

OVERVIEW: On March 27, NSNWA (Nova Scotia Native Women's Association) held a consultation for Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA on Gender Based Violence (GBV) via the Zoom platform. After discussing the lack of available follow up services for 2SLGBTQQIA in this Territory, we specifically recruited, by word of mouth, more well-known and likely to be better resourced Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA educators, service providers and local decision makers to participate in this early consultation. We engaged with 14 Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA community members, from a range of communities, gender identities, and ages, and explored several struggles, including: labelling and categorization; safety; intersectionality and colonization; and lack of culturally safe or identity-specific service providers or services. We also offered a range of helpful strategies, including: more Two Spirited Gatherings; more links to Mi'kmaq culture; Elders as allies: more Two Spirited specific services focusing on hope and resiliency; more gender identity and cultural safety education for all service providers; inclusive Band housing policies; more legal and medical advocacy services; education for all ages on gender identity and sexuality; and arts as a healing tool.

DESCRIPTION OF CONSULTATION PROCESS HELD: We originally had planned to hold a face-to-face Circle, and given the current COVID-19 crisis, we were able, through technology to still connect with fourteen members of the Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA community in total, 12 members on the group call on the 27th, 2 in a follow up call on March 31, 2020, and 2 participants sent in additional materials. Several sets of notes were taken, cross-referenced, and combined to create this report.

Our facilitator, Dr. Fyre Jean Graveline, who identifies as Indigenous Two Spirited, opened by summarizing the Circle process and the plan for the day. We began with an Opening Round to introduce ourselves, and then headed into rounds on Struggles and Strategies and then a Closing round. As much as possible, given the switch from face-to-face to Zoom, we still followed Circle Protocols, opening with a Land Acknowledgement and prayer from a Mi'kmaq Two Spirited Elder invited, and an Opening and Closing Song from another Mi'kmaq Two Spirited Participant. We followed One Speaker at a Time, all others Respectfully Listening, and were reminded to honor the Confidentiality of each of the Participants in Circle, both in terms of not sharing anyone else's story outside of Circle, and also by not revealing anyone else's gender identity to others outside Circle. Dr Graveline said: *"It is for each of us to tell our own story, and identify ourselves as we wish, when we wish, and to whom we feel comfortable"*¹. We advised we were Recording the meeting, and intend to send detailed minutes to the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), as part of their current project to collect information



to help “develop trauma-informed, culturally safe, training for service providers who support 2SLGBTQQIA survivors of gender-based violence” (NWAC Briefing Sheet).

Dr. Graveline summarized the information from NWAC, and offered clarifications around the letters: 2SLGBTQQIA, as referring to Two Spirited, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans Gendered, Queer, Questioning, Intersexual, and Asexual. She offered *“the use of Two Spirited as an Inclusive term, as it was developed by Indigenous peoples, to refer to all of us who are walking with, and rebalancing, in one way or another, both male and female energies, sometimes related to choice of intimate partner, or embodied gender identity, or both”*. Everyone was encouraged to be as specific as they wanted in their own description of their own identity.

The overall goal of the Consultation was described as *“providing an opportunity for us to share with each other our Stories as Two Spirited Survivors of gender-based violence, and/or as service providers for Two Spirited Survivors, to be used to educate others who are trying to change the existing service systems to serve us, and those coming after us”*. Using the NWAC briefing sheet, Dr. Graveline clarified the definitions of “gender based violence” and “trauma informed services” which included a short discussion of Intergenerational Trauma, and cultural safety, which they summarized as: *“how can we be protected from further victimization by providers who often do not understand the complexity of our lives and experiences?”*

The 8 questions listed by NWAC, which were sent out to participants, were categorized into two groupings: our Struggles, and our Strategies, and once we introduced ourselves, we had two deepening rounds to address these issues. Our facilitator encouraged participants: *“We can welcome this as a beautiful opportunity for us to contribute our Lived Experience, through our Stories, both our painful ones and our successful ones, to educate others who are trying to transform the existing service systems to better serve us, and those Two Spirited coming after us, in ways that affirm our intersectional identity, meaning in ways that are sensitive to issues of gender, culture and sexual orientation”*.

OPENING ROUND: First, we did a brief Opening Round, with all participants being encouraged to *“identifying who we are, what qualifiers and pronouns we prefer, what we are bringing to the discussion in terms of our role(s) within community(s), and the range of experiences we intend to share-either personally, and/or as a supporter of Indigenous Two Spirited who are survivors of gender-based violence”*.

Participants in this round began to “warm up” to their “coming out” stories. Some of the Elders acknowledged the gender-based violence, the pain and suffering they experienced



as they, in their lifetimes, began to first acknowledge to themselves their gender identity, and the ongoing struggles to overcome internalized homophobia and heterosexism. Some referenced their family history within Indian Residential Schooling. Several participants mentioned their roles as partners, educators and service providers within their communities, and several mentioned their roles as parents. While there were clear generational differences within the group, there was also common experiences being addressed: exclusion, isolation and lack of services to turn to.

GROUP COMPOSITION: Of the 14 Indigenous Two Spirited participants: 12 identified as Mi'kmaq; 8 identified as female, 4 as male, and two as non-binary (or not in either box); 5 identified as Lesbian, 6 identified as Gay, with 2 identifying as both Gay and Metrosexual, 2 identified as Pansexual, and 1 identified as Bisexual. We had no Trans identified participants in this consultation. Eight of our Indigenous Two Spirited participants identified as parents; nine identified as being currently in couple relationships. We had a rich age range in our group, with several participants who identified as Elders/Olders, fifty or older, and several who identified in their twenties, thirties and forties, who will be considered Youngers. Several mentioned having parents in Indian Residential School, and three mentioned attending Day Schools. No one identified as a person with disabilities, but this may be a population that needs to be consulted with in terms of specific needs. One service provider who identified as a female, heterosexual, ally, was also in attendance as a participant, and three staff who identified as female and Mi'kmaq, two who identified as heterosexual, provided notetaking and tech support functions.

ROUND 2: STRUGGLES AND GAPS: In this Round, we explored the following questions: *“What are the struggles/barriers to accessing services, or unmet needs, experienced by Indigenous Two Spirited who are Survivors of gender-based violence? And by people currently providing supports to Two Spirited Survivors? Are there differences based on Age or Gender? And are there differences if the violence is perpetrated from a person Within or Outside the community? I invite you to give particular examples of what happened when you, or the person you were supporting sought out services? What kind of service was it and, specifically, why do you think it did not work out? What needs of Indigenous Two Spirited Survivors and/or Supporters remained unmet?”*

In this round, participants each delved more deeply into their identity struggles, both as Indigenous peoples in a colonized world, and as Two Spirited in a heteronormative world.

SEVERAL KEY STRUGGLES EMERGED, INCLUDING:



KEY ISSUE 1: LABELLING AND CATEGORIZATION AS A CHOICE

Many expressed knowing our identity our whole lives. Older members of the Two Spirited community have experienced **shame and invisibility**: “You had to hide back then because it was taboo and you had to stay in the closet – you don’t want people to know what your sexuality was back in those days as it wasn’t acceptable and there was a lot of bullies”. While some have gained comfort in finding a home in embracing particular labels and categories, like “gay” or “lesbian” or more recently, “two spirited”, others are enjoying the idea of being “**gender fluid**”. Some Younger members expressed struggling with their identity, and others easily accepted their own identity: “I knew who I was and I didn’t really mind too much who knew about it”. Some youngers are **resisting all “boxes”** and want acceptance of a broader, more gender fluid reality as their “right”.

- ◇ For Older members the **politics of “coming out” were very defined**. An Elder Two Spirited was quoted: “if you don’t say you are gay in a public setting you are not yet gay”.
- ◇ For younger members, **being 2SLGBTQQA can be a personal choice**, without making a political or public statement.
 - One told of repeated attempts to go to therapy, and when the therapist tried to probe into their sexual identity, they did not go back, because they were **not ready to identify**.
 - One expressed **no defining “box”**, and no need or desire to express to others what their choices are, and wanted their choice to not tell, to be honored as well.
 - One identified as gay, and male, but enjoyed **exploring the more “feminine” aspects** of gender identity as well.
 - **Transphobia** was mentioned by several participants, but no one identified specifically as Trans. One participant referenced transphobia as affecting their partnership, and influencing their own capacity to “pass as sis and straight...as my partner identifies as a male, and I am able to hide out in my relationship – but I am becoming more comfortable with my gender identity now.”
 - Some younger participants identified as categories not on the current list provided: 2SLGBTQQA. One grouping was **Pansexual**, which generally refers to not limiting oneself in sexual choice regarding biological sex or gender or gender identity. Another grouping was **Metrosexual**, which generally refers to gay men



living in post-colonial urban culture, having a high disposable income, and particular about grooming and appearance.

KEY ISSUE 2: SAFETY. All participants had experienced GBV in multiple forms, including physical, sexual, verbal, and attitudinal, in addition to the layers of racialized and cultural violence of being Indigenous within a colonized world.

- ◇ Participants experienced GBV from **within their families and communities**, including from partners, parents, grandparents, children, teachers, peers, employers, Chiefs, community members, as well as **out in the world** in sports, post-secondary educational systems, in grocery stores, and in restaurants.
- ◇ Experiences of GBV result in lifetime challenges of internalized homophobia and transphobia, making it **difficult to accept oneself**, to acknowledge our gender and sexual identities, and to reach out to others for supports.
- ◇ Several participants mentioned **sexual assault** as a form of violence used against us, when we don't choose to be sexual with specific others: "crushing mind, body and soul". The assaults were primarily from people known to us, making resisting the assault, and telling others or reporting to authorities, and seeking services, all more complex.
- ◇ Participants named specific taunts around gender identity and sexual orientation being used as **verbal weapons**, like "kistalek" (queer). Fears of name-calling, "gay jokes", labelling, losing family and community supports, and being judged within Mi'kmaq communities were frequently mentioned: "people close to you can hurt you the most."
- ◇ An overall societal lack of acceptance and acknowledgement for Indigenous Two Spirited was also acknowledged in a widespread way, including negative impacts on friends who "got labeled for being friends with us".
- ◇ Several mentioned **Schools and Post-Secondary Educational facilities** as being primary sites of GBV for Indigenous Two Spirited, both in terms of cultural and racialized violence, but also in terms of discrimination in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation.
- ◇ Several participants spoke of lifetime histories of moving, or "**relocation therapy**", where we relocate to other countries, or the city, and then home again, and then move again, and again, trying to find a "safe space" where we will feel accepted, and find community.



- ◇ Others spoke of how GBV, and discriminatory housing policies, can result in us **living off-reserve**, in more urban areas, when we really want to be home. And sometimes not really being accepted back home, once we have left to “find ourselves”.
- ◇ One mentioned the extreme loneliness of never leaving “the Rez”.
- ◇ Several participants mentioned specific incidents where they ran into other community members in urban spaces where they thought they were “safe”, and how that impacted them to isolate themselves even from those spaces, and how they **feared that they would be “outed”** in their communities.
- ◇ Two mentioned a positive connection with the **Rainbow Pride Flag**, and one told of the repeated theft and destruction of their Rainbow Pride flag in their community.
- ◇ One mentioned having to take up the **role of “bully”** to protect themselves, family members and friends.

KEY ISSUE 3: INTERSECTIONALITY/COLONIZATION: Some mentioned intersectionality:

“sometimes you don’t know what is propelling the violence: homophobia, sexism, racism, it is really alienating and really hard to struggle through those situations.” Being Mi’kmaq, with a long history of colonization can be particularly challenging, as living in a colonized reality impacts on all aspects of our identity: “we have a whole backpack of trauma luggage from Intergenerational Trauma, and a whole second backpack from being Two Spirited, that’s why we have high rates of addictions and suicide”.

- ◇ The **general ignorance** towards First Nations, and having to constantly educate people around us was mentioned. One participant was asked “why would you bother learning your mother tongue when mandarin would be more profitable – I was shocked that people thought I should assimilate to non-Indigenous society”.
- ◇ Several mentioned **Indian Residential Schools**, cultural loss, separation from Parents, Elders, Grandmothers, Ceremony, Circles, and Sweats. Some mourn the loss of their language: “I’m still trying to learn my language”.
- ◇ Several mentioned **Catholicism**, which is now embedded within many Mi’kmaq communities, as playing a role in homophobia, especially for older members of the community...“a feeling that God does not love me for who I am.” One referenced the bible language regarding homosexuality as an “abomination.”
- ◇ There is lots of **lateral violence** of all kinds, which is a by-product of colonization, and this is contributing to GBV for Two Spirited. One mentioned being afraid to attend community ceremonial events because of non-supportive attitudes of Grand Council. It



was mentioned that some Elders have their own historical trauma, and can “take advantage of the situation”.

- ◇ Several mentioned that some protocols that are being reinforced in **Ceremonies and Circles** can be sexist and homophobic. Some GBV can happen when we are seeking Ceremony and healing through traditional practices.
- ◇ Some mentioned how 2SLGBTQIA was seen as a “white thing” with **few visible role models** within our communities, meaning we had to look out into the non-Indigenous world, in bars and Gay Pride events, and post-secondary LGBTQ spaces, for “safety”. These are often not inclusive of Indigeneity. When there are a few Indigenous present, “we all huddle together”.
- ◇ A huge **lack of representation** of Indigenous peoples in media was mentioned, including “the old western, feather and bead natives”, and people linking us and wanting us to play that stereotypic character.

KEY ISSUE 4: LACK OF AVAILABLE SERVICES: Several participants spoke of lack of available services or service providers, and this is amplified when perpetrators are well known members of the community.

- ◇ **Generally, it is hard to find culturally-based services, never mind culturally based services that are safe for 2SLGBTQIA:** “We don’t want people to use our experiences to identify us as deficit, we have problems with people not understanding what we are going through. Providers don’t have training, knowledge, experience, or basic skills from an Indigenous perspective”.
 - Some mentioned **not reaching out** for services, did not believe there were any services available, and did not want to have to come out, to get services. Two participants identified as currently in therapy.
 - One participant reported: “**Trans** people have indicated that they have dealt with a lot of gender based violence from others as well as internally, when they sought services they had problems with people not understanding what they’re going through.”
- ◇ Several mentioned discrimination in **housing** services
 - most Band housing policies give priority to married couples, and those with children. Often **same sex marriages are not recognized**, and if we do not have children we are often not eligible for housing, which can force us to move off reserve.



- **Two Spirited Elders** in particular are lacking housing.
- ◇ Some mentioned struggles in **couple relationships**:
 - One did not reach out for help as the **partner was not “out”**, and they did not want to breach privacy around identity. “It is hard to get help for relationship issues when you don’t want to expose your partners identity”.
 - Two told of how when reaching out for help because of violence in relationship, they **had to leave the community** as there was nothing on the Reserve.
 - Some **“normalized” emotional and verbal forms of abuse** within relationships, which lengthened the time spent in relationships that were toxic: “you’re taught to not put up with it but you do.” It seemed that if the abuse was not physical or sexual, difficulties were not acknowledged when we did reach out to peers and service providers.
 - One was told their **marriage wasn’t “real”** because they “didn’t get married in a church” so they felt isolated and unwelcome to attend important community events.
- ◇ Some told specific stories of struggle as **parents**, and spoke of concerns regarding being targeting with slurs for being parents, and witnessing the impacts on their children
 - Some mentioned stories of the difficulties experiences in trying to **adopt**, and when trying to obtain status and services for their children when in same-sex relationships: “Being (Two Spirited) has been nothing but trouble in trying to adopt...children”.
 - The **forms specifying gender and marital status**, and the slots indicating mother and father, rather than parents, can be alienating. Struggles with Canada Revenue Agency were mentioned, with weeks of bickering, with finally an apology coming from the head of CRA.
 - When applying for **parental leave**, the policy only indicated maternity leave, or was only parental leave if birthing, and not for adopting.
 - Extensive paperwork was required to go on vacation and **cross borders** with their children: “we needed court documents to prove we were legal parents of the...children. Finally we sent a 51 page document to prove everything: that we are the parents and married. This process has been a living nightmare.” Heterosexual couples are not required to produce all of this.



- ◇ Some told specifically of struggles in the **health care system**, and doctors not taking time to explain medical language or diagnosis or treatment, and how male doctors in particular can be particularly invasive for patients who have experienced sexualized GBV. This can result in people not returning, and not receiving the medical help we need.
- ◇ Some mentioned stories of discrimination within **employment**: “My previous workplace trained us in diversity and inclusion, except when it came to me...” Management “reprimanded” for a vacation headshot picture as a same-sex couple, posted on Facebook that was “reported” as “inappropriate” to the Agency. The Manager that implemented the homophobic policy was provided support services, but the 2SLGBTQIA person was not. After much struggle and stress, the agency did send a letter with an apology, and an investigator was appointed, who “protected the agency and not us”. When reaching out to others, they were refused help by the local Chief, as well as by a Mi’kmaq lawyer, being told it was not worth the struggle, “just give up the fight”. “They just play a nice game of supporting our Two Spirited community”.
- ◇ Some referenced “**mental health**” issues, like self-harming and suicide as problems in Two Spirited communities. Research findings from the Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance, were mentioned: with the “biggest concerns” being raised as “gender based violence”, “addictions and mental health issues”. “While trying to deal with our own issues, we use coping mechanisms that are self harming”. The historic labelling of homosexuality as a “mental health problem” was also raised, and even now, the available funding for Two Spirited gatherings is often through mental health funding, reproducing this labelling.
 - Several mentioned struggles with **addictions**, as a way of coping with GBV and isolation, and also that bars and dances, as one of the only places to meet and socialize with other 2SLGBTQIA, as a contributing factor.

ROUND 3: STRATEGIES AND POSSIBILITIES: We explored the following questions: “*Are there any examples of services we know of, that are working specifically for supporting Indigenous Two Spirited experiencing gender-based violence, that can be explored further as role models? Sharing could include: What do you think would be helpful ways to reach out, to engage Indigenous Two Spirited who are survivors of gender-based violence in accessing services? How can we best let Indigenous Two Spirited who are survivors of gender-based violence know that services are accessible? Are their differences for supporting or reaching out within genders, or for youth, adults, elders? Are there differences to be aware of if the*”



perpetrator of the violence is within the community/or outside the community? What about specific strategies or take home messages for educating service providers more generally?

MANY STRATEGIES AND POSSIBILITIES WERE EXPLORED, INCLUDING:

STRATEGY 1: MORE TWO SPIRITED GATHERINGS. The Wabanaki Two Spirited Alliance formed in 2009 was mentioned, along with the Liscombe Lodge Gathering in 2011, and smaller annual Gatherings since.

- ◇ More **Two Spirited Groups**, for us to share with each other.
 - Increase **spaces and places of “safety”** for us to explore our identities when coming out, while acknowledging our right to make our own choices and our own timing and not come out if we do not want to politicize our identity.
- ◇ Explore **multi-platforms** for how to reach out and connect with different members of the larger 2SLGBTQQIA community, including face-to-face, on-line, groups, 1-1, including the possibility of a **Two Spirited App**: “so many young people do apps and if someone can create a 2S app to connect for counselling, events or supports...”.
- ◇ For some it may be “scary” to come into a group, or to be seen. This is crucial, especially noting “fears of people finding out”, or trust issues around confidentiality, when sharing their distressing details with members of their own communities. It is important to have **private sessions available**, on a smaller scale to discuss more sensitive issues.
- ◇ Recognize the **similarities and differences between different groupings** with the larger 2SLGBTQQIA community.
 - **Reach out to the Trans community** in particular as expressed needs may be different than Two Spirited, possibly offering a Trans Gathering.

STRATEGY 2: MORE LINKS TO MI’KMAQ CULTURE for 2SLGBTQQIA

- ◇ More **Two Spirited Ceremonies**: Sweat Lodges, Circles, Grandmother Circles, and more Two Spirited presence in Mawiomi/powwows, ie. Pride Flag in Grand Entry.
- ◇ Embrace concepts in **Mi’kmaq language** that are positive words for gender (like “nekal”), or “Etuite’lsin” used for someone who does not have a gender (learnt from an Elder Helen Sylliboy from Eskasoni).
 - Gender based Violence is very Western language, explore Mi’kmaq language to find the right language to speak of GBL: “We don’t want to impose others ideas or strategies on us”.



- ◇ **Tell the stories** of 2SLGBTQIA peoples, from Mi'kmaq traditions, and across different Indigenous cultural groups.
- ◇ Use concepts of **treaty education** to build back up our Two Spirited relationships.
- ◇ Conduct **more research** specifically into Mi'kmaq Two Spiritedness (see articles attached).
- ◇ A **summer camp for 2SLGBTQIA Youth** to connect to culture, drumming, ceremonies, language and Two Spirited Elders.
- ◇ **PRIDE Committees** in Communities to lobby for changes in the community as a whole, back to reclaiming Two Spiritedness as a Gift: "Eskasoni has done a great job developing their pride committee and are moving mountains, different communities can do the same and work together with other communities for the betterment of our people".

STRATEGY 3: WE NEED ELDERS AS ALLIES

- ◇ Form a **Two Spirited Elder Group** or Council.
- ◇ A **Two Spirited Elder/youth group** to help youth. "We are Elders now, we can support our youth".
- ◇ Would be great for youngers to have access to **private sessions with Elders**: "we tend to look to our Elders for support and we need healthy Elders to be able to provide support".
- ◇ Sometimes we have to **take a stand with Elders**, telling them "you are not right at this time....This is a delicate, sensitive, diplomatic process".
- ◇ Rather than just accepting "everyone must wear a skirt" **explore Ceremony and Circle protocols that will help everyone to feel comfortable**. "Lots of knowledge has been erased due to colonialism, including who should be a man or who should be a woman."
- ◇ **Lobby Elders (and Leaders) to accept and perform our marriages** as sacred.

STRATEGY 4: MORE TWO SPIRITED SPECIFIC SERVICES that are **STRENGTH ORIENTED**, and **FOCUSED ON RESILIENCY**: "looking forward at what we have and how can we make it better". As Dr. Graveline stated: "it is vital that we reach for our strengths and our resiliency and bring them forward into our next generations. We have inherited a lot of trauma from our Ancestors and...we have also inherited a lot of resiliency and have survived incredibly tough times, and how can we tap into that to move forward".

- ◇ Some participants expressed an **inner knowing and inner acceptance** of our gender identity and/or sexual orientation as a young person and though out our lives. One



younger expressed it this way: “I always knew who I was”. An Older stated: “As a young boy, my family knew I was gay, I will always be gay, and nothing will change that...I can’t stop the way I am, this is how I was created and I enjoy my life. I am slowing down a bit as I am also not as young as I used to be.”

- ◇ Many participants shared “coming out” stories of hope and resiliency, where we experienced **protection and safety within our families**: “I had protection from my tough mother – she made sure that we were protected and she always said that I had to find a way to figure out who I was.” “I think having my family being so close and my sisters and all of us having our own stories to talk about helped, it allowed me to be comfortable in my own body and who I am.” “I didn’t have a hard time coming out to my dad and there was a lot of support from my family”.
- ◇ For others who had to work through internal and external struggles, and finally were “outed” or had the courage to “tell” our family members, **acceptance and love was also experienced**: “so when I told my mom, my mom told me she always knew and it doesn’t make her love me any less. I was upset that she never told me she knew, but my mom said it was because she was waiting for me to be ready.”
- ◇ Several participants gave examples of being “**trail blazers**” where the actions we are taking to create space for ourselves, our relationships, our families, are making changes in people, policies, and systems, to be more inclusive of Two Spirited peoples. “we like good fights...we do our research...the storm is not over”. As change agents we **need ongoing supports** to keep going: “as strong as we are, there were moments we felt defeated”.
- ◇ Embrace the concept of “**two-eyed seeing**” as it applies to Two Spirited identity. (See article attached)
- ◇ Many Two Spirited are “sensitive” to emotions and energies of others, which can cause “anxiety” and “overload”. Help Two Spirited embrace this **Gift of Sensitivity**, and grow into the natural healers we are.
- ◇ Embrace the “**Unconditional Love**” philosophy practiced by L’Arche Group Homes.
- ◇ **Safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIA Youth** in particular, to open up, and connect with others who have been, or currently are, on the journey to discover gender identity.
 - Accept and advocate for the leadership of Younger 2SLGBTQIA people as language and identity continues to evolve.
 - Form a 2SLGBTQIA Youth Council.



- ◇ Specific **support and advocacy services for Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA couples, parents and families**, acknowledging that our families need to be accepted, and that our issues are more complex due to intergenerational trauma, social isolation, and still rampant heterosexism.
- ◇ Recognition of and development of **strength-oriented responses to deal with the ongoing trauma of sexual assault as a form of homophobia**: within “heterosexual” relationships when one partner is “questioning” and exploring sexual orientation; as a weapon used against Two Spirited when enforcing heteronormativity within communities and society more broadly; and acknowledging the particular shame and distress inherent in reporting and recovery from same sex sexual assault.
- ◇ Strengthen and develop **Two Spirited Peer Support Networks** with training on: “how to help others remove themselves from abusive situations”.

STRATEGY 5: MORE EDUCATION OF ALL SERVICE PROVIDERS to be inclusive of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA, so we can receive safe and culturally appropriate services wherever we are: “Providers need more than training, they need to feel it with their hearts in a multidimensional way.”

- ◇ **Accept gender identity and sexual orientation choices**, rather than trying to change us, or thinking we need help to get over it.
- ◇ **Create language and policies that are inclusive** of all Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA identities and relationships, for all services.
- ◇ Include **more grief work**, especially for Intergenerational Trauma, around Indian Residential Schools, where we were taught not to feel, so we have a lot of “unresolved” childhood grief.
- ◇ More trauma-informed supports for everyone, earlier, around childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault within our youth years, and throughout our lives.
 - **Specialized sexual trauma services** need to recognize the intersecting roles of homophobia, internalized and external shame and blame for the victims of sexual trauma, and high levels of sexual violence in Indigenous communities as a result of Intergeneration Trauma. “I was sexually assaulted in my bed in the middle of the night from (someone) I knew. It changed me and still affects me today because I was too scared to fight (them)...a dangerous individual...I didn’t want (them) to hurt me any further for not going through with it. I don’t enjoy



sharing the story...because I feel judged that I didn't do anything to physically stop (them). But I know my truth and I know my fear".

- ◇ **More addiction services**, in particular AA/NA groups for Two Spirited, recognizing "self-medicating" as a strategy for dealing with internalized and societal homophobia and heterosexism: "I struggled with addictions because I was trying to drown out who I was..."
- ◇ Look at Eskasoni, and their Mental Health Services as a best practice model for other communities, bringing health and mental health services together: "**Eskasoni Mental Health Services is the best** when we need supports or whatever. All staff is trained to accept all people, it would be so cool to have the same model that EMHS offers. This place is a safe haven and there is no place like this anywhere!!"

STRATEGY 6: INCLUSIVE BAND/COMMUNITY HOUSING POLICIES acknowledging 2SLGBTQIA relationships and families

- ◇ If Two Spirited people had housing in our own communities, **we could be positive role models**, and bring our gifts and strengths into our communities.
- ◇ **Housing applications and procedures** around allocation of housing to recognize 2SLGBTQIA relationships and family groupings.
- ◇ Specific housing options need to be created for **Two Spirited Elders**.

STRATEGY 7: MORE LEGAL AND MEDICAL ADVOCACY SERVICES for 2SLGBTQIA

- ◇ An accessible service "**Open Space**": **providing referrals to lawyers, doctors, therapists** who are 2SLGBTQIA, and well informed Allies.
- ◇ **Legal Aid/lawyers** to provide specialized services for 2SLGBTQIA around separation, divorce and custody; child welfare and adoption matters; and discrimination and human rights in education, employment and housing.
- ◇ **2SLGBTQIA Advocates** to attend appointments with doctors, lawyers, and mental health therapists to witness treatment, lobby for "safer" and/or more appropriate services when necessary, translate technical language, and debrief after to ensure person(s) understand what was said, and what the recommended follow up is.
 - Also hands-on training for 2SLGBTQIA to understand options, and lobby and advocate for themselves.
 - Trans people may have specific and particular legal and medical issues to be addressed.



STRATEGY 8: EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES in schools about 2SLGBTQQA gender identity, and GBV, including the range of what Violence is, and the impacts of Intergenerational Trauma.

- ◇ **More sex ed in schools** at a younger age: “if you don’t have appropriate information you may seek it in the wrong places”.
- ◇ **More specific education around sex**, and healthy sexual boundaries specifically for same sex relationships. Although some are becoming more open in general about same sex relationships, one participant felt most remain “closed- minded” in terms of “sex health”: like, “how to protect yourself, how to prepare, those things are lacking. The actual semantics of a gay life were shut behind a closed door”.
- ◇ **More violence prevention in schools**, including increased awareness by teachers and chaperones for reducing the potential of GBV in gym classes, on buses, and on road trips.
- ◇ **More supports for Indigenous 2SLGBTQQA students in post-secondary**, including collaborative approaches across student unions for Indigenous 2SLGBTQQA, ie. Queer Collective centering Indigenous; and a National Position or Council for coordinating Indigenous 2SLGBTQQA across the country to network across Nations and Territories, and communicate about overcoming barriers, and accessing funds.

STRATEGY 9: VALUE OF THE ARTS AS A HEALING TOOL for Indigenous 2SLGBTQQA

- ◇ **More representation of Indigenous TwoSpirited identity in the Arts**, in particular film.
- ◇ **Introduction of Indigenized Art(s) Therapy program**. Contact Dr. Graveline if interested.

CLOSING: Dr Graveline recognized everyone for their fabulous contributions, offering support services: “I hope everyone is supported in what they’ve shared, if after the call, things that were raised are bothering you, we are here for you, and we can support you. Sometimes when we close, we realize that we have opened this up, and think ‘now what do I do with it?’. We can be a support network for you and with you”. She asked: “*What are you taking away from today?*” All participants reported feeling engaged and uplifted by the process and wanted more opportunities to engage again, hopefully in-person. One Older shared: “I am thankful for this group and starting this work, because when I look at our youth and their ability to come out now – they’re developing these new terms and it’s going to be safe for our people to come out.” And a Younger summarized: “this is really awesome stuff – lots of great thinking and sharing. It feels so good to be involved in this community and I believe that we are heading in a



direction of really opening and expanding to be able to create a space for those who identify. I am excited to see where this work will lead.”

LOOKING FORWARD: We plan to meet in the Fall, for a face-to-face Gathering, and in the meantime continue to identify others who may wish to join us, and in particular reaching out to known Trans persons, to explore the possibility of a Trans Gathering in addition, alongside, or within the next Two Spirited Consultation. Mi’kmaq first speakers will be exploring appropriate language for GBV and for identity markers, pronouns and body parts, and Mi’kmaq researchers will continue to collect stories and materials to strengthen our community.

¹ Early quoted material in italics is taken directly from Dr. Graveline’s notes created in advance of the meeting. Later quoted material in standard font is all voice of participants, from minutes taken during the meetings.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OFFERED:

Two eyed seeing/Health: <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/cmaj/192/3/E70.full.pdf>

Two Spirited from L’nuwey/ Mi’kmaq perspective:

<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/antistasis/article/view/29323>

Results of Two Spirited Research Project in Atlantic Canada: <https://uakn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UAKN-Atlantic-Final-Report-Coming-Out-Research-Final-Report-2017.pdf>

<https://uakn.org/research-project/coming-out-stories-two-spirit-narratives-in-atlantic-canada/>

