

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN: INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENTS

What We Learned Report
and Recommendations

2023



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Disclaimer

The “What We Learned Report” (WWLR) summarizes discussions at engagement sessions across what is known as British Columbia between May and June 2023 and provides recommendations based on participant responses during engagements. The views and opinions expressed in the report represent those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the views of the provincial government or any other organizations. The WWLR is provided for information, discussion, and policy recommendation purposes.

We emphasize that each Nation, community, family, and sub-family has different teachings. Work must continue at all levels for these Ways of Being and Knowing to flourish, evolve, and positively influence the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This document is part of an ongoing story and discussion. Please read it as something that is alive and in flux.



Executive Summary

The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Action Plan is an initiative by the provincial government to address GBV in British Columbia. The GBV Action Plan will establish minimum standards for sexual assault response, provide more training for police, crown counsel, and justices, and allocate core funding for sexual assault centers. In 2022, the province conducted a series of engagements and produced a *What We Heard: Summary of Engagement to Inform BC's Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence*. However, it was recognized that in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of Indigenous community members, more extensive and meaningful engagement was required.

Between May and June 2023, Naqsmist conducted 14 virtual and online engagements, and reviewed two written responses, to understand how Indigenous communities were affected by GBV and identify recommendations to address the issue. Using the Enowkinwixw decision-making process and Cultivating Safe Spaces Framework, Naqsmist sought to guide participants through grief and trauma and to learn from Indigenous peoples who have been or are currently affected by GBV. This work has never been done in this way before. Each participant provided deep insights into how to support the systems change required to address GBV for Indigenous Peoples.

The WWLR report reflects Naqsmist's findings from this work. It identifies 14 main themes following the engagements. Themes were organized in storyline format to honour the Tradition perspective of many Indigenous teachings. The themes included:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Residential Schools | 8. Broken Education System |
| 2. Loss of Ceremony | 9. Foster Care System |
| 3. Loss of Identity | 10. Provincial Supports |
| 4. Ostracized Populations | 11. Urban Indigenous Populations |
| 5. Men | 12. Healing and Connection |
| 6. Shame and Stigma | 13. Building Back Trust |
| 7. Cycles of Abuse, Trauma, and Addiction | 14. Funding for GBV Initiatives |

Based on the findings, recommendations were provided for Canadian and Indigenous governments, as well as communities and individuals, to initiate this crucial work. These recommendations encompass areas such as education, foster care, medical systems, broader support networks, and personal identity and Coming of Age work. Addressing GBV must be a collective effort between Nations, the federal government, the BC government, community organizations, and individuals. Broadly, the WWLR report and recommendations promote community-driven and defined approaches to addressing GBV with flexible support from all governments that respect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This report serves as a vital resource for understanding the effects of GBV on Indigenous populations and outlines actionable recommendations for systemic change to address GBV while respecting the unique needs and experiences of diverse Indigenous Peoples.



Photo: Haïda Gwaii



Photo: Hudson Bay Mountain, Smithers

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The Process

Naqsmist uses transformative storytelling and whole-systems healing approaches to support confidence within individuals, organizations, and communities to promote good decision-making and strategizing. At Naqsmist, we help guide people through conflict, disconnect, grief and trauma by sharing our Syilx Knowledge, *Enowkinwixw* decision-making process, and Cultivating Safe Spaces Framework. We provide participants with the tools and processes needed to improve how we show up in our personal and professional lives to solve problems and contribute to change effectively and sustainably.

Enowkinwixw is a decision-making process based on the Syilx creation story “How Food Was Given” or the “Four Food Chiefs” story. This story explains how important it is for us to include all voices in decision-making and tells us how to listen to each other so we can make good decisions. All of our Laws are held in our stories and language. Our stories tell us how we must govern ourselves and make good decisions for the good of all living things. During *Enowkinwixw*, participants are divided into four perspective groups: *Tradition, Relationship, Action, and Innovation*. Participants self-identify into perspective groups and each group is provided with a set of guiding questions and a facilitator/notetaker to capture their discussions. *Enowkinwixw* is not a process in which we come together to figure out something new. It is a process of clarification of what we already know.

Cultivating Safe Spaces (CSS) is a trauma-informed framework based on *Enowkinwixw* that ensures the protocols and perspectives cultivate a productive space for ideas to come into contact with one another by fostering a sense of safety and trust amongst participants. It asks participants to promote one-another’s wellness, inclusion, validation and freedom. Through CSS and *Enowkinwixw*, we acknowledge that we all have different perspectives, experiences, and ways of doing things but that each voice is important.

Engagements

From May to June 2023, Naqsmist hosted 14 engagement sessions throughout what is known as British Columbia (BC), with six sessions hosted virtually and eight hosted in person. Each session was supported by a team of up to five people, with one lead CSS regional facilitator and four small group facilitators. The CSS facilitators included: Elaine Alec, Angeline Day, Candice George, Jen Greenway, and Kayla Mitchell. In-person sessions were organized according to the four perspectives. The virtual sessions were held online using Zoom video conferencing and participants were in a virtual Circle for discussions. In addition, one meeting was held to share lived experiences with Two-Spirit people and CSS facilitators; this is part of a philosophy of researchers-as-participants and active members of the whole set of relations.

Based upon the Path Forward engagements in 2019, rural and remote communities that often get overlooked during engagement and communities that experience a high rate of GBV were prioritized for in-person engagements. Involving communities in

suggesting venues, catering, local cultural support, and local notetakers supported the co-development of engagement sessions and trust building. The list below outlines the engagements that were conducted:

Date	Location
Tuesday May 23, 2023	Smithers
Wednesday, May 24, 2023	Virtual Session 1
Saturday, May 27, 2023	Virtual Session 2 (formerly Fort St. John - moved online due to fire evacuation alert)
Tuesday, May 30, 2023	Virtual Session 3
Tuesday, May 30, 2023	Merritt
Wednesday, May 31, 2023	Nanaimo
Friday, June 2, 2023	Virtual Session 4
Monday, June 5, 2023	Virtual Session 5
Tuesday, June 6, 2023	Williams Lake
Sunday, June 11, 2023	Vancouver
Tuesday, June 13, 2023	Kamloops
Thursday, June 15, 2023	Meeting with BC Women’s Coalition
Thursday, June 22, 2023	Prince George
Wednesday, June 28, 2023	Two-Spirit + CSS Facilitator Virtual

Invitations for the engagements were sent via email to First Nations governments; urban and off-reserve Indigenous organizations such as family services organizations, women’s advocacy groups, and friendship centres; and provincial Indigenous governance bodies like UBCIC and BCAFN. Social media posts were shared on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook by Elaine Alec, and regional facilitators reached out directly to their networks via email, phone and social media to invite participants to join the sessions. Engagements were open to First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants. In total, 148 Indigenous Peoples participated in the engagements, including:

- Community Members
- Leaders
- Advocates
- Naqsmist Cultivating Safe Spaces Facilitators

Given the tight timeline and sensitive nature of this topic, it was important to provide opportunities for participants to engage in other ways. Interviews were offered to individuals to share their ideas and perspectives from their place of knowing. In addition, participants were offered an opportunity to provide written input at any time during the project. No one-on-one interviews were conducted and two written responses were collected and included in the data.

Question Development

In 2019, Elaine Alec led the Path Forward engagements across BC to discuss violence against Indigenous women and girls. Since then, much learning and storytelling has been done to share the sacredness of our 2SLGBTQQIA+ relatives. During the 2019 engagements, one message remained consistent from the Tradition group. This group contributes to decision-making from their lived experiences; they are the language speakers, Knowledge Keepers, cultural helpers, Elders, and hereditary leadership in our communities. They shared that the solution to end violence and trauma in our communities was to bring back “Coming of Age” or “Rites of Passage” Ceremonies. This direction has been given repeatedly through various engagements on several topics ranging from children and families to climate change.

In our decision-making spaces, individuals are often asked the following questions:

- Who are you, and who is your family?
- Who is your Nation, and what Lands do you come from?
- What is your purpose here, and how will you contribute to this work?
- What is on your heart or speak from your heart.

These questions acknowledged the importance of identity, belonging, and connection. These questions were easy to answer when children went through Coming of Age or Rites of Passage work. It helped members of our communities and Nations have confidence, self-regulate when they struggled, and take accountability for their feelings and emotions. There was no need to take power from others when you knew how to find power within yourself. Many folks have lost connection to their languages, stories, and Coming of Age work. Many adults were not raised with these teachings. As such, it was made apparent that our engagements must focus on “Coming of Age” and “Rites of Passage”. With the re-emergence of Coming of Age and Rites of Passage Ceremonies, ultimately, community members will have the confidence in their heritage and community to lead the movement towards self-determination and support the implementation of UNDRIP. Questions were designed to incorporate this crucial learning.

Transparency

Naqsmist strives to adhere to the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession, as the First Nations Data Governance Initiative outlines (OCAP). Notes collected during the engagements were shared in an anonymous format via email with participants and are also available on Naqsmist’s project website.

Writing Approach

Data received from the engagements underwent thematic analysis to compile the WWLR below, including detailed recommendations for the GBV Action Plan. WWLR writers were: Moe Nadeau, Ylan Tran, Lydia Pengilley, Michelyn Lepage, Jen Greenway, and Delaine Zwiek. Raw session data was collated into a single document, where initial analysis established themes. Portions of text that fit into various themes were then colour-coded according to the themes and moved into a new document organized according to these themes. From there, the text was summarized and condensed through an iterative process. Recommendations were captured along the way and/or pulled from themes that emerged following the writing of the body of the report. We want to emphasize that no engagement process or report will ever be comprehensive, and that ideas and opinions can shift with time and throughout space. This report is a snapshot of a moment and not a representation of a definitive, indefinite truth of Indigenous views of GBV in BC.

Prelude

As mentioned earlier, we have leveraged the insights gained from our 2019 engagements to shape our approach for the 2023 engagements. In keeping with a Tradition approach, we will be presenting the WWLR as a narrative account of the engagements. The WWLR, being a story rooted in Indigenous perspectives, may not adhere strictly to the conventions of Traditional English grammar. Instead, it embraces the fluidity and nuances of storytelling, honouring the diverse linguistic Traditions and narrative styles found within Indigenous cultures. Embracing this method of writing allows us to honour and uplift Indigenous voices, fostering a deeper understanding and respect for all communication forms. Our intention is to showcase the voices of the remarkable individuals who participated, emphasizing their valuable perspectives and experiences. By highlighting the themes through a story dialogue, we seek to provide a comprehensive and meaningful account of what we learned, including recommendations for addressing GBV across the province and its particularly disproportionate impacts to Indigenous Peoples. Come take a journey with us.



Residential Schools

Residential schools in Canada are a deeply traumatic chapter in the country's history where Indigenous children were forcibly separated from their families and subjected to cultural assimilation practices. Many communities and individuals highlighted the impact of residential schools as a major component in how GBV has and continues to impact Indigenous Peoples. The effects of residential schools can still be seen now, and we must reestablish the system of Aunties and Uncles, and trusting families not to harm children after the trauma and violence of residential schools.¹

Residential school systems forced many Indigenous Peoples to leave their communities and cultures. At one engagement, a participant shared, "I had to leave my community. If I didn't, I'd be dead. It's displacement, and that's collective; so many of our people have been displaced".² Another disclosed, "I wasn't really raised in culture, my Grandma was a language teacher but never spoke it at home. I was raised by her. Now my daughter is breaking cycles. She doesn't care what people think, I'm so proud of her for being a role model".³

It was through colonial institutions, such as residential schools, that Indigenous Peoples Traditional systems were dismantled. This has left Indigenous Peoples today questioning what is Tradition, and what masquerades as Tradition but was learned through colonial systems. In the engagements, one participant asked, "When did we start stepping into gendered roles? We never used to stand for prayer, that was learned in residential school. Some communities still abide by that, but some communities are starting to unlearn it. There are so many things... in our Ceremony that don't come from us, they came from residential school and the colonial system".⁴ As we contributed to the work of reclaiming Coming of Age Ceremony during these sessions, many Indigenous individuals expressed the damage residential schools did to their communities' understanding of what Coming of Age is supposed to be outside of a colonial context. For example, one participant asked, "What does [Coming of Age] look like? How does it feel? I don't even know what we did Traditionally because of residential schools. Missed generations of Mom and Dad roles, [we] never had teachings of the Traditions. Ghost speakers who know the language but don't speak the language. Coming of Age in residential school systems was be[ing] sexually abused, and becoming a man was letting it happen".⁵ "Collectively, it meant the stealing of our women, the death of our women, the loss of our matriarchs".⁶

The harms that took place in residential schools were unimaginable. Children were raped and beaten because of their Indigenous identity. They were taught to act and think a certain way and punished for seeing things differently than the colonial model dictated. One participant recounted, "a lot of my family went to residential school and the violence we experienced in that institution affected us differently.

For girls, it made us ashamed of our bodies. We were made to feel dirty on our Moon Time. The church and the institution made the girls feel as if we were lesser than the boys and the men. It shaped us differently and we thought it was normal to be abused because that's how we were treated in the institution. We weren't taught to honour our lifegiver, the grandmother, or the sister. Men were allowed and taught they can hit women".⁷ Another stated, "all I knew from coming out of residential school was that I had to fend for myself, because that's what we were taught. So much shame after I left residential school about the things that happened to me in the school, and then becoming violent after coming out because I didn't know who I was".⁸ "In residential schools, we were shown Coming of Age through sexual abuse and beatings that took away our Coming of Age".⁹

The trauma experienced from residential school survivors resulted in many Indigenous Peoples not knowing how to express love, thus contributing to intergenerational trauma.¹⁰ This shifted the understanding in young people of what is right and what is wrong. One participant said, "we are at a point now where it's ok to sexualize Aunties and Uncles, and... that ripples down to disrespect. Suddenly it's disrespect towards Aunties and Uncles and the next generation think that Aunties don't deserve respect".¹¹ In addition, Elders have been impacted in a way that sometimes results in belittling Youth 'because they were belittled or shamed in their past'. Many residential school survivors have been left not knowing how to parent.¹²

These impacts result in misunderstandings of which behaviours are respectful or disrespectful, how to love and be loved, and the persistent intergenerational trauma that affects Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous Peoples today share the sentiment that they are grateful for their connection to Indigenous teachings, but acknowledge that colonial experiences have been influenced by what Elders endured growing up.¹³ However, there are opportunities to communicate and create safe spaces to "transcend past residential schools", if enough support is provided to communities.¹⁴

¹ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

² Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

³ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

⁴ Elaine Alec, Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Virtual Session, June 28, 2023.

⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁷ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁰ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹¹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹² Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹³ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Virtual Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

¹⁴ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

Loss of Ceremony

Ceremony is a way of life for many Indigenous populations. Ceremony is a sacred and culturally significant ritual that holds deep meaning for Indigenous communities, encompassing a wide range of practices such as prayer, dance, song, storytelling and Land-based practices. However, it is important to note that Ceremony extends beyond ritual in a religious context. Many Indigenous individuals acknowledge that Ceremony is in everything because it is the basis for how they move through the world. Ceremonies also vary across Indigenous cultures and reflect the unique Traditions, beliefs, and histories of each community they belong to. Throughout our engagements, we encountered a diverse range of perspectives on Ceremony. From protocols surrounding death to Coming of Age and adoption Ceremonies, from Potlatch to sweat lodges, Ceremonies emerged as a cornerstone of every conversation. Ceremony permeates all aspects of life. It isn't marked on formal calendars.¹⁵ It evolves and unfolds based on individual and community needs. When engaging in Ceremony, the focus is on the collective, intertwining and weaving together various elements of community. The essence of Ceremony was found in the collective experience of braiding everything together, uniting individuals and their shared experiences.¹⁶

The remembrance of Ceremony unveils the devastating losses caused by colonization. Ceremony was criminalized, erasing Indigenous teachings and ways of life or forcing brave communities and their Knowledge Keepers to take Ceremony underground to protect it. The resulting disconnection from culture, language, and ancestral heritage is deeply felt. Yet, there is a growing determination to revive these vital Traditions that lie dormant in Indigenous communities. Standing up for Ceremonies becomes an act of awakening memory, DNA, and Knowledge.¹⁷ Reconnecting with ancestral wisdom by sitting on the Land and embracing stillness is essential to preserving and passing on Ceremony. Revitalizing Ceremonies honours the past and ensures continuity for future generations, reflecting a profound yearning to reclaim cultural heritage.¹⁸

Reintroducing Ceremony to communities is vital to facilitate whole systems healing. Indigenous Peoples require opportunities to reconnect with their cultural Ceremonies and, in the process, rediscover a sense of belonging and personal identity.¹⁹ Healing the community is a crucial step towards addressing GBV, as a strong community bond significantly reduces the likelihood of violence. Violence is much less likely to happen when you spend your life celebrating others and developing a deep connection to your community. Ceremony serves as its own justice system, promoting harmony within individuals and the community as a whole.²⁰

The loss of Coming of Age Ceremonies represents one important Ceremonial reclamation for addressing GBV. Many individuals express a sense of incompleteness or a lack of transition into adulthood due to the absence of Coming of Age Ceremonies.²¹

By reintroducing these Ceremonies, the dynamics of families and the inclusion of younger generations could be significantly transformed.²² Implementing such practices would involve not waiting until later stages of life to receive a name, but rather assigning baby names earlier, to establish clear roles and responsibilities from a young age.²³ This symbolizes personal growth and requires individuals to demonstrate how they can strengthen their given name. Coming of Age Ceremonies Traditionally served as a sacred time, allowing for the navigation of personal trauma and facilitating self-regulation (the ability to understand and manage one's behaviour). Learning through experiences such as being sent to bodies of Water or specific individuals for instruction played a crucial role in this process. These Ceremonies fostered a strong connection to the Land, belonging, identity, and self, which are essential components of personal development.²⁴ Additionally, incorporating Traditional practices for welcoming newborns into the community and teaching them about place and heritage from early on is of utmost importance. Sharing songs, imparting cultural Knowledge, and preserving Indigenous Traditions would help reclaim and revitalize cultural identity.²⁵ By reviving Coming of Age Ceremonies and these interconnected practices, Indigenous communities can regain crucial aspects of their cultural heritage and provide vital guidance and support to their Youth.

“When it's time to pick berries and dig the roots, it doesn't matter what else is happening (sports, tournaments, Powwow), the roots don't wait. When it's time for Ceremony, it's time for Ceremony, and that is what is hard to teach”.

- Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

Indigenous Ceremonies play an important role in supporting men within their communities by offering a pathway for them to reclaim their warrior and protector status.²⁶ By engaging in these Ceremonies, men have the opportunity to reconnect with their Traditional roles and responsibilities, fostering a sense of purpose and identity. In a society where modernity often diminishes or distorts Traditional gender roles, participating in Indigenous Ceremonies helps men regain a sense of belonging and meaning. Moreover, these Ceremonies provide a space for men to learn and grow, reacquainting themselves with essential skills such as wood chopping and Water packing that may have been overlooked in their Coming of Age journey.²⁷ By embracing Indigenous Ceremony, men can rediscover their purpose and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

¹⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁶ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹⁷ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹⁸ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹⁹ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁰ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²¹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²² Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²³ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²⁴ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁵ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁶ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁷ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

For women, Ceremonies offer a sacred space to honour their roles as life-givers, healers, and leaders within their communities. Matriarchs are highly regarded within Indigenous communities, and Ceremonies played a central role in their care and empowerment.²⁸ The significance of these Ceremonies remains potent, especially when women gather together in a safe and sacred space. Indigenous Ceremony empowers women as they transition into motherhood, respecting their journey through pregnancy and childbirth.²⁹ It also honours women entering menopause, acknowledging hormonal changes and providing support during this transformative phase. Moreover, as Elders go through their "second childhood", these Ceremonies provide an opportunity to address and heal the suppressed emotions and experiences that resurface at this stage.³⁰ The presence of knowledgeable Elders who can share teachings and wisdom contributes to the empowerment of women, reminding them of their ancestral connections and power in their own bodies. These Ceremonies provide a platform for women to gather and share their wisdom, stories, and experiences, fostering a sense of sisterhood and empowerment. Through participation in Indigenous Ceremony, women reclaim their cultural heritage, strengthen their identities, and find spiritual nourishment. Ceremony supports Indigenous women to navigate the challenges they face in a modern world, while remaining rooted in their Traditions.

Coming of Age Ceremonies hold immense importance for Indigenous Youth, particularly in addressing GBV within Indigenous communities. Without the guidance and teachings imparted through these Ceremonies, the journey into adulthood becomes more complex and challenging, as valuable Knowledge is acquired at a later age or sometimes not at all.³¹ The dreams and messages conveyed during Ceremony provide Youth with a sense of purpose and direction.³² Coming of Age is not just about physical maturation; it encompasses personal growth and learning new ways for building a better community. Reflecting on the loss of Traditional practices highlights the need to revive and prioritize these Ceremonies. By involving Youth in Ceremonies and fostering their active participation, particularly in Northern and rural/remote areas where engagement may be challenging, we can empower Youth with Knowledge and a sense of belonging.³³ Emphasizing the importance of Coming of Age Ceremonies in a positive and inclusive way is crucial for the overall well-being of Indigenous Youth, who lack opportunities for guidance and support.³⁴ These initiatives must extend to all small communities to create a comprehensive and holistic approach to Youth empowerment and community development.

"It is hard getting people together... [we can] utilize social media to appeal to younger generations. [We need to] make our teachings more accessible... [and] provide more options".

- Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²⁸ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

³⁰ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

³¹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

³² Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

³³ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

³⁴ Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.



Photo: Nanaimo

Implementing and maintaining Indigenous Ceremonies can be challenging due to several factors. Many individuals lack the willingness or Knowledge of how to participate. Those without cultural teachings or Knowledge often carry shame associated with their inexperience and are further inhibited from participating by not wanting to appear foolish or ignorant. There is also the reality that balancing modern life's demands with the time and commitment required for Ceremonies is difficult.^{35, 36} Ceremony must be prioritized to preserve cultural practices and foster community well-being.

³⁵ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

³⁶ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

Loss of Identity

Colonization has disrupted Indigenous Peoples' sense of belonging and purpose, leading to a collective experience of displacement.³⁷ “When colonization came to North America, why did they take away our songs, our language, our children, our Way of Being? It's because the way we operate and love is the antithesis of the colonial way of being/living, so of course they have done everything they could to cut that down”.³⁸ The Indian Act broke Traditional Indigenous governance systems, leading to abuse, trauma and a loss of identity.³⁹ This loss of identity is closely connected to GBV because there are gaps in teaching about love, trust, and relationships.⁴⁰ Indigenous populations have not been taught to love themselves and their identities, which results in the inability to teach this to their children.

The loss of cultural Knowledge and the inability to pass it on to future generations have perpetuated a cycle of cultural erasure. Indigenous participants expressed a deep desire to learn and reconnect with their heritage, as they recognize the importance of awakening these teachings, restoring cultural pride, and showing their value. By learning Indigenous identity from a young age, individuals can reclaim their purpose and make positive changes in their communities.⁴¹ In the engagements it was learned that “people involved need to be immersed in their culture... A sense of belonging is important. There are many of our people that are stuck... There are many in our Nation who are judgemental and shame [others]”.⁴²

Coming of Age teachings support the formation of gender identity and self-discovery early on to ground Youth in their purpose.⁴³ Teachings can be learned through many different avenues. For urban Indigenous populations, teachings have been learned through the Friendship Centre.⁴⁴ For others, teachings may be learned through community, lived experience, parents, and extended families. However, the process of coming into self-identity can be challenging when there is a lack of guidance or understanding from family members, Elders, or other community members.^{45, 46} This can lead to a sense of confusion and disconnection from one's identity, resulting in not feeling loved, sexualizing others, making inappropriate comments, and other problematic behaviours.⁴⁷ Recognizing and embracing the importance of Coming of Age experiences is vital, as they contribute to the formation of a holistic self-identity including mental, physical, and spiritual aspects.⁴⁸ Failure to acknowledge and support these stages of growth can lead to a disconnect from one's true self and feelings of guilt and powerlessness.

³⁷ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

³⁸ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

³⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁴⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁴¹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁴² Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

⁴³ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

⁴⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁴⁵ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

⁴⁶ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

⁴⁷ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

⁴⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.



Reclaiming Indigenous identity is an essential step in breaking the cycle of violence and fostering healing and empowerment within Indigenous communities. By actively reconnecting with culture, language, and ancestry, Indigenous Peoples can resist external forces that perpetuate violence and find strength and resilience in their cultural identity. Indigenous Peoples are asking for space and funding to create modern structures to develop identity and governance to support their communities in a holistic way. This involves creating a space where people can come to gather and learn about culture and wellness, social services, and education, all while working together as a community.⁴⁹ A pan-Indigenous approach must not be taken by any colonial government support.⁵⁰ However, this becomes complex when addressing the needs of urban Indigenous Peoples who reside outside of their home territories and communities. They have established their own communities alongside many other urban Indigenous Peoples from various Nations, relying on each other for support and sharing teachings and stories that may not necessarily align with their own Nations. As a result, avoiding pan-Indigenizing can be a challenge in urban settings as unique structures of community emerge which require unique supports and services. However, it is still important to take a Nation or community approach when considering provincial supports for the reclamation of Indigenous identity. As one participant shared, it is important to recognize differences among community members and peoples' unique ancestries and identities. In their words: “the systems don't allow for flexibility to better address the needs of the families and community”.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

⁵⁰ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

⁵¹ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

Ostracized Populations

Colonial systems have had a significant impact on the marginalization and ostracization of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities. Prior to colonization, many Indigenous cultures had their own understandings of gender and sexuality that embraced non-binary and diverse expressions.⁵² “Even in recent years, Elders would be confused when someone asked “what's the man's role” in the community. That’s not how Indigenous Peoples did things. Centering Indigenous Knowledge is going back to instinct. There was an understanding that every person knows exactly what it is that they are here to do. We define that for ourselves?”⁵³ However, colonial binaries and heteronormativity were imposed on these communities, resulting in the stigmatization of 2SLGBTQQIA+ Indigenous individuals. A Two-Spirit participant relates that “growing up as a child taught me to be ashamed of who I was. I never felt like I had a place to fit in, I always felt othered. People in the community would give me looks, and their tones of voice would change”.⁵⁴ The erasure and loss of cultural acceptance and recognition has led to increased vulnerability and violence against these communities.⁵⁵ GBV, rooted in prejudice and discrimination, is a consequence of the historical and ongoing marginalization of 2SLGBTQQIA+ populations within colonial systems.

Two-Spirit people are sacred in many Indigenous systems. They are able to walk in both worlds.⁵⁶ People who are Two-Spirit have always been referred to as Medicine People and healers, because it is a gift to have the responsibility of trying to keep the balance (working with the feminine and masculine energies).⁵⁷ Two-Spirit people seek out balance and hold accountability where accountability is due, being open to all of the possibilities of creation. However, being Two-Spirit goes against the colonial systems in place in BC. Many older generation Two-Spirit people were murdered, resulting in further othering of younger populations because they do not have older populations to look up to.⁵⁸ In addition, the loss of Coming of Age Ceremonies means younger generations aren’t given opportunities to think about their gender identity and instead are forced to fit within colonial identities. Many Elders do not feel safe in the current system to come out as Two-Spirit.⁵⁹ Providing more support and safe spaces for Two-Spirit people is the “missing piece” needed to support addressing GBV.^{60, 61} “Gender is a colonial construct. I think that if the older generation understood that, it would make things a lot easier”.⁶² “Coming of Age needs to be inclusive of Two-Spirit people and we need to contact our local Nations and see what they are doing... because I know that [Two-Spirit people] are not always included... Maybe even making their own Ceremony”.⁶³

Because 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals are often ostracised from their community, they are at risk when going through significant life changes, or Coming of Age. During discussions about Coming of Age or life transitions Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+, participants noted the painful experience of sacred events like gender transition being harder without the support of their family and community. One participant noted that, when going through transition, people tend to self-harm because they lack the support network, both inside and outside the treatment centre.⁶⁴ Follow-up support does not happen post transition and these individuals do not have an adequate understanding or acknowledgement of what has taken place in their bodies during the transition.⁶⁵ The lack of cultural acknowledgement for their Ceremonial roles that Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals receive from their community has a more profound impact on their ability to participate in Ceremony than many realize. A Two-Spirit participant shared that since coming out, they have not participated in their Ceremonial and spiritual community. “I’ve been around here and there but I never leave feeling good. There is a lot of transphobia in the community. It makes me not want to participate and be around”.⁶⁶ This lack of support system post transition can lead to self-harm. For the holistic support network that 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals deserve, more funding is needed to adequately support these programs.⁶⁷

Funding is not the only requirement for supporting the Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ population. A Nanaimo participant affirmed the mental health struggles that 2SLGBTQQIA+ face, stating, “2SLGBTQQIA+ should be supported, we have suicides every year”.⁶⁸ Another participant voiced that, “2SLGBTQQIA+ [people are] afraid to be themselves and come out”.⁶⁹ Discussions surrounding the GBV that 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals face were also prevalent. “Sexual violence - so many people have experienced that”.⁷⁰ One participant spoke of how being 2SLGBTQQIA+ is not seen as Traditional in their community. They said, “especially in Indigenous culture, being 2SLGBTQQIA+ it is not how Tradition is seen... Being 2SLGBTQQIA+ it is going to be difficult navigating those conversations”.⁷¹ Due to the erasure and lack of 2SLGBTQQIA+ acknowledgement in Ceremony and cultural roles, many members of this marginalized community do not get to experience cultural reclamation and Coming of Age in the same way as other community members. “A lot of kids graduating had come out in no regalia because they are queer”.⁷² “Change is really hard for people to accept”.⁷³

⁵² Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

⁵³ Elaine Alec, Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session, June 28, 2023.

⁵⁴ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

⁵⁵ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

⁵⁶ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁵⁷ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participants, June 28, 2023.

⁵⁸ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁵⁹ Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

⁶⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁶¹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

⁶² Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

⁶³ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

⁶⁴ Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

⁶⁵ Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

⁶⁶ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

⁶⁷ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

⁶⁸ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

⁶⁹ Virtual Session for Service Providers Participant, May 30, 2023.

⁷⁰ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

⁷¹ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

⁷² Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

⁷³ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.



One participant expressed that the roles and experiences of queer peoples were complex and multi-layered, stating, “in the queer community, eroticism was a form of Coming of Age, creating a connection with oneself similar to a cold Water awakening”.⁷⁴ Many of these practices need time and space to be brought into communities in safe ways and better understood. They also shared a need for “groups for Indigenous Peoples that provide spaces for survivors to connect and share on their healing journey”.⁷⁵ “[Queer people need access to] connections from [within] the[ir]

community, maybe through Friendship Centers, with people who aren't just in schools”.⁷⁶ “We need somewhere [for] people to access these resources [and] talk about their gender identity”.⁷⁷

Despite the challenges associated with othering and ostracizing the Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ populations, there are small changes being made broadly across the province. Many people are beginning to celebrate these differences. For example, some “gender-neutral bathrooms are being created in schools”.⁷⁸ People are beginning to introduce themselves using pronouns and embracing their gender and sexual fluidity, and inclusive teaching techniques are being adopted.⁷⁹ Some individuals vocalized excitement and optimism regarding the future for Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ and how they contribute to community healing.

“I'm really excited to see the future of our children and the generations that are to come because of the things we're learning now about Two-Spirit people and gender diversity. The movement and momentum that MMIWG2S is having and knowing that our children are gonna grow up with it, that's all they're gonna know”.⁸⁰ “We're making space for Two-Spirited people, and I always say that when I enter a conversation, especially [when it's] based on gender. I don't have the right to tell or say how it should be for them. I'm still learning. Their comfort with these topics and [they know] what should happen”.

- Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.



The resilience of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community cannot be understated in the conversation of GBV. While some changes have been made, it is critical to push for more supports. Regardless of the small wins, more must be done on a broader scale to change the stereotypes of these populations. More empowerment should be provided to Youth to learn about gender and sexuality at an early age.⁸¹ It is important to note, however, that despite GBV being a serious and dangerous reality for 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, the 2SLGBTQQIA+ experience is not only sorrow and struggle. In lifting 2SLGBTQQIA+ relatives up, it is equally important to honour the community's resiliency and joy. Celebrating queer and non-binary groups can be playful and support a self-ritual such as in performance work, which connects individuals to community and helps them feel more confident.⁸²

⁸¹ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

⁸² Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.

⁷⁴ Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.

⁷⁵ Virtual Session 3 Participants, June 5, 2023.

⁷⁶ Virtual Session 3 Participants, June 5, 2023.

⁷⁷ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁷⁸ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

⁷⁹ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023; Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.

⁸⁰ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

Men

Indigenous Ceremonies play an important role in supporting men within their communities by offering a pathway for them to reclaim their warrior and protector status.⁸³ By engaging in Ceremony, men have the opportunity to reconnect with their Traditional roles, fostering a sense of purpose and identity. In a society where modernity often diminishes or distorts Traditional gender roles, participating in Indigenous Ceremonies helps men regain a sense of belonging and meaning. Ceremonies provide a space for men to learn and grow, reacquainting themselves with skills such as wood chopping and Water packing that may have been overlooked in their Coming of Age journey.⁸⁴ By embracing Indigenous Ceremonies, men can rediscover their purpose and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

While it is true that GBV predominantly affects women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, men are not exempt from its effect and play a significant role in its eradication.⁸⁵ Although the disparity in prevalence exists, men also encounter GBV, and often the support or resources are lacking. “A lot of what we talked about was making room for our men and their healing, honouring that, making safe spaces for them because they are often forgotten about in GBV.”⁸⁶ “I had [experienced] violence, and I had support, but then my counsellor aged out, and so now I have nothing because there is no support anymore. The funding came through the residential school survivors fund to help me move forward so that I can be a better man for my family. But what happened to my support? What about men who feel overwhelmed by everything that’s been forced upon us as men and what we are supposed to do in this grand picture of what a man’s supposed to look like? The counselling isn’t there.”⁸⁷ When people lack a sense of identity and belonging, they may try to take away from others. Men are affected by this, but it may show up in different areas such as social media. “This is where violence comes in. Violence is much more than the physical part - it's the community, verbal abuse, and social media. It doesn't seem like there's any safe space on social media for men to mess up... They need support just as much as women do, and all the more reason why these Coming of Age Ceremonies are so important. Examples are where men say they screwed up but are just completely attacked. How is it safe for any man to say, “I don't know?” Because maybe he did go and talk to an Elder, and case in point in why we need those Ceremonies. We need to bring those back.”⁸⁸

“I think that when we stand up for each other, it lifts all of us up. We don’t have to choose one. We can all heal together”.

- Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

⁸³ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

⁸⁴ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

⁸⁵ Statistics Canada: Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.pdf>

⁸⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁸⁷ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

⁸⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.



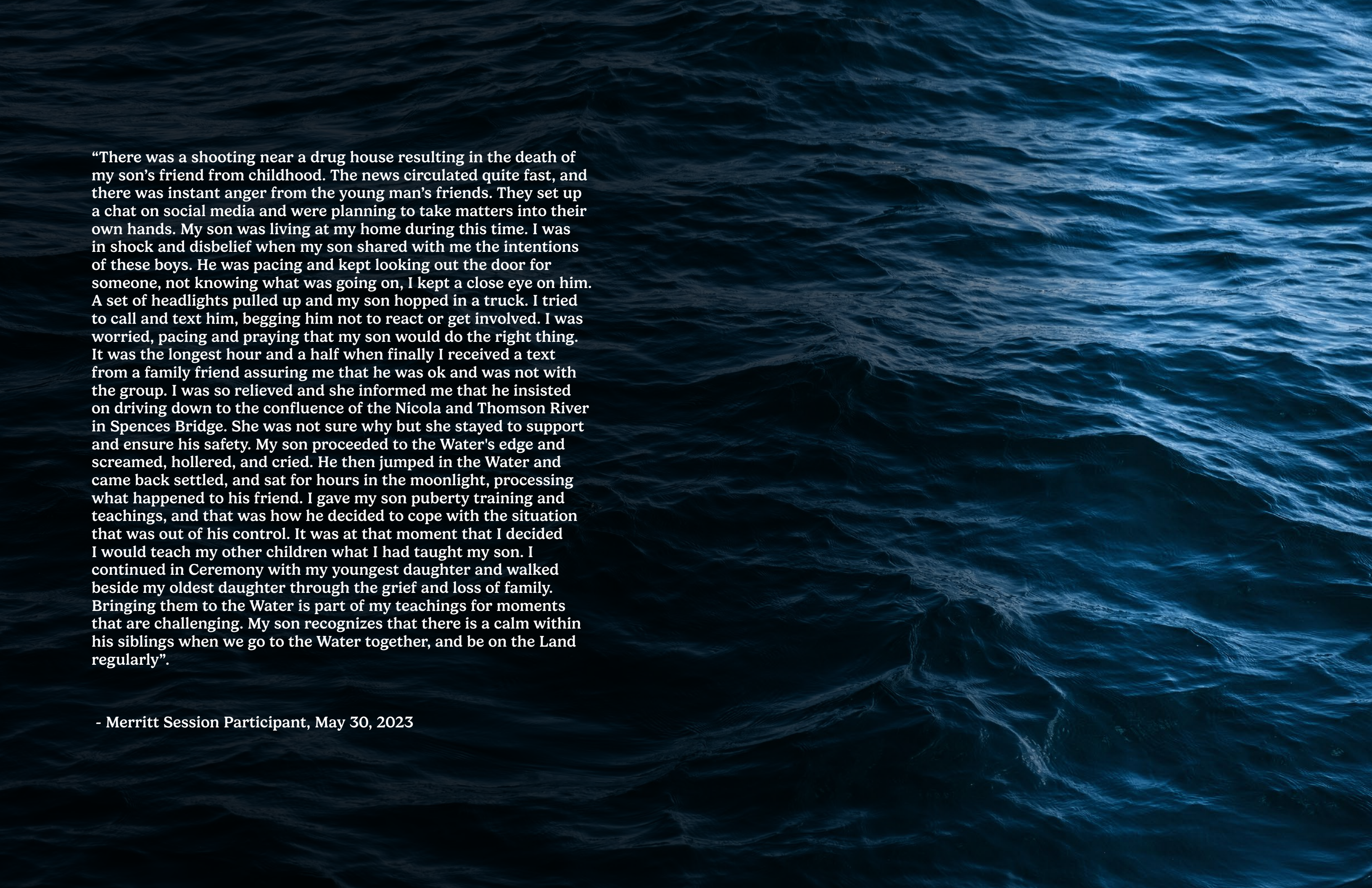
Men were previously taught to respect other women and knew their roles within their communities and Nations. This was also taught through Ceremonies, which can differ from community to community. “Traditionally, we all had our own Medicine bundle, where you would put a baby's belly button and their hair until they passed on. We need to bring back these bundles and Ceremonies to keep our babies grounded. Bringing back berry fasting is important for women but also men. It teaches men to respect our women when they are menstruating.”⁸⁹ “In our culture, we had separate sweats for women and men. All of these Ceremonies need to be brought back. We had Medicine for everything and anything; if you had anxiety, we knew what to do. All our Medicines are out on the Land.”⁹⁰ For people that don’t have access to Ceremony, there are other resources and everyday actions that can be made in order to teach men to support women. “There is a program called “Be More Than a Bystander” about teaching men to stand up for women when they are in trouble. Teaching men that it's okay to tell their friends, “It's not okay to talk to her like that”. The program is through the BC Lions, and it’s a true step in the right direction.”⁹¹ Safe spaces must be created for both men and women to learn about GBV and Coming of Age.⁹²

⁸⁹ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

⁹⁰ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

⁹¹ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

⁹² Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.



“There was a shooting near a drug house resulting in the death of my son’s friend from childhood. The news circulated quite fast, and there was instant anger from the young man’s friends. They set up a chat on social media and were planning to take matters into their own hands. My son was living at my home during this time. I was in shock and disbelief when my son shared with me the intentions of these boys. He was pacing and kept looking out the door for someone, not knowing what was going on, I kept a close eye on him. A set of headlights pulled up and my son hopped in a truck. I tried to call and text him, begging him not to react or get involved. I was worried, pacing and praying that my son would do the right thing. It was the longest hour and a half when finally I received a text from a family friend assuring me that he was ok and was not with the group. I was so relieved and she informed me that he insisted on driving down to the confluence of the Nicola and Thomson River in Spences Bridge. She was not sure why but she stayed to support and ensure his safety. My son proceeded to the Water's edge and screamed, hollered, and cried. He then jumped in the Water and came back settled, and sat for hours in the moonlight, processing what happened to his friend. I gave my son puberty training and teachings, and that was how he decided to cope with the situation that was out of his control. It was at that moment that I decided I would teach my other children what I had taught my son. I continued in Ceremony with my youngest daughter and walked beside my oldest daughter through the grief and loss of family. Bringing them to the Water is part of my teachings for moments that are challenging. My son recognizes that there is a calm within his siblings when we go to the Water together, and be on the Land regularly”.

- Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023

Shame and Stigma

The perpetuation of GBV within communities often stems from the presence of shame and the attached stigma surrounding societal expectations of gender roles. Negative feelings associated with shame and stigma can have far-reaching consequences. For instance, many Indigenous Peoples have “witnessed friends enduring abusive relationships due to fear and a reluctance to come forward”.⁹³ When attempting to address issues related to GBV, voicing concerns is often met with resistance and accusations of being threatening or bullying.⁹⁴ Law enforcement may also become involved, further violating Indigenous Rights and instilling shame. One participant noted that, “while historically prostitution may have brought wealth to entire tribes, it is now accompanied by shame and stigma”.⁹⁵ Similarly, menstruation continues to be burdened with societal taboos.⁹⁶ Part of the work of re-discovering and re-establishing Indigenous Laws and protocols may lie in ongoing discussions around complicated ideas like these, and recognizing that Indigenous legal and social systems are alive and subject to the same debate as any other legal systems. However, it is clear that the judgment received by Indigenous Peoples related to GBV often hinders their willingness to seek counseling and support.⁹⁷ It may also inhibit efforts to revitalize Laws and protocols through lively debate.

Shame not only impacts Indigenous Peoples’ willingness to seek support, but it also hinders access to healing Knowledge as community members feel silence is safer than sharing. “We need to start writing things down for the moms of the parents...There is so much hush hush and people don’t talk about it because it could embarrass the family. I worked with sexual assault victims, and because I know this community, I know most of the families here. All it takes is one matriarch or a Grandmother from a well-known family to come in and shut [the accusations] down, even though the whole community knows. We have to start speaking up about this”.⁹⁸ Sharing stories and opening up can support people in feeling they are not alone and allow people to better understand other ways of life. “[GBV] needs to be something talked about on a daily basis, even in our classrooms”.⁹⁹ “If we do not acknowledge [GBV, then] we do not heal. Since doing trauma counseling, joining women’s groups, and doing 1-on-1s, they went into deep inner work. But by stopping the violent groups, there is shame on them for doing that to you, shame on you for carrying it around for so long”.¹⁰⁰ Individuals also noted the importance of bringing together the Old Ways and modern ways of learning and sharing stories. “We could learn a lot by going back to our Traditional ways with the current Knowledge that we have. It is not just one generation's Knowledge that matters”.¹⁰¹

Photo: Williams Lake



Other participants expressed hesitation with Coming of Age and how it relates to their gender. “I still struggle with Coming of Age, because I thought Coming of Age was only related to women. [For men,] I thought it was as simple as growing up and becoming a man. Over time, we have started talking about “what does it mean to become a man?” When it came to my own understanding of what it meant, I didn't know, and it became shameful because I didn't know. When my nieces and nephews ask me about it, I have a hard time talking about it because I don't know and I feel that shame”.¹⁰² Throughout each Indigenous Nation there were countless Coming of Age Ceremonies that gradually progressed individuals from childhood to adulthood to Elder in healthy ways. With colonial institutions like residential schools stripping away Ceremony, Coming of Age has become confusing and shameful for many Indigenous individuals.

⁹³ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁹⁴ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

⁹⁵ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

⁹⁶ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

⁹⁷ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

⁹⁸ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

⁹⁹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁰² Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

Cycles of Abuse, Trauma, and Addiction

The legacy of colonization has perpetuated cycles of abuse, trauma, and addiction among Indigenous Peoples, inflicting deep wounds on their cultural identity, social fabric, and overall well-being. When you grow up with cycles of abuse, trauma, and addiction, it is all you know. “We’ve been through a lot and struggle with identity... because of colonization. They knew what alcohol was going to do. They planted the seed, and we are festering in it. That is what we are dealing with, and it is hard. Most of us [went] to residential school, and [we need to] reclaim our identity... [and] go back to our Traditions”.¹⁰³ Colonization took away love, attachment, and caring in many Indigenous families, resulting in violence as a form of parenting.¹⁰⁴ Tragic events have become normalized within Indigenous communities; Indigenous Peoples are leaders in statistics when it comes to suicide, alcohol-related deaths, addiction, and abuse, which perpetuates into these harmful cycles of abuse, trauma, and addiction.¹⁰⁵ “When grief shows up... it’s hard to not turn to booze to feel numb, but there are consequences...”¹⁰⁶

The erosion of Traditional practices among Indigenous communities has contributed to cycles of abuse and addiction, depriving individuals of vital cultural healing mechanisms and leaving them vulnerable to the impacts of intergenerational trauma. “I only know a little bit of my language, I grew up mostly with my Grandparents. I have been drinking my whole life, my kids live with my sisters and Auntie... Why do I drink so much? To numb my pain. I want to quit, but it’s so hard...”¹⁰⁷ Many Indigenous Peoples have lost access to Traditional Ceremony. “At 28, I... learned what it meant to be Indigenous, and a lot of questions came up for me”.¹⁰⁸

“My Auntie was murdered on the Highway of Tears... My Dad had to identify her body at the time and he was so young, and that impacted him. He really struggled with his addiction and I understand why. Our lives would have been very different if my Auntie was still here; my Dad wouldn’t have struggled as much as he did, and I wouldn’t have struggled as much. I can see why he was so angry for so long. I’m only understanding trauma now, [realizing] all that pain he carried while I never understood it.”

- Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

The experience of growing up with trauma within Indigenous populations can contribute to perpetuating cycles of abuse within households. Unresolved trauma and its associated effects can manifest in patterns of abusive behaviours, numbness, and chaos, creating a cycle that continues across generations. For many Indigenous Peoples, it is hard not to put their children through what they went through. For others, many sacrifices had to be made to break the cycle.

¹⁰³ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

“I didn’t have a healthy childhood. My son blames me for not being happy in this world... My son never had to be homeless, and as a parent, I had to make sacrifices for that, including staying in an abusive relationship”.¹⁰⁹ “[I] remember the times when we had to hide under the sink, away from all the guys partying at our house trying to kiss us”.¹¹⁰ “It is hard to think about Coming of Age for my daughter and boys when I feel like I haven’t fully come of age myself. [My husband] walked out, I felt abandoned... My Mom is still an alcoholic and she probably won’t change. She brought me to places where I would get hurt all the time; what would my Mom have had to experience to throw me and my siblings away?”¹¹¹

Growing up in unsafe homes presents challenges that extend beyond familial relationships to include interactions with roommates as well. Living in an environment where safety is compromised can lead to heightened vulnerability, strained relationships, and increased risk of abuse or harm.¹¹² Unsafe living situations can create challenges in the workplace as individuals may feel too scared to speak about their experiences. Fear of judgment or further harm can prevent individuals from addressing their living conditions, resulting in increased stress, anxiety, and difficulty focusing. This can adversely impact their well-being, productivity, and ability to advocate for themselves in the workplace.

Growing up under the care of residential school survivors had a profound impact on many Indigenous Peoples. Children were often placed in the role of decision maker in the family.¹¹³ “My father and sister were dealing with alcoholism; self-medicating to escape. I found out I have a brother that grew up in an adoptive family. We grew up in the foster system, then we were introduced to Traditional practices... I was confronted with an opportunity to be a part of the solution. Helping Indigenous men in correctional services with drum-making workshops while at the same time, dealing with my own issues of drinking and violence. This led to berating myself and becoming very shame-based, even though I did the work (counseling and work experience). I still felt I had lost everything”.¹¹⁴

Sexual violence within Indigenous communities is another a systemic and intersectional issue, reflecting the broader societal power imbalances and historical injustices that continue to disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples. Within a modern day context, many protocols are rooted in sexism. “Patriarchy runs on my Dad’s side; violence in the home, abuse, and addiction”.¹¹⁵ “Sexual violence is still happening and it’s swept under the rug. I see people stand up for people who have done nasty things to children and support them. Someone I work with... grabbed my boobs in public. I felt super violated... [and unsafe]”.¹¹⁶ “I remember going to [public] school... at age 9 having sex with several different men... I tried to report it, but they did nothing about it. This abuse caused lots of trauma... Youth need to be aware there are predators out there [and] that no one was supposed to touch my body. That is Coming of Age”.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

¹¹⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹¹¹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹¹² Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

¹¹³ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹¹⁴ Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.

¹¹⁵ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹¹⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹¹⁷ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.



Photo: Kamloops

The experience of not being accepted in society has perpetuated cycles of trauma and contributes to a heightened risk of suicide. “If people don't accept you, you... Why am I like this? This is where suicide comes in; self-harm, hatred of the world, and using drugs and alcohol”.¹¹⁸ “We had a Youth who committed suicide because her uncle sexually assaulted her. She told her family and they did nothing about it until after she took her life. They ended up charging him, but some other family members paid for his lawyers to get out... I witnessed the division of that family; one side who is defending and protecting the Youth, even though she has made her journey into the next world, and the other side protecting and providing financial assistance to the predator”.¹¹⁹

“It took years and years and years to realize that I was traumatized by something... it can completely change who you are and how you act as a human being... it doesn't matter how big it is, trauma is trauma, and it affects [you]”.

- Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

Some Indigenous Peoples are embarking on a journey towards sobriety to address trauma and grief, but this path is challenging. Confronting deep-rooted pain and healing intergenerational wounds requires immense strength, support, and resources, highlighting the need for comprehensive and culturally sensitive approaches to recovery.¹²⁰ “Many of us out there are not taught about trauma and healing so they are ignorant to violence, but once we fix that you will see. And it won't be days or years. It [will take] generations”.¹²¹ “The hug I felt when I smoked or drank... that has been some of the hardest thing to work through in my healing, that “hug” that came from using”.¹²² “They have a lot of pain they want to numb, it feels good to numb, so much pain, too much to carry it by yourself, you don't have to carry it alone”.¹²³ “My Dad... became an alcoholic... had a sober household for many years... We grew up in a very violent home at times. When the alcohol came in, and then the switch to very loving so often caused a lot of confusion. So I wanted my children to have that safe space”.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹¹⁹ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹²⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹²¹ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹²² Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹²³ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹²⁴ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

Breaking these cycles does not happen using punitive measures. It can only happen if supports are put in place for those who need help. People do not want to question their beliefs, or where they got their beliefs.¹²⁵ “I think it's very important to have discussions with our Elders and Youth especially, because it's very purposeful how colonization has taught us to put others down. It's very effective in keeping us oppressed. I want to be able to receive love and give love and feel safe. I want everyone to feel safe and that they have a place”.¹²⁶ “Even the drug dealers, the people that inflict harm on our community. When I was on council, we actually banned a couple of drug dealers... we kicked them off the reserve. Because we're just making it acceptable... to me, that's not okay. If we want to have real change, hold those accountable that inflict these horrendous things on children, on Elders, on our people in general”.¹²⁷

Coming of Age Ceremonies may be an important link to break these cycles. “Experiencing trauma is a sacred time where spirits can shift. Coming of Age teaches self-regulation”.¹²⁸ “Coming of Age Ceremonies are so important. The sacredness needs to be guided and uplifted in communities”.¹²⁹ Demonstrations of healthy arguments are needed such as arguing without shouting or name calling; helping parents approach having those conversations with their children.¹³⁰ “Her Mother did a good job of integrating Coming of Age into their life. Grateful for her Mom to be able to end the cycle in the family”.¹³¹



¹²⁵ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

¹²⁶ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

¹²⁷ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹²⁸ Virtual Service Provider Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹²⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹³⁰ Virtual Service Provider Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹³¹ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

Broken Education System

The BC education system lacks sufficient inclusion of Indigenous teachings, failing to provide opportunities for students to engage with these teachings in a way that allows for their inherent wisdom to be upheld. “It was really tough explaining to the school board that our people learn differently”.¹³² “When you are drumming and singing, you are so powerful that you can go to the next world... Traditions need to be immersed from such a young age. The government needs to understand that it's our culture”.¹³³ Indigenous Youth must learn from the Land. “A lot of... residential school survivors won't step foot in a school because of the triggers. Parents should be able to be involved in a safe way.”¹³⁴



Colonial history is taught in schools, but often painting it in a positive light, without recognition of how harmful it has been to Indigenous populations. Many Youth are not taught the harmful impacts of the Indian Act or other oppressive tactics, with some children only finding out until their late teens or adulthood.¹³⁵ All BC curriculum must include modules on the history of colonization and its effects to Indigenous Peoples, including important information on relevant documents, such as DRIPA and UNDRIP, and their meaning in a modern

day context. Yet, education is an incredibly important foundation for all Youth. “A lot of our young people don't have that support at home, but they have it at school”.¹³⁶

Teaching and honouring the varied cultures of Indigenous Peoples in schools is important in promoting self-identity, connecting to the Land, and Coming of Age. Incorporating Indigenous Traditions would benefit all Indigenous students, especially those who do not have the ability to learn them at home. For example, providing opportunities for children to take part in sweat lodges and having gatherings led by Elders at schools.¹³⁷ Indigenous Ceremony is not valued in the education system and Indigenous Youth are penalized for missing class to participate in Ceremony. “It's degrading, our parents can't know more than the school's Indigenous support workers or the teachers. These absences lead to reports to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Think of the systemic trauma; families might choose not to disclose why their child/Youth isn't in school”.¹³⁸

¹³² Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹³³ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹³⁴ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

¹³⁵ Service Providers Virtual Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹³⁶ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹³⁷ Smithers Session Participants, May 23, 2023.

¹³⁸ Virtual Session 3 Participants, June 5, 2023.

“[My daughter] didn't want to go fishing with her Grandparents, and I felt she disrespected them. She said she wanted to go to school instead. And I told her, some of your teachings are not going to happen in that classroom, they are going to come from days with your Grandparents, and those moments will not be available forever. When Grandma gives you an opportunity to learn, soak it up because I wish someone told me that when I was young”.

- Kamloops Session Participant, June 13th, 2023.

These reasons are why current existing programs such as the Aboriginal Education Program are important. However, questions arise about using Indigenous Knowledge without taking it. There has to be guidance around how to develop a curriculum that is culturally relevant and appropriate. Some possible solutions also include developing policies around Knowledge accessibility and creating platforms that bring all Indigenous Knowledge into one space for teachers and students.¹³⁹

Teachers play a vital role in shaping the minds of Youth and are essential in addressing GBV in communities by promoting awareness, challenging harmful norms, and fostering a culture of respect and equality. “I never knew what Coming of Age was because [it was] never talked about in school. Sex discussions in school were always about abuse”.¹⁴⁰ Teachers must incorporate life skills, communication skills, and relationship building in the classroom.¹⁴¹ “The education system needs to promote conversations about healthy relationships in schools, because violence and abuse are a learned behaviour... We need conversations about healthy relationships in schools, because that's where our kids [spend their time]”.¹⁴²

To meaningfully begin addressing GBV through education, more funding is needed. Youth should learn about Coming of Age in every grade. Amending curriculum to require Coming of Age teachings every year or creating a timeline for students will prepare them for transitions and support love-based learning.¹⁴³ This messaging must speak to sexuality, pregnancy, different types of birth methods, and make Youth aware of the different supports for pregnancy. Tradition should also be encouraged during after school programs. “Some people have access to programs where they do weaving, beading, and eating [of] Traditional foods, which is especially important in urban settings. There are many opportunities for Youth who are from their Nation but not for those who are separated from their home communities”.¹⁴⁴ “I put ownership on the government; you destroyed us through the education system... Coming of Age needs collaboration with the Ministry of Education...”.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Service Providers Virtual Session Participants, May 30, 2023.

¹⁴⁰ Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

¹⁴¹ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

¹⁴² Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

¹⁴³ Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

¹⁴⁴ Nanaimo Session Participants, May 31, 2023.

¹⁴⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

“We teach each other, we have to. All of our children are valuable. We need to go back to the old teachings. This is exactly what we need to get on the right path”.

- Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

Preventative measures must be taken to address GBV. This includes “educating men and having them be a part of these conversations to learn about division, and how women and 2SLGBTQQA+ are affected. Men often don't see the effects, and if more people knew, then the violence would be limited. Everyone should be learning about it, putting it on women and femmes to defend themselves is not right”.¹⁴⁶ “In the education system there are policies against sharing stories, even periods. If I can't talk about periods in kindergarten, that is a problem. There needs to be more healthy relationships. We need to teach about healthy relationships at a young age and that will help us prevent GBV”.¹⁴⁷ GBV must be “taught in classrooms through presentations, [hiring] male role models in schools... bullying workshops [that include concepts such as] physically being moved around the room to be ostracized so you know what it feels like”.¹⁴⁸ “I've worked in classrooms where the teacher starts the day with a check in. When you hear where [everyone is] at, people will approach them differently and on a deeper level; assessing their trauma and what led them to where they are. Once you are aware of those things, you can take the power back and navigate the situation. Teachers need to be informed, before those students enter the classroom, and those who have been traumatized need to be involved no matter how big or small the trauma is”.¹⁴⁹

Systemic changes should be incorporated in the school system such as amending the School Board Act to mandate Indigenous representation on school boards. “Every school board should have delegated Indigenous representation, with a minimum of two people on every board”.¹⁵⁰ Further, more funding must be provided to hire Indigenous support workers of all cultures in classrooms. “I work in a school system and we have amazing Aboriginal workers there who are trying to do such good work, but they are so overworked and their caseloads are ridiculous. Like 100 students... [We need to] fund them so they can... make a difference”.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁴⁷ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

¹⁴⁸ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁵¹ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

Foster Care System

The foster care system in BC perpetuates systemic racism against Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous children are disproportionately represented in the foster care system, often being removed from their families and communities due to cultural biases and discriminatory practices. “My Mom was a full-blown alcoholic... I grew up in foster homes, but I'm still a lost little Indian girl”.¹⁵² “I was in the foster care system from age 11 until I was able to escape that system”.¹⁵³ “Children... feel punished because they miss the connection of parents being together”.¹⁵⁴

Foster care systems fail to provide a safe environment for at-risk Youth. Abuse, neglect, and inadequate support are prevalent, leaving vulnerable Youth exposed to further harm and hindering their overall well-being and development.¹⁵⁵ “The investigation of children is so invasive to prove it happened, the process itself is traumatizing that shuts down kids to not speak, and too often the abuser is found not guilty”.¹⁵⁶ “Violence in our Indigenous families is quite high. UNDRIP has given us a right to stay within families. When I phone social services, I don't know what to expect. Why can't I have a social worker who is part of the plan in the education system?”¹⁵⁷

“For kids to feel safer on the street than in the home is a travesty”.

- Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

Indigenous populations are trying to protect their children but the foster care system is a colonial construct, with colonial ideologies on what it means to raise children. “I have 3 kids of my own, but I've raised 7 kids in total. It wasn't so much the ministries involvement, but it was just the parents who sometimes were not ready. So I would raise them until the parents were ready. I lost two boys that weren't my own, I raised them until the Ministry court ordered them to go home. One of them was hit on the highway in Kelowna, and the other took their life because of the impacts of going home”.¹⁵⁸

The foster care system is not only systematically racist but the support people available are overwhelmed, and the services provided are reactionary as opposed to preventative, only servicing the most urgent cases. “I had a child care worker in my life when I was in foster care - that was great, I wish my kids had that too, they go through things too, even though they aren't in care, my daughter has been on the waitlist for years, they give up - it's like you have to hit rock bottom or almost die before anyone will help you”.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁵³ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹⁵⁵ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

¹⁵⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁵⁷ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁵⁸ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹⁵⁹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

Provincial Supports

The province has established some supports to address GBV. Yet, various factors make these supports either inaccessible or inadequate in addressing Indigenous needs:

Lack of Resources

Historically, Indigenous Peoples have not been provided adequate resources to feel safe when experiencing GBV. There are limited resources and many of them do not encompass the needs of all experiencing GBV. “My ex-partner tried to get help and was put on a waitlist. He was just introduced to the healing world, and not getting a call back really set him back”.¹⁶⁰ “My grandson is Coming of Age, and it's really been on my mind. [I am] doing this for him as he has just turned 11. I wanted to do counseling for my grandsons before we started doing Coming of Age. There are no male counselors in town, and many don't take children”.¹⁶¹ “In Penticton they have a safe house, for those who have violent issues, maybe it needs to be open to more than just women, non-binary [people too]”.¹⁶² “More violence prevention and response programs are needed”.¹⁶³

There are no resources available in communities, resulting in Indigenous Peoples needing to enter other communities to get access for resources. Indigenous populations aren't considered when designing these services, which adds greater load and pressure to the limited systems available. “Services aren't flexible and they need to accommodate the people's needs”. “We need a drop-in treatment or health/healing center. People who need access don't have access to get the help they need, they wait on lists for too long. We often lose them to drugs while they wait, and women are still getting hurt. It's circular. The system doesn't work. What does our Traditional healing look like?”¹⁶⁴ Friendship Centers are a valuable resource for many urban Indigenous populations. However, many communities do not have access to a Friendship Centre, with only 25 across BC and the majority in large major centers.

There is a deep importance in “having some type of connection to your roots...”¹⁶⁵ More “policies [must be developed] within colonial institutions” that support connecting to roots to develop a deep sense of community. In particular, “the relationships with the kids are very important, for them to have access. To know who to go to have a relationship with Elders for teachings”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁶¹ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023

¹⁶² Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁶³ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁶⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁶⁵ Service Providers Virtual Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹⁶⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

Unsafe Support Services

While there are expressed needs in creating more resources for Indigenous Peoples experiencing GBV, the few resources and services presently available are not safe for Indigenous populations. “When you ask for support, the social workers and... government systems... can be scarier than the abuse we're experiencing. So finding those ways of allowing [Indigenous Peoples] to get that support and still having that anonymity to make them feel safe [is important]”.¹⁶⁷ “[The BC government] can be so immune to human emotion, due to the desensitization and their policies”.¹⁶⁸ “I know of so many women who will not call [the police] for help because they know that it will be followed up by a social worker. And for so many of our people that is often scarier... How is it safe for us to call for help?”¹⁶⁹ “I've sat with a lot of people whose stories were not believed or taken seriously... Why tell the story again if nothing is going to happen, no resolution, no follow up. There is advocacy happening now to take investigations out of the hands of the police”.¹⁷⁰ “Every time I've gone forward with charges they always get away with it, they won't listen to me”.¹⁷¹

Colonial medical systems have also been completely disconnected from Indigenous practices and health needs. “We still have people in health and education that do not know our culture. If they see an [Indigenous] child, they label them all the same. They do not acknowledge different Nations”.¹⁷² Indigenous Peoples must be supported in the health care system. More steps must be taken to braid Indigenous and colonial healthcare practices in hospitals. “I want to get our Indigenous doctors into the system, instead of a prescription it will be “You need to sweat”, or “You need an Elder””.¹⁷³ Weaving these Knowledge systems will ensure prescriptions are provided to people that are relevant and informed. “Fibromyalgia is directly related to trauma - I was diagnosed at 15 years old and cured it with Traditional Medicine. I don't think the pharmaceutical industry is about prevention. It is a money-making industry”.¹⁷⁴

There is a need for Indigenous counselors who are trained in supporting Indigenous issues. The colonial approach often falls short in providing effective assistance for Indigenous Peoples, emphasizing the need for specialized counseling programs that do not require clients to educate their counselors about their own culture.¹⁷⁵ This educational burden can lead to feelings of judgment and disconnection. To address this gap, community services programs must actively engage the community and develop inclusive, culturally sensitive counseling programs. By utilizing trained counselors who understand Indigenous issues, communities can move away from stigmatization and create an environment that genuinely supports the well-being and healing of Indigenous individuals.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹⁷⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁷¹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁷² Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹⁷³ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁷⁴ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

¹⁷⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

Many colonial systems designed to support BC residents are racist. For example, there is increased violence and stereotyping within the police system. Many Indigenous Peoples report not receiving adequate care by police officers experiencing trauma or abuse.¹⁷⁷ “People are overpoliced. The [colonial] laws want to separate families. They get more money to apprehend people than to provide support for them. They also don't allow people who live off reserve to get support which is another form of discrimination”.¹⁷⁸ It is not uncommon for Indigenous Youth to end up “...incarcerated or [in] corrections [and lose connection] to their culture” as a result of racist police practices.¹⁷⁹ In addition, many women and children feel unsafe calling the police, especially if social services may become involved.¹⁸⁰ Police must undergo training that promotes learning of Indigenous perspectives.¹⁸¹ Often these challenges extend into Indigenous governments and organizations themselves: “How do we introduce new ways? It needs to be everything that we do, especially Native organizations, sometimes it's our own organizations that are deadly to our people, like band offices for example, the way they deal with it - no open door policy. It's like we created another government, people have to meet all this criteria to get the services they need. One Elder told me that they would rather go to a non-Native organization than a Native one. It's the colonized way of thinking”.¹⁸²

“[When I was abused], I called the cops and they got his name, his credit card information, and I did a rape kit. The female [police] officer made me feel like I was the problem... I felt like I had nothing to defend myself. They make you make a statement in a trauma state. I was downstairs in the hotel where it happened giving my statement. When I remembered more, I tried to give more info and the RCMP officer gave me the look like I asked for it. The Crown Council threw out my court case because they didn't have enough information”.

- Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

Even within community, support may feel unsafe due to systemic concepts of GBV. “When we address violence, how do we ensure safety for everyone?”.¹⁸³ “It is more difficult on reserve because everybody knows everybody and there's no anonymity or cultural safety for victims. There is a right to be heard and a balance between victim and offenders and policies that govern how programs and services are funded”.¹⁸⁴ Funding must be provided to create family healing centers in communities that consider whole systems healing (mental, emotional, physical, and psychological abuse).¹⁸⁵ “There used to be a group in Vancouver where a family could go if there was violence in the family. Instead of breaking them up, the whole family can go there and they have a family rehab center. Why can't we have something like that here for our families? So if there is violence or abuse, families can leave together”.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁷ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁷⁹ Service Providers Virtual Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

¹⁸¹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁸⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁸² Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁸³ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.



Photo: Nanaimo

Urban Indigenous Populations

The Indian Act has had a deep and lasting impact on the lives of Indigenous Peoples, as it was used to forcibly relocate Indigenous populations to designated Lands known as “reserves”. It is a tragic reality that many Indigenous Peoples have been displaced from their ancestral communities, and are now living in urban areas as a result of the harm inflicted by the Indian Act. In BC, roughly 78-85% of Indigenous Peoples live off-reserve, as urban Indigenous Peoples.¹⁸⁷

Many Indigenous parents affected by the residential school system were unable to pass on their Traditions and culture. As a result, urban Indigenous Peoples often turn to Friendship Centres and other urban organizations to find a connection and belonging. “I was raised in an urban setting, the Friendship Centre was a place to gather”.¹⁸⁸ “A lot of my teachings come from the Friendship Centre and I consider myself an urban Indian. That’s where I went through my Coming of Age. My first sweat was at the Friendship Centre. When I started my Moon Time, it swept through our whole family but it was never talked about, and there was no Ceremony”.¹⁸⁹ “I don’t have access to my Elders back home, I don’t have access to our community... I want a safe space for my kids for them to thrive”.¹⁹⁰

While introducing Coming of Age into urban education systems, it is important to acknowledge this topic will differ between an urban and reserve school, yet the core messages should remain consistent. “We are forced to go to urban schools. It is important to bring [Coming of Age] into the education system, and we need First Nations teachers teaching our kids. Our [people] are not meant to be abused.... School-age Youth need to know they’re sacred beings. It doesn’t matter if they’re in grade 1, I know kids who were abused young”.¹⁹¹ “Those teachings need to be acknowledged through Coming of Age, and incorporate current concerns that Youth need to be advised with such as human trafficking, grooming for gangs, and selling drugs. I don’t think urban Youth should receive the cultural introduction of Knowledge, it also needs to [include] current issues to help them from being victimized”.¹⁹² School programs for urban Indigenous Youth can also provide opportunities to learn Coming of Age practices. “[We meet in an] urban setting with all different communities, and created a drum for graduation in high school. It’s about education for people and how important it is to connect to our culture. Strengthen this through Coming of Age”.¹⁹³

More information sharing and support must be provided for urban Indigenous populations to develop Coming of Age Ceremonies and other Traditional practices. “There needs to be some type of tool for urban areas such as establishing a pool of Elders. When would I ask for a Coming of Age Ceremony? Is there a certain age when this would happen and who would I need to involve?”

¹⁸⁷ BCAAFC (2021, February 18). Quick Facts. BCAAFC. <https://bcaafc.com/about-us/>

¹⁸⁸ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

¹⁹⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁹¹ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

¹⁹² Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

¹⁹³ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.



Photo: Kamloops

If it's a Youth, do I need a guardian, and what does that Youth's Nation typically do for Coming of Age? We would need to connect to their community, are they urbanized and non-status, is there a generic Ceremony?"¹⁹⁴ “Last year, I had a young couple, a husband and wife, and three young children that had never been in the smokehouse. They had lived in an urban setting but wanted to come home and harvest Traditional Sockeye so that they could feed their families in the winter. And we invited them into our Smokehouse, taught them all the tips and tricks that we’ve learned over the years”.¹⁹⁵ Recognizing the significant presence of urban Indigenous individuals, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the dismissal of their voices in decision-making processes. To achieve inclusivity for all Indigenous Peoples, the unique perspectives of urban Indigenous communities must be considered.

¹⁹⁴ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

¹⁹⁵ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

Healing and Connection

Despite the devastating effects of colonization on Indigenous populations, many individuals remain resilient in their healing and are rebuilding strong and healthy communities.

At the core of Indigenous systems lies the individual, emphasizing the significance of developing a relationship with one's self to promote healing and connection. When we get a trigger memory, our bodies stiffen up, so we need to remember to breathe. The relationships start to take place with your own body's wisdom... For me the result of that is, making a relationship with wellness that comes in that form. We never know when it's going to show up when it comes to our bodies and wisdom. We are able to access that wellness, that ancestral connection, for me a relationship is very much like that.¹⁹⁶ "...Learning how to love yourself is the biggest lesson I'd like to teach my younger sisters".¹⁹⁷

There is trauma, vicarious trauma, and intergenerational trauma that our Grandparents have felt that could show up in us and not realize. But also remembering, we didn't just inherit their trauma, but also their resilience.

- CSS Facilitator, Prince George Session, June 22, 2023.

Supporting ongoing and open conversation among families and community members has contributed to healing from colonization and its effects of GBV.¹⁹⁸ "Being able to use... communication skills rather than just verbalizing them, sometimes staying quiet can be a powerful thing too. When I was younger I never spoke up... It's crazy how things change when you learn to believe in yourself".¹⁹⁹ Ongoing conversation establishes connections and relationships among Indigenous Peoples. "Connection is where the Medicine is, honour each of us where we are in our journey. Make decisions from love and trust, mistakes are meant to be made, it's called learning, it's about gaining experience".²⁰⁰ "Moments of connection, finding a communal connection is a shared healing".²⁰¹ In a difficult situation, having others to relate to has fostered healing and support for those who are beginning their healing journey. "Our healing alongside folks who aren't ready to do their healing work. I'm here everyday encouraging folks that I'm here anytime you want to make a change".²⁰² "Love: the strong people who showed up at the right time when we most needed it, they lead with their hearts". Friendships should be more about communicating, weaving Indigenous ways of honouring and procreating

relationships. "So that's the reciprocity and the redistribution of wealth. That's the love that you can show. What are you getting from it? I'm not getting anything other than loving you and caring about you and your family and what I can do to better our community and make us feel healthier where each generation gets a little healthier than the one before I've done my piece".²⁰³

A barrier to open conversation within family and community is the generational gap that arose from residential schools and colonization. Some younger populations may not understand the meaning behind Traditional teachings. "There is a lack of discipline and willingness to learn the significance of songs, and will use them how they will... Creating spaces for those teachings and holding the responsibility of knowing the stories behind them [using a] graduated approach [with the] inclusion of young people from childhood. The transformation in how those children are brought up with the culture".²⁰⁴ With the generational Knowledge gap, there is an urgency to learn before the Knowledge Keepers pass on. "Encourage our generation to learn as much as you can, so you can pass it down to the next generation. My Grandfather was a residential school survivor, and he is now gone. He raised my mum but she fell to drugs and alcohol, and so it's now down to us to carry that responsibility of learning and keeping our culture. We lose our culture [and our] Elders everyday".²⁰⁵

Despite the generational Knowledge gap, Indigenous Peoples are reclaiming Tradition in a modern context. "We are a people emerging from genocide. I see this new path as providing some answers and framework and reclaiming our ways".²⁰⁶ "Colonization, religion, colonial European beliefs have been placed on Indigenous Peoples and we get blinded and forget. We are taught to listen to our dreams. They are visions. They tell you what you need to know or what you need to tell someone else".²⁰⁷ "Looking at cell phones, new technology, we don't have words in our languages for these new things. We need to be fluid to be able to adapt and change, but there are still those foundational pieces; the inherent knowing, the body memory, the generic memory of who you are. My late mother said 'if it makes sense then it's probably how it was, if it doesn't make sense then it's probably something they learned elsewhere'".²⁰⁸ It's like recovering the Traditional values that really honour women, men, children, Elders, and Two-Spirits. How do we do this in a modern world? Ensuring it isn't embracing the mainstream values of sexism. There are songs for all kinds of people. You can take a lot of those songs and live by modern teachings.²⁰⁹

¹⁹⁶ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

¹⁹⁸ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁰⁰ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁰¹ Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 2, 2023.

²⁰² Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁰³ Fort St. John Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁰⁴ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²⁰⁵ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁰⁶ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁰⁷ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

²⁰⁸ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²⁰⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

Breaking the Cycles of Abuse, Trauma, and Addiction

Younger Indigenous populations are beginning to end the cycles of abuse, trauma and addiction. “I am here to break cycles for my kids, it takes a powerful person to break these cycles and that powerful person is me”.²¹⁰ “We want the same thing for our lives, for our kids - that they don’t grow up around addictions and violence”.²¹¹ “I want my children to look back on their childhoods and say our parents raised us right, that they aren’t brought up in addictions, they won’t have to see violence”.²¹² “Through the generations we are in a resurgence of healing and we are passionate about children”.²¹³ Parents are teaching their children about developing healthy relationships with drugs and alcohol. “Because of everything we went through and experienced quitting alcoholism. When we got together, we decided we would have a drug and alcohol free house. Our kids all went off on their experimenting and now they talk about it and share what they experienced. I teach my kids about the experiences of what the positives and negatives were from drugs and alcohol. Maybe if you hear about it and experience life maybe you won’t use [substances]”.²¹⁴

Many have turned to Traditional Ceremonies to heal their traumas and break cyclical violence and addiction. “[The] healing journey, it’s a Ceremony in itself, and changes the wording and the way you see things”.²¹⁵ “A big turn in my healing journey [was] when I turned to Medicines and smudging”.²¹⁶ “Our bodies can only handle so much trauma before our brain shuts our body down. Anxiety is huge in our First Nations people, and doctors prescribe drugs to help but they are getting addicted. We need to go back to our own ways. Feelings and everything we carry is in our hair, and there are Ceremonies to cleanse hair in the river to help with those feelings: anxiety, depression etc. So many of our young people are stuck with mental health issues, so we need to bring back those Traditions. I don’t judge when I find people in addictions because it can happen so quickly, it can happen to the strongest people we know, but being able to not judge and support our friends/family to get them through it is important. Ceremonies are the best, sweat houses”.²¹⁷ “Offering alternative Medicines. I know abstinence doesn’t work for everyone and I know for me being a young person it’s like ‘I’m gonna do it’. So offering Traditional Medicines and ways of healing. And so that way it’s like whatever the need... at least folks and Youth can have alternatives.” “Trying to meet those needs but also recognizing that drugs might be the only thing holding that person together, and recognizing that if we take a drug away, we need to have a replacement. And I think this [is] just what comes alive for us when we think about Coming of Age Ceremonies”.²¹⁸

²¹⁰ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²¹¹ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²¹² Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²¹³ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²¹⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²¹⁵ Service Providers Virtual Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²¹⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²¹⁷ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²¹⁸ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

Reintroducing Ceremony

Indigenous Ceremonies greatly vary across different levels and cultural contexts, reflecting the diverse Traditions, customs, and spiritual practices of each distinct Indigenous group. At its core, reintroducing Ceremony is about instilling value, and Rites of Passage/Coming of Age serve as a powerful means to definitively affirm and validate that value, allowing for the reclamation of what was taken away and addressing GBV. “Coming of Age is going to be the answer in addressing GBV. When we have a sense of belonging, we don’t try to take that away from anyone else”.²¹⁹ “Coming of Age is an ever going process that never stops... You are a human here on mother earth and in order to walk the earth in a good way, this is how we will operate and these are the teachings that will help us do our best and operate in a good way... We are social beings, we have not made it this far by doing things alone. It’s our responsibility to help everyone in their journey of learning in this experience of life”.²²⁰

Reintroducing Ceremony plays a vital role in empowering Indigenous Peoples to cultivate a strong sense of identity and Indigeneity, instilling confidence and connection. By teaching Youth about their ancestral roots and the Knowledge of their people, they gain a deep understanding of their heritage and cultural significance. Additionally, through Ceremonial practices, they are introduced to their extended family and Elders, who impart wisdom and guidance, teaching them values of respect and self-worth.²²¹ Emphasizing the importance of respecting oneself and others, these Ceremonies create a transformative family dynamic, fostering a deep sense of pride and assurance in their Indigenous identity, enabling them to embrace their future with strength and resilience.²²² Addressing Coming of Age as a Traditional protocol creates more respect for the topic. Examples of Traditional protocol for Coming of Age include creating ribbon skirts, cradleboard, receiving blankets, “praying in all directions in the cold”, cutting hair, death, hunting, berry fasts, sweat lodges, receiving Indigenous names, gifting, and Water Ceremonies.²²³ “Coming of Age [says] ‘I am proud of you for growing’ and also ‘you are sacred’. It gives you a sense of responsibility to yourself and your community. It asks ‘how are you showing up with care’. I think being celebrated helps your self worth but it also helps others to see your worth. Everybody has their place in the community and it is all celebrated”.²²⁴

Through Coming of Age, we must teach Youth how to regulate their emotions, express themselves in healthy ways, speak up for themselves, and be self-confident as an Indigenous person.²²⁵ I’m raising an Indigenous girl. And I think accountability and boundaries were a huge thing for me to teach her. I think the most important relationship is with yourself before you can respect any other relationship. And so my Mom always

²¹⁹ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

²²⁰ Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

²²¹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²²² Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²²³ Nanaimo Session Participants, May 31, 2023; Williams Lake Session Participants, June 30, 2023;

Kamloops Session Participants, June 13, 2023.

²²⁴ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

²²⁵ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

taught us to be headstrong, and I pass that on to my daughter because I know the importance of having your confidence and your self-esteem and speaking up when things aren't right. Even if I ask my daughter for a hug and she doesn't want to, that's completely fine. And so I think asking permission to step into someone's space and how they express love and how they receive love is also important. Because you know even as her mother I don't expect her to make me feel comfortable. I want to ensure that she feels comfortable.²²⁶

Coming of Age holds significant importance for Youth in Indigenous communities, but its relevance extends beyond adolescence and can be applied at various stages of life to address and prevent GBV. Recognizing milestones such as menopause, graduation, parenthood, and partnership as potential moments of transition, celebration, and personal growth allows for the promotion of healthy relationships and the dismantling of harmful gender norms.²²⁷ By acknowledging and actively incorporating Coming of Age practices into these different life stages, Indigenous communities can create supportive environments that foster respect and a collective commitment to ending GBV. Coming of Age Ceremonies can also be practiced on a family level. Understanding and embracing their unique and culturally specific Coming of Age Ceremonies will promote holistic well-being and create lasting positive change.

“Coming of Age should be celebrated, and it should be looked at as a positive thing. Sometimes even a fun thing”.

- Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

To begin reintroducing Coming of Age practices, it is crucial for Indigenous communities to learn about Traditions. Creating safe spaces where open dialogue can take place and fostering mutual understanding are key to addressing GBV.²²⁸ One aspect includes recognizing the significance of timing and prioritizing cultural practices. Just as the gathering of berries or roots waits for no other event, Ceremonies also demand attention when their time arrives.²²⁹ Restoring lost Knowledge requires a tailored approach, specific to each territory. Conducting community round tables enables Indigenous communities to collectively define what Coming of Age looks like within their unique contexts.²³⁰ Collaboration with school systems offers an opportunity to integrate these practices into educational curricula, ensuring their continuity and transmission to future generations.²³¹ “Establish[ing] a working group of Indigenous Peoples to amend the curriculum to add Indigenous well-being, which could include Coming of Age in the health and physical education class. Change should include Indigenous view and perspective... Perhaps adding something to the curriculum that would allow for a more

²²⁶ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²²⁷ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²²⁸ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²²⁹ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²³⁰ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²³¹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²³² Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

regional approach. Allowing different ways for diversity in how we teach. It can't be one way. Could there be a cultural Coming of Age person who goes from school to school?”²³² Re-teaching sacred Laws, encompassing kinship, Land, and Water, can help restore the Indigenous judicial system, reaffirming Indigenous identity.²³³ Furthermore, language plays a pivotal role, carrying culture, stories, place names, and Laws. Therefore, reviving and prioritizing language revitalization becomes a significant aspect of Coming of Age work.²³⁴

Coming of Age work can also be integrated within colonial systems. “Create committees around Coming of Age within existing systems such as the Health, Education, and Justice... For example, a Coming of Age within the Health System Committee could be made up of nurses and doctors [in a] working group”.²³⁵ “Train our own people to do the work. Don't train non-Indigenous people to do our own work. Certify and train us. Don't reinvent the wheel... Reconciliation in action”.²³⁶ This work can incorporate fun opportunities to engage with the modern era. “Okanagan has a bunch of games and things that can be played at daycares. If we can have apps to learn about language, bodies, health, eating, shopping, taxes, moving out”.²³⁷

“How do we invite others into our circle to make it stronger, kinder, more respectful and at the same time have the experience to educate? Not one of us has all the answers”.²³⁸ Role models who have experienced and overcome challenges in GBV can play a crucial role in supporting Coming of Age work by sharing their personal stories and lessons learned.²³⁹ By providing guidance on avoiding violence, younger generations can gain insight and be better prepared. Mentorship programs and Nations actively involved in this work, along with supporting Indigenous Youth through internships, contribute to the growth and success of Coming of Age initiatives.²⁴⁰ Incorporating Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Indigenous Law, and storytelling, while embracing a holistic wellness approach, ensures a well-rounded experience. It is also important for teachers to receive mandatory training in violence prevention, Coming of Age, and gender-based education, to further support this important work.²⁴¹ Using role models supports the creation of healthy relationships which can trickle down into relationships between friends, partners, and family.²⁴²

“We also have some learning to do within our own communities, and do our own part in Reconciliation. Pointing the finger at the government gives the power away, and does not promote the work and unlearning that our people have to do in... Love should be naturally given based on our Laws - the moment you are born and as you grow we need to be told “you are loved and you are valued”. If we are told this, we never want to hurt each other”.

- Two-Spirit & CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

²³² Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²³³ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²³⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²³⁵ Angeline Day, Email Response, June 29, 2023.

²³⁶ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²³⁷ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²³⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²³⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁴⁰ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁴¹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁴² Virtual Session 2 Participant, May 27, 2023.

Land

Indigenous Peoples have a deep and profound relationship with the Land that extends beyond their own communities. The Land is sacred and embodies ancestral and cultural ties, identity, spirituality, and Laws. It carries the stories and teachings of countless generations who have inherited Traditional Knowledge and practices, ensuring the Land's preservation for future generations. "Coming of Age... requires a sense of caretaking for the Land, the people, and the animals. When I think of Coming of Age, I think about shifting to learn about your surroundings and priorities to be more caring for your community and Land".²⁴³

Being on the Land is healing and a form of Medicine for Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous Peoples are spending time on the Land to recover from addiction.²⁴⁴ Water has also been a sacred Medicine Indigenous Peoples are using to heal from colonization.²⁴⁵ Indigenous Peoples have always known that when you love and care for the Land, it will love and care for you back.

"Traditional Medicine is always the best Medicine, I feel like I've come a long way in learning about my culture and connecting with the Land. It definitely lifts you and makes you realize exactly where you come from and who you are".

- Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

Indigenous Peoples are using Land-based teachings to support healing and connection. You can understand and identify where someone is from based on their stories and the plants and animals in them.²⁴⁶ "So many Indigenous Peoples did not have the opportunity to raise their children with Land-based teachings unless they had a grandparent. But even if it's only two people, if two people are willing to share, then the seed can be planted and nurtured by allowing ourselves permission and confidence, then more people will come to learn".²⁴⁷ So many parents who are reclaiming their culture and Traditions are passing that down to their children; teachings from their Elders, their lived experience on the Land, and what they have learned through their reconnection.²⁴⁸ Land-based healing programs are powerful tools among Indigenous Nations and have been successful in not only healing trauma, but also for reconnecting to the Land. Attending programs like Transformations or Rediscovery Camps have supported this reconnection, particularly for displaced Indigenous Peoples.²⁴⁹ There are many other benefits to these programs, such as the deep relationships developed with other participants.²⁵⁰

²⁴³ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

²⁴⁴ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁴⁵ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

²⁴⁶ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁴⁷ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²⁴⁸ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁴⁹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²⁵⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

Youth

Coming of Age Ceremonies hold immense importance for Indigenous Youth, particularly in addressing GBV within Indigenous communities. Without the guidance and teachings imparted through these Ceremonies, the journey into adulthood becomes more complex and challenging, as valuable Knowledge is acquired at a later age or sometimes not at all.²⁵¹ The dreams and messages conveyed during these Ceremonies provide young people with a sense of purpose and direction.²⁵² Coming of Age is not just about physical maturation; it encompasses personal growth and learning new ways for building a better community. Reflecting on the loss of Traditional practices, such as seclusion during this transformative time, highlights the need to revive and prioritize these Ceremonies. By involving Youth in Ceremonies and fostering their active participation, particularly in northern and rural/remote areas where engagement may be challenging, they become empowered and foster a sense of belonging.²⁵³ Emphasizing the importance of Coming of Age Ceremonies in a positive and inclusive way is crucial for the overall well-being of Indigenous Youth, who lack opportunities for guidance and support.²⁵⁴ These initiatives must extend to all small communities to create a comprehensive and holistic approach to Youth empowerment and community development.

Indigenous Youth are highly esteemed in their communities because they represent the future. Before colonization, it was the young ones that were sacred and performed the Ceremonies on the Land.²⁵⁵ Their perspectives, voices, and actions are essential for the sustainability of their communities. They will become the next generation's leaders, decision-makers, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders carrying on the work of their Ancestors. It is essential to support and empower Indigenous Youth to ensure a bright future for their Land, people, and communities.

Since colonization, Indigenous Peoples have been silenced; taught that their voice does not matter and forced to assimilate into colonial ways. Youth often carry this feeling and don't feel their voice is valid or important. "When Youth come into the BC Indian Chiefs Board, they start by looking at the ground, but as they start to trust, they start to open up and gain confidence".²⁵⁶ We need to give our Youth the power to speak without judgement. We shouldn't be correcting our Youth because they are still just learning.²⁵⁷ "We should be taking their words and acting on them. Listening to them. Treating them like they are leaders. Coming of Age will be different now, and how do we also incorporate the western perspective into this since the [BC government] is leading this work? There always has to be some type of balance".²⁵⁸ "It's a hard thing to share Knowledge because it's not always received in a good way. People always say they want it, but it's hard to be an Indian; otherwise everyone would be doing it".²⁵⁹

²⁵¹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁵² Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁵³ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

²⁵⁴ Virtual Session 2 Participant, June 5, 2023.

²⁵⁵ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²⁵⁶ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁵⁷ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁵⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁵⁹ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

It can be difficult finding the balance between Youth who want to learn and Elders who are still holding on to a lot of trauma. “I started talking with my Grandma about her life but listening in a different way. I made a decision that I wanted to know more, and so I started asking questions. I think it has brought up some really beautiful conversations but also some really difficult ones. My Grandma carries a lot of trauma, and being on my own personal healing journey, I have many questions. But I know putting pressure on our Elders is not ok, and I am at peace with not knowing everything. Though I may never get the full story, I’m grateful for everything that is shared because I know how hard it may have been to do so. Even though I experienced the impacts of the intergenerational trauma that has been passed down, I have learned to change my perspective to one of empathy and compassion for my family’s strength and courage in giving me the life I have today. I can now see that with each generation, the trauma, addiction, and violence has decreased or stopped completely. I am so grateful to my family and my Ancestors for being the strong people they are and were... We are all doing our best, and no one is perfect, and it makes me want to fight even harder for them every day”.²⁶⁰ “My Grandfather just let the younger children be kids for a little while, he waited until all of us became of age before he told us about residential school. So when he was ready to share, we were ready to listen”.²⁶¹ “Breaking cycles at such a young age is not easy, but I am so proud of myself for being a part of it. My Grandmother notices and she says that she is so proud of me for doing this so young”.²⁶²

“My Grandmother would show me dough like when you're making bannock, and she said we can form it into anything you like, and that is like the children's mind. Be very mindful in how you speak to them and to yourself around them. Many of my teachings came from the kitchen or from crafts, the lesson was that sometimes your way isn't always the best way”.

- Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

Coming of Age work is incredibly beneficial to Youth. Accessibility to Coming of Age teachings is limited, especially for parents raising multiple children and balancing life responsibilities. Parents want their children and grandchildren to have a sense of belonging and identity, which can be established by providing a circle of people that love and support them.²⁶³

“We need to start preparing our children well in advance. [Traditionally], it was up to our community to do this work, and today we don't have that. I grew up with my Great-Grandparents, and my family all had a hand in raising me. We need to start thinking in the way of “it takes a community to raise our children”. We have protocols within the community, but also within families. A lot of children have been raised outside the territory or put into care, and we really need to target them and ask, “How do we involve them in our culture?” They are the ones we are losing to addictions, and a lot of the people you see on the streets today are residential school survivors, 60s scoop survivors, urban, or adopted”.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Lydia Pengilley, Nanaimo Session, May 31, 2023.

²⁶¹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁶² Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁶³ Service Provider’s Virtual Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²⁶⁴ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

There are other important topics such as gender, or what 2SLGBTQQIA+ means. What does it mean to be a woman or a man or neither? Teaching children about Two-Spirit people, and helping them figure out who they are.²⁶⁵ “What we need to do right now is talk about these things; how are we going to make our children strong and go forward in a good way? We need to stay strong; it is the only way we are going to heal”.²⁶⁶

Technology has become a huge part of our everyday lives, especially for Youth. There are endless ways to learn and connect with one another through technology or social media. Indigenous Peoples have used YouTube as a way to spread teachings, stories, and Traditions for anyone that does not have the opportunity to learn from their family or communities.²⁶⁷ Games such as Minecraft include Maori teachings.²⁶⁸ Apps can also be created for Youth to build their connection of identity, spirit, and purpose in new ways, giving them the ability to ask questions without feeling judged. Social media and virtual meeting platforms, which can be used to our advantage in teaching a broader audience.²⁶⁹ Technology has played a huge role in increasing mental health challenges such as ADHD or anxiety. It has become more difficult for parents to teach their children discipline in sitting still or staying quiet, as this is often much more challenging for children that experience things like ADHD or anxiety.²⁷⁰ Teachings must be designed in a way that is attractive to Youth, while remaining accessible and cognisant of technologies pitfalls.

Children with disabilities will also start from a different place and must be considered in how they will receive their Coming of Age. For a child with certain disabilities, it can be difficult for them to focus and harder to teach if the teacher has never done so before. There has to be an understanding that they may not understand as quickly or as well as other kids their age.²⁷¹ There are so many invisible disabilities that are quite prevalent in our society, but society doesn’t always operate in a way that makes space for people with invisible disabilities.²⁷²

There is a certain amount of patience required for Youth to learn from older generations and for older generations to teach Youth. Both will learn from one another and as long as there is an understanding of the generational gap and mutual respect is shown, teaching Youth stories and Traditions that were once taken away will become easier. “Statistics show the impact that Youth advocates have. Reintroducing Coming of Age will build confidence in Youth to speak their minds and demand change, and that is what we are fighting for”.²⁷³

²⁶⁵ Virtual Session 3 Participant, June 5, 2023.

²⁶⁶ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁶⁷ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁶⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

²⁶⁹ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁷⁰ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁷¹ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁷² Jen Greenway, Nanaimo Session, May 31, 2023.

²⁷³ Virtual Service Providers Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

Community

Community is crucial to the well-being of our society. Indigenous Peoples have relied on their community for generations, especially when bringing up children. Not only did the immediate family play a role in raising their children, but their extended family and neighbours. “It takes a whole community to raise children”.²⁷⁴ Communities are hopeful and conducting generational work to rebuild trust and support one another.²⁷⁵

Community involvement can look very different between and across territories. “Community is calling each other, supporting each other, crying together, and laughing together. It’s sharing our challenges and our successes, and providing opportunities for each other to share, knowing they are in a safe, confidential space where everyone loves and cares about you”.²⁷⁶ “Laughter is important Medicine too - even when there is a death, someone will show up with food and laughter, it’s so important, the communal feeling of coming together”. For many participants, thinking about healthy communities was difficult because there has been so much change. Without Coming of Age, or even a community who are all going through Coming of Age at the same time, life paths can become quite unclear and difficult.²⁷⁷

“When I was ready to have my child, I had to come home to my community to be with my Aunties, Mother, Grandmother. When I gave birth, I would take 1-2 months off where we couldn't touch anything, and only eat dried fish/meat which had to be prepared by your family. My family raised my child while I rested, because giving birth is powerful and the recovery needs to happen. But we don't do these things anymore, and missing that family bond creates distrust for the children”

- Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

Passing down Coming of Age ceremonies is a tool to promote community. “When I was doing my Coming of Age... we had some young women from the community gather together, and it was about relationship building. Having those people in the community learn the Ceremony, which helps the community to grow and for the Ceremony to be passed down. It helps to build the cell memory that we have from our Ancestors. Thinking about how Coming of Age is Important for the community and how everyone has a role and is a role model for everyone else. It’s so important to build safety, resiliency, and a sense of belonging”.²⁷⁸

It will take a community approach to end GBV. Creating safe spaces for people to gather and build relationships at events such as during harvesting, canning, hunting, and crafting. You end up talking about your lives, the happiness and the pain, surrounded by many different generations of people.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁷⁵ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁷⁶ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁷⁷ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁷⁸ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

²⁷⁹ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

“What I'm realizing now is that colonization has affected so many of us. I see how many boys are lost to violence. I see myself as an Auntie, protector, and advocate. Coming of Age contributes to the relationships that will help us heal. Aunties are like Moms, they have the wisdom to understand the hurt”.²⁸⁰ Navigating ways to fight against GBV can be lonely when you are lacking a strong sense of community. One key lesson learned has been to speak out when something happens. Too often, communities and families are left on their own, but there is an obligation to protect our families.²⁸² An example shared was putting up signs in communities with messages like “drunk does not mean sexual consent”.²⁸³ These are really easy steps to bring awareness to topics that are often not addressed or taken seriously.

Community programs play an important role in introducing topics like GBV and how Ceremonies like Coming of Age can help lower the chances of experiencing GBV. Many communities have women and Moms groups, as well as men’s groups. Community members will participate in activities like arts and crafts, cooking, and just enjoying each other while trying new things. “There is a fantastic program in my community called Ask Auntie. It's for girls 10 to 14. It's a Land-based wellness program, rooted in life promotion, or suicide prevention as it's more commonly known. And I feel like I have really craved those teachings. We meet weekly, and we invite Aunties in our community to come in and share with the girls whatever they feel like. We've done a lot of Land-based activities, like Medicine picking and we've had a language teacher come in. The girls get an opportunity to take control to start to build that community around them. Even though we're all from the same community”.²⁸⁴ There are also Wellness Centres, Youth foundries, and boys and girls clubs who often deal with many of the Youth programs. This would be a great place to introduce GBV and Coming of Age, which could be a local solution.²⁸⁵ Wellness or Healing Centres also focus on topics like trauma, grief, loss, anxiety, and depression.²⁸⁶ Ensuring you have systems in place that support communities where they’re at, whether it is healing, or learning about prevention. Building a network of healing societies for intergenerational trauma, grief and loss programs, and support groups.²⁸⁷ Using a Nation approach that is inclusive of language, mentorship, and how we need to amplify our mentors, Youth, community, activists, and Nations.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁰ Two-Spirit and CSS Facilitator Session Participant, June 28, 2023.

²⁸¹ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁸² Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁸³ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁸⁴ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

²⁸⁵ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁸⁶ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

²⁸⁷ Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023.

²⁸⁸ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

Building Back Trust

Loss of connection and belonging has resulted in Indigenous Peoples feeling complicit and unable to come up with creative solutions to change the colonized system. There is a general distrust in each other, the community, and the government that leads to stagnation in a situation that requires change. Children in this generation are kept close to home because of the loss of trust in others and in the community.²⁸⁹ Children are sometimes isolated from the general public, however, that never used to happen. Children used to be away from home playing all day, but now parents are worried if children are not frequently checking in due to past triggers.²⁹⁰

Distrust within Indigenous communities creates divides that inhibit the re-introduction of Coming of Age Ceremonies and Traditions. “A Knowledge Keeper [in our community] was recently called a Knowledge hoarder as it was thought they weren’t sharing their Knowledge as they should”.²⁹⁰ “Sometimes people don’t want to share culture. I was taught culture is to be shared with all. If we don’t teach it, we lose it. We are holding on so tight because it’s trauma and it’s all we have left. But Traditionally, it’s not the way to not share culture”.²⁹¹

It was also noted that people in power in the community are often seen as unsafe to be around. “People elected in positions know they were violators growing up. There is something wrong with that whole transitioning of Coming of Age when we select our leaders. Because of the dynamics of the Indian Act, they don’t get their integrity questioned”. “Ceremony and Coming of Age - it has to be with safe people. People are making up Ceremonies and they’re not safe”.²⁹³

To build back trust within Indigenous communities, perpetrators need to be held accountable and healing from trauma needs to be widespread. “There was a known predator in a community that they were all protecting, and then a women’s drumming group decided to drum outside his house to let him know that they were watching him. Something similar happened in another community with a drug dealer”. “How do we bring love back into a divided community? People need to be more understanding”.²⁹⁴ There is work ongoing at Northern Health. The unhoused population is asked to connect each month to share stories about their experiences. Conducting an inclusive space to share, allows more people to understand their struggles and ultimately leads to growing compassion. Creating opportunities for Indigenous Nations to be responsible for their own services would support trust building and ultimately support self-determination. “The Indian Act broke down Indigenous Peoples Traditional governance systems. This was orchestrated as part of the colonial agenda. We need to tear those [systems] down and create our own in a modern way that isn’t traumatizing but is informing... People can then come to gather and give informed consent. traumatizing but is informing... People can then come to gather and give informed consent. It all starts with how the

government's way of dividing the funding is more holistic. We need social services, education, culture, and wellness all working together in a team within the community”.²⁹⁵ A participant spoke of an All Bear Clan Patrol (Friendship Centre) and outreach worker at a Domestic Peace group. “I told them I will join that patrol and do my part. They are starting training for that [that is] community-led patrol, not police-led. Reinstating our own protectors”.²⁹⁶

“The reason why UNDRIP is important is because the provincial and federal government both agreed to pass UNDRIP. Article 22 says Elders, women, Youth, and persons with disabilities must be honoured and respected in everything that happens with regard to government. Right now, we haven’t heard what the provincial government is doing to engage these people in enacting this law. They only reach out to the leadership who is elected. They aren’t going to the people. They don’t ask young people how the law should be implemented. And yet, we are the Rights and Title Holders. It’s the people. That’s the shift that has to change. The people are the bosses and we are made to think we are not. If we exercise those articles that are in that law, it would shift systemically. But the government is not consulting at a community level”.

- Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

Accountability from the provincial government is essential in working towards building back trust, not only between Indigenous Peoples, but with everyone in BC. “Right now, the government isn’t accountable to us. We allow them to do as they please”.²⁹⁷ “Working within the colonial system, the lens these decisions are being made through doesn’t bring justice to any of our people or even any of the people it was intended to serve”.²⁹⁸ “There’s a system I have to work within; every day I go to work I set aside that system. I do the work with the trauma and wisdom I have to aid those with trauma”.²⁹⁹ “[The province] is accountable to their mandate and cabinet...They received \$14 billion in 2019 which is supposed to go towards social welfare, child care, and education, yet we don’t know how it’s being used. They aren’t accountable to telling us how it’s being spent. So every year we need to know exactly where the money is going”.³⁰⁰ “Ensure the provincial government is accountable to this work. Include a tracker that shows how many of the recommendations have been acted upon, and in what way. Include detailed reports of how provincial money is spent to tackle GBV”. “Accountability with the government [should happen] much more [often, and] in every way, shape, and form”.³⁰¹

²⁸⁹ Kamloops Session Participant, June 14, 2023.

²⁹⁰ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

²⁹¹ Merritt Session Participant, May 30, 2023.

²⁹² Kamloops Session Participant, July 13, 2023.

²⁹³ Kamloops Session Participants, June 14, 2023.

²⁹⁴ Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

²⁹⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 14, 2023.

²⁹⁶ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

²⁹⁷ Kamloops Session Participant June 14, 2023.

²⁹⁸ Virtual Session 1 Participant, May 24, 2023.

²⁹⁹ Williams Lake Session Participant, June 6, 2023.

³⁰⁰ Kamloops Session Participant, June 14, 2023.

³⁰¹ Virtual Session 3 Participants, June 5, 2023.

Photo: Merritt



To build back trust within government, Indigenous Peoples need to be authentically seen. This means demolishing stereotyping. “There should be a cross-cultural training for all of the government staff who work with our people. In order for them to serve our people, they need to know our people. The government and education system sees our children as the same; they are Indigenous, [and] they do everything the same. We are so different, community to community”.³⁰² “A lot of people think Indigenous Peoples all have the same protocols and we don’t. We continuously educate by showing ‘in my community this is how we do it; in their community this is how they do it’. We are so different from one another when it comes to practicing protocols”.³⁰³

With the lack of trust for the government to serve the community needs, there are guiding principles that could reinstate faith in the system. “Listening to what we need instead of what systems tell us we need...Teaching our [current] systems or giving [non-profits or government] clear direction in what we need...To help, first ourselves, to start to ask those questions, and to notice in the collective. Shifting from the understanding that we know a lot about the individualistic thing, to focus and notice on the collective. Keeping the community together, bringing our Medicines, and keeping that all involved”.³⁰⁴ “Understanding how the different levels of government work helps you understand how to change policy. Every bit of Knowledge has power. I would like to see an opportunity for this group to do a follow up, if possible, after some time thinking about what we’ve shared. It would be interesting to see how our thoughts change 6 months from now. We should replace the BC cabinet with folks in this circle. This is how the government should be run; listening to the people. There is no hierarchy in this circle from what I can see... My big wish is for big change with legislation and policy. I will remember these conversations”.³⁰⁵

“It is up to both sides to be open and to do exchanges of culture. We are all one nation and one people. We are all here and now. I tend to look for commonalities instead of differences now - how can we hold ourselves together as people?”

- Nanaimo Session Participant, May 31, 2023

³⁰² Williams Lake Session Participants, June 6, 2023.

³⁰³ Kamloops Session Participant, June 14, 2023.

³⁰⁴ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

³⁰⁵ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

Funding for GBV Initiatives

It was clear that participants wanted funding to address GBV in Indigenous communities in BC. They felt that there has been money provided for various other emergencies but that the MMIWG2SLGBTQQIA+ and GBV more generally were not seen as crises in the same way as environmental disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic, for example. Participants felt that colonial governments continually state that Indigenous Peoples have a voice when it comes to determining the use and allocation of funds but this is not their reality; they shared that governments often claim to have spent significantly on Indigenous issues but that these initiatives are not felt by communities. There was a desire among participants to increase lobbying for funds from the government to address GBV.

“We know the answers, we have the answers, and it's time that First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, both on and off reserve, have the right to self-determination and to help our own people, our own families, and communities. Enough talking has been done. People want to see funds so they can do the work that needs to be done”.

- CSS Facilitator, Email Response, June 29, 2023.

Further, the sense among participants was that too often funds that come to Indigenous communities are overly prescriptive to the point where the activities eligible under the fund are not what communities want to do. Participants lamented that too often the funders “call the shots” and that ultimately funding for Indigenous GBV initiatives should be “by First Nations for First Nations” or “by Indigenous [Peoples] for Indigenous [Peoples]”.³⁰⁶ Further, larger Nations and organizations that serve Indigenous Peoples (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) typically have greater capacity to apply for and receive funds. This creates inequities that increase over time as smaller organizations and communities are left out of funding opportunities over and over while larger organizations and Nations build more infrastructure, services and programs.

That being said, participants were also skeptical of corruption both within Indigenous and non-Indigenous service organizations. “The second you have profit tied to healing in any kind of way - it will be abused. This is how our treatment centers are working - it's \$375 for a bed, but it's more profitable to kick out people and get four people through the same bed, \$375 times four is more profitable”.³⁰⁷ Participants also felt that the funding process was patriarchal and racist, sharing that it can be very difficult for Indigenous women's and gender-diverse organizations to receive funding and expressing

³⁰⁶ Vancouver Session Participants, June 11, 2023.

³⁰⁷ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.



the desire not to have to compete with non-Indigenous organizations to meet the needs of communities. Participants sought “targeted funding led by Indigenous women”³⁰⁸ as one way to potentially circumvent corruption among organizations that don't want to genuinely engage in GBV prevention and response improvements.

To this point, in many cases, it is people in positions of power who are perpetrators of violence. Oftentimes, because of their status in communities, they are protected from repercussions for their actions.^{309, 310} This trend is something to consider in distributing

funding, since it is often women's and gender-diverse groups that seek justice, rehabilitation, care, and supports for individuals who have faced violence, and yet funding very often does not reach these groups because they can be informal or ad-hoc in nature (such as the group of women who went to drum at a predator's house to “let them know they were watching”)³¹¹, and funding typically goes through organized entities like band offices or charities, preventing it from reaching the communities on the ground doing the work of protecting and caring for others. Equitable funding distribution for communities must consider the power dynamics at play within Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions, organizations, families, and communities to ensure that funds are properly allocated.

Overall, Indigenous Peoples are asking for space and funding to create modern structures to develop identity and governance to support their communities in a holistic way.³¹² Current systems don't allow for flexibility to better address the needs of the families and community. A pan-Indigenous approach must not be taken by any colonial government support.³¹³ It becomes a repeat pattern and it doesn't change at the community level. As one participant shared, “you need to be able to create your own box to meet your needs”.³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ Vancouver Session Participant, June 11, 2023.

³⁰⁹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

³¹⁰ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

³¹¹ Smithers Session Participant, May 23, 2023.

³¹² Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.

³¹³ Fort St. John Virtual Session Participant, May 27, 2023.

³¹⁴ Kamloops Session Participant, June 13, 2023.



Photo: Prince George

Conclusion

GBV is a pressing issue that must be addressed across what is commonly known as BC. Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, immigrants, People of Colour, people living in poverty, and people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by violence and deserve specific approaches to feeling safe and supported. The impact of colonization on Indigenous populations throughout Turtle Island has given rise to a framework that dictates one path to success, perpetuating a narrative that devalues alternative Ways of Being or Knowing. Consequently, this has suppressed the vibrancy of Indigenous cultures and resulted in systemic oppression, generational abuse, trauma, and violence. Indigenous populations have suffered through these experiences without proper support or prevention measures. Despite this, many participants attended engagement sessions with the hope of building a better system for the next generation in their communities. This will require a whole-of-government approach from Canadian governments, but also serious work at all levels of Indigenous communities. Indigenous resilience is not to be underestimated and will only be empowered as more experience Coming of Age and Rites of Passage.

The May and June 2023 engagement sessions provided a platform for countless individuals to share their stories, each with its own strength, vulnerability, and lessons learned. The WWLR braids these unique perspectives together, not only honouring the individual journeys of survivors and advocates, but also telling a collective story of GBV within Indigenous communities. It remains forever incomplete, yet deeply impactful. The WWLR will provide the province of BC with the ability to tailor the GBV Action Plan according to the unique needs and circumstances of Indigenous Peoples, ensuring meaningful and impactful change.

The engagement sessions brought to light the importance of systemic change and the reintroduction of Ceremony, particularly Coming of Age and Rites of Passage, in addressing GBV. Fostering institutional safety for Indigenous populations is a widespread initiative that will include support within education, foster care, and medical systems, by Nations, the federal government, the BC government, community organizations, and more. The WWLR identifies specific recommendations for Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments to begin this important work.

The GBV Action Plan is not a complete solution to addressing GBV. However, by adopting the recommendations listed in the WWLR, we can collectively work together to shift the narrative surrounding GBV and to begin the systemic changes necessary to address the issue from a holistic perspective. By adopting a comprehensive approach and cultivating compassion towards one another and ourselves, we can pave a new path forward that upholds the unique perspectives and addresses the needs of all.

Recommendations

*The recommendations outlined below have been organized according to three classification types:

1. Whether the recommendation is directed towards Canadian Governments or First Nations Communities;
2. Whether a recommendation can be considered:
 - a “first step” - ie. a recommendation that can be implemented quickly and without systemic transformation, or
 - a “systemic” recommendation - ie. a recommendation that is complex in its implementation because it may involve diverse participants and socio-political processes and will require systemic changes at legislative, organizational and/or individual levels.

To classify a recommendation as either a “first step” or a “systemic” recommendation is not to place a priority on any particular recommendation: communities must define their own priorities and governments must be receptive to fostering the relationships and processes that will promote success. In other words, the start dates of work are not for us to determine - we are only providing insight into whether the recommendation is relatively simple or potentially more complex to implement; and

3. The recommended theme that a particular recommendation fits into – themes include:

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| • Gender Equity | • Funding | • Public Safety |
| • Reconciliation | • Accountability | • Justice |
| • Identity | • Reporting | • Training |
| • Culture | • Education | • Housing |
| • Indigenous Law | • Health | • Human Rights |
| • Capacity Building | • Mental Health | • Children/Youth |
| | | • Knowledge Sharing |

***Some recommendations provide explanations and some do not. We selectively chose to add detail to attempt to make the connections clearer between goals and suggested approaches.*

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
1	Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Funding Capacity Building	Provide funding to all Indigenous Nations and bands to develop their own Coming of Age Ceremony education. Ensure education is accessible, with options for varied learning abilities (i.e., social media for Youth, audio for blind, visual for deaf, virtual, etc.).
2	Accountability Reconciliation Reporting	Publish an executive report each year that details progress made on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report; 2. Provincial funding spent on addressing GBV for Indigenous Peoples; 3. Provincial funding directed towards Indigenous Peoples; and 4. Progress on Indigenous issues more broadly, including recommendations stemming from work in other Indigenous engagements.
3	Education Reconciliation Identity Culture	Create a dedicated space within each school where Indigenous students can come to smudge, network, and receive peer support. Where possible, consider designating a space outside as well where students can practice cultural Ceremonies in nature.
4	Education Mental Health Identity Culture	Fund families to attend programs such as Kackaamin, a family treatment program dedicated to a holistic approach to family healing and growth where Traditional teachings empower families to develop healthy relationships as they continue on their healing journey.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
5	Education Public Safety Training	<p>Train teachers and administrators on proper protocols to take when a student reports bullying and physical violence. Ensure trainings are updated and provided as ongoing tools.</p> <p>Explore workshops and scenario planning for school staff to understand the consequences of failing to address bullying. Support services to counter bullying must consider that students from different genders and identities will require different types of support.</p>
6	Reconciliation Identity Education Culture Indigenous Law Training	<p>When children miss a day of school to attend Ceremony, it should not count as a "missed day" that stays on a student's record throughout their time in school. Instead, students receive credit for these educational and cultural opportunities that enhance Indigenous students' lives.</p> <p>Teachers and administrators need mandatory cultural safety training to understand and respond appropriately to these issues and advocate for their students. Ensure trainings are updated and provided as ongoing tools.</p>
7	Health Training	<p>Ensure health care staff have awareness of the broad set of resources available to all Indigenous peoples – whether they be First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and with or without status, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the approved list of mental health providers from the First Nations Health Authority; • Mental health services funding available through the Indian Residential School Survivors' Society for those with family members who attended residential school.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
8	Health Funding Training	<p>Ensure frontline hospital staff and nurses are equipped to receive victims of sexual violence by taking a course designed for first responders to sexual violence. Examples include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sexual Assault Examiner training offered by BC Women's Hospital 2. First Responder to Sexual Assault and Abuse training offered by the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services 3. First Responder to Sexual Assault and Abuse training offered by Sexual Assault Services Saskatchewan 4. Increase funding for sexual assault response in BC, along with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress.
9	Housing Gender Equity	<p>Establish a policy requiring all second stage housing* developments to include safe spaces for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.</p> <p>*Second stage housing is "for women who are at risk of violence or have experienced violence and includes a private, secure, affordable apartment or townhouse where women and accompanying children can live safely and independently, typically for 6-18 months".³¹⁵</p>
10	Reconciliation Identity Culture Capacity Building	<p>Provide funded opportunities for Youth of all genders to attend Indigenous summer camps to foster community and build lasting relationships and support networks.</p>

³¹⁵B.C. Housing (n.d.) Second Stage Housing Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <https://letstalkhousingbc.ca/18230/widgets/77806/documents/50503>

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
11	Reconciliation Identity Culture Mental Health	Expand opportunities in urban and rural areas to help Indigenous Peoples work through intergenerational trauma, including Land-based healing centres.
12	Reconciliation Funding	<p>Across government, establish and support funding pathways through entities such as the New Relationship Trust, MACIW's Giving Voice Initiative, the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, and the First Peoples' Cultural Council, which are already well known in First Nations communities and are led by Indigenous Peoples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As mentioned in other recommendations - funding for GBV must be conceived broadly to recognize and affirm that the restoration of language, culture and governance is as equally a part of the work to reduce GBV as more "direct" approaches. • One example of a broad funding opportunity is the Declaration Act Engagement Fund, which covers many different areas but allows Nations to determine their own proposals based on their local priorities. • It is important to note that these should be considered interim funding measures until "broad, permanent, and sustainable funding that allows flexibility for Nations, communities, and organizations (with or without charitable status) to determine their own priorities to address their needs" is established, as stated in recommendation 17.
13	Reconciliation Funding	Consider oral applications for GBV funding and reporting processes.
14	Gender Equity Reconciliation Funding	Provide avenues that improve access for women and gender-diverse groups to funding for GBV initiatives.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
15	Reconciliation Funding Capacity Building	For Nations and communities that may lack the capacity to prepare a proposal, ensure that there are funded supports in place to assist communities so that they are not left out.
16	Gender Equity Reconciliation Funding	Provide information about current funding and existing programs and services specific to Indigenous Elders, women, girls, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people that are demonstrating the incorporation of UNDRIP into their programs.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
17	Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Funding	<p>Understand that Indigenous methods to address GBV will not always look the same as colonial ones, or other Indigenous communities.</p> <p>To support Indigenous self-determination, create broad, permanent, and sustainable funding that allows flexibility for Nations, communities, and organizations (with or without charitable status) to determine their own priorities to address their needs and make the biggest impact for their people.</p>
18	Gender Equity Reconciliation	<p>Standardize gender-based policies across government to ensure adequate standards are maintained, however, there must also be flexibility for regional and local approaches to be supported and tailored to the needs of communities.</p> <p>For example, safe houses in communities should be available for women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people to access, however, if a need has been identified by the community for a specific demographic to be further supported due to high demand (e.g. a safehouse specifically for Two Spirit people) then funding should be made available for the community to tailor their approach.</p>

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
19	Justice Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Mental Health	Youth who are incarcerated must have access to programs and people that connect them to their culture.
20	Public Safety Reconciliation Indigenous Law Training	Police approaches to working with communities must be based on respect and trust otherwise police are perpetuating relationships where people don't feel safe and won't report crime and domestic violence.
21	Public Safety Reconciliation Training	Police need in-house educators to share the history of residential schools with them and the lasting effects of that trauma on Indigenous Peoples. This Knowledge must be provided on an on-going basis to new and seasoned recruits alike to help police identify their conscious and unconscious biases towards Indigenous Peoples and approach their jobs with greater levels of compassion.
22	Education Children/Youth Reconciliation Identity Culture	Increase the number of Aboriginal Workers in schools who provide meaningful support to Youth during their formative years. While these workers do wonderful work, their caseloads are unacceptably high with some reporting around 100 students per worker. Similarly, funding must be expanded for school psychologists who have high caseloads and often don't have time to create meaningful relationships with Youth to understand their needs.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
23	Education Identity Culture	Utilize the Kackaamin model to develop and strengthen curriculum in public schools.
24	Education Gender Equity Training	Require teachers to include pronoun introductions for all students at the beginning of the school year.
25	Education Gender Equity	To normalize diverse gender identities, introduce drag to schools and invite guests to speak and perform.
26	Education Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law	Create educational opportunities for Youth to understand GBV and its impacts and fund Indigenous experts to develop curriculum for schools. Mandate the development of a new curriculum that includes a module on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Facilitate active participation and learning opportunities by funding Knowledge Keepers in the classroom to share teachings with students.
27	Education Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law	Implement regional Indigenous education programs in schools, including Coming of Age Ceremonies, Land-based learning, and a social media platform where Youth can ask questions in an environment where they won't feel judged. Many youth don't have cultural support at home but there is an opportunity to incorporate it into their daily educational programming. Develop a Coming of Age coordinator position to support parent, caregiver, and grandparent involvement.

Canadian Governments

	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
28	Education Children/Youth Identity Capacity Building	Schools and Youth programs need to teach basic life skills to help young people take care of themselves, including nutrition, cooking, finances, and budgeting.
29	Education Identity Culture Indigenous Law Training	Support school districts to meet with local First Nations and Indigenous groups to understand local Coming of Age Ceremonies and processes and build relationships.
30	Education Reconciliation	Amend the BC School Act to require one Indigenous support person and at least two Indigenous board members on every school board and committee.
31	Education Children/Youth	Establish better screening, identification, and support for children with diverse learning disabilities, including invisible disabilities.
32	Education Gender Equity Health	<p>Ensure that sex education in high schools includes body-positive messaging, consent, relationships between different genders, and important information to support healthy pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies, and informed birthing options, including access to midwives and doulas.</p> <p>To reduce shaming and embarrassment, consider having a safe space or separate workshop for 2SLGBTQQIA+ students where they can come together for discussions on sex education where the content is tailored to a 2SLGBTQQIA+ audience. This should include a facilitator who has experience delivering content of this nature in a sensitive and encouraging way.</p>

Canadian Governments

	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
33	Gender Equity Health Identity	First Nations must have support for gender transitions including before and after support, and treatment centres.
34	Children/Youth Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Training	Provide training to all social workers about the incorporation of Indigenous ways of parenting, including Coming of Age Ceremonies, and employ Indigenous individuals to deliver the training and the service delivery.
35	Children/Youth Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Training	Develop a policy that requires all public servants in MCFD to learn about the Indian residential school system, and Indigenous trauma, and provide opportunities to highlight Indigenous strength.
36	Education Children/Youth Reconciliation Capacity Building	Sponsor and fund Indigenous individuals to become social workers and social service providers.
37	Health Identity Culture Training	Integrate more Indigenous culture into hospitals and in birthing rooms. Open birthing centres that braid western medicine with Indigenous Medicine practices.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
38	Health Identity Culture	Every hospital must have Indigenous Care Coordinators to help people through colonial systems, identify policy and process gaps, and provide teachings that are needed to enhance service delivery for hospital staff.
39	Mental Health Health Children/Youth	Remediate the shortage of male counsellors in rural communities who will see children.
40	Mental Health Health Identity Culture	Build treatment centres with cultural components and follow up care in every community. Consider Round Lake as a model. Other components that could be incorporated include sexual orientation, gender, and the use of pronouns.
41	Reconciliation Identity Culture Training	Indigenous Traditions and practices need to be visible and present in all government spaces. Provide funding for Knowledge keepers to appropriately share and incorporate this into government spaces.
42	Reconciliation Identity Culture	Governments must take responsibility for educating government ministries and partners about GBV in order to promote systemic change. This process must seek to ensure that ministries each understand how their policies and actions both directly and indirectly impact GBV. This work can be supported by Indigenous peoples but should be led internally by government.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
43	Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Funding	<p>When it comes to funding programs, services, and workshops for GBV (and other Indigenous initiatives) governments must stop attempting to fit Indigenous-led initiatives into government funding parameters, and instead focus on how government initiatives fit into the needs of Indigenous communities.</p> <p>For example, it may be difficult to distinguish between funding for the revitalization of language and GBV. A community might see those as being part of the same 'project' because they both work to improve relationships with oneself, the land, and legal systems, enabling better self-regulation, understanding of self, and systems of governance. This is all part of the broader initiative to reduce GBV. Funding should be allocated with an open-ended and community-driven definition of what qualifies as work intended to target GBV, and colonial governments must work to develop processes that enable those types of funding relationships.</p> <p>This process may take repeated iterations before it is successful. Time and care should be given in a commitment over the long term to develop funding mechanisms that get this process right.</p>
44	Reconciliation Funding Capacity Building	Consider methods to provide GBV funding directly to ad-hoc community groups in addition to funding for recognized organizations or governing bodies.
45	Gender Equity Reconciliation Identity Culture Indigenous Law Funding	Fund the development, establishment and continuation of a women's/2SLGBTQQIA+ only funding organization/ mechanism specifically established to provide funding to First Nations women and gender-diverse groups in communities in a women/2SLGBTQQIA+ led, equitable, culturally sensitive, grassroots format.

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
46	Reconciliation Funding Capacity Building	Seek to provide GBV funding in equitable ways to ensure that small, rural and remote, and urban communities with less capacity to apply for funds are provided with opportunities to access funding.
47	Gender Equity Reconciliation Identity	Provide greater public education and information to the media on the stigmatization and stereotyping of Indigenous women since colonization, including the patriarchy and misogyny that has been legislated in the past.
48	Reconciliation Capacity Building	Every program that supports Indigenous communities must include a 'train the trainer' to ensure valuable Knowledge stays within the communities and trainees can continue to pass along these teachings to future generations.
49	Gender Equity Reconciliation Children/Youth	When conducting UNDRIP-based engagements, engage community members and leadership about how laws should be implemented. This is especially true as it relates to vulnerable populations such as Youth who feel the effects of these laws on the ground in their daily lives.
50	Gender Equity Reconciliation	Ensure that for any issues affecting Indigenous Peoples, government entities and public sector organizations provide early, ongoing, and meaningful engagement for Indigenous Peoples so plans and policies are co-developed rather than prepared and brought to Indigenous Peoples for review.
51	Gender Equity Public Safety Reconciliation Training	Implement mandatory training for bureaucrats to address inter-sectoral issues of systemic racism within all ministries, with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How UNDRIP is applied to address inequalities related to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people; • How accountability measures can be strengthened for greater transparency and measurement of performance of programs and services that reflect the use of an Indigenous and gendered lens; and • How Indigenous Peoples safety can be increased through the cooperation of various ministries to effect substantive police reform.



Photo: Fort St. John

Canadian Governments		
	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
52	Human Rights Justice	For those who believe they have experienced discrimination or harassment, eliminate the 1 year limitation period to file a complaint to the BC Human Rights Tribunal. This timeline does not reflect that incidents causing trauma can take time for people to process and feel empowered to come forward.
53	Gender Equity	Develop legislation that requires gender-neutral bathrooms in all government spaces.
54	Education Gender Equity	Develop legislation to require the inclusion of 2SLGBTQQIA+ content in the curriculum.
55	Public Safety Capacity Building	Fund the implementation of a community safety officer program, including training community members and providing equipment for roles similar to the Bear Clan patrol. These are community-led patrols to reinstate protectors in the community and focus on prevention-based initiatives.

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

The recommendations below are intended to be led by First Nations governments, organizations, communities, and individuals. For many of the following recommendations, funding support from provincial and federal governments will be required.

	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
56	Reconciliation Identity Culture Children/Youth	Support programs such as 'Ask Auntie' for young teenage girls that incorporate the identification of pronouns, Land-based healing, life promotion, and suicide prevention. This can include weekly meetings that bring in Aunties in the community to provide Knowledge and advice on a variety of topics, including Medicine picking, language classes, healthy sexuality, dating support to identify red flags, and creating family trees to support community-building and root the girls in their cultural identity.
57	Reconciliation Identity Culture Children/Youth	Support programs aimed at teenage boys specifically and consider training and programming on Rites of Passage that spans 3-4 years to acknowledge the lengthy hormonal changes that are occurring in their bodies.
58	Reconciliation Knowledge Sharing	When consultants and organizations host workshops and engagements to hear from community members about their recommendations and concerns, consider coming back together to hear back from the same group about what they have learned, reflected on, and put into practice since the original session they attended.
59	Identity Culture Indigenous Law Knowledge Sharing	Create gatherings for Indigenous communities to share their culture with non-Indigenous people to build relationships, and trust, and break down barriers that can lead to intolerance and violence.
60	Identity Culture Indigenous Law Knowledge Sharing	Consider activities that bring young people together from all genders, including sports, hobby clubs, and pool halls. Ensure that there are support staff, community leaders, and/or Elders participating or observing to help navigate any challenges that arise.



Photo: Raven Lake Trail, Prince George

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

The recommendations below are intended to be led by First Nations governments, organizations, communities, and individuals. For many of the following recommendations, funding support from provincial and federal governments will be required.

	Themes	"First Step" Recommendations
61	Gender Equity Identity Culture	Some Ceremonies and protocols that are being practiced are gendered, including sweats that are for men or women only. Consider how this excludes people who do not identify in these ways and host sweats that welcome our 2SLGBTQQIA+ people while also acknowledging and uplifting each gender independently.
62	Public Safety Gender Equity Reconciliation	Expand and promote self-defense courses for First Nations people who experience GBV, particularly 2SLGBTQQIA+ and women.

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

The recommendations below are intended to be led by First Nations governments, organizations, communities, and individuals. For many of the following recommendations, funding support from provincial and federal governments will be required.

	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
63	Identity Culture	For many Indigenous individuals, identity is tied to culture. Communities may consider which cultural protocols to prioritize, including Ceremonies to give Traditional names, identify Elders in training (including and with special attention to Two-Spirit Elders), and practicing Ceremonies as a way to share and practice their language with Youth and community members who are being welcomed back.
64	Reconciliation Gender Equity Identity Culture Children/Youth	<p>Revitalize Coming of Age Ceremonies, such as First Moon and First Hunt, to help young people transition into womanhood, manhood, and adulthood. These Ceremonies can improve community dynamics and help people to feel included in their communities and inspire them to live up to the roles and responsibilities that come with the name being given. Consider in-person teachings as well as virtual opportunities to help people connect with their culture who are not living in community.</p> <p>While Coming of Age is an important time in the lives of young people, be mindful of problematic aspects of Coming of Age Ceremonies that are often overlooked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some families may not have Ceremonies because they cannot afford to have big Ceremonies to mark the occasion given they can place a financial burden on families, such as potlatches; 2. For girls transitioning into womanhood, Ceremonies can sometimes be misinterpreted into pressure to become pregnant; and 3. Publicly held Ceremonies can signal to men in the community with bad intentions that a girl is now 'fertile' and is 'officially a young woman'. For this reason, some families may choose to hold private Ceremonies that are not shared widely with the community.

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

The recommendations below are intended to be led by First Nations governments, organizations, communities, and individuals. For many of the following recommendations, funding support from provincial and federal governments will be required.

	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
65	Reconciliation Children/Youth Identity Culture	<p>Given the number of children who have been removed from their communities and placed in foster care, an accessible resource must be established for people without specific Nation(s) identity to request support to identify their family lineages and understand their Indigenous identity as it relates to their Nation(s). This will support children and Youth to access their Ceremonies and feel grounded and confident in their culture and community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to jurisdictional complexity around Indigenous youth in care and the ongoing processes in many Nations to strengthen their knowledge of culture, as well as the informal, community and family-oriented nature of tracing lineage, this recommendation might be supported with funding from the provincial and/or federal government, with communities conducting the work according to their unique laws and protocols. The provincial and/or federal government should provide funding under broad umbrellas that allow communities to determine the best way to reach their goals for cultural rejuvenation and tracking lineage/identity. • A process might be developed to provide access to diverse community databases for individuals to conduct their own research.
66	Education Identity Culture Children/Youth	<p>Develop Coming of Age toolkits specific to each community's Traditions so that families can better support children throughout Youth.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with local school districts to incorporate this Knowledge into education. 2. Ensure that Indigenous education staff in schools have toolkits based in local Knowledge to support Coming of Age processes for students - this could include Coming of Age workbooks. 3. Support Youth/student-led Coming of Age groups in communities and schools.

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

The recommendations below are intended to be led by First Nations governments, organizations, communities, and individuals. For many of the following recommendations, funding support from provincial and federal governments will be required.

	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
67	Health Mental Health Reconciliation Gender Equity Public Safety Identity Culture	<p>Many parents are dedicated to breaking cycles of violence and addiction that have marked their own childhoods. To encourage people to come forward and seek support before they hit rock bottom, it is important to have dedicated staff who will be there and ready to welcome them when the time comes. Community-based, rural, and urban supports should be provided to help caregivers build and expand their skill sets over time, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding reliable, dedicated peer support and mentorship to help caregivers and children break cycles of addictions, family violence, child and Elder abuse, and unhealthy ways of coping with grief and bereavement; 2. Creating safe spaces and providing legal support to help children and caregivers leave dangerous situations, including family violence and workplace harassment where police have proven ineffective; 3. Developing tailored approaches for 2SLGBTQQIA+ and male community members who may need different types of support or approaches than programming designed for women, especially around roles for child rearing, partnership, being a protector, and healing circles; 4. Creating and maintaining healthy relationships that focus on respectful and open communication; 5. Teaching caregivers and children how to love themselves and show love in healthy ways; 6. Using witnessing Ceremonies, love-based practices, Traditional Medicines and smudging to support and enhance peoples' healing journeys; 7. Community healing lodges and Land-based healing centres; and 8. Education and support for Land-based healing centres support people. <p>Consider the importance of having funded criminal record checks and anti-racism training for all staff and support people who are coming into the community to do work with community members and vulnerable populations.</p>

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	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
68	Reconciliation Mental Health Identity Culture Children/Youth	Communities must prioritize interventions with struggling families: meet with the family, offer words of encouragement and hold them accountable. If needed, provide training for leadership and other community members to give them the confidence to approach families and support their transition.
69	Gender Equity Identity Culture Indigenous Law	Make space for healing circles in communities to bring strength back to women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ and support perpetrators to be held accountable and seek healing.
70	Reconciliation Mental Health Identity Culture Indigenous Law	Drug use has been on the rise in many communities and young people who are coming of age and figuring out their path need Ceremony and supportive networks to counter the pressure to use drugs that put their lives at risk, as well as joining gangs and participating in other types of violence, retaliation and harm that can endanger them and their communities. Providing young people with training on Traditional practices to cope and work through the frustrations of life, grief, and senseless violence saves lives.

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

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	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
71	Public Safety Education Mental Health Gender Equity Identity Culture Indigenous Law	<p>In some communities, sexual violence has become normalized, and in some cases perpetrators continue to be supported by people in the community. Provide education and practical tools for communities to identify and address sexual violence, including workshops, safe spaces to transition and report sexual violence, and meaningful processes to hold perpetrators accountable.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a community watch and recruit honourable people in the community who can keep an eye on what is happening. For example, a womens' drum group drumming outside the house of a perpetrator to let him know they were watching him or an online group for community watchers who have access to an index of people convicted of violent crimes to track potential current and future perpetrators. 2. To hold predators accountable, if it can be safely done, encourage the family members of predators and the community at large to speak out and publicly shame and disown the predator to keep them away from events and areas where there are children. Ensure there is a recognition that with changed behaviour they may be welcomed back. 3. Training members for roles similar to the Bear Clan patrol, which is a community-led patrol to reinstate protectors in the community. 4. Trauma-informed approaches, training, and processes for police and support workers who are investigating child sexual abuse to minimize re-traumatizing children and ensure a robust system so that abusers are held accountable. When a child comes forward regarding abuse and the abuser is not held accountable, it creates a ripple effect where other children will remain silent. 5. Information and workshops for caregivers and teens about sex trafficking and grooming behaviours.

First Nations Governments, Communities, Organizations and Individuals

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	Themes	"Systemic" Recommendations
72	Identity Culture Indigenous Law	For communities that experience divides, bring groups together on a regular basis (e.g. twice a month) and have them share their stories about what they are going through so that each side can begin to develop an understanding of the struggles that others are going through and be able to show a greater level of kindness and compassion. This can be done with many different groups within communities: homeless and unhoused, feuding families, 2SLGBTQQIA+, and those struggling with addictions.
73	Identity Culture Indigenous Law	Due to colonization and lateral violence, Traditional Knowledge that used to be shared communally is often only shared within families. This distrust has broken up the Knowledge base within communities and so we must re-establish these connections so that Traditional Knowledge is shared more freely.
74	Gender Equity Identity Culture Indigenous Law	For those community members who identify as 2SLGBTQQIA+, being their true self can marginalize them within their families and communities. Consider opportunities to introduce and highlight their authentic selves to the community, such as a video, presentation, or hosting meetings in safe spaces where they will feel supported and loved while sharing more about who they are and what their story is.
75	Identity Culture Indigenous Law	When sharing cultural teachings, we must be mindful to be kind and not shame people and perpetuate lateral violence. For people who have experienced past trauma, constructive feedback can sometimes be perceived as harsh criticism for some Youth and adults who are being trained on cultural protocols.

Resources

Over the course of the engagements a number of resources for GBV emerged, which we have shared below. This list is not comprehensive, but it is our intent to provide a starting point for those experiencing or working to support GBV to find the support they need.

If you are viewing this document online, please click the blue headings to direct you to the webpages. If you have a printed copy, search the headings online to find the resources.

Mental and Physical Health

[BC Criminal Record Checks](#)

These can be useful tools for staff working with vulnerable populations.

[Family Treatment Program](#)

This program supports families experiencing trauma and addictions with Indigenous teachings rooted in relationships and trauma-informed care.

[BC Government Situation Tables / Hubs](#)

Situation Tables empower agencies to reduce a broad range of risks that can impact a person's well-being and safety.

[BC Lions - Be More Than a Bystander \(BMTAB\):](#)

BMTAB is a groundbreaking initiative between the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) and the BC Lions aimed at increasing the understanding regarding the impact of GBV. The program provides tools, language, and practical ideas about how to be more than a bystander.

[First Nations Health Authority Mental Health Providers List](#)

Free virtual appointments with providers who are on an approved mental health providers list.

[Foundry BC](#)

Foundry is a province-wide network of integrated health and wellness services for young people ages 12-24. There are Foundry locations across BC.

[Fraser Region at Risk Health Centre](#)

Emergency short-term stay for adults who are in a mental health crisis. Open 24/7.

[Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#)

An organization by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice throughout the United States and Canada. A safe place to ask questions and get support with sexual health.

[Rediscovery Camp](#)

Drawing on the teachings of Indigenous Peoples and the wisdom of the Elders, with a philosophy of love and respect for each other and the earth, Rediscovery seeks to empower Youth of all ages to discover the world within themselves, the world between cultures and the natural world.

[Transformations Program](#)

A series of Land-based, trauma-informed experiences intentionally designed to address the health and wellness needs of First Nations communities across Canada.

[Unist'ot'en Camp](#)

An Indigenous re-occupation of Wet'suwet'en Land in northern "BC, Canada". Year round volunteer support is needed on the frontlines and beyond.

Identity

Book: Reclaiming Two-Spirits: Sexuality, Spiritual Renewal & Sovereignty in Native America by Gregory D. Smithers

[FirstVoices App](#)

An online space for Indigenous communities to share and promote language, oral culture and linguistic history. Language teams work with Elders to curate and upload audio recordings, dictionaries, songs and stories.

[Our Way is a Valid Way](#)

A professional development resource for educators.

[Spi7uy Squqluts Language and Culture Society](#)

A society which develops and implements cultural curriculum.

Legal Assistance

[Battered Womens' Support Services](#)

A support service which advocates for GBV.

[First Nations Justice Council](#)

Lawyers who support Indigenous individuals experiencing challenges with child welfare and criminal cases.