are hung around the UNB campus as a reminder of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The Red Shawl Campaign has connections with the REDress Project, but is inspired by the cultural importance of the shawl in Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey societies. Shawls are traditionally given to women as they grow up as a symbol of protection, healing, and hope.¹

Elder Imelda spoke about the Red Shawl Campaign at the National Inquiry's Knowledge Keeper panel in Moncton, New Brunswick. She said that one of the most amazing parts of starting this campaign was the support they received from non-Indigenous allies, from the store that donated materials to the church group who knit and crocheted red shawls to donate.

Culminating in a series of events held over multiple days, the Red Shawl Campaign seeks to bring the community together while providing comfort and support to the families of lost loved ones. One of these events is a ballet performed by the Atlantic Ballet Theatre called *Ghosts of Violence*. The ballet presents Indigenous traditions and cultures to a greater public while raising awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women. In speaking about this partnership, Elder Imelda recalled:

I wanted it more Indigenous. I said I know your dancers can't wear shawls but is there anything I can do. Can I at least bless the ballet shoes that they're going to be dancing with because this message is spiritual, it's not just a performance. And so we got this idea to do artwork on the ballet shoes to give it more presence of our symbols.



In what has now become tradition, Indigenous artists paint the ballet slippers to be used in the annual Ghosts of Violence ballet. These slippers were painted by Claudia Gray and her son Oakley, from Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation. Facebook, Atlantic Ballet Atlantique Canada Public Page, September 29, 2016, Fredericton, NB. No copyright infringement intended.



So we put those symbols that you had on your pictographs on the ballet shoes. And the first year, you know, Claudia Gray did the beautiful artwork on the ballet shoes and actually I think they made posters of it. And I blessed the feet of

the dancers and we performed in our language so we represented four generations – the young girl, the teenager, the mother, and the grandmother. And so, so that's how it started and ... we just did our third year!"

I UNB Newsroom, "Red Shawl Campaign."

II Elder Imelda Perley (Wolastoqew), Part 1, Public Volume 44(a), Moncton, NB, pp. 155–156.



Healing for Future Generations: Engaging Youth in Wellness

For many people, the importance of healing lies not only in the current generation, but in the future ones, through work with youth. The importance of healing youth also featured prominently in testimony concerning the need to heal in Métis, First Nations, Inuit, and 2SLGBTQQIA communities, further explored in our analysis of the Guided Dialogues in Chapter 11. As Lorraine S. shared,

What I see happening is our kids are doing their own suicides now, or now they're killing each other because they don't have a connection, they don't have a bonding with somebody. They don't have a bonding with the grandparents anymore, with the parents – it's all disrupted.²⁶

Some witnesses discussed their work with youth as a way to engage youth in wellness. Travis Hebert, who is Cree/Métis and who is part of the hip hop duo Mob Bounce, discussed his work with youth like those from 'Na Aksa Gyilak'yoo School, who appeared before the National Inquiry to share "The Highway," the song they wrote in November 2016 as part of a creative writing and artistic expression project at their school in Kitsumkalum. As he explained about his work in connecting youth to the healing power of culture and identity:

A lot of it relates to being able to connect with inner space and sacred space. And when we go through experiences in our lives, whether they're trauma or memories that are difficult, you know, even good ones, there's this inner space that's tampered with that creates walls and blockages.

For youth, Travis explained, the impact of this kind of disconnection is clear:

And when we go into communities, you know, you can see through the body language, you know, where the eyes are – you know, some youth tend to go into this space and look down. It's because they're protecting themselves. There's a very vulnerable space within.²⁷

"AFTER I PUT ALL MY FEELINGS DOWN ON PAPER AND WE FINISHED THE SONG, WE ALL ENDED UP BREAKING DOWN AND CRYING BECAUSE WE'RE PUTTING OUR VOICES OUT THERE, WE'RE STANDING UP FOR WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO SHOW."

Youth from 'Na Aksa Gyilak'yoo School

Youth themselves who were part of the panel talked about how engaging in the project helped them to begin their own healing journey: "After I put all my feelings down on paper and we finished the song, we all ended up breaking down and crying because we're putting our voices out there, we're standing up for what we are trying to show."²⁸



Leona Simon, who spoke as part of the Youth Panel held in Moncton, explained how connecting with cultural crafts is helping her: “Recently I started doing the medallions with the sealskin and that’s pretty cool in itself as well.... But I haven’t been beading long, maybe three or four years, and it’s helped me focus a lot on keeping calm and there’s a lot of love that’s put in it and I hope it heals just as much as it looks beautiful.”²⁹

There were many important programs, initiatives, and outlets for grief shared within the context of the National Inquiry; in common, they included a foundation in a culturally safe, distinctions-based approach that allowed families to heal at their own pace. Together, they emphasize the importance of self-determined methods of healing appropriate for the community or family they engage.



In St. John’s, NL, Gerri Pangman of Peguis First Nation and her daughter Corley McPherson were present to offer their talents to those who attended hearings and who needed an outlet, through beading. A self-described wife and mother of four wonderful children, Gerri explained: “I began beading when I was 14, self-taught through a book. I eventually stopped beading for many years up until the tragedy of my sister Jennifer’s passing in 2013. I remember that first time picking up a needle and thread again with the many beautiful beads in front of me, it brought me some peace as I was mourning my sister’s death. I realized how much healing there is through beading, and how soothing it is. It is truly my passion to share this healing therapy that beading brings with other MMIWG family members as it was so healing for me, so for just that brief moment we can just feel a sense of normal and laugh and share together as we get to know each other, to help ground each other and know we are all in this together.”



The Young Bears Lodge

Young Bears Lodge is a healing lodge for Indigenous youth aged 13 to 18 who want to change their relationship with alcohol or drugs. Based in Vancouver, it is run by the Urban Native Youth Association.

Recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work best for youth, its approach draws attention to the uniqueness of each individual, their strengths, knowledge, skills, preferences, and goals, in support of changes they wish to achieve.

With an Indigenous focus, the lodge brings traditional teachings, cultural practices, and communities of origin to the forefront to help youth move toward health and well-being. Its philosophy includes two-eyed seeing, culture as therapy, trauma-informed care, harm reduction, and person-centred care. Its programming includes community cultural events, such as going to Pow-Wows, workshops with Elders and traditional Knowledge Keepers, teachings on traditional ceremonies, individual and group counselling, connecting with positive role models, healthier coping skills, life skills, and many more. Indigenous youth are introduced to many aspects of their own cultures, and are guided toward educational paths of their choosing and provided with referrals to additional services and programs.^I

Patrick S. told the National Inquiry about his experience of trauma as the result of his older sister's murder when he was only 15 years old. Living through the hurt and difficulties brought on by that trauma, he self-medicated with alcohol and drugs. He highlighted information that had a significant impact on

him from a report written by the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth about Paige, a 19-year-old Indigenous teen who went through years of neglect and "persistent inaction" from more than 40 social workers in her life before she died of an overdose in April 2013.^{II}

In particular, Patrick affirmed the healing and stability that culture can bring to the lives of Indigenous youth.

The one line in that Paige report that stood out to me, it said, "The one time Paige had stability was when she was in Young Bears treatment centre, a youth-based cultural treatment centre." That was the one time she had stability, they said in the report. And I believe that because that has been what has stabilized my life, you know, learning about my culture.^{III}

Patrick was very grateful for the cultural and spiritual direction he received. However, healing through culture should be available to every Indigenous youth, not just a lucky few.

I "Urban Native Youth Association – Young Bears Lodge."

II Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, "Paige's Story."

III Patrick S. (Kwagw'ł, Fort Rupert, Qualicum), Part 1, Public Volume 102, Vancouver, BC, p. 10.



The Good Touch/Bad Touch Program in Nunavik

The Good Touch/Bad Touch program in Nunavik started in 2012 as a collaboration between the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, the Department of Youth Protection, the Kativik Ilisarniliriniq School Board, Nunavik health centres, and the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF).^I

KRPF Prevention Counsellor Lizzie Aloupa shared about her experience piloting the Good Touch/Bad Touch program at the National Inquiry's panel discussion on the healing journey of Inuit women.

The Regional Health Board decided that we would prioritize sexual abuse in Nunavik. At that time, we didn't know what to do, where to begin. I was the only Inuk in a committee that decided to work on that.

So, in the beginning ... we pilot-projected the Good Touch/Bad Touch program. The Health Board had taken this program and we went over it, we translated it, we adapted it to what we needed, and we did that in Kindergarten and Grade 1 ... because I'm a certified teacher, I went to teach the program in two schools.

In the second school, we realized that one teacher and one worker could not even bear to hear the word[s] "sexual abuse," so I realized before we go into the classrooms, we have to work with the front-line workers first. So, Pauktutit Inuit Women of Canada had this ... resource called "The Hidden Face." It is about a

woman who was sexually abused.... So, we built a two-day healing workshop using that resource.

...

We only go to communities that request the program, because sexual abuse is rampant in all the communities, or was. So, when we're invited to a community, we take the front-line workers, give them the two-day "Hidden Face" healing workshop, and give them orientation to sexual abuse, and then we go into the school.

We do the same thing with all the staff of the school, and then finally we go into the classrooms and we teach each class three times, as prescribed by the program. And on the fourth day, we meet each child to make sure that what we taught them was understandable.^{II}

The Good Touch/Bad Touch program teaches children about abuse, about safe and unsafe touches, and about who can help them if they are threatened or harmed, using skills appropriate to their age.^{III} It is a positive example of different service providers coming together to help protect children in a culturally sensitive way.

I Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, "Good Touch/Bad Touch."

II Lizzie Aloupa (Inuit, Quaqtaq), Part 1, Public Volume 66, Montreal, QC, pp. 10–11.

III Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, "Good Touch/Bad Touch."



The Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre

The Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC) is one of many projects set up by the urban Inuit of Ottawa. It is a parent-driven initiative that provides cultural, educational, recreational, and social services to Inuit children and families (including land-based family camps), supports for adoptive and foster parents, supports for Inuit women experiencing partner violence, and other programs.^I

Reepa Evis-Carleton, originally from Nunavut, told the National Inquiry about her work at the OICC.

I'm now working with the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre and I'm really loving it.... I work as a mental health counsellor and we work with the family. We run the parenting courses, the Inunnguiniq parenting courses.... It's 20 weeks long and it's for Inuit parents. So, it's been really wonderful to have that running.^{II}

Karen Baker-Anderson is the executive director of OICC, and, as one of the interesting facts she shared, said, "We deal with many children who have never, in fact, lived or seen or experienced the North in any way, shape, or form, other than the cultural stories and the pictures that are passed to them as they visit the centre and speak with their families."^{III}

The OICC includes educational programs on language and culture, connects Inuit Elders with youth, and provides support to children and families receiving medical care. The OICC also organizes an art studio program to bring culture and language skills to children and youth.

From having started with only five staff, the OICC now employs over 60 people, offering a wide variety of helpful programs serving Inuit families living in Ottawa. As Karen Baker-Anderson shared with the National Inquiry:

The services are nothing but a tool kit to help people. People ask, "How have we grown this agency?" And it's simple. We have done what the Inquiry needs to do. We have asked Inuit: "What do you need?" We have listened, and we have responded. The community built this agency. It is theirs. You can see it in the eyes of the children when they walk through the doors. You can hear it with the staff and how proud they are of their work.

...

There needs to be healing, we need to get back to what Inuit always know and have known: that children are the centre of the universe. Without children, there is no community.^{IV}

I "Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre."

II Reepa Evis-Carleton (Inuit, Pangnirtung), Part 1, Public Volume 66, Montreal, QC, p. 20.

III Karen Baker-Anderson, Part 1, Public Volume 66, Montreal, QC, p. 23.

IV Karen Baker-Anderson, Part 1, Public Volume 66, Montreal, QC, pp. 29–30.



“We can’t have only the women heal”: Healing Men and Boys

Of the key themes we encountered within the context of healing, many witnesses, particularly among Inuit and First Nations participants, cited the importance of healing men as a way to combat violence. Among witnesses, some men, who are also former perpetrators, came forward to share their story. We acknowledge their participation and their willingness to begin to rebuild trust by sharing their stories in such a public way.

Bernard A. grew up surrounded by violence and was sexually abused. He also witnessed the abuse of his family members, who were abused in front of him. As part of his trauma, Bernard became a substance abuser and became violent himself. As an adult, Bernard has committed to trying to break this cycle for his children. Bernard’s son was recently murdered, and he has struggled with that pain. Bernard recounted the circumstances that led him to begin his healing, to confront his violence toward those around him, after he put two of his friends in hospital.

When I went to see the judge in Cornwall, Ontario, he gave me an ultimatum. “Either go to rehab or go to prison for 25 years for being a very violent person,” he said. I could not see myself as a caged animal, so I chose rehab. And, when I went to rehab, that was just to get away from the jail. I loved getting drunk, got up getting stoned, 22 years old. I had no problems.

But once he was in the program for two months, he said, “I started hearing people’s stories similar to mine.” He began to speak in group and “the floodgates opened.” He was able to talk about his childhood trauma, including the molestation, the rape, and the violence that he had witnessed. “All that hurt and that pain, I had to forgive the people that did it to us,” he said.³⁰

Matthew W., who was sexually abused as a child, talked about violence that he himself perpetrated in his home, and how finding a way toward healing began with listening to the women around him.

I had to listen to my wife. I had to listen to the females in my life ... just being able to look at myself and say, “Well, why am I doing it this way? Why am I doing it that way?” You know? Where did I go wrong? And, just reflect. And, I think that – and being honest with myself, you know what I mean? Being honest with myself was key. I mean, I look back at who I was and I hate that person, but I also love them.³¹

As a member of the National Inquiry’s Elders and Grandmothers Circle, traditional medicine carrier Audrey Siegl explained how the work that she does is about the community as a whole – including men: “We don’t just do it for our women here, we don’t just do it for brown women, we’re doing it for *all* women. We’re doing it for all little girls. And then we have to open that up to boys and men. We can’t have only the women heal.”³²



The idea that healing must extend to men was reflected in many of the testimonies we heard from fathers, brothers, and male relatives and friends. In particular, this idea was especially prominent within Inuit testimonies offered both during the course of the National Inquiry's hearings and within the Guided Dialogues discussions. For instance, both Harriet and her husband Johannes L., Inuit from Labrador, testified about how intimate partner violence in their community was aggravated not only by the lack of services for Inuit women fleeing from violence, but also by the need for their male partners to heal from intergenerational trauma.³³



In Calgary, a drumming circle offers a song.

A Lifetime of Healing

For some witnesses, appearing before the National Inquiry to testify in relation to loved ones was a healing experience. Amena E. H., who shared about her mother, Mary, an Inuk woman murdered in 2002 when Amena was only five years old, explained how, for her, sharing has helped.

I think the best thing anyone could ever do in a situation like mine is to continue to talk about it. And continue to bring awareness to it because it sometimes it feels like it's just being shoved underneath a rug or something like that. And it needs to be talked about. And it helps with the healing to talk about your feelings and the anger, the sadness, and the grief. It needs to be something to be worked on.³⁴

Sarah B., testifying about her daughter Mary Ann, said, "I have been shut down, I have clamped down my emotions for this long and at last I let them go before you.... I thank you so much for this opportunity to speak. I would otherwise have never spoken about it, ever."³⁵ She continued: "Let's keep moving forward together; I still have life in me to live.... I feel now, from this point on I will be able to speak more about it. I want to start healing, too. It is not something I need to be ashamed of, as it turns out; it's not shameful to speak of – it is not my shame."³⁶



Virginia C., whose mother's body was not recovered until three and a half years after her murder, explained how testifying before the National Inquiry is the first step, but that her healing can never be complete: "For me, it was just the beginning of my true healing, my true healing time, but I wonder, does one ever dream in this lifetime? I feel I will only be made whole when I am reunited with Mom in the time of eternity. That's when I'll be made complete."³⁷

Similarly, as Robert P. Sr., testifying about the murder of his daughter Virginia over 20 years ago, explained, "They say healing will come about and will heal each and every one of you. I don't believe that. I've waited 24 years for healing. It heals, all right, but then when that subject comes up, it's like – just like opening that wound all over again, you know."³⁸

"I THINK THE BEST THING ANYONE COULD EVER DO IN A SITUATION LIKE MINE IS TO CONTINUE TO TALK ABOUT IT. AND CONTINUE TO BRING AWARENESS TO IT BECAUSE IT SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE IT'S JUST BEING SHOVED UNDERNEATH A RUG OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. AND IT NEEDS TO BE TALKED ABOUT. AND IT HELPS WITH THE HEALING TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS AND THE ANGER, THE SADNESS, AND THE GRIEF. IT NEEDS TO BE SOMETHING TO BE WORKED ON."

Amena E. H.

For most witnesses who spoke on this subject, the issue of finding closure as an essential part of healing was key. In situations, for instance, where a loved one was never found, or the remains never recovered, that essential step can be missing. In other situations, the issue ... of not being able to put the person to rest properly was exacerbated by social or financial hardship that made reuniting a person's remains with their homeland difficult. As Nikki K. explained, in relation to her cousin Jessica:

We had her funeral in Winnipeg. My foster parents put the funeral on and hundreds of people showed up because we were well-known throat singers in Winnipeg, and when it was time to bring her body back home to Chester, CFS [Child and Family Services], the justice system, Nunavut, no one wanted to pay for her body to come back home and that really hurt. Why? Why a young girl, 17 years old that's from Nunavut, her roots are here and no one wanted her back home. My foster parents were on the verge of selling their house just to bring her body back home.³⁹

The National Inquiry heard from many families who stressed the need for proper burial and care for a loved one's remains, and the financial hardships associated with doing so for many families. For Inuit, this was especially true, where loved ones died far away from their home communities.



The Importance of Access to Healing

As many witnesses identified, addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people must include healing of the individual, of the family, and of the community. These interventions can be transformative.

However, solving the crisis of violence and promoting healing in all Indigenous lives isn't something that will happen quickly or easily. Healing requires an important commitment to long-term positive outcomes. While many witnesses cited the importance of healing to their lives, they also pointed out that many Indigenous people don't have, or can't, access services. Marilou, who discussed her participation in providing ceremony for those who need it, explained how important it is for more people to be able to engage in this work.

We need to have that kind of healing for the people [who] have been affected by this because they're never going to heal. It's always going to be raw pain unless we can help them more. So there has to be – more work has to be done. There's got to be more – more solutions, more – more money so people could be hired to do this.⁴⁰

Annie B., a residential school and sexual abuse survivor, explained how a healing centre helped her, but she still struggles with access to health and wellness services. Despite having benefited from several healing programs over the years, as she explained:

Right now, I don't have any [programs] who can help me, because there's a lot of me needs to do more healing. And, I ask you, for my own people, if there can be a long-term help available, wherever, in Nunavut, or down here, anywhere, because we who have been so hurt, it's living in us [the] rest of our lives.⁴¹

As Cheryl A. pointed out:

Whether it's culture, counselling, whatever it is they need support in.... All the services [have] to be provided and it has to be indefinite. There should be no time frame on the healing services provided. That needs to be sent strongly as a message to Canada, you know. This is not something that [can] happen overnight, and it's going to take a heck of a lot longer for us to be able to address [these issues].⁴²



In Ottawa, the National Inquiry handed out painted commitment sticks to symbolize a public commitment to addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. In this photo, Commissioner Robinson hugs Corley McPherson, who has just received her commitment stick.

Finding Strength

As Cheryl M. shared, healing work should involve one mission statement, one intention: “Organizations shouldn’t have different ones, they should all be the same: helping teach our people to care for themselves, to value themselves; to keep themselves safe.”⁴³ As Veronica M. explained, true healing at all levels needed to make change means long-term, and engaged, support: “Support should be available to everyone anytime someone is seeking support. We are being watched all the time from above. We must be kind to one another and should help those in need when they need it.”⁴⁴

“Giving back” is part of the foundational pillars guiding the National Inquiry’s approach to healing and wellness. We approach wellness from a holistic perspective, which ensures that emotional, physical, mental, social, and spiritual aspects are considered, as each provides a unique contribution to well-being. Our vision for healing and wellness was to contribute to an empowering experience, preserve dignity, show compassion and kindness, and inspire hope.

The National Inquiry committed to the development of a comprehensive approach to community engagement aimed at fostering an empowering experience for participants throughout their involvement before, during, and after sharing their truth. In support of enhancing opportunities for all to participate, the National Inquiry recognized the importance of community outreach in order to more effectively engage those who chose to participate in the Truth-Gathering Process.



According to Elder Lillian Pitawanakwat, Ojibwe/Potawatomi, “The strawberry teaches forgiveness and peace. The strawberry is shaped like a heart, and strawberries are known to our people as heart berries.”

The strawberry is, in part, a representation of our vision. Many Indigenous Nations consider the strawberry to be women’s medicine. It is heart shaped and is connected to a vast system of leaves, runners, and roots; so, too, is the heart connected to all the organs and parts of the human body. The heart is the centre of the human. The heart berry helps us understand connection between the mind, body, spirit, and emotions.⁴⁵

In the words of Haudenosaunee Elder Jan Longboat, the strawberry represents Konnorónhkhwa, commonly translated as “I love you” or a caring and compassion toward another relation. Jan explains that when you say this to someone, it represents your dedication to loving them to the end. It was important to weave the strawberry teachings into every phase of the continuum of care process to “show you care,” as Jan explains, because the strawberry reminds us of the commitment to provide support through all stages of the journey. We tried to be mindful of this when supporting family members and survivors of violence who shared their truth within the Truth-Gathering Process.

Our understanding of community engagement is a communication process for working collaboratively with families and survivors, as well as other key stakeholders, to address issues related to their participation in the Truth-Gathering Process. This approach was developed through collaboration with family members and survivors from different Indigenous communities and perspectives, who helped us to understand how to best develop, implement, and maintain a program to support wellness for those who came forward to share their truths. We are grateful for their voice and guidance in the development of the following four foundational aspects rooting our best practices, which allowed us to establish a circle of support for family members, survivors, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who journeyed with the National Inquiry.



These foundational concepts are to:

1. Reflect a holistic understanding of wellness that tends to all aspects of well-being, including emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being;
2. Work within a trauma-informed approach that is woven into all aspects of practice;
3. Create culturally safe spaces respectful of identity, beliefs and language; and
4. Incorporate both Indigenous and Western supports.

Our vision for healing and wellness was to contribute to an empowering experience, preserve dignity, show compassion, kindness, and inspire hope through a principled approach.

Holistic Wellness

Elder Jim Dumont describes wellness from an Indigenous perspective as

a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one's connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment. The spirit causes us to live, gives us vitality, mobility, purpose and the desire to achieve the highest quality of being alive in the world.⁴⁶

The National Inquiry embraces a holistic understanding of wellness that includes spiritual well-being as “central to the primary vision of life and worldview ... being rooted in family, community and within creation as extended family is the foundation of belonging and relationships.”⁴⁷ This is known as the “heart level,” and is necessary for total well-being. Well-being also includes a mental aspect, and represents “the conscious and intelligent drive to know and activate one's being and becoming.”⁴⁸ Finally, physical well-being, defined as the extension of spirit and mind, is also key in wellness, and in being able to participate in events and experiences that activate and ensure well-being.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

Trauma-informed services take into account an understanding of trauma in all aspects of service delivery and place priority on trauma survivors' safety, choice, and control. They create a treatment culture of non-violence, learning, and collaboration. Working in a trauma-informed way does not necessarily require disclosure of trauma. Rather, services are provided in ways that recognize needs for physical and emotional safety, as well as choice and control in decisions affecting one's treatment. In trauma-informed services, safety is created in every interaction. In trauma-informed contexts, building trust and confidence paves the way for people to consider taking further steps toward healing and recovery while not experiencing further traumatization.



Researchers and clinicians have identified key principles of trauma-informed practice. These include:

1. **Trauma awareness:** All services taking a trauma-informed approach begin with building awareness among staff of how common trauma is; how its impact can be central to one's development; the wide range of adaptations people make to cope and survive; and the relationship of trauma with substance use, physical health, and mental health concerns. This knowledge is the foundation of an organizational culture of trauma-informed care.
2. **Emphasis on safety and trustworthiness:** Physical and emotional safety for people dealing with trauma is key because trauma survivors often feel unsafe, are likely to have experienced boundary violations and abuse of power, and may be experiencing, or have experienced, unsafe relationships.
3. **Opportunity for choice, collaboration, and connection:** Trauma-informed services create safe environments that foster a client's sense of efficacy, self-determination, dignity, and personal control. Providers of care aim to communicate openly, equalize power imbalances in relationships, allow the expression of feelings without fear of judgment, provide choices as to treatment preferences, and work collaboratively. In addition, having the opportunity to establish safe connections – with treatment providers, peers, and the wider community – is reparative for those with early and/or ongoing experiences of trauma.
4. **Empowerment and strength building:** Care services help participants to identify their strengths and to further develop their resiliency and coping skills. Emphasis is placed on teaching and modelling skills for recognizing triggers, calming, centring, and staying present. Parallel attention to staff competencies and learning these skills and values characterizes trauma-informed services.⁴⁹

The National Inquiry outlined its understanding of trauma-informed care in its *Interim Report*. In this approach, we committed to shaping the National Inquiry process as much as possible around the needs of those affected by trauma, instead of the other way around. We incorporated knowledge of trauma into our policies, procedures and practices whenever possible. Our trauma-informed approach also included creating culturally safe spaces for survivors and family members to share their stories, and placing equal value on Western and Indigenous healing approaches.

Developing a continuum of care grounded in a trauma-informed approach was critical, from registration to initial contact and conversation to family members and survivors sharing their truth to working with the health team on after-care supports. This continuum was guided by foundational principles which aimed to produce a positive empowering experience for those who engaged in the National Inquiry Truth-Gathering Process.



Foundational principles included:

- centring family and survivors;
- being respectful of gender and cultural identity;
- drawing on strengths and resilience;
- creating culturally safe spaces;
- honouring the right of choice;
- treating everyone with compassion;
- using a proactive and flexible approach to identifying needs and challenges;
- supporting the individual's rights, including privacy; and
- ensuring a collaborative approach with external parties where feasible.

These guiding principles aligned with our commitment to not cause further harm. At the same time, we acknowledge that we were unable to ensure a trauma-informed approach was taken at all times and deeply regret any situations where people may have been triggered and did not feel well cared for.

Participation of Family

When establishing supportive protocols and practices for the National Inquiry, it was of utmost importance to promote a sense of safety. Family members and survivors of violence repeatedly shared that feeling safe and connected to their family is necessary for healing and maintaining wellness throughout this process, meaning that family members of those who were sharing their truth were able to participate in a supportive role. It was important for us to honour their voices, and, early on in the process, we adopted the definition of “families of the heart,” an inclusive term that extends beyond the nuclear or even extended family to include individuals chosen as family members. These chosen families, or families of the heart, may not be biologically related, but have made the decision to stay closely involved and support each other out of mutual love and respect.

Those participating in the National Inquiry were encouraged to identify their family support circle throughout the journey and were empowered to engage them if they chose to do so. Many did choose to have their families attend in person as a support when they shared their truth, and were provided resources to assist the families in attending in this capacity.

Inclusion of families, including families of the heart, made an important difference for those testifying. As Courtney B. shared, “I’m really grateful that my family is able to come together. The ones that have come, you know, on our healing journey and embarked on, you know, this spiritual path to be here for one another, to support one another, to see that we’re here.”⁵⁰



Inclusion of Peer Support

Fostering connections with those who have experienced similar circumstances is essential and plays a role in enhancing comfort and cultivating a sense of belonging, especially for individuals who may not feel a strong connection to biological family or community. We understood the importance of this early on, and, in preparation for the first hearing in Whitehorse, we included lay counsellors and actively engaged regional Resolution Health Support workers,⁵¹ faith-based supports, and family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and survivors of violence in our circle of support teams for the hearing. This practice was replicated for all events as we witnessed a strong lay support movement across the country, with the family members of those missing and murdered, as well as survivors of violence, holding each other up and sharing the responsibility to care for one another. As Marilou S. shared, “When I was helping those people, they were helping me.... So I was really grateful for that.”⁵²



In Calgary, Alberta, NFAC members Charlotte Wolfrey, Cynthia Cardinal, Sarah Noyakallak, and Bonnie Fowler speak to those in attendance, accompanied by interpreter Minnie Amidlak.

Culturally Safe and Specialized Services

When individuals share their experiences of trauma, strong emotions emerge. Some may experience panic attacks and other responses to increased levels of stress. Offering access to specialized practitioners is critical when supporting individuals who have experienced trauma. Throughout the process, we engaged local respected Elders and traditional people to guide us in ceremony and play an active role in ensuring the Truth-Gathering Process was grounded in a calming way, incorporating local protocols, ceremony, and medicines. As Reepa Evic-Carleton noted about her healing and as a part of the National Inquiry’s Inuit Perspectives Panel,

I started talking to an Elder. What really helped me was I really had to share what was going on with me, so I started sharing with an Elder and she listened and listened, never judged. And, I cried a lot. I didn’t even know what was happening to me because I’ve never lived this kind of a life before.⁵³



Although many family members and survivors chose support from Elders, it was important for us to also include specialized services on-site. We included psychologists, psychiatric nurses, and counsellors in our circle of support throughout the Truth-Gathering Process. Our best intentions were to include Indigenous practitioners where requested, though access to some of these services was limited by availability. When we included non-Indigenous practitioners, we chose individuals who had an understanding of the historical context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and an understanding of intergenerational trauma.

“I STARTED TALKING TO AN ELDER. WHAT REALLY HELPED ME WAS I REALLY HAD TO SHARE WHAT WAS GOING ON WITH ME, SO I STARTED SHARING WITH AN ELDER AND SHE LISTENED AND LISTENED, NEVER JUDGED. AND, I CRIED A LOT. I DIDN’T EVEN KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO ME BECAUSE I’VE NEVER LIVED THIS KIND OF A LIFE BEFORE.”

Reepa Evic-Carleton

The National Inquiry’s Aftercare Program, and Lessons Learned

The National Inquiry was mandated by the Terms of Reference to conduct matters in a trauma-informed way and to make culturally appropriate support available to registered families who shared their truth in order to ensure continued healing. As a result, we developed a short-term aftercare framework to guide the provision of these services. Family members and survivors of violence who shared their truth played an active role in creating an aftercare plan inclusive of their personal wellness needs. Providing support after an individual shared their truth was critical in assisting them along their healing journey.

Our short-term aftercare program was intended to address immediate needs, where support would be provided for up to three months. This would enable time for referral to organizations for longer-term support where available. Financial resources were made available up to \$3,500 to support the implementation of the individual aftercare plan. It was important for us to advocate for individuals to have full choice and control of their aftercare, as we heard throughout the Truth-Gathering Process that many family members and survivors were not seeking support from grassroots organizations and government services. In many cases, witnesses cited no culturally appropriate or preferred services in their community, a lack of trust in the service providers, a lack of financial resources to engage in memorials for lost loved ones, and geographical barriers to accessibility.

With these concerns in mind, the National Inquiry established an aftercare program that tried to address these concerns. It was the first of its kind in terms of its establishment of individualized and needs-specific contribution agreements between the government and the family member or survivor. This meant that each individual who shared their truth could develop an individualized aftercare plan, outlining their needs. Financial resources would go directly to them to implement



this plan. This approach meant that organizations would no longer receive the funding to create aftercare support but rather, in keeping with being trauma-informed and supporting the individual's right to make choices around their healing, family members and survivors could create a healing plan which resonated with their immediate wellness needs.

Ultimately, the financial support for aftercare services could be used to fund the following:

- referrals to existing support services and programs which may have financial implications such as treatment centres, counselling, and on-the-land healing programs;
- costs to attend ceremonial events, including: travel and accommodation, meals, child care, honorarium for Elders if the ceremony they're conducting is not part of an organization's event, supplies (e.g. medicines, cloth);
- traditional healing and counselling from an established Healer/Elder/Cultural Liaison;
- Western counselling from a qualified professional;
- memorial and commemoration events/ceremonies;
- travel costs, including transportation and hotel accommodation;
- workshops related to healing and wellness, such as suicide intervention, grief and loss, working through trauma;
- activities that support and enrich physical wellness; and
- other reasonable items considered upon special request.

The majority of aftercare activities requested for short-term healing were cultural and commemoration activities. Access to ceremony and traditional healing practices was a recurring request we heard throughout the aftercare process. Visits with Elders, harvesting medicines, making regalia, feasts, beading, healing circles, land-based healing programs, hunting and gathering of traditional foods, and attending Pow Wow, Sundance and sweat ceremonies, and other spiritual practices were commonly requested.

It is important to note that many family members didn't differentiate between commemoration, healing and wellness; in fact, we heard repeatedly throughout the Truth-Gathering Process that the act of commemoration and remembrance of a lost loved one is most often expressed in a ceremonial way and contributes to the grieving process needed for healing. As Virginia C. explained, for example, after a farmer found her mother's remains outside of Prince Albert, "That gave us some closure. At least then we could bury my mother next to her mother on Sturgeon Lake Reserve. My mother's remains were buried, we had a traditional funeral which was very, very releasing of our emotions and our sorrow."⁵⁴



Elder Sarah Ponniuk lights the qulliq in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Conclusion: Respect and Connection

For Monique F. H., whose work helping others is informed by her own experiences, drawing from the stories and experiences of other women gives her the motivation to continue to work to heal others: “Hearing the stories of the women that I work with.... They lift, you know, they give you so much strength. I try to give that back to them all the time.”⁵⁵ Providing strength and lifting others up, and doing so in a spirit of respect and of connection – these are principles that witnesses articulated over and over again. Understanding that healing requires a holistic approach and must be delivered in a culturally safe and specific way, without an expiry date, is key to ensuring that whatever solutions are generated as a result of this process can be successful. The provision of self-determined services led by those who know best what they, their families, and their communities might need is an important and basic truth upon which all others must be based.

“HEARING THE STORIES OF THE WOMEN THAT I WORK WITH.... THEY LIFT, YOU KNOW, THEY GIVE YOU SO MUCH STRENGTH. I TRY TO GIVE THAT BACK TO THEM ALL THE TIME.”

Monique F. H.



Notes

- 1 Elaine D. (Cree, Mistawasis First Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 21, Edmonton, AB, p. 24.
- 2 Monique F. H. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 17, Membertou, NS, pp. 96-97.
- 3 Monique F. H. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 17, Membertou, NS, p. 98.
- 4 Monique F. H. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 17, Membertou, NS, p. 100.
- 5 Stephanie H. (First Nations, Fort McKay), Part 1, Public Volume 20, Edmonton, AB, p. 129.
- 6 Adrienne B. (Cree) Part 1, Public Volume 23, Edmonton, AB, p. 47.
- 7 Courtney B. (Peguis First Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 11, Winnipeg, MB, pp. 13-14.
- 8 Amena E. H. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 55, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL, pp. 24-25.
- 9 Alisha R. (Métis), Part 1, Statement Volume 453, Edmonton, AB, p. 65.
- 10 Harriet L. (Inuit, Nain), Part I, Public Volume 57, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL, p. 15.
- 11 Micah A. (Inuit, Talurjuaq), Part 1, Public Volume 46(b), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 10.
- 12 Anni P. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 80, Vancouver, BC, p. 26.
- 13 Treaty 6 Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 24, Edmonton, AB, pp. 4-5.
- 14 Kirby B. (Cree Nation of Nemaska), Part 1, Public Volume 60, Montreal, QC, p. 62.
- 15 Delilah S. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 17, Membertou, NS, p. 69.
- 16 Shae-Lynn Noskye, (First Nations), Part 1, Public Volume 96, Vancouver, BC, pp. 53-54.
- 17 Marilou S. (Bear Clan, Anishinaabe), Part 1, Statement Volume 563, London, ON, p. 115.
- 18 Leona Star (Nehiyawak), Part 1, Public Volume 10, Winnipeg, MB, p. 69.
- 19 Monique F. H. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 17, Membertou, NS, p. 115.
- 20 Translation ours. Andrée V. (Pessamit), Part 1, Public Volume 32, Maliotenam/Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, QC, p. 79.
- 21 Natalie G. (Mi'kmaq), Part 1, Public Volume 18, Membertou, NS, p. 80.
- 22 Matthew W. (Brokenhead Ojibway Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 9, Winnipeg, MB, p. 132.
- 23 Alisha R. (Métis), Part 1, Statement Volume 453, Edmonton, AB, p. 23.
- 24 Rachel W. (Métis), Part 1, Public Volume 9, Winnipeg, MB, p. 116.
- 25 Kim C.-M. (Inuit, Labrador), Part 1, Public Volume 49, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL, pp. 3, 4.
- 26 Lorraine S. (Thunderchild First Nation and Mosquito First Nation), Part 1, Statement Volume 112, Saskatoon, SK, p. 36.
- 27 Travis Hebert (Cree/Métis), Part 1, Public Volume 6, Smithers, BC, pp. 106-107.
- 28 Student from 'Na Aksa Gyilak'yoo School, Part 1, Public Volume 6, Smithers, BC, p. 86.
- 29 Leona Simon, (Elsipogtog First Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 45(b), Moncton, NB, pp. 23-24.
- 30 Bernard A. (Inuit, Happy Valley-Goose Bay), Part 1, Statement Volume 437, Kuujuaq, QC, p. 10.
- 31 Matthew W. (Brokenhead Ojibway Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 9, Winnipeg, MB, p. 131.
- 32 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 70.
- 33 Harriet L. (Inuit, Nain), Part I, Public Volume 57, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL, p. 10.
- 34 Amena E. H. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 55, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL, p. 18.
- 35 Sarah B. (Inuit, Iqaluit), Part 1, Public Volume 65, Montreal, QC, p. 33.
- 36 Sarah B. (Inuit, Iqaluit), Part 1, Public Volume 65, Montreal, QC, p. 33.
- 37 Virginia C. (Métis), Part 1, Statement Volume 117, Saskatoon, SK, p. 23.
- 38 Robert P. Sr. (Mi'kmaq), Part 1, Public Volume 19, Membertou, NS, p. 4.
- 39 Nikki K. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 46(a), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 44.
- 40 Marilou S. (Bear Clan, Anishinaabe), Part 1, Statement Volume 563, London, ON, p. 19.



- 41 Annie B. (Inuit, Pangnirtung), Part 1, Public Volume 16, Winnipeg, MB, p. 18.
- 42 Cheryl A. (First Nations), Part 1, Public Volume 11, Winnipeg, MB, p. 29.
- 43 Cheryl M. (Wolf Clan, Mohawk Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 59, Montreal, QC, p. 62.
- 44 Veronica M. (Inuit), Part 1, Statement Volume 263, Rankin Inlet, NU.
- 45 Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Strawberry Teachings.”
- 46 As cited in National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (now known as the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation), University of Saskatchewan, Assembly of First Nations and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, “Definition of Wellness.”
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, “Trauma-informed Care.”
- 50 Courtney B. (Peguis First Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 11, Winnipeg, MB, pp. 9-10.
- 51 The Resolution Health Support Program provides professional counselling, emotional support, and cultural support to those needing care. The program is also instrumental in support of former residential school survivors and family members, outside of the context of the National Inquiry.
- 52 Marilou S. (Bear Clan, Anishinaabe), Part 1, Statement Volume 563, London, ON, p. 19.
- 53 Reepa Evic-Carleton (Inuit, Pangnirtung), Part 1, Public Volume 66, Montreal, QC, p. 17.
- 54 Virginia C. (Métis), Part 1, Statement Volume 117, Saskatoon, SK, p. 8.
- 55 Monique F. H. (Cree), Part 1, Public Volume 17, Membertou, NS, p. 126.



“I am here for justice, and I am here for change”: Commemoration and Calling Forth

Introduction: Beyond Commemoration

Speaking about Mi'kmaw history, Miigam'agan, a Mi'kmaw Elder in residence at St. Thomas University, explained how the ancestors preserved identity and knowledge through artistic expression.

Everything that our ancestors took, [they] turned it into such beauty, such art, and used every tool that they ever had access to, to write, to tell us stories, to record history. So from carvings to paint on the rocks, to tools of beadwork, you know, and the way we dressed, all that was all of stories about our identity, our history and who we are as a people.¹

These expressions by ancestors are preserved now, in the present, in efforts directed toward emphasizing the foundation upon which the National Inquiry is based: that our women and girls are sacred.

This concept goes beyond the traditional confines of what has been understood as commemoration in Canada. Among other changes, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action have changed the dialogue around commemoration, compelling non-Indigenous Canadians to begin to acknowledge and remember the ongoing impact of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples and communities. The TRC's Calls to Action 79, 80, 81, and 82 all speak to the importance of approaching commemoration through a new lens. This includes Indigenous representation in decisions on commemoration, the establishment of new initiatives, such as a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and residential schools monuments across the country for victims of the system. In addition, Call to Action 83 is a call for the Canada Council for



the Arts “to establish, as a funding priority, a strategy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.”²

In the National Inquiry’s *Interim Report*, we supported these calls, and called upon governments to engage in cross-jurisdictional action plans on a variety of issues, including public education and greater public awareness on this crisis. In particular, the National Inquiry called upon the federal government to establish a devoted fund

in collaboration with national and regional Indigenous organizations (including Indigenous women’s organizations) and in partnership with family coalitions, Indigenous artists, and grassroots advocates who have spearheaded commemoration events and initiatives related to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2S people.³

“EVERYTHING THAT OUR ANCESTORS TOOK, [THEY] TURNED IT INTO SUCH BEAUTY, SUCH ART, AND USED EVERY TOOL THAT THEY EVER HAD ACCESS TO, TO WRITE, TO TELL US STORIES, TO RECORD HISTORY. SO FROM CARVINGS TO PAINT ON THE ROCKS, TO TOOLS OF BEADWORK, YOU KNOW, AND THE WAY WE DRESSED, ALL THAT WAS ALL OF STORIES ABOUT OUR IDENTITY, OUR HISTORY AND WHO WE ARE AS A PEOPLE.”

Elder Miigam’agan

In early 2019, the federal government responded with the launch of its \$10 million commemoration fund, with the objective to “honour the lives and legacies of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and LGBTQ2S individuals; and, [i]ncrease awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and LGBTQ2S individuals.” The fund allows Indigenous organizations and Indigenous governments to access commemoration funds to “work with families, survivors and/or communities” to design initiatives aimed at “honouring, educating, remembering, memorializing and paying tribute to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and LGBTQ2S individuals.”⁴ Initiatives can include events like Pow-Wows and healing circles, as well as community monuments and other forms of commemoration. Maryam Monsef, minister of Women and Gender Equality, announced the initiative, adding: “The fund will raise awareness about this ongoing tragedy that has affected Inuit, Métis and Indigenous peoples across this country.”⁵

In many ways, the purpose of the commemoration fund reflects what we heard from family members appearing to testify for a lost loved one, or from survivors speaking out about their experiences. In other ways, though, witnesses appearing before the National Inquiry went further, calling not only for commemoration, but for commemoration activities that ultimately support concrete action and the need to recognize their experiences as rights violations, in order to make change for future generations. In particular, many families noted the need to gather with other families, as well as their own families, in order to remember, to gather strength to move forward, and ultimately, to heal.



This chapter first examines what witnesses shared about the impact of commemoration within their lives, and then links to the importance of calling forth these teachings to reduce violence and increase safety. Then, this chapter examines the many artistic expressions within our Legacy Archive that speak to this important work, as well as the National Inquiry’s engagement in decolonizing practices in caring for them. This chapter shares the important lessons generated through meaningful art engagement and outreach, including our ReClaim Project, led by award-winning artist Jaime Black.

We characterize these expressions, through art, as the act of “calling forth.” This includes calling forth the legacies of those who no longer walk among us; calling forth awareness that leads to concrete action; and calling forth the power and place of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people as a pathway to healing and, ultimately, to safety.

Commemoration and Calling Forth from the Perspectives of Families

For witnesses sharing their truths with the National Inquiry, commemoration included the act of remembering loved ones. In many cases, witnesses discussed the importance of commemoration as a component of healing, as well as of making sure that their loved ones are never forgotten. As Alisha R. explained in regards to her mother, Laura, “I thought being part of something like this would be, like, the closest thing to closure that I will ever get. It’s just so that if she is, like, listening, she can know that, like, I did everything I could. And now she won’t be forgotten.”⁶ Fallon F., whose parents were murdered when she was a child, discussed a memorial held 20 years later:

It was always important for us to remember them, and to continue to have them in our memories. And to make sure that other people do as well, because if we don’t continue, then their memories and what they went through disappears. And it shouldn’t be forgotten.⁷

“I THOUGHT BEING PART OF SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD BE, LIKE, THE CLOSEST THING TO CLOSURE THAT I WILL EVER GET. IT’S JUST SO THAT IF SHE IS, LIKE, LISTENING, SHE CAN KNOW THAT, LIKE, I DID EVERYTHING I COULD. AND NOW SHE WON’T BE FORGOTTEN.”

Alisha R.

Many witnesses also pointed out the importance of events, or markers, within the commemoration of their loved ones. Some of these events were public, and some, more private. In many cases, public and personal commemoration combined to create important healing experiences.



Markers or monuments in honour of victims were diverse, depending on the community in which they took place. As Marie P., testifying for her sister, Virginia, said:

We have [a] sister spirit walk. What else do we do? We do gatherings. We put a quilt up on our reserve ... we had a quilt of ladies – women and men that were missing and they have it on a quilt. It's on display there in our gymnasium and we have a lot of support.⁸

Shaun L., testifying about his mother, Jane, indicated how markers and monuments aren't just about memorializing, but about acknowledging the important legacy of those who might otherwise be painted simply as victims. As he explained:

One thing is there has to be a memorial in every community, First Nations community, with the names engraved of all the women, names not to forget... We have to have, I don't know, a symbol or something where those names are engraved and there forever. Because they did something. They did something great. They brought in the next generation. My – my family and my friends who sit behind me, their mom, their grandma gave them some amazing life lessons and those have to be remembered.⁹

Shaun's testimony speaks to the importance of commemoration as a way not only to remember those who no longer walk among us, but also as a way to call forth the legacies they have left for the future.

Many witnesses also identified how attending events and participating in community could help other families as well as contribute to their own healing journey. Harriet L., testifying about her daughter, explained:

I do a lot... I help with [the] Take Back the Night March in September. I attend vigils when I can. I attended Sisters in Spirit vigil[s] and my daughter's picture is always up in other vigils... That's how – that's how our Inuit ancestors lived, to let go so that we can – so their spirit can be set free.¹⁰

Similarly, for many people, the National Inquiry represented a forum in which these memories could come alive and serve another purpose. As Ruby F., testifying in relation to her sister, said, "But I was really happy, given the opportunity to speak about my sister Linda [F.], because all my life it felt like I needed somebody to know something about my sister."¹¹

"IT WAS ALWAYS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER THEM, AND TO CONTINUE TO HAVE THEM IN OUR MEMORIES. AND TO MAKE SURE THAT OTHER PEOPLE DO AS WELL, BECAUSE IF WE DON'T CONTINUE, THEN THEIR MEMORIES AND WHAT THEY WENT THROUGH DISAPPEARS. AND IT SHOULDN'T BE FORGOTTEN."

Fallon F.



Daniel B. also explained why it's so important to remember.

It's important that as many people come forward as possible because, I mean, these stories are what – you know, it's what's going to benefit, you know, trying to make this happen, because if we don't talk about the stories of these women, you know, they're forgotten. If they're forgotten and their stories are forgotten, what do we have to come back on? You know, what do we have as proof or evidence that, you know, these are the effects of what has happened and this is what's going to continue to happen for years to come?¹²

Many witnesses also testified to the idea that, beyond creating action for future generations, their loved ones' experiences provided strength – were called forth – as a way to contribute to reclaiming power and place in the present. Many testimonies, from diverse Indigenous perspectives, included these themes. When asked how she would like her loved one remembered, Martha A. U. explained: "I would like her – her character to be emulated because she was able to help other people that needed clothing or in need of food to fill their stomachs. I think Canadians, you would learn of her character, that's how we should live as Canadians."¹³ Delilah S., speaking in relation to the murder of her sister, Loretta, expressed a similar sentiment: "She's someone that I still look up to and that I feel really guides me. And someone who – who's still teaching me today through the conversations that we've had and the things that she's lectured me on. But she – she's still very much in my heart."¹⁴

Cheryl M., testifying in relation to her sister Carleen, explained how dancing in her sister's regalia helps her to call forth.

I know when I put on that regalia, she dances with me. And I have to honour her, honour her for showing me how life ends or life begins; and she was my greatest teacher. And in our way, when someone dies, they say, "They came in our lives for a reason, to teach us." And so, she was my teacher. She showed me how to be strong, how to communicate if someone's mistreating me. How to love my kids when I didn't feel like it because I was grieving or I was angry. She taught me to love them, and I did the best I could.¹⁵

In relation to Jessica, her cousin, Nikki K. said: "I always say the strength that I have now ... is because of Jess. She shows me something and does something for me to know that she is there for me and guiding me and helping me. I believe that 100%."¹⁶

Some witnesses directly connected to what the loss of their loved one and the calling forth of those memories mean in concrete terms. Laura M., testifying in relation to her aunt, talked about the importance of calling forth and connecting with reducing violence for future generations: "How can the Inquiry honour my loved one, Betsy [K.]? There are many ways you can honour a young woman's life in future generations of Inuit that will go ahead of her."¹⁷ Laura went on to specify important areas for improvement in services and safety for Inuit women.



Similarly, for Fallon F., the most important part of remembering victims is about addressing the causes of violence that led to their death or disappearance in the first place: “Make the changes. That’s the best I can say. No memorial. That’s not going to do anything. Make the changes that need to be done. It has to stop; otherwise, it’s just going to continue.”¹⁸

“I KNOW WHEN I PUT ON THAT REGALIA, SHE DANCES WITH ME. AND I HAVE TO HONOUR HER, HONOUR HER FOR SHOWING ME HOW LIFE ENDS OR LIFE BEGINS; AND SHE WAS MY GREATEST TEACHER. AND IN OUR WAY, WHEN SOMEONE DIES, THEY SAY, ‘THEY CAME IN OUR LIVES FOR A REASON, TO TEACH US.’ AND SO, SHE WAS MY TEACHER. SHE SHOWED ME HOW TO BE STRONG, HOW TO COMMUNICATE IF SOMEONE’S MISTREATING ME. HOW TO LOVE MY KIDS WHEN I DIDN’T FEEL LIKE IT BECAUSE I WAS GRIEVING OR I WAS ANGRY. SHE TAUGHT ME TO LOVE THEM, AND I DID THE BEST I COULD.”

Cheryl M.

The Legacy Archive

Honouring the lives of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people for future generations is an important theme that animates the National Inquiry’s own research and engagement; the idea of linking to this theme through art is the foundation of the Legacy Archive.

The Legacy Archive is based on the idea that art in particular is a powerful tool for commemoration and for calling forth. It can send a message of hope, resilience or reconciliation. Artistic expressions can bear witness to injustice, recognize the human dignity of those who are targeted, and raise awareness that will ultimately hold accountable those who are responsible for the violence that persists today and ultimately, effect change. Art is also an important tool for healing. As expressive arts therapist, philosopher, and educator Stephen K. Levin has found, art is important because “there is in the use of art a capacity for self-expression that is desperately needed by those who suffer intensely.”¹⁹

The National Inquiry’s Legacy Archive is a key component of ensuring that families and individuals are able to remember and to call forth their loved ones in deeply personal expressions aiming to raise and to support their memories, as well as to raise awareness of the crisis of violence. As Alisha R. testified, art provided an outlet for her to redirect her energies.

I don’t go out very often anymore. I stay home and I do art now. I needed a hobby. Something, like, safe, and something I could do by myself ... and that was, like, just healthy.... So I chose painting. So, that’s what I do now.... It’s a quiet life but, like, when I think of, like, what I’m going to get at the end, it’s worth it.²⁰



Art also represents a way to share that may be more accessible for some than communicating in words. Principal Biilts'ik Colleen Austin, an educator appearing as part of a panel with the 'Na Aksa Gyilak'yoo School (Kitsumkalum First Nation), explained: "Education can be so impactful – so much more impactful when it's done with artistic expression.... This is how our youth learn, and know, and understand so well, and this is how they get the confidence to be here today."²¹

Travis Hebert, of the hip hop duo Mob Bounce, echoed the sentiment in his testimony to the National Inquiry.

You know, the way that we live is through art, whether it's carving, painting, dancing, singing, drumming, all of it is there. It's like the foundation of who we are. And so that needs to be fostered a lot more in education. You know, like creativity should be, you know, at the centre of education, because that's who we are.²²

The practice of creating art, for some, is also a means to take powerful messages to those who need to hear them the most; their art represents a form of activist art. Artist Helen Klebesadel defines "activist art" as "historically specific ... [and which] aims to address particular cultural, political and social concerns with a view to producing concrete social change."²³ Klebesadel argues:

The arts and culture can teach our citizens to be critical thinkers that can analyze social messages and decide for themselves what they believe. The arts are a place where we share our differing belief systems in ways that allow us to learn to understand each other, and they help us to define our values as communities, and as a larger society. The arts can be a place of original discovery and deep social criticism.²⁴

This idea echoes what many witnesses, and artists, expressed. For example, as Halie B. described her efforts:

I have participated in various art projects. The most recent one is one called "Testify," which is an exhibit put on by the Indigenous Laws + the Arts Collective, that pairs lawyers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous legal thinkers, with artists, to explore areas of Indigenous laws.... One of the things I wanted to do was to challenge this notion that I came across in law school called *Racine v. Woods*, where the judge in that case decided in favour of a non-Aboriginal foster parent, that, in the words of the court, culture abates over time. Bonding doesn't matter. "Culture abates over time." *Racine v. Woods*.²⁵

As these examples demonstrate, the links between art and culture, art and healing, and art and justice were important for many witnesses, whose own art practice arose directly out of the violence they or their loved ones experienced. The question of how to properly care for these expressions, and to make sure they are accessible to the public, is what animates the National Inquiry's practices within the Legacy Archive.



The Legacy Archive acknowledges the power of archives and the important gaps that exist in framing Indigenous histories and perspectives. For this reason, the National Inquiry takes on an activist archival approach where it actively collects records – specifically, artistic expressions – in order to promote rights of victims, to include Indigenous cultures from around the country, and to make people aware of the violence that witnesses and their families have faced, for educational, research, and outreach purposes.

The Legacy Archive has collected artistic expressions through donations (from family members of missing and murdered loved ones, intergenerational survivors, and those working toward reconciliation), education projects, or acquisitions from artists and storytellers with an interest in the subject. The Legacy Archive houses over 340 artistic expressions created by over 800 participants. It is an archive that allows art by all people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and in any language from anywhere in the country, with the provisions that the expression address culture, healing, justice, and commemoration of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and/or draw attention to violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Subjects could include Indigenous historical knowledge, culture, language, acts of resistance, activism, the honouring of those who are missing and murdered, acts of commemoration or reconciliation, and art as a means of healing.

“YOU KNOW, THE WAY THAT WE LIVE IS THROUGH ART, WHETHER IT’S CARVING, PAINTING, DANCING, SINGING, DRUMMING, ALL OF IT IS THERE. IT’S LIKE THE FOUNDATION OF WHO WE ARE. AND SO THAT NEEDS TO BE FOSTERED A LOT MORE IN EDUCATION. YOU KNOW, LIKE CREATIVITY SHOULD BE, YOU KNOW, AT THE CENTRE OF EDUCATION, BECAUSE THAT’S WHO WE ARE.”

Travis Hebert

The Complicated Nature of Archives

While, from the outset, the National Inquiry acknowledged the need to properly steward these important expressions, it also recognized that archives are laden with a colonial history that has often contributed to the erasure of Indigenous voices. As archivists Joan Schwartz and the late Terry Cook contend, traditionally, archival records are all about “maintaining power, about the power of the present to control what is, and will be, known about the past, about the power of remembering over forgetting.” In this context, they can serve to “wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies.”²⁶ For example, when archivists appraise and select, arrange, describe, and preserve records, they convey particular values. Records also reflect the purpose of the creation of the record, the desires and requirements of its creator, as well as the legal, technical, organizational, social, and cultural-intellectual context in which the creator was operating, and under which the records are accessed in the present. Archivists Joanne



Evans, Sue McKemmish, Elizabeth Daniels, and Gaven McCarthy reinforce this statement by explaining how both the records and the institutions that keep them are places of power, expressed through the laws, policies, culture, ethics, theories, and models upon which they are founded.²⁷

While archives may, traditionally, uphold oppressive power structures, they can also work in a different way. As Schwartz and Cook point out, “Archives have the power to privilege and to marginalize. They can be a tool of hegemony; they can be a tool of resistance.”²⁸

One way to overcome the challenges of the colonizing archive, argues Mick Gooda, a Gangulu person from Central Queensland and a Royal Commissioner for Australia’s Royal Commission into the Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems of the Northern Territory, is for archives to implement articles from the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). He suggests that these principles can be used as a type of quality assurance for archives. Gooda believes that the right to self-determination; participation in decision making; free, prior, and informed consent; resetting relationships; and cultural rights are the key points an archival institution can take from UNDRIP. Gooda suggests that the right to self-determination allows

Indigenous peoples to be central players in record keeping processes from the beginning. Their voices, aspirations, cultures and their value and knowledge systems must be respected and accommodated. The onus is on the institutions of archiving and record keeping to evolve in order to accommodate Indigenous peoples, rather than on Indigenous peoples to conform to mainstream practices.²⁹

Additionally, he stresses that having Indigenous Peoples or communities participate in the decision-making process improves the lives of that people and community.

UNDRIP has also been cited in a Canadian context as an important tool for archives to incorporate into policies that address the management of Indigenous archival records, or records that incorporate Indigenous knowledge. Several of the TRC’s Calls to Action identify UNDRIP as the “framework for reconciliation” (for example, calls 43, 46, and 92). Calls 69 and 70 specifically enjoin archives to apply UNDRIP.

In addition to applying UNDRIP, the TRC’s Calls to Action also suggest the need to apply what are known as the Joinet-Orentlicher Principles on the Preservation and Access to Archives Bearing Witness to Human Rights Violations. Their roots lie in a set of principles approved in 1997 by the United Nations Human Rights Commission and recommended by United Nations Special Rapporteur Louis Joinet in his report on the question of the impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations, and which were updated by lawyer Diane Orentlicher in 2005. The Joinet-Orentlicher Principles attest to the power of archival records and outline the resulting responsibilities of archivists, including the need to provide avenues for victims to access records about themselves created by state, military, intelligence, and police services. Furthermore, the



Joinet-Orentlicher Principles also push for penalties for those who falsely conceal, destroy, or remove important records from archives, especially those from agencies that are responsible for the protection of human rights and security agencies.³⁰

These principles have enormous implications for archives and archival theory. Essentially, these principles propose that an archive must:

- facilitate access to relevant records for the marginalized or violated community;
- create measures for preservation of these records;
- build relationships among archives, the courts, and extra-judicial commissions of inquiry; and
- take measures relating to the management of the archive with respect to restoration or transition to democracy and/or peace.³¹

By applying all of these principles, the National Inquiry developed a set of policies governing the Legacy Archive that centres decolonizing Indigenous protocols for archives from its very foundations. Beginning with UNDRIP, the Legacy Archive's policies include articles 8.1, 11.1, 12.1, 15.1, and 31.1.³²

Article	Legacy Archive Policy
UNDRIP 8.1	The Legacy Archive will be inclusive and will collect all artistic expressions that share Indigenous knowledge, especially materials used to relay knowledge about Indigenous traditions, culture, acts of resistance to colonialism, special events, and historical truths.
UNDRIP 11.1	The Legacy Archive will preserve any artistic expressions that are donated, including records of performative arts, ceremonies, sculpture, written text, paintings, and much more.
UNDRIP 12.1	The Legacy Archive will adhere to all ceremonial and traditional protocols that go with the donation, as per donor's request. Further, the Legacy Archive will adhere to all access and privacy restrictions, based on any cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial traditions as instructed by the donor.
UNDRIP 15.1	The Legacy Archive acknowledges, and is aware of, the diversity of Indigenous cultures and Nations, and will be sensitive to, and stay away from, any type of pan-Indigenous teachings and descriptions of any artistic expressions donated.
UNDRIP 31.1	With that, the Legacy Archive will always allow a donor to change her/his/their minds about her/his/their donation in any capacity (continuing consent) and apply standards of free, prior, and informed consent. The power of ownership will always stay with the donor. The Legacy Archive will always be respectful of the relationship, and honour the donation for which it was given.



In addition, the Legacy Archive also worked to operationalize the following Calls to Action:

Call to Action	Legacy Archive Policy
TRC Call to Action 13	The Legacy Archive will accept archives in any language, especially those that are in any Indigenous languages, and the Legacy Archive will take on the responsibility of getting the records translated into English and French. This makes the records accessible to the public across the nation, but the Legacy Archive primarily aims to preserve the record in the donor's preferred language.
TRC Call to Action 79	The Legacy Archive will integrate Indigenous values, practices, and ceremonies into the processes of archiving, including use of language and the handling of Indigenous objects. Further, the Legacy Archive will work with donors to share the story about their donation; a variety of recording options (either audio, video or written text) are available to preserve the donor's statement about their art and its meaning, so that donations truly reflect the donor's voice. This provides the user with a more engaged, emotional, and powerful relationship with the artistic expression.
TRC Calls to Action 43 and 44 (with UNDRIP)	The archive will inform a donor about the nature of this archive, how the records donated to their archive will be used, and recognize the conditions under which knowledge can be ethically and legally acquired.

The Legacy Archive has also implemented the best practice protocols for Indigenous archival materials that were published by the First Archivists Circle, known as *The Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*. These protocols establish the importance of building relationships of respect and understanding the wishes of people/communities; they stress the importance of discussions of education for the public and of understanding the issues surrounding the Indigenous people/communities. The Legacy Archive has implemented these protocols throughout its policies.

Artistic Expressions from the Legacy Archive

Many artistic expressions within the Legacy Archive honour those who no longer walk among us, and, in doing so, illustrate the importance of relationship and of community for those loved ones who remain.

Commemoration

At the hearings, witnesses were able to put artistic expressions into the *Miskwaabimaag* Basket. The *Miskwaabimaag* Basket was created by a group of Indigenous *kwe* (“women”) in Manitoba: the *Miskwaabimaag* Collective (“red willow collective”). The basket was gifted to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to assist the Commissioners as they gathered the stories of loved ones, families, and survivors of violence. For many Indigenous Peoples throughout the world, baskets are used to gather things that support our *mino-biimaadiziwin* (“the good life of all beings”). *Miskwaabimaag* (“red willow”) is used by many Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island. It is often used in ceremony to demonstrate respect and to



provide spiritual protection. The red willow used for this basket was harvested near the *Manito Api* sacred site, a place where Indigenous people have gathered for ceremony for thousands of years.

The basket represents kwe; it symbolizes our continued connection to land, language, and culture through the ceremonies and teachings of our grandmothers. It is a visible reminder of women's important role in building, strengthening, and repairing relationships. As the National Inquiry



The National Inquiry included the Miskwaabimaag Basket (red willow basket) at each of the hearings to symbolize the process of gathering truths, which are then woven together as a whole.

undertook its work, the basket held all of the truths that are gathered by the Commissioners. These stories are teachings that help identify ways we can work together toward a collective good life.

For example, Gerri Pangman and Kim McPherson, who testified at the Winnipeg Community Hearing on behalf of their loved one, Jennifer McPherson, donated a dream catcher Christmas ornament and stained glass feather. As they explained, Jennifer used to make ornaments herself, and making the ornament, which was placed in the Miskwaabimaag Basket during the ceremony, was an important way to honour Jennifer and her creativity. To each ornament they make, Gerri and Kim attach a card explaining who Jennifer is so that she is never forgotten.



Glass feather, Gerri Pangman and Kim McPherson, AF A2017-0013.2.

There were multiple donations in memory of babies at the Malietenam Community Hearing. Many people

talked about babies taken away for often questionable “medical reasons,” who were frequently never seen again. To this day, families are unable to get details of what happened to their babies or get death certificates.



Agnes Poker is an Innu woman from Pakua Shipi, Quebec, who donated a heart-shaped swaddle with embroidered baby socks, booties, a baby bottle, and mitts. This represents the shocking rape and murder of a baby in foster care in the 1980s. Marie-Louise Mark, an Innu woman from Pakua Shipi, knitted a pair of baby socks and donated them



Heart Shape Swaddle w/Accessories, Agnes Poker AF A2017-0038.1.

on behalf of her son, who was taken and is one of the missing from the community. He was taken at just 10 months old. Brown baby booties were donated by the Unamen Shipu Women's Association.



Brown baby booties, Simone Bellefleur on behalf of Unamen Shipu Women's Association, AF A2017-0040.1.

These booties represent the first steps of the baby and also protection of the baby, and so the empty booties represent the spirit of the missing baby.

Mothers also featured in many of the artistic expressions received. *Motherly Love* was painted and donated by Dee-Jay Monika

Rumbolt, whose Inuk name means Snowbird, from Port Hope Simpson, Newfoundland. A member of NunatuKavut, Monika donated *Motherly Love* in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Monika remembered how hard her mother worked as a provider and protector for their family: "She was so loving and so compassionate ... and her compassion for others, her dedication, her strength, made me what I am today and is incredible that we got this far.... She's like no other person ... I'm going to do her justice."³³



Motherly Love, Dee-Jay Monika Rumbolt (Snowbird), AF A2018-0008.1.



Some works of art were community collaborations, including the wooden star blanket curated by a Cree artist, Jessica Slater, composed of 128 individual tiles. Each tile was hand-painted by survivors and families affected by missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls at the Saa-ust Centre in



**Community Art Piece,
Saa-Ust Centre, AF A2018-
0049.1-0049.128.**

the Downtown Eastside while the National Inquiry was in BC. The Saa-ust Centre is a space for families and survivors affected by missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, an idea brought to life by the City of Vancouver's Urban Indigenous Peoples Advisory Community. Saa-ust Centre opened its doors to the National Inquiry as a pop-up location for statement gathering in the spring and summer of 2018, where the survivors and family members could make a statement with the National Inquiry and share their thoughts on small wooden tiles that made up the star blanket. The tiles were beautifully illustrated with feathers, red dresses, flowers, and the medicine wheel. Some had encouraging words: "Our Women and Girls are Sacred," "Gone but Not Forgotten," "Justice," "Cultural Resurgence," "Cultural Healing," "Truth-Respect-Humility-Love-Wisdom-Courage-Honesty," "Hope," "We Stand Together," "Beautiful," and "We are All One – Namwiyut."

Jason Sikoak, an Inuk man from Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, painted the watercolour *Sister Drummer in Faded Red*, along with an accompanying poem of the same name. The watercolour depicts an Inuk woman drumming and was created in memory of a loved one, Elaine Flowers. The poem reflects the heavy emotion one carries of the loss of a loved one.



**Sister Drummer in
Faded Red, Jason
Sikoak, AF A2017-
0017.1.**



Her amauti is empty ...
She carries no child ...
Her burden is heavier than any.
She carries with her the names:
... of the missing
... of the murdered
... of the lost mothers, sisters, and daughters ...

The red is fading from the fabric of her amauti as the struggle of those left behind
fades from the consciousness of those not mourning the loss of a sister ... a mother ...
a daughter ...
Faded also, by the salt of the tears as we mourn those taken from us ...
Her song, her drum, her voice ... will never fade ...
She drums to have them remembered ...
Those lost to us forever ...³⁴

The Legacy Archive also received musical expressions. For example, Vince Fontaine donated his song “Through the Flood,” with the accompanying music video. The song addresses violence and the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Vince’s daughter Gabrielle Fontaine sings in the song performed by Vince’s band, Indian City. As Vince explained:

It is our small and humble contribution to this tragic issue.... We want to remember those we have lost, and share the weight with families in pain. Socially, we want to foster a future of healing and positive change. Politically, we want to continue the conversation of equal weight to tragedies across the communities.³⁵

Musical expressions to the archive also included a song by Adele Keyes about the suspicious death of Annie Pootoogook, an Inuk artist from Cape Dorset, Nunavut, who was found in the Rideau Canal on September 19, 2016. Adele wrote the song, as she explained in donating her expression, “in honour of Annie, the legacy she left behind, and the questions that remain concerning her tragic passing.”³⁶

As these expressions demonstrate, individuals and organizations who donated to the Legacy Archive shared deeply personal recollections of those who have been taken through many of the rights violations detailed within this report. These donations represent important touchstones for commemoration, as well as for calling forth, to work toward eliminating violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.



Healing

The Legacy Archive also received many expressions calling attention to healing, both personal and collective, from the historic and ongoing traumas of colonialism.

For example, a heart puzzle collage was donated through the British Columbia Bereavement Helpline at the Vancouver Community Hearing. This heart puzzle collage was made by family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The family members participated in the first annual Sisters in Strength Wellness Retreat



*Sisters in Strength,
Melodie Casella on
behalf of the BC
Bereavement Helpline,
AF A2018-0019.1.*

held in October 2017 at Sts'ailes Lhawathet Lalem (Sts'ailes Healing House). The wellness retreat was hosted by the British Columbia Bereavement Helpline and organized by Terry Androvsky (counsellor support). Each woman was given a puzzle piece to create a memorial to their loved one with various art supplies. When put together, the pieces formed a heart. Each broken piece could be put together to reveal strength, love, and beauty. One of the women took her piece home, which left a hole in the heart. This happened for a reason: it expresses how family members live the rest of their lives with a piece missing from their heart. Members stated that “being in a grassroots setting with ladies who also understand grief and loss, it brings forth the healing along with strength.” Another family member stated that it “helped me gain my balance once again.”³⁷



*Etched vase and medicine,
Gerri Sharpe, AF A2018-
0001.1 to 0001.2.*

Gerri Sharpe made the etched vase pictured on the left at a glass workshop with Robbie Craig, a northern artist. On the sides of the vase are etchings of wind and on the front, an etching of a muskox. In her testimony at the Yellowknife Community Hearing in January 2018, Gerri shared that muskoxen give both meat and strength, and that they protect their young by forming a circle around them. She also donated a smudge that accom-



panies the vase, made up of ground sweetgrass, cedar, tobacco, and sage. It is the last smudge from Walking With Our Sisters, for which Gerri was the keeper of the sacred bundle. She gifted the vase with the smudge to the National Inquiry during her testimony at the Community Hearing in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

In Quebec, a sacred antler was donated by Jean St. Onge, an Innu man from Uashat mak Mani-utenam, at the Community Hearing in Maliotenam. He shared the story behind the antler in a video. The sacred antler has travelled with the National Inquiry since then, and was part of the National



*Sacred antler,
Jean St. Onge, AF
A2017-0035.1.*

Inquiry's sacred bundle at each hearing. Jean spoke of the oral history and importance of the master of all animals, "Papa Kasi," and how he is the protector and helps the others to survive. That is why he put a caribou antler on the base: so it will help us find our direction. The base is painted in red, signifying Indigenous Peoples, and the closed flowers painted on the base represent witnesses before they testify, when they are closed off to the world. There are also open flowers, and the open flowers are the witnesses after they testify.



*Wall Mural – Bear Clan,
Veronique and Brigitte
André, AF A2017-0041.1.*

Also from Maliotenam, Veronique and Brigitte André donated a bear wall mural, which hangs on the wall. It was created by Brigitte in memory of their parents. As they explained, the bear is very important in their community in many ceremonies; the spirit of the bear is a symbol of strength and bear oil is used as healing medicine. In addition, their father was a hunter.

Veronique and Brigitte offered this mural as a way for families to begin healing and to give them courage on their journey. They also offered the mural in memory of their uncle and aunt who went missing many years ago.



Walk with Us and Bella Spirit, Nicole Carpenter, AF A2018-0014.1 to 0014.2.

Walk with Us and Bella Spirit is a piece in two parts painted and donated by Nicole Carpenter, a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation, from Bella Bella, British Columbia, who came to the Vancouver Community Hearing to support her sister. These paintings show Nicole's community of Bella Bella from the view of her grandmother's house on the beach and represents the strength that has been passed down from

her grandmothers: the family was her grandmothers' strength; she and her sister were her mother's strength; and her daughter, mother, and sister are her strength. When asked where she finds her strength, Nicole, who is a single mother, responded, "Family, community ... [but] when I'm really down I have to remind myself why I'm doing it, everything is for my daughter ... so I get a lot of strength from her, my mum, and my sister."³⁸

Some healing cultural expressions were also oriented toward youth. For instance, Travis Hebert, works with N'we Jinan, the non-profit organization that creates educational and artistic expression opportunities for Indigenous youth and that worked with the youth from Kitsumkalum First Nation discussed in Chapter 9. As we explored earlier, Travis presented to the Commissioners at the Smithers Community Hearing on the importance of artistic expression as evidence, and on the vital role it plays in the lives of Indigenous youth. Travis donated the CD by N'we Jinan³⁹ titled *Silent War: Volume 5*, which is described on their website as follows:

There is a story that has been blowing in the winds of our history. Many generations ago, an elder from the mountains shared a prophetic tale about a group of leaders united through music, prayer and love. Fully armoured, ready for battle, prepared for the risk; the story of the silent war is ready to be told by hundreds of young Indigenous voices, in hopes to shed light on the darkest truths of our beautiful country.⁴⁰

Travis and his business partner, Craig, work together providing workshops to Indigenous youth. Mob Bounce has been actively doing youth work since 2011, helping to combine traditional and spiritual expressions of Indigenous cultures with contemporary methods of musical and artistic expression.



Justice

Many of the expressions explicitly sought to promote justice, building on previous projects already created by other artists. Artist Jaime Black, who created the REDress Project as a public art installation that aims to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls through the hanging of red dresses, attended the Saskatoon Community Hearing and handed out red satin ribbons to families and survivors. She explained that the gesture was about “having loved ones represented and heard and to bring visibility to the issue.... It makes for a really amazing conversation between people who may not be experiencing any violence in their families and people who are directly experiencing it.”⁴¹



Walking a path; never alone,
Nadzin DeGagné, AF A2017-0028.1.

Black’s REDress Project has influenced many people in their own art expressions in the Legacy Archive. For example, Nadzin DeGagné, from Quebec, of Algonquin and European ancestry, created a red-dress painting on canvas called *Walking a path; never alone*. Inspired by the red-dress art, she created her own expression: a painting of trees with red dresses hanging from them.

Five felt red-dress pins were placed in the Miskwaabimaag Basket at the Winnipeg Community Hearing by the family of Nicole Ashley Daniels during their testimony. The dress pins were made by Nicole’s sisters the night before the family testified, and were worn by the family. Commissioner Audette asked if they would place them in the basket.

In Smithers, there was the Red Dress Brooch campaign. As explained in a note attached to each brooch,

Bringing awareness of the Highway of Tears and of all missing and murdered indigenous and non indigenous women and girls throughout Canada, in an effort to help the Families by donating a portion of the sale of each “Handmade Red Dress Brooch” to affiliated non-profit organizations. Design Initiative by Mi’kmaq Artist: Margaret Cranford.



Red-dress pin, Red Dress Community Care Project.

These were handed out to people at the hearings.

In Thunder Bay, there was the Red Dress Community Care Project, put on by Walking With Our Sisters, who had a series of bead-ins to create hundreds of red-dress and heart pins for attendees and witnesses as a way of

showing that, as a community, they care about them.

Beverly Beckly donated the *Red Dress Diaries* on behalf of her partner's cousins, and all Indigenous Peoples of Alberta and western Canada, at the Edmonton Community Hearing. The *Red Dress Diaries* consists of 54 poems, numbered backwards, symbolizing the 54% of the missing and murdered women who are from western Canada. Among them, the poem "Sunshine" poignantly describes the stark distinction between life and death, for one person.

In this time she's missed the most
a summer girl of copper skin
eyes that laughed
sang a youthful song
closed and dreamed a million lights
prospecting time
counting down to happiness and love
even in the lean mean years that sparkle was there underneath a cot of dirt.
does dirt cover her now?

No more shine through?
dull grey silence
no laughter, no song, no movement?
lost upon the rotting?⁴²



Awareness and Empathy

Though not all about red dresses, other pieces from the Legacy Archive also signal the way in which the National Inquiry has helped to raise awareness of the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people — an awareness due, in part, to art.



“J’existais” bookmark,
Jeannette Vollant,
AF A2018-0009.1.

Jeannette Vollant, a member of the Innu Nation from Pessamit, Quebec, donated a bookmark in Montreal. Jeannette donated it to the Legacy Archive in memory of her loved one so that she, and all the other women, are not forgotten. The dark forest path on one side of the bookmark represents all missing and murdered women. On the other side, the same forest path, now brightly lit by sunlight, has a silhouette of a woman with her hands in the shape of a heart and the words “J’existais” (“I existed”) to remind us that these women existed, that they were alive.

A star blanket with a white buffalo, a dream catcher, and a talking stick were made and donated by Darlene Clarke, who is First Nations from Peguis First Nation, in memory of her sister, Kimberly Clarke. The background of the star blanket is red, representing the families that have been affected, and there is a white buffalo in the centre, a symbol for a call for change. Annie Ross, who is Maya, donated a painting titled *'til victory*. It was created “in memory of those whose lives were taken.” In her description of

her piece, Annie talks about the statue *Nike of Samothrace* (called *Winged Victory of Samothrace*) and how it is invincible, and stood for centuries. She writes, “To my beloveds/relatives/sisters, everyone, especially those referred to as the MMIWG – we shall prevail till victory (justice, peace, right to life for all living beings).”⁴³

The Legacy Archive also received submissions from non-Indigenous people whose perspectives had been changed through hearing many of the testimonies. Hermina Joldersma, a non-Indigenous Canadian from Yellowknife, made and donated a quilt entitled *In My Heart*. The quilt, which has a red beaded heart on it, stands as a tribute to all those who participated in the National Inquiry. Hermina learned to bead the heart by working with traditional beading artist Margaret Nazon from Tsiigehtchic, Northwest Territories, in creating the backdrop for the Yellowknife Community Hearing.



In her written description of the quilt, Hermina writes,

Listening to the moving testimony at the Yellowknife hearings of the MMIWG Inquiry, I was inspired to create a quilt celebrating both the resilience and courage of all those who tell their stories and how their testimony makes it possible for the rest of us to hear and bear witness.

In listening to testimony, she was

struck by the way in which the simple fact of the Inquiry's existence and work has shone light on this devastating situation for all of us in different ways.... While there has been negative press about the challenges the Inquiry has faced, I believe it has achieved and is achieving its primary purpose: to raise awareness in broader society of this important issue ... and to support those who have experienced or been impacted by this violence first hand.⁴⁴



Unspoken Words (Social Justice Day quilt), Mikhayla Patterson in collaboration with the School of Social Work, MacEwan University, AF A2017-42.1.

Similarly, a quilt donated by second-year students (presented by student Mikhayla Patterson) of the social work program at MacEwan University honours the memories of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. To make the quilt, each student wrote a letter to someone who has been lost, telling her she was – and is – loved. The quilt was smudged once it was assembled, so that the letters would pass into the spirit world and rejoin the people to whom they were addressed. For

students, the hope was also to let the families know that they are not fighting alone. As Mikhayla explained, “Let us work together in the fight for justice.”⁴⁵

A news article about missing Indigenous women along Highway 16, also known as the “Highway of Tears,” about which some of the witnesses testified, also inspired a song called “The Highway” by Chris Scott, who is non-Indigenous. He performed it in his home, recorded it, and sent it to us. He wrote the song “to give the family members that are left behind some hope.... I hope [the song will] connect to them and to [the public] as well.”⁴⁶



Student and Youth Engagement Guide

Over the course of its mandate, the National Inquiry has also engaged in another important project: *Their Voices Will Guide Us*, a student and youth engagement guide. As the guide's foreword explains:

When we think to the future, we consider the legacy we will leave for those who come after us: our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and other young people for generations to come. One of the best legacies we can leave them is an education that will help prevent violence and keep Indigenous women and girls safe so that they can all flourish. Together, we can create a society in which all Indigenous lives are valued.⁴⁷

The guide asserts the importance of collective responsibility through education as a way to effect real change. It also emphasizes a human and Indigenous rights approach, through its privileging of Indigenous perspectives and voices throughout, as well as its emphasis on the very concrete changes that need to occur to protect these rights.

[Women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people] have human rights that must be upheld so that they can achieve their dreams and use their gifts, talents, and skills to benefit their families, communities, and all of Canada. They have the right to the peaceful enjoyment of their lives. Our collective action can make all of this a reality.⁴⁸

Developed in collaboration with Indigenous educators across Canada, *Their Voices Will Guide Us* invites students of all ages to understand the crisis of violence through forging connections with communities in their own area and by centring the importance of Indigenous teachings as a means through which safety can be achieved. In line with our other initiatives on education, the guide's purpose is to “engage students of all ages in generating arts-based messages of resilience, truth, hope, solidarity and justice. These messages can inspire and motivate Canadians from all walks of life, at all ages, and in all territories to take action in their own lives to generate transformative social change.”⁴⁹

A full copy of the guide in English and French is available online and outlines in detail the National Inquiry's focus areas and approach to education.

Reclaim(ing) Power and Place: A Pilot Project

As a part of its arts engagement strategy, which includes the call for artistic expressions, the National Inquiry also created some new projects intended to build awareness and promote education about the issues surrounding violence and the targeting of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.



The ReClaim Project combines the aspect of “remembering” with the concept of “calling forth,” implying a more active, ongoing engagement with not only the memory of those lost, but also with the sacred teachings and connectedness that can ultimately help contribute to safety and to healing. This project connects women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people to reclaiming power and place, to the land, to the sacred and traditional teachings, and to one another. The mission of the National Inquiry – finding the truth, honouring the truth, and giving life to the truth – is realized within this project, which aims to reassert presence and power on the land itself as a way of reclaiming the sacred feminine, promoting safety and wellness, and transforming the narrative around Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. It creates opportunities for families, women, and youth to come together to reconnect to the matrilineal knowledge across different Indigenous communities.



Interdisciplinary artist Jaime Black stands beside the Red River during a ReClaim event in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Organized by renowned Métis artist Jaime Black, the first pilot of the ReClaim Project took place in Winnipeg, at The Forks. As Jaime reflected on the experience, she shared:

For centuries, we have gathered where the rivers meet, and this land remembers us, remembers the drum, the heartbeat, the song, remembers the women who gathered with their families, harvested clay by the riverbank and formed the vessels. Sitting here listening to the stories of the Elders, forming clay figures, we see the women who gathered on this land thousands of years ago, we see them reflected in ourselves.

The first ReClaim gathering at The Forks was a day of connecting, to ourselves and to each other through story and art making, pulling the past into the present and imagining, forming, shaping a new future. Participants gathered around the fire to listen to the oral history of The Forks through the storytelling of Elder Clarence Nepinak, whose family has a long history tied to the site. Clarence spoke of his family’s travels, their dreams, and of the spirits of the ancestors that still inhabit the land where the two rivers meet.

In the afternoon we came together in the tipi to acknowledge the missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls. Palms full of tobacco, a participant led us to the memorial there devoted to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls with a drum song and we put our prayers down together. We returned to the circle grounded in why we



were here, why we were gathering, we are here to remember. Not only to remember the pain but also to remember our power, our agency as women, our strong connection to this land.

We worked with red clay, with earth, not only knowing that connection to the land in our minds but really feeling it, working with it, working with the hands, a mutual healing. We formed human figures, figures of women and girls, goddess figures, calling in the strength, courage, and power of all the circles of women that have gathered at this place.

My son is there, Josef. He is serious about fire keeping and in awe of this special and important gathering that his mama is holding. I can tell he feels the weight of it.

I can tell it will change him.

Later we lay our clay figures as gifts at the MMIWG memorial and sing ourselves down to the water, leaving our offerings to the river, to its slow power, to its mysteries.

My boy ties a piece of red cloth to a stick and, in our silence, all the others do the same and we become warriors, women walking together with staffs tied with red.

Someone suggests that we cross the bridge to Spirit Island, a place where ceremony has been held for centuries, that we plant the sticks in the ground there; a promise that we will continue to stand and to fight for justice for women and girls.

A tour boat goes by as we are placing our sticks along the bank of the river, strips of bright red cloth against the grey of the day. They watch us and I think, for a moment they actually see us, they see us standing together.



Clay figures are placed on the land in ceremony during a ReClaim event in Thunder Bay, Ontario.



Jaime also wrote a poem about her experience in Winnipeg:

a coming together
a picking up
here
where we left off
they moved the skulls of the buffalo
but we still remember
the way home
impressions in clay
molding, shaping
a prayer
a song
a sacred figure
the power of creation

calling in the ancestors
we rise and fall
together together together

The National Inquiry hosted a second pilot event for the ReClaim Project in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in late 2018, when students from Confederation College, along with residents of Thunder Bay, gathered at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. In the morning, participants met inside the gallery's open space to talk and learn from Knowledge Keeper Ann Magiskan of Lac Seul First Nation. Surrounded by her sacred items, Ann shared her journey and experiences of reconnecting to culture and ceremony, and the profound impact they have had on her life and the lives of those around her.

After years feeling disconnected from her culture, Ann was able to find her way back to tradition and ceremony as powerful practices for healing and reconnection to self and community. Jaime Black said she was struck, as Ann shared, by the vastly different ways in which people both lose and find themselves and one another.

Ann's experience and perspective allowed participants to see the value in honouring their own personal journeys back to themselves, back to one another, and back to the land. When Ann was finished sharing, she invited students to engage with the sacred items on her table, allowing them to hold these items and feel the power they carried, perhaps to carry some of that power with them on their own journeys.



In Thunder Bay, Ontario, ReClaim participants spend time connecting with the land, led by a local Elder and artist Jaime Black.

Participants then gathered outside in a circle to smudge, and then walked together down the main road onto campus, each holding a red cloth tie to honour women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Together, they walked alongside the bushland that covers much of the college campus, holding onto their red ties, holding onto their prayers for healing or for justice, for balance, or for remembering the collective strength of Indigenous women. Each participant chose a space in the bush to tie their ties, to bind these hopes and promises.



ReClaim participants in Thunder Bay, Ontario, placed red cloth in the trees as a way to honour and to raise awareness about violence facing missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Later, participants worked with clay, and Jaime shared the understanding of clay work as a direct and powerful way of connecting to the land. As she explained, before colonization, some communities would make vessels of clay from the land where they made camp. These vessels were often left behind when the people moved to a new location. This practice indicates an intimate and respectful relationship with the land. As they worked with the clay, participants talked and shared thoughts and knowledge about these concepts, knowing that whatever they made wasn't permanent, but that the process of the making brought connection and healing.



During a ReClaim workshop, participants work to create clay figures to leave on the land as an offering.

The National Inquiry hopes that the ReClaim Project, which is being offered by Jaime Black in other locations, will inspire other, similar actions that will persist beyond the life of the National Inquiry itself. In this way, this kind of art action will represent a new way of asserting the importance of calling forth, and the importance of the power and place of the relatives who no longer walk among us, and the sacred place they hold in community and in ceremony.

Conclusion: Art Actions for the Future

For those who donated artistic expressions to the Legacy Archive, or who participated in public art action like the ReClaim Project or in creations of their own, their work is not only about commemoration, and it is not restricted to making change today. As Jaycee Gouchey, from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, shared, “I’m doing this for all our lost and stolen sisters, and my daughter is a motivation.... I don’t want her to grow up scared. I don’t want her to grow up the way I did.”⁵⁰ In a video capturing her project, Jaycee made herself look like a victim of violence and sat in silence in a hallway for three hours to confront people with the violence that Indigenous women face. Jaycee wanted to symbolize the silence that Indigenous women also often face when looking for help.

The National Inquiry hopes that the Legacy Archive, the student and youth engagement strategy, the ReClaim Project, and all of the actions these projects inspire will have legacies of their own and inspire more acts of commemoration, awareness, courage, healing, and justice. These acts are important in fulfilling a key pathway to safety, in restoring power and place to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people everywhere they are.



Notes

- 1 Elder Miigam'agan (Mi'kmaq), Part 1, Public Volume 44(a), Moncton, NB, pp. 126-127.
- 2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action*.
- 3 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Interim Report*, 81.
- 4 Canada, Status of Women Canada, "About Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Commemoration Fund."
- 5 Von Scheel, "Feds to fund commemoration events."
- 6 Alisha R. (Métis), Part 1, Statement Volume 453, Edmonton, AB, p. 26.
- 7 Fallon F. (Métis), Part 1, Public Volume 11, Winnipeg, MB, p. 61.
- 8 Marie P. (Mi'kmaq), Part 1, Public Volume 19, Membertou, NS, p. 48.
- 9 Shaun L. (Kaska Dena, Crow Clan), Part 1, Public Volume 3, Whitehorse, YU, pp. 17-18.
- 10 Harriet L. (Inuit, Nain), Part 1, Public Volume 57, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL, p. 15.
- 11 Ruby F. (Inuit, Inuvik), Part 1, Public Volume 42, Yellowknife, NT, p. 74.
- 12 Daniel B. (Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation), Part 1, Statement Volume 509, St. John's, NL, pp. 40-41.
- 13 Martha A. U. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 48(b), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 16.
- 14 Delilah S. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 7, Membertou, NS, p. 46.
- 15 Cheryl M. (Wolf Clan, Mohawk Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 59, Montreal, QC, p. 51.
- 16 Nikki K. (Inuit), Part 1, Public Volume 46(a), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 63.
- 17 Laura M. (Inuit, Rankin Inlet), Part 1, Public Volume 46(a), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 12.
- 18 Fallon F. (Métis), Part 1, Public Volume 11, Winnipeg, MB, p. 61.
- 19 Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *Dancing, Singing, Painting*, 26.
- 20 Alisha R. (Métis), Part 1, Statement Volume 453, Edmonton, AB, p. 72.
- 21 Biilts'ik Colleen Austin, Part 1, Public Volume 6, Smithers, BC, p. 99.
- 22 Travis Hebert (Cree/Métis), Part 1, Public Volume 6, Smithers, BC, p. 109.
- 23 Klebesadel, "Helen Klebesadel" (blog).
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Halie B. (Namgis/Kwa'kwa'kawakw/Tlingit/Scottish), Part 1, Public Volume 111(a), Vancouver, BC, p. 42.
- 26 Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power," 2-3.
- 27 Evans, et al., "Self-Determination and Archival Autonomy," 339.
- 28 Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power," 13.
- 29 Gooda, "The Practical Power of Human Rights," 145.
- 30 Mnjama, "The Orentlicher Principles," 215.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 This is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 69. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action*, 8.
- 33 Dee-Jay Monika Rumbolt (Métis [southern Inuit, German]), Legacy Archive, AF A2018-0008.2 [Video].
- 34 Jason Simoak (Inuit, Rigolet), "Sister Drummer in Faded Red," Legacy Archive, AF A2017-0017.1.
- 35 Brophy, "Indian City song."
- 36 Adele Keyes, "Annie," Legacy Archive, AF A2018-0013.3.
- 37 "Ten Things to Know About Grief" (BCBH Pamphlet), Legacy Archive, AF A2018-0019.23.
- 38 Nicole Carpenter (Heiltsuk, Bella Bella), Legacy Archive, AF A2017-0014.1 [Video].
- 39 N'we Jinan is a non-profit organization that travels to Indigenous communities and schools across North America providing educational services in the music and art sector. See <http://nwejinan.com>.



- 40 N’we Jinan, “Services.”
- 41 Woodward, “Red Dress artist.”
- 42 Beverly Beckley, “Red Dress Diaries,” Legacy Archive, AF A2017-0024.1.
- 43 Annie Ross (Maya), “‘til victory,” Legacy Archive, AF A2018-0043.1.
- 44 Hermina Joldersma, “In My Heart,” Legacy Archive, AF A2018-101.2.
- 45 Mikhayla Patterson, Legacy Archive, AF A2017-0042.5.
- 46 Chris Scott, “Highway of Tears,” Legacy Archive, AF A2017-0001.1.
- 47 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Their Voices Will Guide Us*, i.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Jaycee Gouchey (Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation), Legacy Archive, AF 2018-0042.2. As cited in “Art student pays tribute,” included in AF 2018-0042.2.



Valuing Lived and Front-Line Experiences

Introduction: Four Guided Dialogues and the Distinctions-Based Approach

Between October and December 2018, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls hosted four Guided Dialogues to identify best practices and solutions to increase safety, improve well-being, and safeguard the rights of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people in Canada.

Facilitated in partnership with Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, the Guided Dialogues brought together front-line service providers and community organizers to explore the particular perspectives of different Indigenous groups. The following sessions were hosted:

- 2SLGBTQIA Perspectives and Best Practices (Toronto)
- Inuit Perspectives and Best Practices (Inuvik)
- Métis Perspectives and Best Practices (Edmonton)
- Quebec Perspectives and Best Practices (Wendake)

Each Guided Dialogue brought together participants invited by the Commissioners who contributed on the basis of trends, experiences and needs identified within the body of National Inquiry testimonies and statements. Participants were individuals and organizations identified in public testimonies and statements, or in third-party research on service delivery in key areas. In inviting participants, the National Inquiry also took into account research and surveys of ally and support groups and recommendations from Commissioners and internal advisory groups. One Commissioner was present at each Guided Dialogue.



The primary intended outcomes were to:

- deepen knowledge of systemic institutional weaknesses, gaps, and problems that marginalize and negatively impact the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people;
- identify best practices and solutions for institutional and systemic change that would increase safety, improve well-being, and uphold the rights of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in terms of identity and culture, health and well-being, human security, including housing and anti-poverty work, and issues regarding access to justice; and
- make specific recommendations to increase the safety of diverse Indigenous groups and individuals when they experience human and Indigenous rights violations within experiences of encounter.

The secondary intended outcomes for the Dialogues were to:

- co-create a safe, culturally appropriate, and legitimate dialogue process;
- offer participants an opportunity to share knowledge with peers and to build on one another's ideas in "a focused conversation among equals" that appreciates differences of perspective and experience; and
- convene gatherings of practitioners and professionals in a spirit of respect and recognition.

Over the course of the Dialogues, data was gathered from multiple sources, including notes taken at each Dialogue table, as well as flip charts, anonymous participant feedback forms, artwork, and other documents submitted by participants.

Overwhelmingly, as participants shared in each of the four sessions, racism is at the heart of the colonial structure and represents a core cause for the violence faced by Indigenous communities. At the same time, participants highlighted intersecting experiences of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, and discrimination against marginalized populations such as sex workers, people engaged in substance use, people who are homeless, or based on their intersectional identities as Indigenous groups with many distinctive experiences and perspectives.

This chapter conveys the emerging themes and recommendations from all four Guided Dialogues. Many key recommendations were echoed across the country. However, this chapter also aims to delineate, where possible, the issues, perspectives, and recommendations that are specific to the experiences of 2SLGBTQQIA people, Inuit, Métis communities, and Quebec First Nations. These groupings provide important regional and issue-specific focus, and, collectively, emphasize the importance of a distinctions-based approach that acknowledges the issues that can be addressed in common and those where approaches might differ.



Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.

OUR TWO-SPIRIT TEACHINGS:

SPIRITUALITY: Two-Spirit people are one of the conduits between the physical world and the spiritual world and can open doors to healing.

BELONGING: Two-Spirit people are worthy of love, respect and safety. Two-Spirit people carry the responsibility to give love, respect and safety to everyone.

VISIONING: Two-Spirit people see and acknowledge the impact of harmful colonial constructs and work to challenge them within the Two-Spirit community and beyond. The vision and voice of Two-Spirit people must be recognized and integrated into Indigenous leadership structures to ensure inclusive, equitable and fair access to resources and settlements.

TRANSFORMING: Two-Spirit people promote non-discrimination and acceptance by dismantling harmful colonial concepts of gender and sexuality and advocate for contemporary approaches to non-discrimination.

EQUALITY: Two-Spirit people challenge race, gender, and sex-based privilege within the Two-Spirit collective and the broader community.

STRENGTH: Two-Spirit people are assets to their families and communities because of their role, purpose, gifts and abilities.

SEXUALITY: Two-Spirit people are sex-positive and believe that relationships, however they are constructed, are enhanced by the celebration of sex.

ADVOCACY: Two-Spirit people stand in solidarity with other equity-seeking groups and will assist or support these groups in their advocacy struggles, the civil and human rights of ourselves and others.

YOU CAN SUPPORT US BY:

- Creating safer spaces, free of shame, violence, stereotypes, bullying, homophobia and transphobia
- Inviting us and welcoming us into events, traditional spaces and ceremonies
- Being open to learning about Two-Spirit experiences
- Respecting and honouring traditional Two-Spirit roles
- Challenging systems and institutions to address the unique needs of Two-Spirit people
- Advocating for our inclusion, our civil and human rights, and our Indigenous rights
- Providing and increasing opportunities for us to share our gifts

WWW.TWOSPIRITMANITOBA.CA

TWO-SPIRIT PEOPLE OF MANITOBA IS AN ORGANIZATION THAT SEEKS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF TWO-SPIRIT (INDIGENOUS GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER) PEOPLE.

HARM REDUCTION
WE PROMOTE PROMISING PRACTICES THAT CAN REDUCE HARM AND IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN OUR COMMUNITY

LAND
WE RECOGNIZE OUR HISTORICAL FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND METIS RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR HOMELANDS AND THE TRADITIONAL LANDS AND TERRITORIES OF OUR ANCESTORS

WE ADVOCATE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE LAND, USE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES, AND RESTORATION AND RECLAMATION OF LAND BASED RESOURCES

The Manifesto of Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc. speaks to many of the issues that participants discussed at the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives Guided Dialogue in Toronto, including the need to understand Two-Spirit teachings, and the values associated with safety that they imply. Used with permission.

Promoting Empowering Research and Representation

“Not about us, without us at the table.” (Inuit Perspectives)

The collection of data and research processes are often cast as neutral processes, but research has often been engaged in the service of colonial ideas. One of the priorities for our approach to the Guided Dialogues was in co-creating a process, with participants, that privileged decolonizing research processes and applied them in data collection and interpretation. This kind of meaningful engagement led to important discussions regarding the nature of research itself, and the need to develop more structures that reflect a more equitable representation, particularly in the context of Indigenous engagement, consultation, and participation in policy and program development. For many women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, becoming meaningful participants in decision-making processes is key to unlocking the solutions that have been buried under patriarchy, misogyny, and colonialism. This is necessary in order to bring about systemic change to support the safety and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Participants particularly highlighted the need for more equitable representation of Indigenous women and youth, Métis and Inuit communities, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and offered recommendations for data collection, research, public engagement, and leadership models to effect this change.



Data Collection and Research

Participants emphasized the importance of collecting accurate, culturally specific, and comprehensive data on Indigenous communities to contribute to policy development and strategic planning for program and service delivery.

Data collection was a particularly prominent theme in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives Dialogue. Both social stigma and inadequate data collection methods contribute to inaccurate and incomplete data collection on 2SLGBTQQIA experiences. For instance, the census has historically excluded gender non-binary individuals, and coronary reports currently identify a victim's gender based on their biological sex instead of their gender identity. Some participants described communities where the gender identity and/or sexual orientation of youth who had died by suicide were deliberately masked by parents or leaders in the community due to homophobia or transphobia. Participants described how data gaps contribute to the erasure and invisibility of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people, and negatively impact funding for dedicated support services and resources.

“We need to have our numbers in the reports for our advocacy work.”
(2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)¹

Specific recommendations for accurate and comprehensive data collection included:

- ✓ **culturally specific data collection** differentiating among Inuit, Métis, and First Nations victims;
- ✓ **additional gender options** in the census and other avenues for data collection; and
- ✓ **more specific data collection to recognize and capture the internal diversity of 2SLGBTQQIA communities.** Participants noted that the use of “Two-Spirit” as a blanket term for all Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people perpetuates the erasure of other gender identities and sexual orientations. Participants specifically called for a differentiation between “Two-Spirit” and trans-identified individuals, and between trans-masculine and trans-feminine experiences.

“The term Two-Spirit is an umbrella term that does not necessarily reflect the diversity of the gender spectrum.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Suggested priority areas for research and data collection included:

- ✓ **data on Indigenous victims of violence**, including murdered and missing people, as well as on suicide rates, recognizing that the violence, discrimination, and inequities faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people contribute to the risk of death by suicide;



- ✓ **more accurate statistics on Inuit people in urban centres** to ensure adequate funding for culturally specific support services;
- ✓ **research and data collection on systemic, institutional discrimination:** for instance, exploring the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in health, justice, and correctional systems, in order to better understand the gaps, barriers, and inequities they face, and data on racial profiling in policing against Indigenous Peoples;
- ✓ **research into the experiences of previous offenders** reintegrating into community; and
- ✓ **research into patterns of violence** and the experiences and life trajectories of vulnerable individuals.

Ethical and Empowering Research

Several participants expressed the sentiment that Indigenous and 2SLGBTQQIA communities are over-researched and over-consulted without the related sufficient implementation of recommendations and findings. They described how this pattern of over-consultation risks re-traumatizing vulnerable populations who have to repeatedly share adverse experiences, while it contributes to the erosion of trust that can deter Indigenous Peoples from participating in data collection and public-engagement opportunities. Additionally, some participants discussed issues with “exploitative” or “predatory” research practices that compromise ethics of consent and can lead to skewed research findings. For instance, individuals facing poverty are more vulnerable to being coerced to participate in studies that offer honoraria in exchange for participation.

Participants recommended the following ethical and empowering approaches to research:

- ✓ **validate diverse forms of knowledge** (including academic research, lived experience, and traditional Indigenous knowledge);
- ✓ **develop and implement research frameworks, epistemologies, and research terminology grounded in Indigenous world views;**
- ✓ **promote meaningful collaboration between academics, front-line workers and grassroots organizations** to inform policy development and service delivery;
- ✓ **dedicate funding and support for research led by Métis, Inuit, First Nations, and Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people;**
- ✓ **adopt a strength-based approach to research** that aims to generate and affirm good practices, instead of focusing on traumatic experiences; and



- ☑ **update the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2)* concerning the guidelines that govern Indigenous research, in order to better protect research participants from “predatory research tactics.”**

“Research partnership is vital. Academics [need] to work with front-line workers in a meaningful way. Part of finding healing is demanding more authority in [the] research process and how we are spoken about.” (2SLGBTQQA Perspectives)

“More Métis research by Métis researchers, that honours and values our ways of knowing and being – without being ‘extractivist.’” (Métis Perspectives)

Equitable Representation

Participants in the Toronto, Inuvik, and Edmonton sessions discussed the prevalent under-representation and relative invisibility of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQA people, Inuit, and Métis communities within policy development, and the inequitable distribution of funding and services for these communities. They described how work done under an “Indigenous” or “Aboriginal” framework tends to focus on First Nations contexts and cultures, which can be vastly different from Inuit and Métis communities. At the same time, one participant noted that the Indigenous communities, whose traditional territories encompass major urban centres, can feel “displaced” by Indigenous populations migrating to their home. It is important to strike a balance between acknowledging the historic roots of territories and creating a hospitable environment for newcomers.

“[The] Métis voice is commonly underrepresented.” (Métis Perspectives)

“Métis citizens and people do not feel they are under the umbrella of ‘First Nations.’ They do not feel comfortable in, or accepted in, those spaces.” (Métis Perspectives)

“There is a lot of presence of First Nations in Ottawa, but Inuit aren’t very visible there. With no disrespect to them, we’re just not very visible.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“We represent a large area with a smaller population, but [the] issues are so different.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Additionally, participants in the 2SLGBTQQA Perspectives session noted that policies and recommendations (including the common framing of “missing and murdered Indigenous women”) often lack a recognition of diverse gender identities and fail to address issues that predominantly affect Indigenous 2SLGBTQQA people.



Recommendations to improve equitable representation included:

- ✓ **dedicated funding streams, programs, and services** for Inuit, Métis, and Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA communities;
- ✓ **dedicated Inuit and Métis advocacy bodies:** for instance, in Edmonton, there were calls for the establishment of a Métis Health Authority, Métis child welfare agencies, and a National Circle for Métis Women;
- ✓ **dedicated Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA advocacy bodies** that recognize and address the unique experiences and needs at the intersections of cultural and gender identities. There was a strong call in Toronto for a national network or organization to represent Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people and conduct dedicated advocacy, education, data collection, and research for their communities;
- ✓ **equitable inclusion of 2SLGBTQQIA people** within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leadership and advocacy bodies (such as the Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Health Authority, Native Women's Association of Canada, etc.);
- ✓ **gender-based analysis of policies and recommendations**, including landmark documents such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action; and
- ✓ **increased public-engagement initiatives**, with particular attention to the unique circumstances that can impact the participation of Inuit, Métis, and Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people, and allocation of resources to ensure cultural safety and inclusion for parties.

“Métis-specific funding for developing transformational change that is rooted in Métis world views.” (Métis Perspectives)

“Policies need to be based on ... values taught by Elders about Inuit culture.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Participants called for more equitable representation of Indigenous women, youth, and traditionally marginalized populations (such as sex workers, ex-offenders, etc.) in policy making.

“All levels of government need to prioritize LGBTQ2S+ Indigenous youth voices and experiences in the development of solutions and strategies.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“We women are coming back, and we are taking those leadership roles, so we have the power to make change. We all want the same thing. We want change. And the change we want is to have our women in positions of power and leadership.” (Métis Perspectives)

“Indigenous women need to be heard and recognized, when it comes to policy-making and officiating.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)



Strengthening Accountability

Implementation of recommendations was a primary concern echoed throughout the Dialogues, with many participants critiquing historical patterns of over-consultation and relative lack of implementation. Participants called for the development of a strategic plan for the implementation of recommendations from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, as well as recommendations from other, related provincial, federal, and international conventions, landmark inquiries, and declarations.²

“First Nations became cynical about the impacts of various commission reports, in the past. Could it be because they were not an integral part of a governmental action plan?” (Quebec Perspectives)

“Go from idealism to action. We need to see the system changed.” (2SLGBTQIA Perspectives)

“A long-term plan to put in place structural changes. Make sure there is a measure that resists political changes. That it is enshrined in a master document of the country. That all governments are obligated to put money in it.” (Quebec Perspectives)

Recommendations to strengthen accountability included:

- ☑ **an oversight committee** to develop a strategic action plan for the recommendations, with representatives from Inuit, Métis, First Nations, and 2SLGBTQIA communities;
- ☑ **safeguards** to ensure that the implementation of key recommendations can continue despite shifts in government or organizational leadership;

“You need recommendations that do not depend on the person in the position. It should not depend on the person.” (Quebec Perspectives)
- ☑ **communication and partnerships** with key ministries and organizations to create a broad network of advocacy and action for the implementation of recommendations;
- ☑ **increased public education and advocacy** to increase awareness of Indigenous rights and recommendations for action; and
- ☑ **an Indigenous Rights Tribunal**, to supplement work from the existing Human Rights Tribunal, with an acknowledgement of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.



Core Principles and Values for Safety

Through a discussion of these experiences and themes, participants focused on important concepts that inform the principle of safety. Specifically, the Guided Dialogues drew attention to a number of core principles, values, and practices that can increase the accessibility, cultural safety, and effectiveness of support services to contribute to the safety and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals.

Wellness as Wholeness

In all four Dialogue sessions, participants expressed a holistic understanding of safety and well-being, advocating for care that addresses mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Similarly, participants predominantly spoke of the individual as being embedded within a web of interdependent and interactive relationships, including their family, community, wider society, and environment.

Participants noted that a holistic approach to well-being and the value of relationships is fundamental to an Indigenous world view, which emphasizes the interconnected nature of life. Indeed, one participant in the Quebec Perspectives session suggested that Western models such as the Maslow hierarchy of needs may not be applicable to an Indigenous context. Rather, participants in different groups shared Indigenous philosophies such as those reflected in the Cree term *mino-pimatisiwin*,³ or the Quechua term of *sumak kawsay*,⁴ or the teachings of the medicine wheel. One participant shared a framework of concentric circles, “with sustenance in the middle, then children, then women, then Elders, then men” to represent the systemic nature of safety and well-being.

Participants discussed how moving forward in a culturally safe way, with respect to the delivery of programs, services, and systems to reflect this holistic approach to well-being, could ultimately provide improved care not only for Indigenous communities, but for society as a whole.

“Indigenous people have always paved the way when it comes to changing the systems, opening the door for Canadians.” (Métis Perspectives)

Participants suggested that a holistic and culturally safe approach to program and service delivery across several different areas, including cultural services as well as those services that are culturally safe in areas like health, security, and justice, is one that:

- ☒ **supports the well-being of whole families and communities**, including men and boys, instead of focusing on the individual or services for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people;

“We won’t become healthy if we look [only] at individuals.” (Métis Perspectives)



“These people are part of a community. How can you extract one and help them, and leave the rest?” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ☑ **strengthens family and community ties**, and fosters trusting relationships of care between clients and service providers;

“Human connection is medicine.” (Métis Perspectives)

“Who is close to you? Who’s your neighbour? All of these things should be included in the interventions, instead of just basing the system on the individual.... The community and the family context can be rich resources to improve the intervention.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ☑ **recognizes the primacy of cultural and spiritual needs**, the fulfillment of which may be necessary for the attainment of other wellness goals;

“First Nations women recognize the importance of First Nations spirituality, at the heart of healing, prior to treat addictions, etc.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“People who heal the most are those who have healed on a spiritual level.” (Métis Perspectives)

- ☑ **addresses the root causes** of behaviours that serve to place people at risk, and ensure that needs related to healing and recovery are being met;

“People join gangs because they want to feel like they belong, so one way to deal with this [need] is to help people form a stronger sense of connection.” (Métis Perspectives)

- ☑ **takes a preventative approach** to increasing the safety and well-being of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people; and

“Often people do not use the services until it’s an emergency. There should be more prevention, opportunities to ask questions ... a preventative service – rather than [a] cure.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ☑ **sees the wholeness of people beyond labels** such as mental health diagnoses, convictions, adverse experiences, ethnicity, gender, etc.

“I have a foster name.... Many other systems wrongfully misconstrued our name ... mislabelled us shamefully.... I reached out to social services for help. I was labelled with everything in the book ... adjustment disorder, borderline personality disorder, slightly mentally retarded.... These structural and systemic labels promote blaming the victim. They are pathologies and constructs that perpetuate the missing and murdered Indigenous women.” (Métis Perspectives)



A Haudenosaunee Example of Healing through Culture

At the National Inquiry's Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearing in Toronto, National Family Advisory Circle member Norma Jacobs opened the second day of hearings with a traditional Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Thanksgiving Address.ⁱ

The Haudenosaunee (meaning "People of the Longhouse") are a confederacy made up of six distinct Nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. The Thanksgiving Address is an ancient way of greeting the natural world and aligning the minds of the people as one.ⁱⁱ

Norma is Wolf Clan of the Guyohkohnyo Cayuga Nation and grew up on the Haudenosaunee Six Nations reserve. In her address, she thanked the people, Mother Earth, the food that sustains us, the shrubs, grasses, and medicine plants, the trees, the birds, the animals, the air, bodies of water, thunder, lightning, rain, the sun, the moon, the four sacred beings, the teachers who bring the words of the Creator, and the Creator. Norma called this address "a dance of intimacy of how we relate to everything that's in our environment, and we should be doing that dance every day."ⁱⁱⁱ

While opening a gathering with the Thanksgiving Address is traditional in Haudenosaunee territory, Norma also used this opportunity to emphasize how it and other Haudenosaunee teachings and ceremonies are the most important tools they need for their own well-being.

Norma taught us that the Creator gave these teachings to the Haudenosaunee as medicine, to enhance their lives.

The whole structure of the Confederacy and the teachings that are there to enhance our life, and to acknowledge and validate everything that was given here on this Earth walk, you know ... because everything here that the Creator provided for us was for ... our benefit, for our health, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.^{iv}

Some of the Haudenosaunee values Norma shared were about compassion, reciprocity, diversity, balance, and communication, among others.

We learn about, you know, our ancestors, and we learn about being inclusive. We learn about unity, you know, coming to that one mind, and that one heart, and that one body. We learn about protocols, intervention, and prevention. We learn about sacred space. You know, we all have sacred space around us. Acknowledgement, validation, values and beliefs, honouring relationship, healing, ceremony, empowerment.^v

The Haudenosaunee traditionally have 13 ceremonies throughout the year, which help maintain the "health and prosperity of the Nations."^{vi} Norma explained that coming back to these ceremonies on a regular basis is a way of creating accountability for yourself, to build relationship with all of the gifts that have been provided through the natural world and honour one another for it.



She sees hope in the way that young people are returning to Haudenosaunee ceremonies.

I see the dismantling of our culture and our way of life in all of our communities, but I also see the restructuring and the revitalization, and I'm proud of those people. I'm proud of the young ones. You know, the young men who stand who I haven't seen growing up, and all of a sudden there they are, and they're doing our ceremonies, speeches. You know, and I feel that respect in their behaviour and their attitude for the people.^{vii}

Norma emphasized that this revitalization is actually built into the teachings the Haudenosaunee already hold – including the Thanksgiving Address: “We learn about the rebirth every day, when we wake up in the morning, that we have life. So, we know how to revitalize, and that’s part of our teaching, to restructure, to recognize, to re-enliven our people and to re-evaluate, to re-establish, to rejuvenate.”^{viii}

For example, Norma shared, the Haudenosaunee have always had their own ways of evaluating the health of their communities.

It was always told to us, too, that, you know, the state of our health was recognizable by the number of cornfields that we have in our community, you know, because cornfields – white corn is medicine, you know. It tells us about how to use it in mourning, you know, grieving. So many things that we haven't even touched upon.^{ix}

Norma's mother taught her that using the medicine of traditional teachings still involves thinking critically about them, especially with the creeping influence of colonization. Norma said:

One of those things that she used to tell me was, [speaking in Cayuga] you've got a brain, use it, you know? ... She used to say, [speaking in Cayuga], you've got to take ... all the things that I shared with you and think about them, and take them to the depth, you know, of your being. Apply it to your mind, apply it to your heart, apply it to your physical self and to your spiritual self. She says, and if all of those parts of you feel good, then you must be on the right track.

...

So, I spent my life, you know, thinking about that, you know, and shaping and chipping away at those colonial thoughts and the colonial influence on my family.... I've been working at that all of my life, to find and to enhance the lives of our people through our stories, through our way, through our language, through our ceremony, you know, and to reclaim that for myself.^x

For Norma, these teachings came down to the idea of one heart, one mind, one body. By working together and reconnecting to their own knowledge, Haudenosaunee can bring each other up to their highest potential.

- I Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON.
- II Kanienkeha: An Open Source Endangered Language Initiative, “Thanksgiving Address.”
- III Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, p. 27.
- IV Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, p. 4.
- V Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, pp. 26–27.
- VI Haudenosaunee Confederacy, “Ceremonies.”
- VII Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, p. 23.
- VIII Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, p. 28.
- IX Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, p. 27.
- X Norma J. (Cayuga), Part 3, Public Volume 9, Toronto, ON, pp. 21–23.



The Importance of Coordinated Services

In addition, almost every Dialogue table across all four sessions called for an interdisciplinary, systemic approach to increasing safety and well-being for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA individuals. Participants strongly criticized the predominantly “siloe” organization of social services, and the competitive culture among programs that are applying for the same funding sources. They discussed a number of ways in which partnerships and collaboration can benefit service providers, including to:

- increase awareness of local services to facilitate referrals and reduce duplication;
- facilitate knowledge exchange to address complex issues;
- enable partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers to increase staff cultural competency; and
- reduce administrative burdens and increase efficiency.

“I always use the metaphor about the Métis sash. You can’t just pull out one thread and find a solution to one alone. Then how can you put it back? We need to find solutions that weave together all those things: health care, justice, policing.”
(Métis Perspectives)

“Big believer in wraparound services and a network of helpers.... I see the different disciplines working in silos and trying to sheep steal. I find that frustrating.”
(Métis Perspectives)

“Inuvik is a mess of organizations. Native band, Gwich’in tribal council, community leader and council, Métis local. All doing their own thing, not communicating and coordinating activities. All working in siloes, doing their own wellness, parenting, etc. programs with their own funding. [We] need partnerships, coming together to make an action plan.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Recommendations of successful models for coordinated services included:

- ☑ **federally or provincially funded action tables**, bringing social service providers together to develop partnership, coordinate services, and develop strategic action plans to support well-being; and

“In a [federally funded] local accessibility table ... social services centres, school board, youth protection, CAVAC [Crime Victims Assistance Centre], victim support services.... They [didn’t] speak to each other to begin with. Now they sit down and speak to each other. They do an inventory of what they offer. Opening their eyes. Should have been done a long time ago.” (Quebec Perspectives)



- ☑ **co-located services.** Many of the recommendations that participants shared involved integrating multiple service providers within the same facility, or in close proximity to one another, in order to provide “wraparound care.” This “hub” model was especially highlighted when discussing wise practices for vulnerable or marginalized populations.

“Customers are between two chairs and fall into the cracks.” (Quebec Perspectives)

Participants described how coordinated or co-located services support the well-being and safety of clients by:

- creating holistic, preventative care plans that address root causes and support multiple dimensions of well-being in order to increase the success of interventions;
- creating networks of support, which may increase the likelihood of detecting when individuals go missing, and avoid having clients “fall through the cracks”;
- minimizing the number of times clients need to retell their story, which may exacerbate trauma;
- improving continuity of care, and minimizing the impact of staff turnover;
- providing follow-up care to address needs that emerge through interventions;
- increasing awareness of available services;
- enabling families to remain together as they receive care instead of separating them into siloed services; and
- minimizing the need for transportation between services.

“Services [should be] close together: They can see the options, they can see the goals, they know it’s there, it doesn’t have to be forced. Giving people hope that there is something there, creating conditions around them that their life is okay enough that they can think about that.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“There are individuals who are overloaded with service providers, too, because each one offers a specific service, instead of having a single service provider with an understanding of the overall situation.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“It cannot be assumed that [one] service [e.g., police] is responsible for all other services as well. We need to help clarify who does what. The problem is that the structures and the division of resources among the partners are decided elsewhere.” (Quebec Perspectives)



The Importance of Cultural Safety

Participants outlined various best practices for the ethical and culturally sensitive integration of Indigenous values and traditions in social services, especially when those services are delivered by non-Indigenous institutions and organizations.

Participants stressed the importance of providing *cultural safety* in the delivery of support services, which recognizes the internal diversity between and within different Inuit, Métis, and First Nations communities, instead of offering generalized “pan-Indigenous” or “Aboriginal” services. For example, there was a call to increase the availability of Métis-specific and Inuit-specific support services in urban centres. There was a call to demonstrate greater sensitivity for individuals’ diverse spiritual or religious beliefs, including, for example, accommodating Métis who follow the Catholic faith as well as those who follow Indigenous spiritualities.

“Even though we are all Indigenous, we need specific services. When you are in a vulnerable place, it is most comfortable to be with your community.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“There are Métis people who follow the *wahkohtowin* ways. There are also lots of land-based Métis who are very Catholic, who would want to see a Catholic approach [to Métis culture in the prison system]. I have an uncle who is an oblate, who also fasts. He is comfortable walking in both worlds. People love him for that. He makes them feel at ease. There is not one set-in-stone Métis way, but let people be okay being both or one or another without judgment!” (Métis Perspectives)

In addition, participants in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives Dialogue indicated the need to provide cultural safety in terms of the particular challenges placed before 2SLGBTQQIA people, who noted the need to reinstate and accept gender as a spectrum, rather than as a colonial binary. For these participants, culturally safe healing and services need to be inclusive of 2SLGBTQQIA people who have felt excluded by colonial norms and within their own First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

The idea of cultural safety also extended to other aspects of care. For participants who are often forced to access services in a language other than their own, linguistic accessibility was important. In the Inuit Perspectives and Quebec Perspectives sessions, there was a strong emphasis on linguistic barriers that impede Indigenous Peoples from accessing critical support services, including health care, legal aid, and crisis support. Language barriers may also impact access to resources and information about available services, and these barriers may lead to discrimination from service providers. Participants described how linguistic barriers particularly affect traditional language speakers from northern, rural, or remote communities, especially when they travel to southern or urban centres. Anglophone Indigenous Peoples face an additional language barrier in Quebec.



Many of the participants who met within the Guided Dialogue sessions also worked collaboratively to discuss recommendations. Here, some participants from the Inuit Perspectives Dialogue, as well as other invitees, meet in Ottawa.

Additionally, participants discussed how Indigenous Peoples may feel more comfortable and safer expressing themselves in traditional languages when speaking about trauma or emotionally charged issues.

“If someone from the North goes to the Val d’Or hospital, she will probably wait a long time, and probably [she will] stop the treatment, because there is no translation or support.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“Another story about a woman in a park: it was visually clear she was sexually assaulted, but because there was a language barrier and she was a sex worker, the police easily dismissed her.” (Quebec Perspectives)

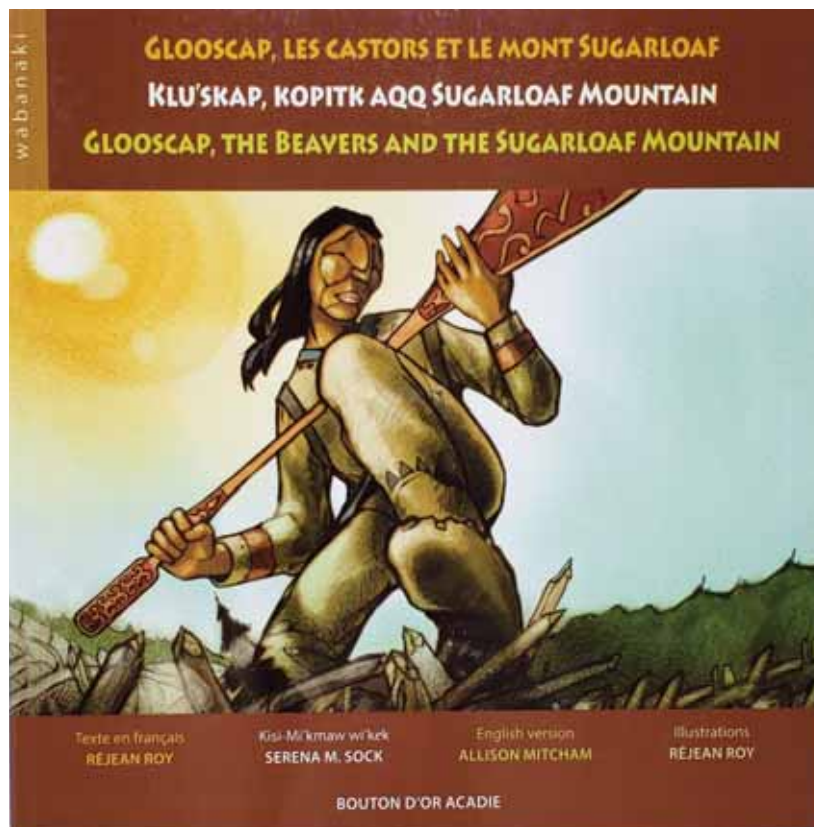
One participant described the lack of Indigenous interpreters as a form of discrimination, while others noted the historical and spiritual significance of being able to speak in traditional Indigenous languages.

“Expressing yourself in another language when you are in pain – it isn’t your mother tongue.... A lot of people don’t understand the significance between language and your spirit and how those things work together.” (Quebec Perspectives)



Recommendations to increase linguistic accessibility included:

- ✓ **federal or provincial funding** for interpreters;
- ✓ a **national database and call centre** offering individual referrals to local translators or linguistically accessible support services;
- ✓ **staff who are fluent in Indigenous languages** that are in high demand in the communities they serve;
- ✓ **team-based care or co-located services** to increase the likelihood that clients can be served in a language of their choice; and
- ✓ **key resources and reports published in Indigenous languages**, to serve communities of interest.



“Glooscap, the Beavers and the Sugarloaf Mountain,” or “Klu’skap, Kopitk Aqq Sugarloaf Mountain” in Mi’kmaq, is an example of how local Indigenous stories can be published in English, French and Indigenous languages. Copies of this book and others in the series were donated to the National Inquiry’s Legacy Archive, AF A2018-0004.1 to 0004.



“When we speak our language...”:

Understanding the Foundation of Indigenous Knowledges

While the right to culture is foundational to the right of self-determination, the right to language is foundational to the right to culture.

Language is one of the main ways people convey their culture.ⁱ It shapes the way people view the world, and contains knowledge unique to its people. It connects people to their land, their laws, and their ancestors. Culture is so often rooted in the language that, once language is taken away, culture is much more susceptible to being eroded – and, with it, Indigenous knowledge, values, and teachings.

Elder Kathy Louis is Chief Commissioner Marion Buller’s advisor, and a member of the National Inquiry Elders and Grandmothers Circle. In her experience, language is critical to cultural knowledge.

The primary means of teaching proper behaviour and community-held values was informally through storytelling. Stories are powerful ways of sharing traditional teachings of cultural knowledge. Deep listening is necessary. The tradition of respecting Elders for their wisdom, age, experience, and sharing plays an important role in the passing on of cultural knowledge.ⁱⁱ

Because Indigenous women are usually the traditional keepers of their languages and cultures, the cultural knowledge passed from mother to daughter is critical to maintaining that common sense of identity. Colonial policies that sever Indigenous women from their children (for example, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and child welfare), or Indigenous women and children from their communities (for example, discriminatory laws regarding Status and matrimonial property rights), are particularly effective at devastating Indigenous languages. As a result, every Indigenous language in Canada is now at risk.

In 2016, only 12.5% of Indigenous Peoples spoke an Indigenous language as their mother tongue.ⁱⁱⁱ Of the more than 70 Indigenous languages spoken in Canada, 25 languages have less than 500 fluent speakers.^{iv} Joann Green shared at the Inquiry’s Heiltsuk Women Community Perspectives panel in Vancouver how much this affects her.

As a Hemas [hereditary chief] in our community, I struggle with the idea that our language – our Heiltsuk language is so close to extinction. In August of this year, I conducted a research project and was so disheartened because I realized that our fluent speakers were only at 1% of our entire population, and that really broke my heart.^v

Losing one’s language makes it much more difficult to connect to one’s own identity as an Indigenous person. This has a significant impact on Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellness. The National Collaboration Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCA) has argued that culture and language are social determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis health, and this is borne out in the testimonies we heard. Many people feel shame for not knowing their language anymore, and that loss of cultural identity contributes to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and, in some cases, suicide.^{vi}

The loss of Indigenous languages is not an inevitable result of the modern world, but of intentional assimilationist policies that targeted Indigenous languages for extinction. This is a violation of Indigenous Peoples’ languages rights, which were most recently



enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). Speakers at the UN's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues have called the ongoing violation of language rights a form of cultural genocide.^{vii}

However, this also means people can find healing and well-being through relearning their Indigenous language. This revitalization strengthens families and is part of the resurgence of Nation-specific knowledge, world views, and legal systems.

Although languages are severely threatened, more and more people are stepping forward to relearn their languages. According to the 2016 census, the total number of people who can carry on a conversation in an Indigenous language rose by 8% from 1996 to 2016.^{viii} Estimates also suggest that 35% of Metis, 23% of First Nations, and 10% of Inuit are currently learning an Indigenous language as an additional language.^{ix}

There are also several successful initiatives going on today for language learners of all ages, including language nests and immersion daycares for small children, one-on-one master/apprentice programs for adults, language programming in schools and universities, and apps and digital programs to bring Elders' knowledge more easily to the next generation.^x

Elder Kathy shares that Elders in Samson Cree Nation are continuing the necessary work in teaching language and culture to the next generation.

The Elders in my community in Alberta say, "When you lose your traditional language, you lose the cultural knowledge," and in my opinion you lose your sense of belonging. Today in my community the local Elders insist and encourage Cree language [Y dialect] be taught and learned by those prepared to learn about the richness of our culture, and thus learn about the sacredness of the different stages of young girls' development. Young girls are required to participate with mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other relatives in their development of discipline and responsibility. These values are taught throughout the time spent with the role models. This process

occurs as young girls evolve to womanhood, through the puberty rites ceremony. This process is basically the traditional teaching application and foundation of the medicine wheel teachings.^{xi}

Wolastoqew (Maliseet) Elder Imelda Perley participated in the National Inquiry's Knowledge Keepers panel in Moncton, New Brunswick. She is doing her part to bring the language back, one child at a time.

My favourite responsibility is I sing to the babies in the womb.... One way for me to save the language is by naming those babies, but I would get them, you know, used to their language. And I work with moms to say the first thing that baby should hear is not, "Is it a boy?" or "Is it a girl?" it's [phrase in Wolastoqew]: "I've been waiting for you, and here's your language that's been waiting for you."^{xii}

In the same panel, Mi'kmaw Elder Miigam'agan shared that the language comes from their ancestral grandmothers, and contains the essence of how they perceive the world.

That's my driving force to continually to honour the language and to bring the voice ... of our cultures forward. And they were held by the women.... When we speak our language, we regard women to be the highest source of life. And then so the women teach us, our mothers teach us how to connect to life.^{xiii}

Rebuilding all Indigenous languages through recovery and revitalization back to normalization – a task former Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson calls on Canadians to embrace as a "national imperative"^{xiv} – will require meaningful, equitable government funding support.

Funding for Indigenous language support has been in decline in recent years, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) reports. This is in stark contrast to the funding dedicated to French-language services, which the Supreme Courts of Canada have vigorously defended as essential to the right to freedom of expression.^{xv} The National Inquiry agrees



with the TRC that this same defence should apply to Canada's "original" languages^{xvi} just as much as it does to the official languages of English and French. Federal, provincial, and territorial governments cannot look at funding for Indigenous languages as something "extra," but as a critical component of fulfilling their mandate on language rights in Canada.

Revitalizing and normalizing such a wide diversity of Indigenous languages across the country will be no easy feat. However, it is essential to the health, identity, and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples. As the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health says:

The urgency to revitalize and restore the well-being of culture and languages is now more than ever a critical endeavor. This task will enlist the expertise and collaboration of many, including elders, linguists, teachers, educational institutes, non-profits, health care providers, and government. It will take place in language nests, in classrooms, around the kitchen table, and in environmental and digital landscapes. Ultimately, this concerted vision can ease intergenerational traumas, promote holistic healing, rebuild self-esteem, and restore cultural and linguistic pride.^{xvii}

- I Kirmayer, Brass, and Tait, "The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples," 613.
- II Elder Kathy Louis, personal communication, February 6, 2019.
- III Statistics Canada, "Census in Brief: The Aboriginal Languages."
- IV Boulanger, "Indigenous Language Revitalization."
- V Joann Green (Heiltsuk), Part 1, Public Volume 90, Vancouver, BC, p. 17.
- VI National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, *Culture and Language as Social Determinants*.
- VII "Permanent Forum Speakers Say Violation of Language Rights 'Cultural Genocide,' Call for Concrete Public Policy to Protect Indigenous Languages," United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, HR/4948, April 24, 2008, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2008/hr4948.doc.htm>. See also Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar, "Indigenous Children's Education."
- VIII Anderson, Insights on Canadian Society, "Results from the 2016 Census."
- IX Statistics Canada, "Census in Brief: Aboriginal Languages in Canada"; Frideres, "Continuity or Disappearance."
- X National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, *Culture and Language as Social Determinants*.
- XI Elder Kathy Louis, personal communication, February 6, 2019.
- XII Elder Imelda Perley (Wolastoqew), Part 1, Public Volume 44(a), Moncton, NB, p. 41.
- XIII Elder Miigam'agan (Mi'kmaq), Part 1, Public Volume 44(a), Moncton, NB, pp. 62, 63.
- XIV Clarkson, "Indigenous Languages Are Vital."
- XV TRC, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy*.
- XVI Assembly of First Nations, "Assembly of First Nations Engagement Sessions."
- XVII National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, *Culture and Language as Social Determinants*, 7.



The Importance of Education

Every single Dialogue group across the country called for ongoing, mandatory training to equip front-line workers and management to serve and engage with Indigenous communities in culturally sensitive and safe ways. Participants recommended training in various sectors, including law enforcement, justice and correctional systems, health care, education, child and family services, and natural resource industries. Additionally, some participants suggested training for Elders and Knowledge Keepers working with marginalized populations.

“We need to be seen as human.... There is so much education that needs to happen.... If police officers have never been taught about the history of why things are the way they are, that things didn’t just happen, then how can we expect them to know? We need to educate front-line workers about why women [engage in sex work], why they’ve fallen into alcohol and drugs. They don’t just fall into it for no reason or like that [with a snap of the fingers].” (Métis Perspectives)

Proposed topics included:

- history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and the impacts of colonialism
- cultural awareness training on the traditions, values, and world views of specific Indigenous communities
- Indigenous language training specific to communities they serve
- cultural safety and cultural humility training
- 2SLGBTQQIA-inclusion, particularly within an Indigenous context, including an understanding of traditional Indigenous understandings of gender and sexual orientation
- anti-oppression and decolonization
- understanding of historical, intergenerational trauma and trauma-informed care
- crisis de-escalation and non-violent intervention
- harm-reduction approaches
- suicide prevention and intervention
- context-specific training, such as abuse and domestic violence, sexual exploitation, mental health concerns, working with youth, etc.

“Anti-racism education is important ... because learning about bannock is not going to help change your views.” (Métis Perspectives)



“More needs to be done for services to be trained in the Two-Spirit community. The Indigenous context is different.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“That the history and realities of the Métis people be woven into the very fabric of Canadian society, through building the skills, knowledge, and competencies of the policy makers, the members of the judicial system, the health care system, and the education system.” (Métis Perspectives)

Recommendations for the implementation of public sector training included:

- ✓ **mandatory training** for all public sector workers;
- ✓ **continuous training and professional development.** Participants noted that current training programs are often optional or are limited to a brief orientation training. They emphasized the need for continuous, gradual, in-depth training to familiarize staff with emerging issues and best practices;
- ✓ **context-specific training**, adapting national programs to reflect the specific Indigenous communities and marginalized populations they serve, and tailored to users’ needs;

“Inuit and First Nations are different. There are officers who have worked briefly with First Nations, who come to the North, and they treat us the same [as First Nations].” (Inuit Perspectives)
- ✓ **training in collaboration** with Indigenous communities, and/or training delivered by Indigenous facilitators. One participant in Wendake suggested incorporating a “feedback loop between clients and those who train their service provider, in order to be able to influence the training that will have an influence on the next generations”;
- ✓ **curriculum integration**, starting in elementary and secondary schools, but also including mandatory university-level courses;
- ✓ **community orientation programs delivered by local organizations**, Elders, or other community leaders to introduce front-line workers to local community members, organizations, and the nuances of cultural norms, traditions, and protocols – from bereavement practices to seasonal rhythms. This recommendation was particularly emphasized in the Inuit Perspectives session, in response to the high turnover rate of social service staff in northern communities, which limits their ability to familiarize themselves with communities. Some participants recommended hiring Elders or other local community members as ongoing liaison workers supporting teachers, law enforcement officers, and other social service staff on a day-to-day basis; and



“[There is a need for] orientation, training and integration of new front-line workers into the communities. They must become a part of the community, we need to teach them about the community. We need to leverage our mayors to do some of this work. An appointed Elder in every community – they talk to all service providers, they will teach and give a cultural orientation, [and] this would be a salaried Elder. Our communities will grow from that.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“In our culture we acknowledge with a smile or a nod.... The Canadian army [had begun] training in her community. She was walking down the road while a platoon was marching towards her. She smiled at them and said, ‘You’d camouflage a lot better if you were wearing white,’ since they were in green gear in a snowy space. She expressed this in a joking way to express the hospitality northerners live. Her comment made the platoon laugh. To joke and be personal is a northern characteristic. [It is] berry picking season, caribou harvesting season—yet there are 40 members of the army on 40 ATVs back to back to back driving all over the land, scaring away caribou and squishing our berries!” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ☑ **accountable social services** for the implementation of measures to ensure cultural safety and inclusion in programs and policies. As one participant in Inuvik described, training should be “grounded in [a] professional expectation to utilize Inuit teachings throughout the job. This will be a form of prevention of violence and threats to the family.”

Continuity of Care

Participants stressed the importance of being able to build long-term, trusting relationships with service providers, including social workers, health care professionals, and law enforcement. The high turnover of staff in public sector work, and particularly in northern communities, can leave individuals feeling abandoned in the midst of crisis situations, which forces them to retell their story repeatedly, and erodes trust. Additionally, short-term placements limit service providers’ abilities to understand the needs and culture of the community they are working with.

“[She] needs the same person to work with her, listen to her, believe in her, instead of different people (rotating, no relationship).” (Inuit Perspectives)

Providing long-term funding for program sustainability was deemed important. Participants expressed a need for consistent, long-term, and, ideally, core funding for successful initiatives. This will enable community organizations to provide continuous service, develop long-term strategies, retain expertise, and relieve the administrative burden of annual grant proposals. Several participants critiqued the prevalence of short-term, project-based funding, which is often vulnerable to changes in government. They noted that short-term funding increases staff turnover, threatens the sustainability of projects and partnerships, and may require groups to pitch “something new” every year, instead of continuing, building on, and expanding successful initiatives.



“To think about initiatives over four years does not change society. You have to think in the very long term.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“We’ve done some really amazing things in the past, but with changes in government, funding and community, the projects fall apart.” (Métis Perspectives)

Long-term placements of social service staff, particularly in northern or remote communities, and encouraging social service providers to build trusting relationships with community members by engaging in community events, were considered important to continuity of care.



*Community Health Centre
in Pangnirtung, Nunavut.
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Exploring Safety through Four Key Themes

While participants across all four Guided Dialogues cited the interrelatedness of program themes, facilitators worked to understand how recommendations about best practices related to the four key rights areas encapsulated in the *Final Report*. As a way of grounding best practices for accountability, participants were guided through questions related to best practices in areas that contribute to keeping communities, and the women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people within them, safe.



Culture as a Critical Source for Safety

A core theme throughout the Guided Dialogues was the vital importance of culture and community for the well-being of Indigenous communities. Based on the holistic approach to safety and well-being, which grounded the discussions, access to culture was seen as a fundamental right, a basic need, and a top priority to reduce risks of violence. It was given prominence as a key to empowering and revitalizing Indigenous communities. Participants spoke eloquently about the significance of land, languages, and cultural teachings as sources of strength, healing, and guidance that should inform work in all sectors. Family and community members were identified as critical sources of support and safety, especially for highly vulnerable members of society.

Participants offered a number of recommendations to support the revitalization of Indigenous cultures, to foster a positive sense of identity among Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals, and to strengthen community ties.

“Culture is a birthright, not a reward.” (Métis Perspectives)

“The answers are there and have always been there. We have not been connecting with them.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Challenges to Cultural Knowledge and Connection

Engaging in conversations about research models and equitable representation also engendered many discussions about the participants themselves. The Guided Dialogues weren’t sessions aimed at hearing personal testimony, but many of those who attended were survivors of violence, people who worked with families, with women, with girls, and with 2SLGBTQQIA people, as well as family members themselves. The combination of their lived experiences, along with their professional expertise, generated important insights into the context of violence, based in racism, sexism, and ongoing discrimination, that impacts, in an intersectional way, the lives of participants.

As one 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives participant noted, “There are so many spokes in the wheel of discrimination.” Participants in all four Dialogue sessions highlighted colonial policies and programs as a primary cause for the violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, as well as the contemporary impacts of those policies – such as substance use, interpersonal violence, abuse, and poverty – rooted in intergenerational and multigenerational trauma. As one participant in Toronto noted, “Colonialism is what brings us here today.”

In particular, participants spoke of the devastating impact of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, displacement from traditional lands, and the destruction or banning of traditional Indigenous traditions (for example, the killing of Inuit sled dogs). As one 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives participant noted, “The old people before them had no one to give this [cultural] piece to, with residential school, etc.” In other words, the physical and cultural separation brought on by these



policies resulted in entire bodies of knowledge not being transmitted. In addition, the reality of languages under threat was noted as an important part of the inability to transmit teachings, or to learn them as they were intended.

Disconnection and Dislocation

Participants in all four Dialogues also described how the disconnection from land, culture, and community caused by colonization has had a profound effect on Indigenous Peoples' sense of identity and purpose, increasing the risk of suicide or of engaging in substance use or violence.

Discussing the loss of connection from a traditional land base and from the cultural identity associated with it, several participants across all four Dialogues commented on the pain of becoming disconnected from their traditional land base in both a material and physical sense, as well as in a cultural or spiritual sense. In the Métis Perspectives Dialogue, in particular, participants described how questions of identity become even more fraught, due to differing perspectives on the definition of "Métis," and the lack of a Métis land base in many situations that could help bring communities together to exchange knowledge. As one participant noted, "Not participating in your culture, you lose your identity and you suffer throughout your life not knowing your identity and where you came from."

For Inuit participating in the Inuit Perspectives Dialogue sessions, the impact of multi-generational trauma and of intergenerational trauma is rooted in policies the National Inquiry also heard about in the context of its other hearings. For instance, many participants discussed the impact of the killing of Inuit sled dogs in the mid-20th century. As one participant described, the sled dogs were an essential part of Inuit people's livelihood, serving as protectors and companions while facilitating transportation and hunting. Participants discussed how losing the sled dogs, as well as losing traditional hunting skills and being forced into stationary communities, contributed to poverty, food insecurity, and a sense of anger, frustration, and purposelessness among Inuit youth and men. As one Inuk explained, "They used the agricultural law from the South to justify the kill[ing] of the dogs and killed the lives of those men as they knew it." The impacts of that policy have crossed over into the next generation, as one participant noted about youth.

"We have a generation that are stuck because they don't know traditional practices for resiliency and survival. They don't have an education that provides that opportunity so that they can't fall back to the traditional skills, but they also don't succeed in the wage economy and they are stuck in the middle. They don't know this and they also don't know that – and there is a lot of rage. And that's why there's a lot of acts of violence."
(Inuit Perspectives)

As this example also makes clear, some participants in the Inuit Perspectives session described a sense that youth in their communities are caught "in between cultures" or "in two different worlds, our traditional lives and modern lives."



Aawi – “One who is who they’re supposed to be”

By Roger Roulette, Ojibwe Language Specialist

Pronoun – A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun.

In Algonquian languages such as Cree and Ojibwe, pronouns have no gender as in “he” or “she” as they do in other languages such as English. Instead, they have “proximates,” which are understood to be either “he/she” or “something alive.” This is the reason that some speakers in these Aboriginal languages may interchange the terms when referring to a third person, whether they are male, female, or other: in Cree, “wína” – “he/she or other”; in Ojibwe, “wiin” – “he/she or other.”

When these Aboriginal peoples are speaking in their respective languages, the only indication of any reference to gender is by other nouns, as in the following examples: “he is a big man,” *mindido inini*; “she is a tall woman,” *ginoozi ikwe*. The other ways of gender qualifiers are adjectives. Adjectives define nouns or things. A man may be referred to as “beautiful,” as it is done in English, but the term is often associated with describing women or people of the feminine persuasion. It is also the same as the term “handsome” – *minwaabeke*, where it may be used to describe a woman’s appearance, as in “a handsome woman,” but is usually attributed to a man’s appearance.

The following are examples in Ojibwe grammar for nouns and adjectives that may indicate or designate as being close to a person’s gender.

Ikwewayaa’ii (prep.) – something feminine, of a woman

Ininiwayaa’ii (prep.) – something masculine, of a man

Wemitigoozhiikwe (n.) – white woman

Wemitigoozhi (n.) – white man (person)

Ikwewing (adj.) – of a woman, in the area of womanly

Ininiwing (adj.) – of a man, in the area of manly

For all intents and purposes, the Algonquian languages do not necessarily focus on the gender of the third person or “other.” Not only does use of such a language lessen the speaker to presume or make judgments, but the listener is expected to extrapolate or come to a conclusion for themselves on the qualities, gender, or other attributes of the one spoken about.

The term *aawi* is an Ojibwe word that literally means “he/she is who he/she is supposed to be.” Because Ojibwe and Cree have animate and inanimate designations in place for gender, the inanimate form would be *aawiwān*, or “it is what it is supposed to be.” The former is used more often the latter, due to its practical usage.



Shifts in Societal and Family Values

Other elements of loss rooted in intergenerational trauma included cultural knowledge and traditions, which also connected with the violence that front-line workers and community members see today. For instance, in the Toronto Dialogue on 2SLGBTQQIA experiences, many participants described the lasting colonial influence on gender norms and relations, and perspectives on gender identity and sexual orientation, leading to increased misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia in Indigenous communities. For participants working within the 2SLGBTQQIA communities, the impact is severe, particularly when the understanding of the value of Two-Spirit and gender-diverse individuals in some Nations is not being communicated consistently today: “Our young people don’t know our history, so they don’t know who they are, so they became violent.”

These understandings – the ones that participants thought could offer pathways to healing and could constitute an important component of best practices in the delivery of services – are rooted in bodies of knowledge directly threatened by many colonial policies. For example, in discussing the loss of language and culture, many participants noted how the loss of the rich body of knowledge – including Indigenous languages, traditional skills, guided teachings, stories, ceremonies, and laws – directly compromised the access of Indigenous Peoples to supports and to services that take place within the context of cultural safety. Speaking of language, one Inuk participant noted, “Our language has changed so much over the years. My language is so different from my ancestors’ now because of the English influence.”

Across all sessions, participants also noted significant shifts in family and societal values, such as increased consumerism and social isolation, and decreased sense of resiliency or respect for Elders. For example, some participants proposed that some individuals, especially youth and men, may be led to engage in violence, criminal behaviour, or substance use as a way to fill in a gap left by the loss of their culture, linking the violation of cultural rights directly to the violence that targets Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. As one person explained, in Toronto,

“Men have lost their teaching; they have been struggling with the consequences of residential school, drugs, and alcohol. They have crushed spirit and have forgotten that when they were born they received a gift as an Indigenous People, but events like the residential school have crushed their gift.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Ironically, as another 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives participant explained, “For many, [correctional facilities are where] they get cultural support – many people, the first time they’ve been to a sweat was in a jail. So, they go back in there again to access that.”

One of the distinctive elements that emerged over the course of the Dialogue sessions was how, for some community members and front-line workers, lateral violence can also contribute to the targeting of individuals for violence. In the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives and Métis Perspectives



Dialogues in particular, participants also spoke about the lateral violence experienced by 2SLGBTQQIA people and Métis people. For instance, Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA individuals face discrimination, marginalization, and harassment from members of some Indigenous communities as well as non-Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA communities, and from broader society. Meanwhile, the existence of differing and strongly held views regarding what constitutes Métis identity can exacerbate exclusion and harassment within the Métis community, as well as from other communities, such as from some First Nations people.

Interpersonal Violence and Families under Attack

The impact of much of the discrimination described by participants was interpersonal violence and families under threat. Participants in all four Dialogue sessions identified family discord (including the perception of parental neglect by child welfare authorities, family violence, weak family ties, or parental substance use) as a risk factor for the safety and well-being of Indigenous children and youth. Many participants emphasized the negative impact of trauma, particularly from residential school experiences, on parenting abilities and parental substance use, creating intergenerational cycles of trauma and abuse. Similarly, participants discussed the rupture of family ties when family members were sent away to residential schools or placed in foster care, or needed to leave their home community to access services such as health care.

“She and her family were so close. They spent so much time together, working together, supporting each other, all filled with love. Residential school took that away.... When she returned home, nothing was the same. Ten months away, and everything was broken when she returned: the closeness the family had, the love they shared, the caring.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

“Growing up, our parents were caught up in their own addiction [and] we were left to our own devices.... Where I found safety was with my cousins; cousins took rank, took on roles to protect each other.” (Métis Perspectives)

Participants discussed how the lack of safety and care in the family home can lead to youth running away from home at an early age, or children and youth carrying the burden of taking care of other minors in the family. They indicated a need for greater support for children and youth facing or fleeing adverse conditions in their family home.

“Kids are running away because there’s something missing – unconditional love, a safe place.” (Métis Perspectives)

“When I was eight, I had to take care of my family. Today, I see my role being to look out for those girls and catch them. Nobody ever questioned my role as the provider and caretaker for my family, they always saw me as the strong one. I never got acknowledged for all the work I did, for all the growing up I had to do. If only there had been someone there to say, ‘How can I help you?’” (Métis Perspectives)



Recommendations and Best Practices: Centring Families

Of the many systems that participants discussed in reference to their work or to their own experiences, the well-being and unity of families were identified as being central to the safety and well-being of individual Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Participants highlighted childhood as a critical period that can either strengthen and protect women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people from harm, or cause lasting trauma and lead to targeting. Participants discussed at length the damage caused by experiences of family violence, or by individuals becoming separated from their families through the residential school system, or by foster care interventions. They noted that family is a central value in Indigenous cultures, and that positive change often begins within the family home.

“To make change, you have to start in the bedroom, living room, kitchen and your bathroom, then four corners of your house, then your whole community. That’s how you keep your household and community from becoming a violent one.”
(2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Participants discussed a range of systemic inequities that contribute to the persistent overrepresentation of Indigenous children in Canada’s foster care system,⁵ including:

- the historic use of foster care as an avenue for assimilation (most notoriously through the Sixties Scoop and Saskatchewan’s targeted transracial adoption program, “Adopt Indian Métis”);
- the impact of intergenerational trauma on family relations and substance use; and
- socio-economic inequalities, including the underfunding of child welfare and other social services on Indigenous reserves.⁶

Indeed, several participants noted that struggling parents are “criminalized” or “doubly victimized” (Quebec Perspectives) by a system that does not acknowledge these systemic inequities. For instance, one participant described how available subsidized housing does not always meet the square footage requirements set out by child welfare services, leading to child apprehensions (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives). Participants described patterns of precipitous child apprehensions, which do not help improve living conditions, offer parents support and guidance, or work to reunite families.

“When you are accused of being guilty by service providers, you have to prove in court that you are *not* guilty. Children are always removed before the problem/issue is addressed.” (Métis Perspectives)

Several groups discussed how child welfare policies and criteria do not reflect Indigenous values and ways of life, operating under a “colonial structure” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives). In the Inuit Perspectives session, for example, several participants expressed a sense that federal child



welfare legislation does not always apply in an Inuit context, or reflect Inuit values regarding the priorities for child welfare. Some participants cited instances of child apprehensions based on discriminatory profiling of caregivers.

“[It] comes down to what the norm is. No one knows what the norm is for our communities. You shouldn’t measure our norms against what’s expected by ‘Canadian’ norms.” (Métis Perspectives)

“The court does not reflect Inuit values when making decisions. The courts should be accountable to the community.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Child welfare is so important. Legislation has been made without our input. The way to live is so different. We need these laws that take care of our children.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Several participants noted a conflict of interest where financial incentives for child and welfare agencies, social workers, or foster parents may encourage the use of foster care as a primary approach to child welfare.

“There are whole economies where the whole communities [are] based on child welfare and raising Inuit children.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Noting the inequities, participants across all four Guided Dialogues also emphasized the negative impact that foster care experiences have on the long-term safety and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA people, and families as a whole. These impacts include:

- weakened or permanently ruptured ties with parents, siblings, extended family, and home communities;

“We have no relations or support biologically and culturally due to the Sixties Scoop. Taking away a child’s most valuable resource – their family, extended family, and nationhood.” (Métis Perspectives)

- loss of culture, language, and sense of identity, especially when Indigenous children are placed in non-Indigenous families or far from their home communities. For instance, one participant in the Métis Perspectives Dialogue described losing their birth name and not learning of their Métis identity until they were in university. Some participants noted that the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in non-Indigenous homes has a similar effect as the forcible removal of children through the residential school system or the Sixties Scoop;
- risks of abuse or neglect for children in care. For instance, participants described instances of children’s being placed in unsafe homes, delays in registering children in school, and strict policies discouraging foster care parents from demonstrating affection



in healthy ways, such as through hugs. One participant in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives session noted that 2SLGBTQQIA children and youth face an increased risk of experiencing harm in care;

- inadequate support services for children and youth in care, including gaps in capacity and funding to support children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, or children who have experienced trauma or abuse;

“In Nunavik we had 40 kids in foster care waiting for the Sûreté du Québec to interview them on their sexual abuse case, but the one officer was on sick leave so those children were just left in limbo.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- lack of stability for children cycling in and out of foster care or through multiple foster homes. For instance, one participant described how they had moved through 14 foster homes over the course of their childhood;
- profound sense of loss for parents, increasing their likelihood of engaging in substance abuse, violence, or experiencing mental health concerns, and limiting their ability to improve their parenting skills; and

“My best friend died because of the system. Her kids got taken away, then her house, then she ended up dying from alcohol poisoning. She had nothing. Nothing to live for. Nothing supporting her.” (Métis Perspectives)

“They are still quick to take children away. So, they are taking away the parenting learning.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- lack of support for youth aging out of care, as well as a lack of guidance for those still in care, increasing their risk for homelessness, poverty, substance use, exploitation, and engaging in criminal behaviour.

“[Youth aging out of foster care] have nowhere to go, they feel like ‘throw-aways.’” (Inuit Perspectives)

“The child can turn from victim to perpetrator without the proper guidance.” (Métis Perspectives)

In Depth: Understanding the Crisis of Child Welfare

While the alarmingly high rates of child apprehension are related to many of the different themes discussed in the Dialogues, including culture, health, security, and justice, participants discussed this system in relation to its impact on families and on connection as the starting point for discussing how it violates other basic human rights.



As a result, there was a strong call across all sessions for a preventative approach to child and family welfare services, with an aim to preserve family unity and avoid recourse to foster care interventions insofar as possible. Participants stressed the importance of providing support for the whole family, not just the children, because individual well-being is inherently connected to that of the family.

“Our child protection system is focused on crisis management. It needs to be reversed [to] focus on keeping families whole and healthy, [addressing] housing, parenting, counselling, food, financial problems.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“We don’t just work with the kid ... if we are going to help the child, we are going to help the family.” (Quebec Perspectives)

Specific recommendations include:

☑ **increased financial assistance for families**, as participants noted the disparity between funding allocated toward foster care in significant amounts and the lack of funds directly supporting families to address their basic needs and long-term stability.

☑ **increased funding for family welfare services in general**, increasing child tax credits and social assistance amounts to support low-income families, and ensuring that all children have equitable access to services through Jordan’s Principle⁷;

“Maybe they need a spare bed, maybe they need some more food security, and maybe they need to go back to school. We shouldn’t be separating families.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

“They are paying non-Inuit to raise our children. Yet we don’t get support to raise our own children.... If we only changed one thing, to put the money in the family, it would change things dramatically.” (Inuit Perspectives)

☑ **family healing and treatment centres** that provide multigenerational, wraparound care, including substance use treatment, mental health supports, and guidance from Elders. Participants noted that this model would help address root causes of substance use or family violence, allow parents and children to remain together throughout the healing process, and provide specialized support for children experiencing trauma, violence, or neglect in their family home;

“Keep the families together during times of healing and a transition. Provide them with the support they need to work out their issues and rebuild their life.”
(Métis Perspectives)

“Whole family restoration and healing as opposed to removing one person and not addressing possible root issues and opportunities for re-traumatization when returning to the home.” (Inuit Perspectives)



“When we talk about removing men from violent situations, from home, we are actually continuing that cycle [of removing people] from home to go to residential school. We need to give people a place that feels like home, and to help children, [a place] that is age-appropriate for children, to help people to reconnect, to switch the dialogue from ‘your parents are bad’ to ‘your parents are hurt.’ Children are probably the most able to break that cycle. We need to understand why people are abusing, how we can [address this] in a way that reflects our values, and not the values of a court system.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ☑ **outreach services**, bringing preventative services and support directly into the home; and

“When someone loses someone, our way is to go visit them. You do not ask them to go somewhere. People don’t have the care they need to recover their children and recover their life.... Sometimes it just takes one warning for someone to change their behaviours. But you need to go there and talk to the person.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

- ☑ **culturally informed support and education for parents and caregivers**, including early education about healthy relationships, family planning, and parenting skills that are rooted in specific, local Indigenous values. Additionally, participants called for increased emotional support for new mothers, and support for parents or caregivers of youth involved in the justice system or engaging in high-risk behaviour.

“It’s grandparents that are now being parents for their grandchildren for whatever reasons. We hold sessions to support grandparents so they are not alone.”
(Métis Perspectives)

“We need Inuit-specific parenting teachings. Keep the kids together and the families together. The mother and the child are learning. Single mothers want to be with their child, but it’s a struggle without support.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Now, when someone gets pregnant, it’s a panicky, difficult experience. But we should prepare them for traditional parenting [not just home economics] in advance in schools.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Parents are not always equipped with parental skills to work with their teenagers. Create environments for parents, make a budget, make menus, equip parents to take care of children. Cooperative group workshops to equip parents.”
(Quebec Perspectives)

In the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives session, participants recommended offering parents and caregivers 2SLGBTQQIA competency training to increase their understanding, acceptance, and ability to support their children – especially for parents whose trans children are receiving gender-affirming care, and in communities outside of urban centres.



“If there is a transphobic family and that forces the child to run away, the kids can be taken under child welfare. The family should be able to receive support on how to parent their child better, and [how not to be] transphobic.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“There is a need too for families to adopt more inclusive and affirming languages. The families have to adapt to the reality of their children.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Participants also identified various recommendations to improve the safety and well-being of children and youth in care, including:

- ✓ **Indigenous child welfare agencies**,⁸ or culturally specific child welfare legislation that would be tailored to the cultural context of particular communities. One participant recommended that Elders be involved in shaping the legislation, offering guidance so that Indigenous child welfare agencies are shaped “from a spiritual and cultural place, not [a] colonial place” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives). Similarly, a participant in the Métis Perspectives session recommended the involvement of Métis child welfare agencies prior to apprehensions;
- ✓ **local foster care placements and kinship care**, including increased recognition and financial support for existing informal arrangements where children and youth are being cared for by extended family;
- ✓ **access to culture**, especially for children placed in non-Indigenous homes, such as by providing foster families with dedicated funding for cultural enhancement, and engaging children and youth in care in community-based cultural programs specific to their heritage;
- ✓ **stability** within group home staff, social workers, and foster care placements;
- ✓ **support for youth aging out of care**, including legal guidance, living skills, mentorship, and connections to Elders. One participant cited policies that allow children above the age of majority to continue receiving child support if they are enrolled in a full-time educational program. They suggested that as the “de facto parent” for children in foster care, the government should be responsible for comparable support; and
- ✓ **national or provincial advocacy bodies** to oversee and champion the needs and rights of children and youth, and to provide legal representation to children and youth who are not receiving adequate care in foster systems.

“There is an existing [new] advocacy group for children who are not being supported, but it’s only for children and only in the capital. So, [it] needs to be in other communities and not just for youth. Travelling from one community to the next is not working. Especially not for crises.” (Inuit Perspectives)



The Importance of Cultural Revitalization

Although participants in all sessions discussed the devastating impact colonialism had on Indigenous communities' ability to practise, develop, and transmit their culture between generations, they also celebrated and encouraged the increasing revival of Indigenous cultures.

In particular, several groups in the Quebec Perspectives Dialogue also echoed the notion that Indigenous women are sacred, and stressed the need for advocacy and awareness to value and empower Indigenous women as a component of cultural revitalization.

“Indigenous women are sacred; they need to be humanized. Indigenous women are easy to be discarded because we have been dehumanized. We need to hold our women and girls as sacred.” (Quebec Perspectives)

Approaches to fostering Indigenous culture included:

- ✓ **cultural programming** to pass on Indigenous teachings, values, ceremonies, and traditions with sufficient funding to equitably compensate Elders and Knowledge Keepers;
- ✓ **integration of cultural supports and ceremonies** in social services;
- ✓ **integration of Indigenous teachings in school curricula** that are culturally specific to different communities. Suggested programs included classes on Indigenous languages and history, allotted time to engage in seasonal traditions and ceremonies, and on-the-land programs. Participants recommended engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers to collaborate with teachers in delivering culturally relevant curriculum. They noted that integrating Indigenous content in public school curricula is important for the cultural well-being of Indigenous students, and that it also increases awareness of Indigenous histories – and understanding and appreciation for Indigenous cultures – among non-Indigenous students. As a result, this can contribute to the dismantling of systemic discrimination and oppression in Canadian society as a whole;

“The majority of children in schools are Inuvialuit. Not all of us grew up in a cultural home. I had to be out of school for seasonal cultural activities. We’re trying to do that in schools, with Elders and champions who can teach children about being out on the land, and [who can] act as role models. Cultural [and] history classes need to be mandated, but education is run by [the] territorial government.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **teaching of Indigenous languages** and promotion of their use in day-to-day life;



- ✓ **support for Indigenous artists** by investing in infrastructure for art production and sales, and promotion of, and advocacy for, Indigenous art in Canada;

“Elevate arts in the communities.... [There] needs to be more knowledge about [the] role of artists in our decolonization process.... Make sure they are funded, have space to work, have a platform to share.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“Making art [is] a way to let our ancestors go through our body – and put it to use and do things that will vibrate through the next generation.”
(2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)
- ✓ **public education and awareness campaigns** on Indigenous cultures and histories, and promoting lateral kindness and anti-oppression. For instance, some participants suggested establishing an Indigenous History Month modelled on the existing observance of Black History Month; and
- ✓ **programs dedicated to empowering and reaffirming** the identity of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, including programs delivered through schools.

Access to Culture in Urban Settings

Discussions about culture and identity in the Quebec Perspectives Dialogue session centred notably on delivering programs and services through a culturally grounded lens. This included the importance of incorporating culturally specific traditions, ceremonies, and healing practices, either within mainstream social service agencies or through Indigenous-specific service agencies, such as friendship centres or First Nations holistic health centres.

“Healing will happen through celebrating our identity in implementing our health and social services.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“Best practices deal with combining conventional knowledge and First Nations traditional knowledge. A First Nations agency, which entrusts to First Nations people the capacity to act for their services and care, all the while undertaking a decolonization process of health care and services, [would be] a contribution of First Nations knowledge from a cultural angle, connected to the family, the community.”
(Quebec Perspectives)

Additionally, some groups discussed the notion of “Indigenizing” urban spaces as a way to increase the visibility and recognition of Indigenous communities. For instance, participants highlighted ideas such as the use of Indigenous languages in street signs or creating a sweat lodge in a botanical garden.



“Create Indigenous spaces ... Indigenize the city and the people citizens interact with. There should be markers of this, for other citizens also. People need to see those markers: visibility.” (Quebec Perspectives)



Fort Smith, Northwest Territories has adopted stop signs that include local Indigenous languages. Source: Mario De Ciccio, Radio-Canada. No copyright infringement intended.

2SLGBTQQIA Identity and Inclusion

A central theme in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives Dialogue was the tensions within Indigenous communities concerning differing perspectives on gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and the associated barriers to accessing culture and ceremony.

From some perspectives, traditional Indigenous cultures held an honourable place for Two-Spirit persons, which were altered by cis-normative and hetero-normative colonial influences. One Elder described this as the difference between the “old old way” (Indigenous culture before colonial contact) and the “new old way” (Indigenous culture influenced by colonization). Some Elders disagree with this view, reflecting a lack of acceptance of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA individuals.

Participants described how some Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people are embraced and supported by their family and community when they express their gender identity and sexual orientation. Others, however, face discrimination, marginalization, or violence, and may even be forced to leave their home communities in search of greater acceptance or support services. Similarly, participating in ceremonies in a way that aligns with an individual’s gender identity can be a profoundly uplifting experience, which allows 2SLGBTQQIA individuals to connect more deeply with both their Indigenous and 2SLGBTQQIA identities. Participants described how some individuals are excluded, discriminated against, or harassed in cultural or ceremonial



spaces, or are forced to take on roles in ceremonies that correspond with their biological sex instead of their gender identity. Several participants described a sense of having to choose between finding belonging in their home communities and Indigenous identities or “living their truth.”

“His communities would not let him participate in the Pow-Wow, dance, or drum because he was gay. [He] had to choose between being gay and [being] Indigenous.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“This is one place where we truly should be ourselves, but what if we’re not even safe there?” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“The medicine man ... tried to exorcise me. He didn’t see me as a transman but as something that shouldn’t exist. But that really opened my eyes. I took it as a sign – that this is coming from a cultural leader and is influencing so many people, and that something is wrong.... Since then, I’ve been doing things. Putting up gender-neutral sweats. Talking openly about the events that took place, the hurt that happens, but also the transformational change.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Participants proposed various recommendations to support 2SLGBTQQIA inclusion in Indigenous communities and cultural spaces, including:

- ✓ **dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA ceremonies and cultural spaces**, such as gender-neutral sweat lodges;
- ✓ **visible indicators in 2SLGBTQQIA-inclusive spaces**, such as flying rainbow flags at Pow-Wows;
- ✓ **protocols and advocacy for 2SLGBTQQIA inclusion** in cultural spaces and ceremonies; for instance, allowing individuals to choose roles in ceremony based on their gender identity, or re-establishing traditional roles for Two-Spirit people. As one participant noted, dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA ceremonies help create a safe space, but can also perpetuate the marginalization and segregation of 2SLGBTQQIA individuals in Indigenous communities if “mainstream” cultural spaces assume that *they* don’t need to change. Participants spoke of the delicate balance between respecting Elders and cultural leaders and honouring conventional protocols, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the need to “gently challenge and push” discriminatory teachings and practices that are jeopardizing the safety, well-being, and access to culture of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people. They described gradual shifts in some communities led by dedicated role models, advocates, and allies, who determinedly participate in cultural spaces despite backlash, and who open spaces for dialogue; and

“I do things like, I bring a pipe. And that means a lot to them. People have children identifying as queer and they get to see that. Small steps – word is getting out there.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)



“There are 2S ambassadors, going around to different Pow-Wows with their sashes. Jokes about them are raised up by emcees, and they come up to raise awareness.”
(2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“I know it’s a continuum of change. And it’s not changing fast enough. It’s a challenge – the Sundance. We’ve seen that strict binary expectation, and youth being disrespected and ostracized in public. There needs to be a strong advocate.... How do we repair damage that’s done to them? An Elder had told a lesbian to leave – and we need to repair that relationship. But that’s reactionary, and we need to also be proactive. We need to challenge these situations. These 2S dancers – they take a beating, but she’s doing it. We try to support her as much as possible and unite. Some of the dancers, some of the drummers won’t dance with her. But that’s not the majority, the majority is open.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

- ☑ **enhanced role of cultural leaders.** In particular, participants noted the degree of influence that Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other cultural leaders can have on 2SLGBTQQIA inclusion in the wider community, especially when they are being called on by schools, social services, or community centres to lead ceremony. Having those individuals promote the visibility and importance of 2SLGBTQQIA people, and by including them, was noted as an important measure to increase cultural safety. In addition, participants called for allied cultural leaders to become more engaged in advocacy: for instance, by participating visibly in 2SLGBTQQIA events, conferences, or ceremonies, and therefore showing support.

Celebrating Métis Culture and Identity

In the Métis Perspectives Dialogue, there was a strong emphasis on the role of education, advocacy, and cultural programming to support positive perceptions of Métis culture and communities, reduce lateral violence and discrimination, and help foster a positive sense of identity among Métis people.



Beadwork as an Act of Resistance

Métis beadwork has its history in the lessons taught by First Nations mothers to their children, and then in the dynamic nature of the art that emerged from the process.

As material culture researcher Patrick Young explains:

The origin of Métis beadwork designs came from experimentation and merging of various art traditions that influenced Métis style. Several Plains First Nations used geometric patterns on their tipi covers, parfleches and clothing and, up until the 1840s, Métis decoration was dominated by geometric designs.ⁱ

Once the Catholic Church became more involved in Métis communities, and through the education by orders like the Grey Nuns in the West, many Métis beadworkers incorporated new floral designs, using new techniques. As Young notes, “By the 1830s, increasingly naturalistic and colourful floral designs became evident on Métis products from Red River after the establishment of Roman Catholic mission schools at Pembina, St. Boniface and Baie St. Paul.”ⁱⁱ

Métis beadwork was highly sought-after, especially during the fur trade and on clothing that traders wore, which often featured trailing flower designs that earned the Métis the nickname, from the Dakota Sioux and the Cree, of the “flower beadwork people.”ⁱⁱⁱ For a Métis family, beadwork could make the difference between an easy and difficult season, and the income generated from this work was an important piece of survival for many Métis families, particularly in the face of mounting pressure on their primary food source, the bison, and the need to market their work to non-Métis. Young says that some Métis women began making “decorated Victorian objects such as caribou-hide purses, picture frames, greeting cards, glasses cases and ladies’ caribou-hide slippers. In more northerly regions, women continued to produce traditional, decorated functional clothing items into the twentieth century.”^{iv}

Today, flower beadwork remains an important and distinctive symbol of Métis identity. But, like many art forms, beading isn’t just about art.

Beading represents an opportunity to retain and to share Métis knowledge. For example, Katherine Boyer, Métis artist and creator of the exhibition “The Prairie Rose Won’t Mourn Us,” explains how her art is drawn from the lessons learned from important women in her life, from other artists, from her mother and her grandmother. As she explains:

Another thing I saw as a young girl was the care that exuded from those female relatives.... I still think that is the core of why I take the time, and why I spend such an absurd amount of time, doing this work – it’s to connect with that place, and that memory, of all of those women (from my family) that is founded in care and connection, in physical work.... I see a strong tie between using these materials and connecting to the familial memory that I’ve just described – it’s an important place of grounding.^v

In addition, Métis beadwork today can constitute an important act of resistance in its use to raise awareness on important issues impacting Indigenous and, specifically, Métis women. In addition, the act of resisting the assimilation of colonization to engage in ongoing cultural practice is an important element to the craft. One project that combined beading and resistance is “Walking With Our Sisters,” a crowd-funded project that features thousands of beaded vamps – or moccasin tops – meant to honour women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people who are missing or who have been murdered.^{vi}

According to the project’s website, Walking With Our Sisters features 1,760+ pairs of moccasin vamps and



108 pairs of children's vamps "created and donated by hundreds of caring and concerned individuals to draw attention to this injustice."

What's more:

Each pair of vamps (or "uppers" as they are also called) represents one missing or murdered Indigenous woman. The unfinished moccasins represent the unfinished lives of the women whose lives were cut short. The children's vamps are dedicated to children who never returned home from residential schools. Together the installation represents all these women; paying respect to their lives and existence on this earth.

They are not forgotten. They are sisters, mothers, aunties, daughters, cousins, grandmothers, wives and partners. They have been cared for, they have been loved, they are missing and they are not forgotten.^{VII}

Projects like this one demonstrate how beadwork that historically affirmed and supported Métis women is still important in affirming and supporting women today. As interdisciplinary artist Amy Malbeuf, Métis, from Rich Lake, Alberta, shares, "Beadwork is resistance. Beadwork is revolutionary.... We are celebrating and being proud of our culture. Being involved in these things makes us strong individuals and nations."^{VIII}



In This Painting is a Mirror, by Métis artist Christi Belcourt, tiny dots of paint mimic the look and feel of traditional Métis beadwork. Used with the permission of the artist.

- I Young, "Métis Beadwork," 1.
- II Ibid., 2.
- III Ibid., 1.
- IV Ibid., 3.
- V Fournier, "Métis Beading."
- VI UM News Today, "Sewing the Beads of Change."
- VII <http://walkingwithoursisters.ca/about/>.
- VIII Kirman, "Beadwork is an act of resistance."



Recommendations included:

- ☑ **cultural programming and curriculum integration** to help revitalize and practise Métis language and culture. One participant highlighted the Gabriel Dumont Institute's Métis Essential Learnings (MEL) project, which conducted focus groups in Métis communities across Saskatchewan and consulted Elders to develop a community-based understanding of Métis culture and identity. They have developed a library of resources to help safeguard Métis culture and history. The project's next step (pending funding) is to work with the Ministry of Education to incorporate cultural information into the curriculum of schools in Saskatchewan;

“Making the sound of the language spoken word. I don't speak Michif, but when I was exposed to that, everything inside of me changed.” (Métis Perspectives)

“There's singing, jigging, dancing, which is full, healing, fun and joy-filled. That in itself gives girls, people good memories and good feelings and release and empowerment.” (Métis Perspectives)
- ☑ **the fostering of a positive sense of Métis identity** by facilitating connections with family, land, community, and culture;

“I didn't grow up in my territory. I was adopted out to BC. This dialogue is like coming home. I will be going to visit my home territories for the first time. I'm meeting my family and learning my language, and this has been transformational for me.” (Métis Perspectives)
- ☑ **education and advocacy** on Métis culture, history, and achievements, to increase the visibility, understanding, and appreciation of Métis people;

“I'm very proud to be a Métis, because of all we have accomplished despite the hardships. We carry the cross and we carry the smudge. That is the contract. We are able to negotiate those worlds.” (Métis Perspectives)
- ☑ **acknowledgement of the traditional homelands of the Métis**;

“The words we choose are important. Elders say, ‘I am glad to be on your Treaty 6 territory and homes of the Métis.’ Métis acknowledgement is important.” (Métis Perspectives)
- ☑ **enhanced dialogue and respectful relationships between Métis and First Nations communities**; and
- ☑ **respect for individuals' self-identification as Métis**.

“[We] need to respect how people self-identify. [I] had to fight my way into being able to identify how I want to identify.” (Métis Perspectives)



This Red River cart was gifted to the National Inquiry during the hearings held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, AF A2017-0027.1-0027.3.

Métis participants were confident in their own identities as Métis people, but called for allyship from other Indigenous groups, and from Métis groups, in terms of creating culturally safe places to be Métis and to engage in culture.

“Coming in with pipes and drums ... shifts the atmosphere and the conversation.”
(Métis Perspectives)

“At the Law Society, when I sing or give a teaching or speak in the language, I feel like I’m changing the molecules of the space.” (Métis Perspectives)

Fostering Inuit Values and Culture

Participants in the Inuit Perspectives dialogue spoke of Inuit culture, values, and traditions as a central source for well-being in Inuit communities – helping to foster a sense of purpose and belonging, supporting sustainable livelihoods, and offering guidance for the development of respectful relationships.

Recommendations centred on the revitalization of traditional skills, such as hunting, fishing, harvesting, and sewing. Participants spoke of traditional skills, such as drumming, dancing, throat singing, and the sharing of stories and myths. Several participants recommended teaching Inuktitut in schools and promoting the use of Inuktitut in the public sphere, such as including fluency in Inuktitut as an asset, priority, or requirement in the hiring of social service staff.

“It’s taking time to get back to our traditions, because it was beaten out of us in residential school. We have to relearn how to light the qulliq, and sing the songs in the morning. This is what keeps us safe. We need a good cleansing in the region, because we had two residential schools here in Inuvik. We are strong and resilient, but we need time to reconnect with that.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“I teach seal skinning sometimes.... When they learn, there is a sense of pride. There are feelings of self-esteem and success. Once you accomplish something, whether for girls or boys, there is a sense of accomplishment and pride, which helps alleviate them from [painful] things.” (Inuit Perspectives)



The Inuit Naming System

When an Inuk child is born, they are usually given the name of another person. Naming practices assign one name or several at the birth of an Inuk child, depending on the region. One could not tell whether a person was male or female just by their name because Inuktitut, the Inuit languages, are not gendered. The person a newborn is named after is their *sauniq/atiq*, which translates to “homonym” (Latin: “having the same name”). *Sauniq* literally means “bone”; a child is normally named after a deceased relative and so your *sauniq*, your namesake, is your bones. In certain regions, the term *atiq* designates the namesake, and it means “name.” This naming system was based on reincarnation, and in place before the influence of Christianity and the imposition of family names by government.

When an Inuk woman is pregnant, she begins searching for a possible name for her child. A dream of a deceased loved one is often an indicator of the name to be chosen. In the Inuit way, once a child is named, the child carries the kinship links of their *sauniq*. So, for instance, if the child’s *sauniq* (homonym) had a son, this son becomes the newborn’s son, and the child must address him as her son. A child may be given different names or even change her name later in her life – for example, if she was ill and in need of strength, a new name could be given to her. All Inuit children were named in this manner.

Today, the child is said to carry the strengths, abilities, and the character traits of her *sauniq*. The kinship bonds created through the naming system form the identity of the child; as she grows up, she learns of who she is as her parents and grandparents teach her all the kinship terms of her relatives, through her *sauniq*. The child growing up with the name of her *sauniq* forms a special bond with her kin and she maintains close relationships with her kin. In this manner, the Inuit family maintains a close bond based on kinship.

What is special about carrying the name of a relative is that an Inuk child also carries on the kinship links of their *sauniq/atiq*. The deceased loved one they have been named for has been reincarnated at the birth of the baby and the child continues to carry on kinship relationships. Kinship plays a crucial role in the Inuit community: as the child’s identity is forged,

so are her relationships with her kin and community. These relationships show her the importance of not only her history and identity, but also that those around her love her and treasure her. She learns to care for others and remains close to them. In this manner, kinship maintained social order, and this cultural practice brought about safety.

During the hearings, we heard several Inuit families speaking the name of their loved ones. Martha A. U. spoke her daughter’s name to the National Inquiry, as she began telling her truth: “Tracy ... was her name. I never called her *panik* [daughter], I called her my son, even though she was female, yes. She was named after my father. When I was a child, I was very envious of other children who grew up with a father because I didn’t have a father growing up.”^I

Janet B. also spoke of Inuit names and of the importance of having a name:

So, Ashevak is my – I call him middle son now. Now we have Miles, who is 12 now (and younger than Ashevak); ... but also, my youngest son is actually named Anguti, after Qajaq’s brother. And you know, our names are so important to us in our relationships in our lives, our Inuktitut names. They’re an important way to create lifelong connections and life experiences and expectation. Above all, we are always expected to be of good behaviour so that we can honour the name we are carrying.”^{II}

I Martha A. U. (Inuit, Iqaluit), Part 1, Public Volume 48(b), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 2.

II Janet B. (Inuit, Iqaluit), Part 1, Public Volume 48(a), Rankin Inlet, NU, p. 43.



Additionally, participants described many traditional Inuit teachings and values that they saw as important for promoting well-being, such as resiliency, community interconnection, family ties, and minimalism. Participants spoke of the importance of grounding policies and social services in northern communities in Inuit perspectives, instead of “imposing” southern models.

“In the old days, we did not wish for things others had. We had food and we had housing. We were accepting the way of life. Today we have too many things we want. We have to live in two different worlds. We have to try to live in two different worlds: our traditional lives and the modern lives. Now we need more. We used to appreciate every piece of clothing because it was handmade.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Additionally, there was a strong call for designing and delivering programs and services in a way that embodies distinctive Inuit world views and values, and that dedicates spaces and resources for integrating Inuit traditions, ceremonies, spiritualities, and healing practices. Participants noted that programs that are culturally relevant can have a deeper impact, as they support social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of well-being; help to address trauma from colonial impacts; and help to recover and apply traditional, holistic responses to complex issues.

“Teach them how to deal with trauma. It existed before the colonization. We need to learn how to deal with it traditionally.” (Inuit Perspectives)



In Ottawa, Ontario, Abigail and Charlotte Carleton throat-sing for the group.



“Today is a new way of living”:

An interview with Dorothy Taqtu Aglukark

She was born in Arviat, in 1945, when her parents and grandparents, and other Inuit, used to move inland during summers, “to the mosquitoes!” Her grandmother had named this baby, still in the womb, *Taqtu*, after her deceased brother. As Taqtu said, “They used to name babies after their relatives.” Her grandmother adopted her as per Inuit adoption practices and she was well loved and sheltered by her and her maternal uncles.

Dorothy Taqtu remembered the time when men would depart on hunting expeditions, for oil had to be procured for the *qulliq* (oil lamp) and skin for clothing. In her childhood, she recalled the men harvesting seals and having a delicious meal of seal stomach, and then the next memory was of moving camp along a river during summer. An image of geese comes as young snow geese are harvested onto a canoe. Taqtu said, “I remember them doing these things, observing them only; there is joy, and there is nothing to break the heart, and nothing to worry about.”

As she grew a little older, around 10 years old, it was fall, and her maternal uncle had come to fetch her and her grandmother to return to the sea for winter. They were lacking food by then, and her memory goes to her grandmother, who had cut a piece of leather and had told her to eat it. It was her first memory of hardship, for in the following days, one of the dogs would lose strength and had to be left behind. They walked a great distance and her uncle became snow-blind and asked Taqtu to watch out for sled tracks that would eventually lead the way. She recalled the joy when they arrived at a camp where they were welcomed and fed.



Pictured here is the qulliq used by the National Inquiry during the Truth-Gathering Process. We incorporated the qulliq into our ceremonial process, which is usually used by Inuit women, to symbolize Inuit women's strength, care, and love.



In 1956, she had a little brother.

It would be the last time we would spend on the land that winter in the Inuit manner. The month of November, the ice had formed and an airplane arrived. Some *Qallunaat* came in to our *iglu*, and informed us that we are to go to school. Without any warning! My grandmother, who initially had said no, seemed to have acquiesced, since I would be with my brother. We boarded the plane, resisting, and we were sent away to the Arviat missionary school. That first night, he cried all night, and being so much younger he ended up being sent back home whereas I was to remain. However, I was intent on getting home.

One night, Taqtu began to walk back home, leaving the missionary school behind. She tells her story.

Now it is dark and nothing is visible outside. No one saw me for I had waited for night when all would be dark, so wise then! There is a hill that we know, I could imagine our family camp at a lake. Each time I saw a dark spot, probably a boulder, I would just give myself to it! As I continued in the dark and tired, I lay on a boulder

and slept to rest. I continued walking in the morning. And lo! There was our camp! My grandmother was completely surprised to see me walking in. A search party had been sent out, by airplane and dog team, but I had reached home fast enough.

When she thinks back to how she had walked away from residential school, she reflects upon the danger she may have placed herself in, but also on how she had missed an opportunity for education, thinking that she was a failure. Yet, after so many years, she encouraged her children to become educated. She looks back and she knows how well she has been. "Today is a new way of living, and it will continue to change. It would be good to understand these changes, being educated. Advising our children to be a certain way, and to not stay quiet."



Health and Wellness

Participants in the Guided Dialogues highlighted the intersection between physical and mental well-being and the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals. For instance, mental health services and substance use treatment were identified as being critical to supporting family well-being, preventing violence, supporting victims of crime, and rehabilitating offenders.

Recommendations to increase cultural safety and equity in health care services included:

- ✓ **expanded and improved mechanisms for accountability and advocacy** to support patients facing discrimination or mistreatment in health care services. For instance, one participant recommended expanding the number of community health representatives to more communities, while another participant in the Inuit Perspectives session proposed establishing an oversight/advocacy committee made up of Inuit community members;
- ✓ **cultural safety training for health care workers;** and
- ✓ **dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA health services.**

Inequities in Health Services

Participants discussed two key inequities that impact Indigenous peoples' ability to seek or receive timely health and wellness services: discrimination and mistreatment; and gaps in services in various regions.

Participants in all four Dialogue sessions described instances of discrimination and mistreatment from health care workers, including:

- acts of racism, homophobia, transphobia, or discrimination against Anglophones in Quebec;
- actions by health care providers of dismissing symptoms, misdiagnosing patients, or making false assumptions based on race;
- refusals to refer patients to specialists, including substance use treatment programs or physiotherapy; and
- performances of procedures without a patient's full understanding or informed consent, such as in cases of forced sterilization.

Participants noted that the prevalence of these experiences has led to an erosion of trust in health care institutions, and that this becomes a barrier to Indigenous people seeking or receiving proper medical attention.

“Taking my own [family], or even just myself to the doctors is traumatizing. All because of past experiences.” (Quebec Perspectives)



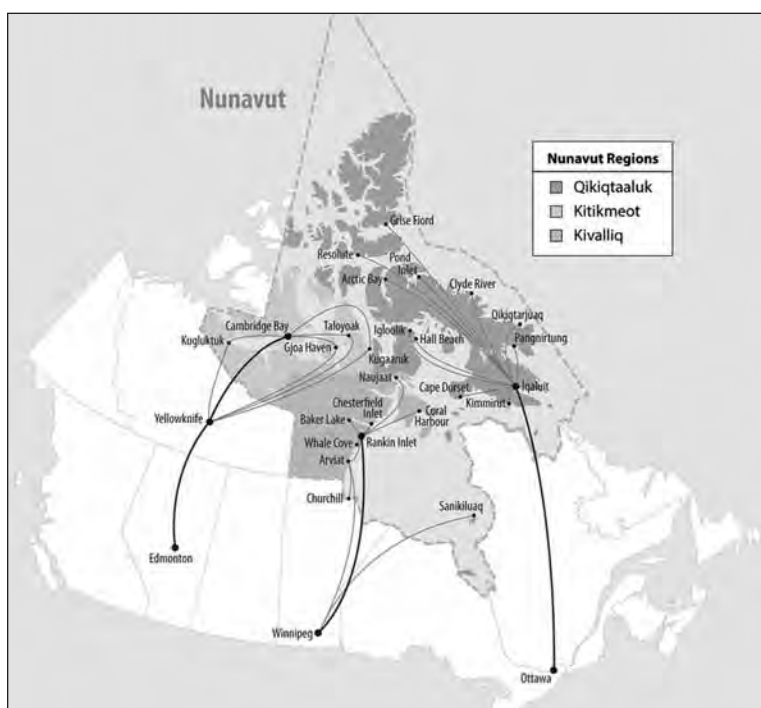
“A lot of people die from lack of care from the nurses who are not paying attention to their needs. Her mother had cancer for three months, and was just given Tylenol and sent home.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Doctor[s] will reject Indigenous [patients] because our health concerns are too complex.” (2SLGBTQIA Perspectives)

Access in Remote, Rural, or Northern Communities

Participants also described how significant gaps in health care services in northern, rural, or remote communities negatively impact the quality of care that Indigenous people receive, and contended that this compromises the safety of individuals and their families.

Several participants discussed the risks associated with individuals’ having to travel outside of their community, province or territory to receive needed care. For instance, participants noted that the stress of this transition, coupled with a lack of family or community support, negatively impacts the patient’s well-being and recovery. Patients and accompanying dependents may also face increased risks in an unfamiliar urban context. For instance, one participant from Inuvik described how youth accompanying Elders to receive medical care may “end up being drawn out into vulnerable situations,” such as engaging in substance use, and “may not come back.” Additionally, it can be difficult for parents to find care for children and dependents while they are away. One participant described the case of a mother whose children were apprehended by child and family welfare services when she had to fly out of her community to give birth.



Inuit are often forced to travel far from home to access health services not available nearer to the community. For many, this travel places them directly in danger. Source: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2017, based on information from the Nunavut Department of Health.



“Often people have to leave to get higher level of [medical] care.... People can have escorts if they need them, but only people who are involved in their medical care. People with children often have to leave them behind, and [there is] not always a safe place for children to be; so they leave their children or don’t go.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Individuals may face long wait times to receive care either within or outside of their home community, which can significantly increase risks of harm, particularly for individuals seeking substance use treatment or mental health supports. Participants described instances where a lack of timely mental health support led to individuals’ committing suicide, or receiving inadequate, makeshift care. For instance, one participant from Inuvik described how “when someone wants to commit suicide and they ask for help, the service they get is being put in a jail cell to be monitored. When they are in the cell they experience discrimination, and lateral violence. There is no follow-up to make sure they didn’t cause harm to themselves or others.”

“When someone needs out-of-territory help for [substance use] treatment, they could be on a waiting list for six months even if they’re ready to go and accept help now.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“I know that if a child needs mental health services, they need to be assessed and the assessor often comes up from Saskatoon and that takes time.” (Métis Perspectives)

Recommendations and Best Practices: Addressing Gaps in Health Care Services through a Combined Model

While many participants recommended the expansion of mobile health services, some noted that these services are often too time-limited to provide sufficient care for complex concerns such as trauma. Additionally, the lack of permanent services within the community leads to insufficient aftercare (for instance, for individuals recovering from addictions), and offers people no alternatives when facing discrimination or mistreatment from local health care providers, or if they want a second opinion.

“Limited funding: workers can only visit communities once a year, which is not enough to help thoroughly heal the trauma.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“[A] psychologist would come on the reserve [for] 20 days within six months. This is not sufficient.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“Having to move people out of the community to get support, and then to come back after two weeks to the community where they have lived for 48 years without support: it doesn’t work.” (Inuit Perspectives)



Participants proposed that supporting equitable and safe access to health care in remote communities requires a combination of approaches, including:

- ✓ **mobile outreach clinics;**
- ✓ **local capacity building** of health care providers, such as midwives;
- ✓ **increased permanent health services in remote communities;**
- ✓ **increased support for newcomers in urban contexts;** and
- ✓ **increased aftercare and follow-ups** offered by local service providers.

New Models for Mental Health and Healing

Across the country, there was a strong call for increased mental health and healing services to support victims and families in the criminal justice system, to help communities heal from the intergenerational impacts of colonialism, and to address underlying mental health concerns or trauma that increase risks of suicide, substance use, and other forms of violence. There was a particular emphasis on this theme in the Inuit Perspectives and Best Practices Dialogue, where participants noted that northern communities face greater gaps in mental health services.

Participants called for a variety of models of services to support mental health and healing, including:

- ✓ **suicide prevention and crisis support**, including 24-hour crisis lines, increased access to counsellors, crisis response teams, advocacy programs to encourage vulnerable individuals to reach out for help, and suicide prevention/intervention training for community members and public-sector workers;

“We must tackle suicide and murder-suicide. How do we learn to encourage people to ask for help? We need to find a way to defuse things before it comes to the point where people are so afraid of others that all they can think of is to die.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

“Need a mental health and suicide-prevention squad/crisis-preventions team like Emergency Medical Service (EMS), who are trained in crisis situations and will follow up with these individuals.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **affordable long-term therapy** for individuals experiencing complex mental health concerns or healing from trauma. Participants also called for increased access to psychiatrists and psychologists;

“Twelve sessions are not enough. It opens up, [breaks] the surface, and then what happens next? It may take 12 sessions for that person to open up, to feel comfortable with that psychologist. It may re-traumatize.” (Quebec Perspectives)



- ✓ **culturally grounded healing programs** that integrate traditional healing practices and ceremonies. Participants emphasized the need for culturally specific programs for Inuit, Métis, First Nations, and Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA communities, available in multiple languages. Examples included community healing circles, land-based programs, initiatives partnering with Elders, and space in mental health services for ceremony;

“Within the community, we have started healing circles.... We talk about whatever is troubling your heart, loss, other troubles. [We] use the qulliq, traditional drum in [the] centre. As you come to the circle, [you] bring whatever you want. [It] doesn’t cost any money. We might provide soup or stew, and then we go into the sessions. [It is] very well attended, we try to draw out the men.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“People need to heal through culture, language, and heritage.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **bereavement support services**, especially for families of missing and murdered individuals, or individuals who took their own life;

“One family had five members commit suicide. We need to heal, to be safe, and keep going.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ✓ **local and external care providers**. While participants emphasized the importance of family and community as a source of support for individuals facing adversity, they also noted that in small communities, individuals may at times need to speak with mental health support staff from outside the community to minimize conflicts of interest and to increase privacy;

“There are many health needs and it’s different to talk to family members about this. Some don’t have Elders to talk to. Sometimes the family says, ‘Just go back to the relationship.’” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Maybe their cousin or chief is the abuser. You need an outsider, [but still Inuit] that you can talk to.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“In some cases there is a preference for someone from outside, because there is too much familiarity locally with people’s histories.... In those cases, a mobile unit of Inuk support would be preferable.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **integration of mental health services within other sectors**, including the criminal justice system, education system, substance use treatment programs, housing, and child and family welfare services; ensuring that people interacting with other systems that are not necessarily health systems can be referred or find mental health support; and

“Parents will also need a place to detox before going to treatment centre. They will need mental wellness support to get clean and stay committed to going to treatment. Their children may have experienced trauma during this time. Surrogate grandparents may be good support for the family and children during this transition.” (Métis Perspectives)



“Community justice [bodies] sometimes run out of ideas in terms of dealing with some young people, and [they] send them off to Iqaluit, where they end up in the justice system. Sometimes they need more access to mental health services instead of ending up in the penitentiary system.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“In Iqaluit, if people are a danger to themselves, and there is no space at the health centre, they end up in RCMP holding cells. It also happens in other communities. RCMP are being asked to address mental health issues. There is no mental health support. It doesn’t address the core of the issue that created the dangerous situation. We are telling young people that they are criminals when, really, they are seeking help for mental health. It is leading people down a path of destruction.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“We know that children are being abused. We know that they are witnessing family violence.... The education system should have wellness, safety, trauma recovery, meditation, self-help, issues that come up with abuse. [Then the children] will be more able to learn how to read and write.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ☒ **dedicated funds for healing from the impact of colonialism.** For instance, several participants called for the restoration of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, with equitable access or dedicated funds for Inuit and Métis communities.

“It is going to take generations for us to move out of this cycle. A fund that is specifically about being community-driven. Every community decides what their needs are, instead of [someone else] putting it on them.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Participants also offered various recommendations to improve access to mental health and wellness supports, especially in northern, rural, or remote communities, including:

- ☒ **24-hour access** to some level of support in all communities;

“People who commit suicide do that because they don’t know where to go. There is nothing for 24 hours. If we could have counsellors 24 hours a day.... We have nowhere to go and no information indicating this is who you can call. And it’s urgent. It’s critical that we have a place close to the Inuit. Why is this not available?” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ☒ **services in multiple formats**, such as phone lines, texting services, or online consultations;

“Some young people have a hard time articulating what they feel by speaking to you, they feel more at ease sending text messages. Whatever format is going to work for people should be made available.... Keeping communication lines open, whatever the line looks like. As soon as the teen suicide line was made available by text in Nunavut, they had 15 young people contacting them within 24 hours.” (Inuit Perspectives)



- ✓ **a dedicated space for services.** For instance, participants in the Inuit Perspectives dialogue described counselling services delivered in a hotel room, or a corporate office where clients felt uncomfortable due to the security desk and thin walls;

“There is a need for more support to have safe locations established for community members where the anonymity is available. Some days she walks for hours with her clients just to be able to provide them with a safe space to unload their pains and heal. It makes this work challenging without proper space.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **mobile programs,** ideally including capacity- and awareness-building components to recruit, retain and to train local community members and public-sector staff; and

“Healing camp vision is to train Aboriginal counsellors, and to send a mobile unit out into other communities to train more counsellors.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **increased permanent infrastructure for healing spaces.** Participants indicated a need for more readily available mental health and wellness supports and spaces in all communities, including sufficient aftercare or follow-up for vulnerable individuals accessing services outside the community.

“People who are Medevaced after suicide attempts are often just sent home the next day. There should be more counselling. If they charter a plane, there should be enough money to send counsellors. Provide psychologists in every village rather than responding when it’s a crisis. Police and youth protection workers are not trained to deal with crises.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“We all need to have meeting places in our community. We have RCMP and social services, but we need a place to go in every community. That would be the ideal setting. We have churches in the community, we have relatives, we have jails, but the one thing we need the most, it seems, is a healing place – for women and men. This is absolutely required now for Inuit. And we know this. Because they say we are good at hearing people, when people are talking about their pain and sadness, our fellow Inuit need a friend to speak with in confidence where it won’t be gossiped in the community.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Substance Use Treatment

Participants described how individuals engaging in substance use face greater barriers when seeking support services, including health care, due to policies from service providers that restrict access to programs (as in the case of Métis and sometimes, Inuit) and/or physical challenges while they are waiting for care when struggling with addictions.

“The crisis line won’t help if there is alcohol or drugs involved, but half the time that’s what the crisis is.” (Métis Perspectives)



However, long wait times, restrictive policies, geographical distance, or financial barriers can impede individuals from accessing substance use treatment programs when they are seeking help.

Wise practices for the delivery of substance use treatment programs included:

- ✓ **treatment programs that support whole families**, providing children with mental health supports while parents receive substance use treatment;
- ✓ **culturally grounded treatment programs**, such as land-based programs and programs engaging Elders;
- ✓ **enhanced availability of local treatment programs**, including in northern communities and within urban centres. One participant noted that treatment programs in their province were largely found in rural locations;
- ✓ **timely access to treatment programs**, in order to support individuals when they are feeling ready for care; and
- ✓ **follow-up care**, including ongoing mental health supports for individuals recovering from addictions, and engaging their families and communities to support them. Participants noted that aftercare is particularly important when individuals have travelled outside of their home communities for treatment.

“There is no aftercare to do follow-ups. People come back to the same home. No follow-up. No immediate help within the family. So, they return to their previous behaviours. [There is] no housing support. If you are living with extended family, and you return, and the people you return to are not sober, people who are homeless and undergoing treatment, need to be able to return to their own home, their own space. [There is a] need for counselling services.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Prenatal and Maternity Care

In the Métis Perspectives and Inuit Perspectives Dialogues, several groups discussed the importance of prenatal and maternity care to support close relationships between mothers and their children and improve the safety and well-being of pregnant women and new mothers. They shared traditional teachings and practices for maternity care and birthing, which offered holistic support for women’s physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, and helped prepare them for their new roles.

“Traditionally when Inuit women birthed, they would have three support people. ‘The maker,’ who would be behind her, she would speak blessings over the child, sing a traditional lullaby. Each lullaby would be specific to each individual child. There would be two women on either side of her to help offer her strength and support. The pregnant woman would stand and use gravity to help the baby. The Elders could help the baby shift if necessary.” (Inuit Perspectives)



However, gaps in maternity care in rural, remote, or northern communities, coupled with the loss of traditional birthing practices, now force many women to travel out of their community, sometimes alone, to give birth.

“The women are flown out from the community alone generally without any emotional support, or support for the family back home in the community.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Participants noted that they have seen a recent revival of traditional Indigenous approaches to prenatal and maternity care, including doulas and midwives, or home births, although funding, training, and access to midwives vary greatly across the country.

Participants called for increased support for maternity care, including:

- ✓ **funding to train Indigenous midwives**, and mentorship programs to help emerging midwives learn alongside more experienced ones;
- ✓ **increased maternity care** in rural, remote, and northern communities;
“We would like there to be centres in the communities for women to birth, so they do not have to travel.” (Inuit Perspectives)
- ✓ **priority of prenatal care**, including supporting women’s physical health and nutrition, as well as providing emotional and cultural supports and traditional teachings; and
- ✓ **facilitation of Indigenous traditions** within mainstream health care services, such as allowing mothers to keep the placenta for birthing ceremonies.

2SLGBTQQIA Health Care Services

In the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives Dialogue, several groups discussed particular gaps, barriers, and inequities faced by Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA individuals – especially trans people seeking gender-affirming care – including:

- **a lack of doctors** with an understanding of, or specialty in, 2SLGBTQQIA health care needs;
- **financial barriers** for gender-affirming care;
- **ineffective substance use treatment programs** that separate patients based on sex or gender, don’t address dimensions of gender identity, and may not be “effective in providing appropriate services for 2S and trans [individuals]”;
- **difficulty accessing gender-affirming care**, if youth don’t have support from parents;
- **homophobia or transphobia** from health care providers; and
- **a lack of advocates** for 2SLGBTQQIA health and wellness.



Participants noted that these gaps and inequities are more pronounced in northern, rural, or remote Indigenous communities. They described how individuals who lack access or financial means for proper care may feel “hopeless” or resort to engaging in criminal behaviour, sex work, or black markets to access gender-affirming hormones.

“When I transitioned in 2013, I had to travel eight hours to get hormones.”
(2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“Trans [individuals] have a hard time getting services, and once they get services, the doctor does not know how to help.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“Trying to get access to hormones – if the children don’t have supportive parents, then they won’t get access by the age 18, and by then it’s maybe too late – because they did not have access to the hormones.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Participants recommended an expansion of 2SLGBTQQIA-specific health services, including health centres, substance use treatment programs, and mental health services and resources.

Healing Programs for Men and Boys

Participants across the country repeatedly mentioned that programs and services should not focus solely on the well-being and empowerment of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals. They described how the loss of traditional roles for men and boys, due to the impact of colonization, and the high rates of unemployment and intergenerational trauma all contribute to a low sense of self-worth among men and boys and an increased propensity toward violence and harmful behaviour.

“The men are unemployed, ashamed, don’t know how to ask for help, don’t know how to talk about emotions. Men are our throwaway people. We are so quick to throw them under the bus. But they need this just as much as the women do.” (Métis Perspectives)

Participants called for efforts to “lift up” Indigenous men and boys through initiatives such as:

- ☒ **safe spaces to discuss emotions**, learn healthy coping skills for negative emotions, and learn about healthy relationships and parenting;
- ☒ **programs that support allyship** against misogyny and violence against women, such as the recent Moose Hide Campaign [the Moose Hide Campaign is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are standing up against violence toward women, wearing small squares of moose hide to symbolize their commitment];



- ✓ **mentorship programs** and male role models to promote healthy forms of masculinity;
- ✓ **networking and employment support services;** and
- ✓ **culturally grounded programs**, such as on-the-land programs, or programs to learn traditional skills such as hunting and fishing.



Leo Wells, Clarence Wolfleg Jr., and Sean Cutter sing a drum song in Calgary, Alberta.

“These programs also need male role models, teaching about how to be a good man. Where are little boys getting positive male-to-male relationships and modelling in their formative years? There is a gap.” (Métis Perspectives)

“Teaching the boys and the men how to be in respectful and loving relationships. There was a lot of violence and trauma when we grew up and it was carried down. Young men have to be retaught how to live and to be in relationships.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

Human Security Issues

The National Inquiry has incorporated a broad definition of “security” based in human security and development, understanding that Indigenous groups in Canada have been and continue to be threatened by economic, social, and political marginalization, as well as by underdevelopment in many communities. Marginalization is not an accidental or an incidental result; rather, marginalization is a product of colonialism and of colonization, as well as of the ongoing discrimination that targets Indigenous communities and individuals.

Participants across the country emphasized the need to lower rates of poverty, unemployment, and insecure housing in Indigenous communities in order to mitigate a number of associated risk factors that threaten the safety and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA



individuals. Participants advocated for equitable access to basic needs, such as shelter and food, along with increased support to attain higher levels of education and employment.

“Working on poverty, housing, and food insecurity needs to be tackled first.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

Inequities in Security

Poverty and insecure housing were identified as critical risk factors that disproportionately impact Indigenous communities in Canada. Participants listed a number of historic and systemic inequities that contribute to the prevalence of poverty and homelessness for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, including:

- lower education rates, adverse experiences, discrimination in education systems, and difficulty accessing post-secondary education;
- higher unemployment rates, and racial- or gender-based biases in hiring processes;
- the loss of traditional Indigenous land, skills, and livelihoods;
- higher costs of living in northern communities;
- lack of support for youth aging out of foster care;
- being forced out of the family home or home communities due to family violence or discrimination due to gender identity or sexual orientation;
- lack of affordable housing, and insufficient capacity in shelters, or lack of shelters; and
- cyclical, intergenerational impacts of low socio-economic status.

Participants described how poverty and insecure housing increase risks of:

- family violence, exacerbated by the stress of financial hardships and overcrowding;
- foster care interventions;
- engagement in criminal behaviour;
- mental health concerns, low sense of self-worth, and suicidality;
- substance use and addictions;
- sexual exploitation or being forced to engage in sex work as a means of subsistence;
- contraction of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, due to overcrowding; and
- food insecurity.



Additionally, participants discussed the social stigma and marginalization faced by homeless people, including increasing restrictions on the spaces where homeless people are allowed to gather and sleep in urban centres. One participant described how homeless people are often not identifiable when they pass away, making it difficult for their families to learn what happened to them. Individuals living in poverty may also have increased difficulty participating in cultural ceremonies or accessing social services, including health care. Participants in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives session noted that trans people face additional financial difficulties accessing gender-affirming care. Several groups noted how financial difficulties can make it difficult for individuals to travel or access shelter in order to flee family violence, especially for those living in rural, remote, or northern communities.

“Poverty is the main factor of vulnerability.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“When parents are homeless, so are their children; this affects every part of their well-being.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“If you don’t have housing, it affects everything else: security, health, etc.” (Métis Perspectives)

“Poverty is a core part of the conversation; that’s why kids are taken away, not because the parents don’t love and care for them.” (Métis Perspectives)

“[Financial difficulty] forces trans people to crime, mostly sex work and buying illegal drugs for [gender-affirming care]. When you are on-reserve and you don’t have a home or education, you end up homeless. Then you lose more rights and respect by service providers.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Other factors and risks participants described as negatively impacting the safety and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals include:

- social isolation or disconnection from families and communities;
- low levels of education;
- unemployment;
- sexual trafficking and exploitation; and
- involvement in gangs.



The Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment (Mincome)

Structural poverty has profound impacts on family and community health, and can be very difficult to escape. In recent years, governments have considered implementing test programs for a guaranteed basic income to reduce poverty in Canada. However, these studies are not new. One of the most significant long-term guaranteed income experiments was a five-year study in Manitoba, known as Mincome, which ran between 1974 and 1979.

In 1968, the Economic Council of Canada produced analysis that recommended implementation of a "Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) program to address poverty."ⁱ Following this recommendation, the Liberal federal government under Pierre Elliott Trudeau partnered with the Manitoba New Democratic Party provincial government under Edward Schreyer to test a new strategy for combatting poverty. Officially known as the Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment, this project is most often associated with the city of Dauphin, where nearly one-third of Dauphin's population became eligible for this income experiment.ⁱⁱ

The overall goal of the project was to test the viability of providing a top-up with no strings attached for workers whose income did not reach a living wage. The project developed three levels of guaranteed funding (\$3,800, \$4,600, and \$5,400), based on tax rates for a family unit of two adults and two children younger than 15, with adjustments for smaller and larger family sizes. Throughout the experiment, the federal government agreed to pay 75% of the project while Manitoba covered the remaining 25%. In addition to the top-up, another goal of the project was to evaluate the effects of such a program on the overall community.

While there was no official data collected on the impacts of the study on the communities' determinants of health,ⁱⁱⁱ a number of former participants have noted the positive impacts on their lives and on their family's health. When family providers fell ill, the family could rely on the guaranteed income provided by the program.^{iv} The structure of the program also gave people the ability to either stay in school or go back to school to gain new professional skills that could be translated into better economic prospects.^v

One of the experiment's hypotheses to test was if a guaranteed income would make people unmotivated to work. This was not the case; people could and did continue to work, with their top-up adjusted in a way that did not penalize working families for earning additional income. What the experiment did do was provide families with "financial predictability and a sense of stability,"^{vi} helping to lift many people out of poverty.

Despite these successes, Mincome was cancelled with the election of new federal and provincial governments in the late 1970s.



The Ontario government decided to recreate this experiment as a three-year pilot project in 2017 under Kathleen Wynne. However, the pilot project was cancelled after a change in government, despite the urging of anti-poverty activists and business leaders alike.^{vii}

The World Health Organization has declared that poverty is the single biggest social determinant of health – meaning that if you live in poverty, your

health will almost certainly suffer.^{viii} As Candice S. told the National Inquiry, “Poverty has an impact – it impacts everything. Your mental health, your spiritual health, your physical health, your access to services.... It’s really, really sad.”^{ix} Meaningfully changing the structures that maintain poverty in Canada has to be at the top of the priority list if Canada is serious about upholding Indigenous Peoples’ rights to health.

- I Simpson, Mason, and Godwin, “The Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment,” 86.
- II Lum, “A Canadian City.”
- III Mason, “Revisiting Manitoba’s Basic Income Experiment.”
- IV Lum, “A Canadian City.”
- V Ibid.
- VI Ibid.
- VII Monsebraaten, “100 Canadian CEOs.”
- VIII World Health Organization, “Poverty and Social Determinants.”
- IX Candice S. (Skatin Nation), Part 1, Public Volume 106, Vancouver, BC, p. 11.



Access to Housing or Shelter

Several participants echoed the notion that access to shelter is a basic human right, and that a lack of safe and affordable housing or shelter increases risks of violence and harm, presents a barrier to fleeing unsafe situations, or forces individuals in rural, remote, or northern communities to migrate to urban centres.

“What is it that will keep you safe? Housing – a place to go back to at night.”
(2SLGBTQIA Perspectives)

“The base [should be] that everyone have a roof over their heads. [Priority] number two is food. You can put more effort into your challenges, once you have a roof and food.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

Barriers to accessing housing and shelter include:

- **insufficient capacity in shelters**, including warming shelters and emergency shelters for individuals fleeing violence, as well as **lack of shelters**;
- **shortage of subsidized housing**, creating long wait-lists;
- **deferred maintenance challenges** that limit available housing or shelter space, adding financial burdens to shelter and housing organizations. This creates poor living conditions, which negatively impact the sense of self-worth of individuals in need of shelter and housing;

“It’s very expensive to build houses, and utilities need to be upgraded. It’s very hard to catch up. Maintenance services are also a big issue, especially for infrastructure. Small communities have a hard time getting things done to maintain housing.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

“[The] homeless shelter has been shut down, because of bedbug infestation. Takes a long time to get someone to clean it. It’s run by an NGO [non-governmental organization], which can’t afford to bring it up to code.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Non-profit housing is built in sub-par standards, making it seem like [clients] are not appreciated, [because] they are living in ... subsidized housing.” (2SLGBTQIA Perspectives)

- **risks of discrimination in shelters**, including racism, homophobia, and transphobia;
- **lack of transitional housing** for individuals returning to communities from correctional facilities or from substance use treatment programs, or aging out of care. Participants noted that individuals at these transition points are particularly vulnerable to violence or harm, and that the lack of shelter funding from justice, health, or child welfare sectors increases the burden on shelter spaces;



“Judges are releasing men to the ‘care’ of a shelter, but there is not [enough] funding to house these men through the justice system, and they expect the shelter to absorb or find space for them.... [There are] men sleeping on [the] floor and in [the] kitchen.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- **strict policies against substance use in shelters**, which create barriers for individuals struggling with addictions. One participant from Inuvik described her experience on the board for a men’s shelter where other members lacked an understanding of addictions, espousing the belief that “if [someone] wants the shelter enough, they will stay sober.” She said there was little support for “wet” shelters that allow substance use due to complications of insurance and risk management. Another participant described how substance use policies “further marginalize the already marginalized”;

“It sends the message that you’re not welcome here, because you use drugs and alcohol. Some women were murdered because they used drugs. They will use drugs to stay awake and stay safe. This stigma around drug use and alcoholism makes people feel unwelcome, unsafe, and puts them on the street and at risk.”
(2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“The rules [for substance use] for [2SLGBTQQIA] clients in facilities cannot be so stringent. These people are at the facilities in crisis.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“Men in the system are in crisis. [It is] unrealistic to expect them to avail themselves of services. These men are not choosing to use. One should not have to choose using or housing.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- **gender-based shelters and prioritization of women with children in housing**. This supports the safety of women and girls, but also creates complications and barriers for families, men, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals. For instance, some participants described how policies against teenage boys in shelter spaces force women to have to choose whether to leave their sons behind when seeking emergency shelter spaces. Other women may feel safer staying with their partners on the streets instead of seeking shelter space. The prioritization of women with children limits available shelter and housing space for 2SLGBTQQIA individuals (particularly those without children) and for men, who have to leave their home during situations of family violence;

“I wouldn’t have been able to take my son with me to the shelter if I had needed to do it. Daughter, yes. That’s what mothers have to think about.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“Often women on the street want to stay with their boyfriend for security reasons.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

“A lot of 2S don’t have housing because there are requirements to have children ... and a lot of 2S folks don’t have children. That doesn’t make sense. They’re not included in the list.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)



“There is no transitional housing for the abuser, for these mainly men, to go, to live.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- **financial barriers to public housing** for individuals who are marginally above the low-income threshold, or are receiving limited income support; and
- **inequitable access to housing**, where individuals with connections to influential people may receive preferential treatment.

Recommendations and Best Practices: Addressing the Crisis of Housing and Shelter

There was a strong call for increased and well-maintained shelters and subsidized housing in all communities, with sufficient capacity to meet current and projected demands. While many participants discussed the need for priority shelter spaces for women fleeing violence, groups also recommended establishing a variety of housing and shelter alternatives in communities, in order to meet the needs of different populations, including:

- ✓ **mixed-gender shelter and housing**, accommodating couples and families with teenage boys;
 - ✓ **wet shelters** accommodating individuals struggling with substance use;
 - ✓ **dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA housing and shelters**, or dedicated beds in shelters for trans and non-gender binary individuals; and
- “Establish 2S treatment centres and shelters with practitioners who are 2S themselves or [who] ‘get’ it.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)
- ✓ **transitional housing with relevant support services** for individuals fleeing family violence, youth aging out of care, or individuals returning to communities from correctional institutions or substance use treatment programs.

Participants spoke of housing and shelter as a critical first step that establishes the security, stability, and trusting relationships needed to address more complex risk factors. Many described housing and shelter models that integrate support services, such as substance use treatment programs, employment services, cultural supports, and mental health services.

“First, you house the person. You give them a place to live and be safe. Then you start focusing on the other issues that lead to homelessness and addictions.”
(Inuit Perspectives)

“We need a place that’s not like a conventional shelter, but a living space; not necessarily a permanent space, but you need space where you have access to a phone, Internet, a



place to study, a place to get training.... You need these things to get a job. We need supports for employment. I wouldn't see it like a shelter, where there are bunk beds. We need dignity and privacy. Maybe you moved from the reserve to the city, and you don't have your supports there. Transitional housing that helps you and mentors ... you could hire 2S people to do that." (2SLGBTQIA Perspectives)

Some participants described the importance of providing long-term housing options for individuals and families, with recommendations to increase transitions from shelter spaces to subsidized housing.

"Shelters [are] such a dehumanizing experience.... The place you belong [to] is constantly stripped away. There's never any place you belong." (Inuit Perspectives)

"[The] assumption was that sending men out in the cold, even in extreme cold weather, would motivate them. These men were being turned out in the morning. At 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. these Inuit men are being turned out into the cold, with harmful impacts, [including] on their self-esteem." (Inuit Perspectives)

"Not just shelters and safe houses, but stable, reliable housing, where they can live long-term. It's not temporary, it's permanent. So, if they have children, they can go to school. Stable home.... They don't have that grounding space, to shut the door and go to bed, and then get ready for the day to go to work or school." (Inuit Perspectives)

As with other support services, participants emphasized the importance of providing culturally specific support services in shelters and housing, adapted to the identities of local clientele: for instance, including Inuit- and/or Métis-specific support services in urban shelters, and housing for those arriving from rural, remote, or northern communities.

"For people who are not in their home communities, which are very far away, it gets really hard when they can't find a stable and safe place to rest their head. There needs to be more subsidized housing for women and families.... First Nations-specific, Métis-specific, Inuit-specific; even though we are all Indigenous, we need specific services. When you are in a vulnerable place, it is most comfortable to be with your community." (Inuit Perspectives)



Education and Employment

Alongside basic needs assistance, participants called for increased investment in education and employment services in order to obtain, as one participant described, “high quality education and meaningful work for all” (Inuit Perspectives). These investments included:

- ✓ **advocacy about the importance of education**, and celebration of the achievements of Indigenous students excelling in school;
- ✓ **strengthened communication between schools and parents** to promote schools as a safe place, especially for families impacted by the legacy of residential schools or other adverse school experiences;

“Investing in children, in the education system. Parents had trouble walking into those schools, because of their trauma. We need to make schools a safe place, a healthy place for families, with food, where everybody can have meals together.”
(Inuit Perspectives)
- ✓ **financial support** for Indigenous post-secondary students and youth aging out of care;
- ✓ **increased mental health services and culturally specific supports** for students, especially in post-secondary institutions;
- ✓ **increased access to post-secondary education in rural, remote, or northern communities**: for instance, through the expansion of online learning opportunities and development of needed digital infrastructure;

“You should be able to learn in a different way, not having to leave community and go thousands of miles away to do advanced learning. We need access to the Web faster than circa 1999, in order to be successful in an online education. A rights-based approach to access to the Internet.” (Inuit Perspectives)
- ✓ **the teaching to youth of traditional Indigenous skills**, such as hunting, fishing, arts, or language skills, and developing careers in the revival of Indigenous traditions;

“[I] saw one 12- or 13-year-old boy who was very skilled culturally [such as in] trapping, language, etc. but would shrink in school, because he struggled with maths, etc. [We should be] building Knowledge Keepers. Some kids are naturally Knowledge Keepers, but they struggle in school. Those are the mentoring roles we have as adults. Can you identify people in your community who are like that? How do you recognize, lift them? What can you do with them, to help young women and girls stay safe?”
(Inuit Perspectives)
- ✓ **promotion of careers in the trades**;
- ✓ **employment services**; and
- ✓ **recognition for experiential equivalencies** for jobs and education.



Practices to Enhance Security for 2SLGBTQQIA People

Although the National Inquiry, through the Truth-Gathering Process, has adopted the inclusive acronym of 2SLGBTQQIA, it acknowledges the diversity of experiences within this spectrum. The Dialogue held in Toronto was a rich opportunity that many people identified as the first time in their lives they had been in a room with so many 2S and Indigenous LGBTQQIA people, and how feeling that they were not alone was a healing experience. As a result, many suggested that it would be important to support a networking of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people across the country, because of the strength generated in working together and in getting together. At the same time, some participants pointed out that the distribution of participants left some groups, such as transwomen, feeling largely underrepresented, and shared how the needs of different groups whose identities are included in this acronym might not be the same, particularly in the areas of security and of justice.

In highlighting common experiences, however, participants in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives Dialogue session particularly emphasized the need to address administrative procedures, protocols, and program designs in social services to ensure the safety, dignity, and accessibility of 2SLGBTQQIA individuals, especially trans-identified individuals and individuals with non-binary gender identities. Recommendations included:

- ✓ **gender-inclusive options** in application or intake forms, Status cards, and data collection;
- ✓ **accommodation of non-binary gender identities in program and service design** by eliminating gender-based grouping of programs and services, allowing individuals to join gender-based programs and services based on their gender identity, and/or offering dedicated trans, non-binary, or gender-neutral programs and services. Participants emphasized the need for greater gender-inclusivity in both social and cultural spaces, as well as in key support services and institutions such as housing and shelters, substance use treatment programs, and correctional institutions; and
- ✓ **availability of gender-neutral washrooms and change rooms in facilities.**

Strengthening Community Ties

Alongside culture and family, participants stressed the importance of strong community networks, role models, and community spaces to support the well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals. They described how people facing discrimination and marginalization – such as 2SLGBTQQIA individuals, sex workers, ex-offenders, or individuals lacking secure housing – tend to form their own communities of support. These communities of support are extremely valuable for their well-being and security in the face of adversity.

“When Métis women are suffering, we do what we’ve always done. We get together and support each other doing Métis practices ... Métis beading, trade show/craft fair, traditional performers and ... dry dance.... It’s not enough to give people housing, they



need to have their community surrounding them. Often you don't know who your neighbour is.” (Métis Perspectives)

Participants offered a number of recommendations to strengthen community ties, including:

- ✓ **low-barrier “safe spaces,”** where individuals can gather, engage in social activities and Indigenous traditions and ceremonies, and/or have access to support services;

“Women’s centres in each community are essential ... a place where women find themselves, it’s a place that is very warm. They can sit and just talk. It must be a place where different women come (women, grandmothers) and must also provide places for children.... It’s a place of sharing. It is a place where you can also spread knowledge. It is a ... place where I feel good.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ✓ **recreational centres** offering extracurricular activities to promote healthy lifestyles, decrease isolation, and deter youth from engaging in gangs, substance use, or criminal behaviour;

- ✓ **peer support networks,** and encouraging a culture of mutual support; and

“The big question we heard was: Who would advocate for me? If I were murdered, if I were missing, or if my children were taken away? ... There’s a need to raise an angel network of all Métis people who look out for one another. That’s what love is, that’s what the circle represents. So that when you go anywhere, someone will take you in.” (Métis Perspectives)

“We need to get back to volunteerism – when people get money to cook for [a] community feast, they just cook the food, drop it off, and leave. When a community volunteer’s cooking, they cook the food and bring it to feast and stay for festivities.” (Inuit Perspectives)

- ✓ **mentorship programs** for youth.



A young jingle dress dancer and cousin of Nicole Ashley Daniels, an MMIW family member, chats with Commissioner Michèle Audette in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Used with permission.



Justice

In discussing their encounters with various elements of the justice system, participants across all four Dialogues noted the frustration they felt in trying to navigate systems they didn't see as fair, representative, or their own. In many cases, participants discussed how justice might be redefined in Indigenous terms, and in terms of how people kept each other safe, cared for one another, and ensured that the laws and rights were upheld and related responsibilities were followed. These principles are still important today. While the context of justice might have changed from what one participant called the “old old way,” understanding how these concepts might be articulated to transform the encounters that people have today was a key feature of our discussions.

Inequities in Policing, Justice, and Corrections

Participants discussed a number of issues related to inequities in the justice system, including:

- **delays in court proceedings due to insufficient capacity.** Participants noted that delays can prolong the healing process for victims and families and create barriers for victims living in remote communities who lack the resources to relocate for prolonged periods of time to seek justice;

“If she is a fragile woman, in family law and domestic violence, a woman at risk cannot wait so long. Someone who is in a remote area and has to go to court, it's not as accessible.” (Quebec Perspectives)
- **discrimination and inequities in the criminal justice system.** Several participants argued that the justice system overcriminalizes Indigenous Peoples, while offering overly lenient sentences in cases of violence against women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Some participants questioned the impact of Gladue rights on the safety and justice of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals;
- **the discrediting of victim statements** based on race or mental health, or from victims who were seen to be engaging in “high risk” behaviours at the time of the crime, such as sex workers, or victims who were inebriated or were engaging in substance use;

“Often it is just you going to make a statement and it's all men. Sometimes your story is overlooked/diminished by your looks, your mannerisms, your skin colour.” (Métis Perspectives)
- **limited access** to court services and victim support services in northern communities; and
- **racial discrimination or mistreatment** from guards in correctional institutions.



Of particular note regarding 2SLGBTQQIA individuals who are incarcerated, trans people who have not undergone gender-affirming surgery are often placed in a binary system, according to biological sex. They can face violence, discrimination, and segregation from staff and other individuals within the institution.

“There is a case of an [incarcerated] transwoman, who was mistreated, and who made a formal complaint of human rights abuses. The officers did not want to give her back her [female] clothes. They gave her paper clothes. What she needs is someone to support her.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Participants also identified a number of gaps and inequities that obstruct fair and timely access to security and law enforcement for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals. These included:

- **police discrimination.** The majority of Dialogue groups shared experiences of discrimination and mistreatment from law enforcement officers based on race, gender and gender identity. Several participants described instances of racial profiling of Indigenous suspects, paralleled with delayed, or a lack of, responses to reports from Indigenous victims. Other participants spoke of instances of harassment, sexual abuse, transphobia, homophobia, and a lack of accountability for reports of discrimination or abuse of power. Participants noted that the prevalence of contemporary police discrimination, compounded with the historical role of police in the enforcement of colonial policies (such as the killing of Inuit sled dogs, or the forcible removal of children for residential school) has led to an erosion of trust in law enforcement institutions, which deters individuals from seeking help. In addition, the ongoing mistrust, due to negative experiences with law enforcement, continues to foster an environment in which many participants noted, people feel unsafe even asking the police for help;

“Police are very transphobic. When people say their name and it doesn’t ‘match’ their ID, they can be arrested.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“You’re less likely to turn to the police if you’ve been abused, even more less likely if you have been abused by the police.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“First question from police dispatch: ‘Is she Indigenous?’ After telling them over and over again that we needed an ambulance, they still sent the police first. Then they kept calling and calling, and there was no ambulance for another hour and a half.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“When a crime happens, they aren’t thorough with investigations. They just assume it is domestic violence from the men in our community. It feels like our women are worth less than others.” (Métis Perspectives)



- **gaps in policing in remote communities.** Participants noted that many small, rural, and remote communities lack local police officers or direct contact with local police detachments. Emergency calls are transferred to regional dispatching offices, delaying response times and discouraging community members from seeking help;

“So many people don’t report because they have to call down to Regina [from a rural area], answer 100 questions, and get solutions three days later.”

(Métis Perspectives)

“When we call RCMP in Inuvik, our call gets transferred to Yellowknife, then they phone the local detachment. It takes a long time to get them to come to a place. It takes too long to respond. It gives time for the perpetrators to get away.”

(Inuit Perspectives)

“[It takes] three hours or so to get a cop sometimes in rural communities.... The police that service one community are the same police that service the other ones – they don’t have their own. They try to patrol once a day or so, but it can’t always happen. Sometimes [it takes an] hour, hour and a half more to get a cop.”

(Quebec Perspectives)

- **jurisdictional barriers,** which obstruct communications and coordination of investigations, even between neighbouring jurisdictions. Participants called for a nationally integrated system for investigations, especially for cases of missing Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals; and

“When a young girl went missing the police wouldn’t go there because it wasn’t in their jurisdiction even though it [was] close by.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“The problem of communication between police services to track young adults: the reporting processes are complicated. Find an integrated system so that disappearances are reported more quickly and efficiently. An amber alert for adults.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- **high turnover** of law enforcement officers, particularly in northern communities, which detracts from their ability to establish trusting relationships with community members, or develop deeper cultural awareness of the local context.

“The high turnover of police officers is also an issue. There is no orientation, no preparation. Oftentimes they are just out of police training, they know they can’t get a job down south right away so they are just here to get an experience.... In Iqaluit, some officers want to stay longer than two or three years, but are told no.”

(Inuit Perspectives)

In addition to these issues, participants also described the risks of re-traumatization when victims must repeatedly give statements, and especially when statement-taking procedures become akin



to “interrogations” or when victims are alone giving statements. Participants noted that insufficient victim support services can negatively impact the reliability of victim statements, and therefore threaten the victims’ ability to receive justice in courts.

“The process is confusing, you don’t get things explained to you, you don’t automatically have a lawyer. It sends a message to aggressors of who is the easy victim.” (Quebec Perspectives)

“Victim services isn’t always safe for women, [who are] sometimes more traumatized by the services provided. They have to relive the incident, and do not feel like they are being helped. [They are] interrogated and made to feel like a criminal, rather than a victim.” (Métis Perspectives)

Recommendations and Best Practices: Justice

Improving Law Enforcement Practices

Participants proposed measures and initiatives to reduce discrimination, improve crisis response, and help rebuild trusting, collaborative relationships between law enforcement and community members. Recommendations included the following:

“It’s a sense of trust that also needs to be developed. Without trust, people do not even want to go to police premises. You have to trust someone who can support them. These are small steps, and it will take time.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ☑ **physical descriptors instead of racial descriptors** in law enforcement procedures and media reports, in order to discourage racial stereotyping, profiling, and discrimination in security and justice systems as well as the broader society;

“[The police force] didn’t realize that they were being racist by asking on dispatch whether someone was of Aboriginal descent. By ... removing that from protocol, we’re changing things.” (Métis Perspectives)

- ☑ **protocols for early intervention** in crisis situations or cases of family violence, as well as more immediate responses to reports of missing Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA individuals;

“These are situations that don’t need to escalate, if they are addressed when attention is required. I know the RCMP do very beautiful work, but in emergencies there’s not enough response. If we give them information, we can avoid murders and killings. Incidents of murders and rage escalate, and we can avoid it if we get prompt attention.” (Inuit Perspectives)

“They need to realize everyone knows everyone in our villages and communities. Sometimes they don’t understand how urgent our calls are. We know our people and know when it is urgent.” (Inuit Perspectives)



“It requires a change of approach and steps. You have to initiate a reaction the very moment the call is triggered.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ☑ **extended length of law enforcement placements**, especially in remote or northern communities. For instance, some participants recommended minimum five-year contracts, and incentives to remain in the community long-term;

- ☑ **engagement with community members** in community events, or through the establishment of liaison officers in schools and social services to build trusting relationships, especially with youth or marginalized community members; and

“[The] RCMP planned a round dance for First Nations and Métis people in the Saskatoon Police Service gym. Some people (like my niece) were nervous about going because of the negative experiences they had had in that building. It turned out to be a huge success. Biggest round dance Saskatoon has seen.”
(Métis Perspectives)

“We have a police officer who does the liaison at our centre, and he came once a week to build relationships. Today he has too much to do because he is called all the time – it is really an important support and the users of our services have confidence now. It’s really a plus to have this connection. It really facilitates the exchanges. When he arrived, the women started to open up. But it’s because of the person, too. It takes the ability to meet the system.” (Quebec Perspectives)

- ☑ **increased training and community orientations** for law enforcement officers.

Focus on Crime Prevention through Community-Based Models

Participants additionally recommended preventative measures to safeguard women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people against common risks, and empower them to increase their own safety. These included:

- ☑ **expand and legitimize community-based security models**, such as local peacekeeper officers, or the Bear Clan Patrol program based in Winnipeg. Participants described how community-based security patrols can often offer a more timely response, particularly in northern, rural, or remote communities, and may be more effective at de-escalating situations due to their deeper knowledge of local contexts and cultures. Community-based security programs can increase the overall sense of safety in communities and provide preventative measures, such as providing resources, developing relationships, educating community members on their rights, and providing outreach;

“Many communities have peacekeepers, who are busier than the police force, because people trust them and go to them when things happen.” (Métis Perspectives)



- ✓ **provide secure transportation options.** Women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals living in remote communities face increased risks due to a lack of secure transportation options both within and beyond their communities. Gaps in transportation can make it difficult to flee unsafe circumstances such as domestic violence, or individuals may resort to unsafe means of travel such as hitchhiking. Participants highlighted successful initiatives such as “safe rides” programs, or monitoring “high recruitment areas” such as bus stops to ensure that vulnerable individuals have a safe means for transportation;

“Last year, the government cut off transportation services, so I see a lot of women on the highway every day. Lack of transportation services is a huge issue. It puts a lot of women at risk every day.” (Métis Perspectives)
- ✓ **identify and provide early warning of risks**, such as legislative measures that allow for the disclosure of a person’s criminal history to their partners,⁹ or identifying spaces and services that are unsafe for 2SLGBTQQIA individuals;
- ✓ **provide public education** on non-violent conflict intervention, safety, self-defense skills, consent, Internet safety, sexual exploitation prevention, and on rights. Participants noted that raising awareness of risks and safety measures is particularly important for Indigenous youth moving to urban centres who may be less aware of safety risks in an urban context; and
- ✓ **leverage technology for safety.** For instance, participants discussed the use of social media or mobile phone applications as an accessible “check-in system” for vulnerable women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals.



This sign, on British Columbia’s infamous Highway of Tears, warns young women not to hitchhike. The Highway of Tears refers to an over 700 kilometre stretch of the Yellowhead Highway in British Columbia where many Indigenous women have disappeared or been found murdered.



Navigating the System: Improving Victim Support Services

Participants offered recommendations to help victims/survivors and families navigate the legal system and support their healing and well-being throughout the process of seeking justice, including:

- ✓ **Indigenous legal advocates** to help orient survivors and families within the legal system and to accompany survivors when giving statements. Participants in the Quebec Perspectives Dialogue proposed that the Centres d'Aide aux Victimes d'Actes Criminels (or CAVAC)¹⁰ establish dedicated Indigenous centres to provide culturally appropriate supports;
- ✓ **information kits for survivors and families** with resources, service directories, and orientation to the legal system;
- ✓ **support for Elders or family members to accompany survivors** when giving statements;
“Being in a room with men can be intimidating. We’re not supported by Elders or cousins or family.... If the woman is properly supported, she could [provide] better testimony. The victims need to be solid, so there aren’t any slips in people’s minds, because it can cause damage. I see victims who were well supported versus ones that are not supported. I see the damage this causes.” (Quebec Perspectives)
- ✓ **increased cultural and spiritual supports** for survivors, including during court proceedings;
- ✓ **interpreters** for Indigenous language-speakers as well as to help survivors and families understand legal terminology;
- ✓ **community-based spaces for access to justice**, including access to legal counsel and spaces where survivors may feel more comfortable reporting a crime if they feel unsafe in the security and justice system;
“Every Indigenous friendship centre should have a centre for access to justice, too. Many people do not feel comfortable asking for help, so you need a service that is confidential and accessible on-site.” (Quebec Perspectives)
- ✓ **increased victim support services in remote communities**. One participant suggested the use of video conferencing to provide more advance legal counsel for survivors seeking justice through travelling courts;
- ✓ **increased support services, especially for survivors of family violence**, including safe houses, financial aid, transportation to flee unsafe circumstances, and legal advice for the enforcement of emergency protective orders; and
“Restraining orders need to be explained to people: what they are for, how to use them. People don’t know how to enforce their rights. They think the paper means nothing, and the aggressor lives in my community. That paper should have been



explained to those women: How does it work? What does a breach look like? What are the nuances of living in the same community or shopping in the same stores?” (Quebec Perspectives)

☑ **aftercare** to support survivors and families in the healing process.

“The survivors are all alone in their grief, even if they are all together.” (Inuit Perspectives)

Restorative Justice and Indigenous Laws

Across all four sessions, there was strong support for restorative justice programs, particularly models grounded in traditional Indigenous approaches to law and justice. Participants argued that culturally grounded restorative justice programs can be more effective in fostering a sense of accountability in offenders, addressing root causes of violence to reduce recidivism, and supporting healing for survivors, offenders, and their surrounding families and community.

“He won’t feel any shame in front of the judge/jury. But in front of the community, there is more accountability. A youth hearing their impact on people because of their vandalism is more impactful than going to court.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Nonetheless, some participants suggested that survivors of violence should be entitled to choose between different approaches to justice proceedings, informed by the specific context and the survivors’ needs.

“Restorative justice was good for some [youth], but not for all situations. A young woman was raped, but the family of the boy who did it, [wanted restorative justice] instead of jail time. But the young woman ended up being re-victimized. The girl didn’t have a lot of family support, but the boy had a big family and even the Elders who were there were related to him.... Victims should have a choice in what justice options they want. Jail time, criminalization isn’t what everyone wants.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

“[I am] hesitant to say they are always the best solution, because they work different in different communities, with different levels of success.” (Métis Perspectives)

Participants in the 2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives session called for increased funding and training for 2SLGBTQQIA-specific restorative justice programs. Such programs need to be inclusive and safe, reflecting diverse understandings of gender, and equipped to address 2SLGBTQQIA perspectives.



Understanding the Complicated Nature of “Traditional Governance”

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy is one of the best-known examples of Indigenous forms of traditional governance. It is made up of six distinct Nations who agree to live under a single governance system, encoded in the 117 articles of the Great Law of Peace. The Great Law includes many aspects of Haudenosaunee life, including rights and remedies in the case of criminal acts and other traditional forms of ensuring justice. The traditional Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council still operates today, despite the fact that the Dominion of Canada, as enforced by the RCMP, imposed an *Indian Act* chief-and-council system on the Haudenosaunee in 1924.ⁱ This is a testament to the resilience of the Haudenosaunee.

However, as we heard from some women in the Truth-Gathering Process and through other means, there are ways in which “traditional governments” or the traditional forms of justice they use have been warped by sexism, racism, and colonization, and are now failing Indigenous women and girls.

These struggles aren’t unique to the Haudenosaunee. Instead, as Mohawk professor and cultural anthropologist Dawn Martin-Hill writes, “the global reality of colonialism leaves Indigenous communities shattered, fragmented and traumatized, and creates space for the growth of a desperate and perverted radicalism.”ⁱⁱ

The Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (“People of the Longhouse”), also known as the “League of Nations,” are Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. The confederacy was born during a time of violent conflict between the Nations, until the Creator sent the Peacemaker, also known as Deganawida, to teach people the laws they needed to live in peace. After the Peacemaker’s people originally rejected his message, he enlisted the help of Jikonsahseh, a powerful woman and ally who became known as the first “Mother of Nations.” Later, with the help of Aionwatha (Hiawatha) and after

many trials, they persuaded the chiefs to end the feuds between them and together abided by the Great Law of Peace.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Great Law of Peace, or *Kaianerekowa*, lays out the Haudenosaunee rules of governance based on the three principles of righteousness (justice between people and Nations), health (soundness of mind and body, and the peace that comes from that), and power (the authority of the law). It defines the structure of the Haudenosaunee Council, different Clans’ roles and responsibilities within it, as well as laws regarding adoption, legal redress for murder and theft, and international relations. The needs of future generations, the “faces yet to come,” are an important consideration in any deliberation, and decisions affecting the entire confederacy are made on a consensus model through the Grand Council, while Clan councils and Nations are given the authority to handle their own affairs.^{iv} As professor of law at the University of Victoria Faculty of Law and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Law John Borrows writes in *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, “The *Kaianerekowa* is a complex and significant legal code and stands as a testament to the power of human creativity and accomplishment.”^v



Within this system, Haudenosaunee women have had great political autonomy through the General Council of the Women, as well as through their roles as Clan Mothers, who choose chiefs and keep them accountable. Also, in the consensus-based decision-making model of the Haudenosaunee, every person has a voice and a veto. According to the Great Law, Haudenosaunee women are the explicit owners of the longhouse and the land, and have equal property rights as men. Major decisions could not be made without the consent of women.^{vi}

Haudenosaunee traditional territory encompassed southern Ontario, southern Quebec, New York, and Wisconsin.^{vii} By the late 1800s, the stark difference between the many rights of Haudenosaunee women as compared with settler women inspired early suffragettes, including Elizabeth Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Lucretia Mott, to see that other systems of society were possible. These feminists frequently wrote about the freedoms enjoyed by Six Nations women in local newspapers and in their professional writing as they fought for the basic right to vote.^{viii} Matilda Joslyn Gage was so impressed that, in her book *Woman, Church & State – The Original Exposé of Male Collaboration Against the Female Sex*, published in 1893, she wrote: “Under their women, the science of government reached the highest form known to the world.”^{ix}

The confederacy has always maintained its sovereignty, despite several hundred years of colonization. However, as cultural anthropologist Dawn Martin-Hill writes, Haudenosaunee laws, like in all Indigenous Nations, have been affected by “missionizing, residential schools and assimilation policies”^x that diminished women’s authority. While traditional governments had strong checks and balances to its power built in, the legacies of colonization have taken those away. As she puts it, “We are healing, but it is a path fraught with the debris of colonial domination.”^{xi}

The issue of “banishment” is one such area where traditional governments may not be delivering justice for Indigenous women and girls.

Historically, banishment was one of several forms of punishment for severe crimes used by the

Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous Nations.^{xii} As Michael Cousins explains in his 2004 master’s thesis, banishment was used in rare circumstances where the offender posed a significant risk to others’ safety and did not show remorse. Banishment also allowed the offender time for “intense personal reflection that often led to a spiritual awakening.”^{xiii} In almost all the cases, banishment was meant to be temporary. As he explains, “Banishment rarely occurred for life, and the individual often returned home after a prescribed period of exile and would be allowed to remain if they had fully embraced the principles of peace and unity.”^{xiv}

Today, banishment has been revived as a form of traditional justice in Six Nations and other First Nations.^{xv} People may be stripped of their membership or band enrolment, forced off the reserve, and have their land reverted to the band council. However, there are disputes about how it is being used today.

Some community members we heard felt that their traditional governments were being co-opted, and only “selectively” banishing some people, while not others. This has been particularly painful for family members of missing and murdered loved ones or survivors of sexual violence who live in the same small community as the offender. Some of the women we heard from have sought to have these offenders removed from the community but were shut down, with few avenues to challenge the decision.

In her article “She No Speaks,” Dawn Martin-Hill discusses the example of one Six Nations mother, whose daughter was sexually assaulted in front of witnesses. When she tried to go to the police, Six Nations Peacekeepers insisted instead that they would “deal with it” by taking him into a sweat lodge and teaching him how to respect women—despite the mother’s objections that this was not the appropriate punishment. As Martin-Hill says:

The mother decided to investigate our traditions that deal with sexual assault according to the Great Law, and she sought out a Clan mother who would have some authority on the matter. The Clan mother explained to her that traditionally a violator of women would have suffered severe consequences for his crime. This punishment would have been carried out by the



women of the community. Afterwards, the mother shared with me and others her feelings of being terrorized, intimidated and scorned by the Peacekeepers. She was experiencing first-hand how “tradition” is used to subordinate women and to silence women.^{xvi}

In Kahnawà:ke, a Mohawk community in Quebec, violence under the guise of “tradition” has manifested through the “marry out, get out” law, as it is known. This local law, passed in the early 1980s, stipulates that any Mohawk member living in Kahnawà:ke with a non-Indigenous spouse must leave the reserve. While this law is meant to help preserve Mohawk land and culture, this has caused anguish for many Mohawk women who are denied their right to live close to the family and culture they love, while regulating who they are allowed to marry and with whom they are allowed to have children. For those who have been forced out, the law contributes to their own and their children’s loss of language and culture. While the Quebec courts have struck down this law as unconstitutional, this remains a deeply contentious issue in the community.^{xvii}

These and other circumstances show that we cannot deny Indigenous women justice in the name of “tradition.” However, Indigenous forms of justice, law, and governance are essential to the work of decolonizing, and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is built on principles of peace and justice that do protect its people. In an editorial criticizing the use of banishment for those people fighting addictions, Six Nations member Jonathan Garlow reminds us that many challenges across Canada are the same; what is uniquely given to each community is the gift of their teachings, which allows them to cope with the challenges they face.^{xviii}

Indigenous communities should not be afraid to call out the ways in which “tradition” hurts Indigenous women, while at the same time they revitalize the principles underpinning their own justice systems. As Dawn Martin-Hill emphasizes, “Although the cultural revitalization movement is critical to our cultural survival and to teaching our young people traditional ways, we must ensure that we are teaching and passing on traditions that are *true to us*.”^{xix}

- I Cousins, “The Inherent Right.”
- II Martin-Hill, “She No Speaks,” 107.
- III Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*; Haudenosaunee Confederacy, “Confederacy’s Creation.”
- IV Cousins, “The Inherent Right.”
- V Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, 73.
- VI Cousins, “The Inherent Right.”
- VII Borrows, *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*.
- VIII Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit*.
- IX Gage, *Woman, Church & State*.
- X Martin-Hill, “She No Speaks,” 110.
- XI Ibid., 112.
- XII Kunesch, “Banishment as Cultural Justice.”
- XIII Cousins, “The Inherent Right,” 45.
- XIV Ibid., 45.
- XV Kunesch, “Banishment as Cultural Justice”; Garlow, “Could Using Banishment?”
- XVI Martin-Hill, “She No Speaks,” 107.
- XVII Fennario, “‘Marry out, Get out’”; Peritz, “Mohawk Community’s ‘Marry out, Get out.’”
- XVIII Garlow, “Could Using Banishment?”
- XIX Martin-Hill, “She No Speaks,” 109.



Rehabilitation and Reintegration Supports

Participants voiced support for culturally grounded rehabilitation and reintegration programs in correctional facilities, such as healing circles, increasing access to Indigenous ceremony or on-the-land programs, Indigenous art and culture workshops, and support from Elders. Participants argued that these programs offer holistic support to help address root causes of violence and criminality, rebuilding offenders' sense of identity and positive self-worth while reducing recidivism.

“Teach young people how to build their own sweat lodge [in correctional facilities]. They are so happy to be part of something, to have a role [in ceremony]. Even if they don't agree, they can work together and respect each other.” (2SLGBTQQIA Perspectives)

Participants discussed the need to increase access and availability of successful rehabilitative programs; for instance, by:

- ✓ **allowing individuals in remand to access programs and services** while waiting for sentencing or convictions, so that they may use that time toward constructive growth;
- ✓ **improving availability** of programs and services for individuals with shorter sentences or serving time in provincial facilities; and
- ✓ **safeguarding programs from shifts in funding or leadership**, including staff turnover within correctional facilities and changes in government.

Participants emphasized the need for increased support for individuals transitioning back into communities from correctional facilities, in order to support them in re-establishing healthy lives and rebuilding relationships with their community. Key programs and services identified by participants include:

- ✓ **transitional housing** in well-connected areas of the community, to increase access to other support services;
- ✓ **dedicated employment services**, with a recognition of the increased barriers previous offenders face in finding employment;
- ✓ **healing lodges**, providing ongoing, culturally grounded support to address root causes of criminal behaviour such as trauma;
- ✓ **ceremonies to mark this important transition and welcome them back into the community**; and
“Ceremony that represents leaving behind what once was, and what is no more.”
(Métis Perspectives)
- ✓ **dedicated 2SLGBTQQIA support services**, acknowledging the particular challenges that this population faces in correctional facilities, such as renewed trauma from discrimination.



At the Two Spirit Pow Wow in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Two-Spirit dancers are able to dance as themselves. Used with permission courtesy of Sadie-Phoenix Lavoie, two-spirit Anishinaabe from Sagkeeng First Nation, Treaty 1.

Conclusion: Making Connections

The Guided Dialogue sessions sought to bridge many of the experiences the National Inquiry heard about with the need to better understand the context within which these experiences took place. Bringing together front-line service providers, along with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, provided a bridge that animated our approach to transforming experiences into actionable, impactful recommendations. Embracing a new research model within the context of the National Inquiry, and perhaps of national inquiries in general, participants were also able to build their own bridges and forge new connections for engagement in the critical and important community-building and capacity-building work that they do. We thank the participants for their candour, their passion, and their ongoing commitment to improving outcomes and creating safety for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.



Notes

- 1 Quoted statements in this report are drawn from notes taken during the Guided Dialogues sessions, indicating the session perspective in brackets to provide further context for the statement. Although notetakers were instructed to stay true to the language used by participants as much as possible, quotes do not necessarily represent verbatim statements from participants. Minor edits for syntax and clarity are indicated with brackets.
- 2 For instance, participants cited the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action*, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Viens Commission, a resolution passed by the Assembly of First Nations regarding Two-Spirit people, and the *Convention on Violence Against Women*.
- 3 As Williams, Craft, and Pastora Sala describe, "The Cree worldview is founded on relationships with the goal of achieving *mino-pimatisiwin*" (13), a concept that includes physical, social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being. See Williams, Craft and Pastora Sala, "Keeyask."
- 4 The Quechua term *sumak kawsay*, also known in Spanish as *buen vivir*, can be translated to English as "good living" or "the good life." This concept reflects ethical principles of living in harmony with our communities and nature, and preserving culture and identity. See Pachama Alliance, "Sumak Kawsay."
- 5 According to 2016 census data tables, as interpreted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Indigenous children made up over half of the children in foster care in Canada, although they represent only 7% of the total population. See Ontario Human Rights Commission, *Interrupted Childhoods*.
- 6 In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal concluded that First Nations children in Canada have received inequitable funding for child and family welfare services, constituting racial discrimination. See First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, "Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Decisions on First Nations Child Welfare and Jordan's Principle: Information Sheet."
- 7 See Canada, Department of Health, "Jordan's Principle" and First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, "Jordan's Timeline."
- 8 One participant cited the fourth Call to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) that calls for an affirmation of the right of Indigenous governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action*, 1.
- 9 Participants cited Saskatchewan's introduction of the *Interpersonal Violence Disclosure Protocol (Clare's Law) Act* in 2018.
- 10 Assistance Centres for Victims of Crimes.