

# **Becoming home: What Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people say about home, community and belonging**

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# Original Migration Research

- **Funded Research Project: 2006-2011**  
Vulnerability and Resilience among Sexual Minorities in Canada  
Funding Source: CIHR: Reducing Health Disparities and Promoting Equity for Vulnerable Populations competition  
Principal Investigator: Danielle Julien (UQUAM)
- **Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project**
- **Community-based, qualitative research project adopting research principles of Ownership Control Access and Possession (OCAP) (First Nations Centre, 2007), pursuing Indigenous and feminist methods.**
- **Please see the Winnipeg and Vancouver Final Reports available at [www.2spirits.com](http://www.2spirits.com)**

# Research Team

## Principal Investigators

Janice Ristock, Professor, Vice - Provost (Academic Affairs) and Professor Women's and Gender Studies Program, University of Manitoba

Art Zoccole, Executive Director, Two-Spirited People of the First Nations, Toronto ([www.2spirits.com](http://www.2spirits.com))

## Community Advisory Committee - Winnipeg

Marjorie Beaucage, Community Member

Rosa Colavito-Palao, Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Cathy Denby, White Wolf Speaking, Sexuality Education Resource Centre

Kelly Houle, Community Member and Educator

Albert McLeod, UAR-AYC, Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. - *Those Who Lead*

Carrie McCormick, Kali Shiva AIDS Services

Peetanacoot Nenakawekapo, Two-Spirit Outreach Worker, Nine Circles

Rath Pranteau, Community Member

# Research Team Continued

## Community Advisory Committee - Vancouver

Ken Clement, Co-Chair Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network

Raigen D'Angelo, Trans Alliance Society of BC

Tia Eagles Claw, BC Persons with AIDS Society

Lynda Gray, Urban Native Youth Association

Robert Hong, Four Feather Society, and Aboriginal Wellness Program,  
Vancouver Coastal Health

Sarah Hunt, Community Advocate, Independent Contractor

Karen Joseph, Co-Chair Community Advocate, Independent  
Aboriginal Contractor

Winston Thompson, Healing Our Spirit

## Research Assistants

Lisa Passante, Winnipeg

Cindy Holmes and Jonothan Potskin, Vancouver

# Community-Based Research Principles

## Community Consultations with Key Stakeholders

Winnipeg – contacts made with 28 people, including 24 programs across 18 organizations.

Vancouver - connected with 15 people from 12 programs/agencies.

Commitment to producing and sharing meaningful knowledge.

Research Focus

# Methodology

**Criteria:** 18/19 years of age or older; self-identify as Aboriginal (including First Nations, Inuit and Métis); self-identify as two-spirit, and/or LGBTQ, or as WSW or MSM; experiences of migration/moving; conversational English.

**Recruitment:** through posters at key organizations; through Advisory Committee members; through word-of-mouth.

## Individual and Focus Group Interviews

- **Vancouver:** 11 transcripts including recordings of 26 participants over 3 focus groups and 8 interviews of one or more participants (Women's and Youth focus groups)
- **Winnipeg:** 14 transcripts including 24 participants over 3 focus groups and 11 interviews of one or more participants (Trans and Youth focus groups)
- All received a \$25 honorarium, food and drinks.

# Two-Spirit

*Two-spirited people are, are a word for the Indian people...like a Native word... My granny said, “You have two strengths, my boy. You’ve got two strengths. You’ve got one of a woman and one of a man, put together.” I said, yeah, you know, to use it like that, no I don’t think that people look at you different. They say you have two spirits. Like I have the gentleness of a woman and the sensitivity of a woman but the masculinity of a man (24, male, First Nations, gay, Two-Spirit, Winnipeg).*

# Two-Spirit

*Two-Spirit is a very, very new term. It only came to light in 1991 and prior to that people really didn't have a reference point as to how we wanted to identify because we weren't gay and we knew that we weren't gay. 'Gay' is too, it's too broad. It doesn't really define who you are as a person and one of our elders, one of our Aboriginal Elders now, had a vision that, she was told this is what we would be called and she gave it to us.*

*... And so a lot of us took on the term Two-Spirit because we wanted to be identified as Aboriginal men and women... with our spiritual sense of being. Yeah, so for us, for a lot of us that were there in the 80s and early 90s it was finding a place and a name for ourselves, to identify ourselves (First Nations, transgender, Two-Spirit, 40, Winnipeg).*



# Migration Findings

- Negative impacts of moving come in experiences of racism and discrimination based on gender and sexuality (Ristock, Zoccole and Potskin, 2011).
- People spoke about encountering physical and sexual assaults on the street, and physical manifestations of stresses on the body like trouble sleeping, fatigue, drug use, survival sex work, HIV and homelessness (Ristock, Zoccole and Passante, 2010).

# Migration Findings Continued

- ***A theme of seeking “home”, community and belonging.***

Everyone described the sense of belonging that can come with community. Community is rooted in relationships and connections people have with each other and geography.

- ***A theme of disconnection.***

Colonization, abuse and discrimination can cause people to be disconnected from Indigenous languages, culture and positive Indigenous and Two-Spirit history leading to disconnection in themselves as LGBTTQ and as Indigenous peoples.

# My Research Questions

How do Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people describe home, community and belonging in the context of migration and mobility?

In relation to their Indigenous and sexual and/or gender identities?

And in a context of wellbeing, strengths and resilience?

# Methods

- **OCAP** – permission secured from Advisory Committees (Winnipeg and Vancouver, 2010) to use data (recordings, transcripts, demographic forms, process/field notes).
- **Thematic analysis** (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Kirby et al. 2006) of templates of themes in the interview and focus group transcripts related to the terms home, community and belonging.
- **Indigenous approaches** emphasize relational reciprocity, attention to content and process, context and history, shared decision-making, community relevance, and reflexivity and transparency (Hart, 2009; Kovach, 2009).
- In particular, **intersectional analysis** allows and invites us to consider participants' specificities and requires us to look at the interfaces among identities to understand participant experiences, insights and recommendations (Lee & Brotman, 2011; Meekosha, 2006; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004).\*
- Presented preliminary findings to Advisory Committee Members (i.e. community consultant validation, October 2011).
- Reflective journaling served as a process audit and transparency tool.

# Winnipeg Participants

- **Status:** 18 First Nations; 6 Métis
- **Gender:** 3 male; 14 female; 10 transgender; 2 Two-Spirit
- **Sexuality:** 3 gay; 3 lesbian; 6 bisexual; 7 Two-Spirit; 3 straight
- **Age range:** from 19-47
- **Education:** 2 some grade school; 12 some high school; 4 high school diploma; 4 some college or University; 2 university degree and 1 specialty certificate.

# Winnipeg Continued

**Primary Home:** 20 Winnipeg; 2 city; 1 town, 1 reserve community

**Secondary Home:** 6 First Nation, 1 rural town, 4 Winnipeg

22/24 from Manitoba

## **Housing** at the time of interview

- 12 rented a house or apartment
- 1 owned a home
- 1 was in a rooming house
- 2 were homeless
- 5 with relatives, 6 with a partner, 3 with friends, 2 live alone

# Vancouver Participants

- **Status:** 19 First Nations with Status, 3 without; 4 Métis, 1 Inuit, 1 Bill C-31
- **Gender:** 8 male; 8 female; 3 transgender; 3 transsexual; 11 Two-Spirit, 2 queer
- **Sexuality:** 5 gay; 2 lesbian; 3 bisexual; 14 Two-Spirit; 2 straight; 1 queer; 1 transgender; 1 transfemale, 1 butch.
- **Age range:** from 19-60+
- **Education:** some grade school; some high school; high school diploma; some college or University; university degree and specialty certificate.

# Vancouver Continued

**Primary Home:** 26 Vancouver

**Secondary Home:** 3 First Nation

14/26 from BC > 12 from out of province

## **Housing** in the last 12 months

- 22 rented a house or apartment
- 1 owned their home
- 5 paid room and board
- 3 with family/friends, 1 sleeping on a couch, 1 correctional Institution, 1 hostel



# Overarching Themes

- The majority of participants left their original homes to seek a place to be themselves and find acceptance for their sexuality and/or demonstrated gender differences.
- Over time they found homes and community spaces of belonging - to make sense of themselves as Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people *and also* find places of respect, with traditions, teachings and contemporary practices that nurtured their Indigenous and Two-Spirit-specific identities.
- Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people cannot be reduced or described as a single group. The diversity within and across participant identifications is enormous.

# Home

- People moved for growth - education, employment, housing, proximity to family connections, to visit, explore urban culture, access health care and services for people living with HIV.
- Age and development seem to affect one's perceptions and attachment to home (or desire to move).
- Seeking opportunities or basic shelter, acceptance, safety, freedom to be themselves.
- Stayed for the gay community, urban culture, entertainment, available resources, nice weather (Vancouver), active Indigenous presence (esp. the First Nations diversity in Vancouver), warm and generous people (Winnipeg).

# Participants said

- *Home* = shelter, where I live, eat, sleep and clean myself, where my things are, where I feel relaxed, comfortable with a partner.
- Home is where I come from, my territory, my people, a cushion to fall back on if I need to (with some distinction).
- Home is about relationships with friends, family. Acceptance and Indigenous and LGBTTTQ visibility are staying factors.

*A place where you can be yourself, a place where you can just let go and not worry about anything ... a home where you can just go relax, lay down and just think things over. If you want, it's a place where you can just study or work at home. Just a place where you feel comfortable, mostly comfortable even to a point where you don't have any clothes on, right? That's how comfortable... (Transgender, female, 28, straight, Two-Spirit, First Nations, Status, Winnipeg).*

# Participants said

One participant spoke about her experiences in Native Housing, to illustrate how sometimes she decides to hold back parts of herself.

*It's a very hard question because who is the same person in all different aspects unless you're someone who's out everywhere, and I find you cannot be out everywhere. My housing, I am not out to the other residents. From what I mentioned before, people are using drugs, alcohol. They don't even know who I am and I've already had bad experiences with some of the residents. So no, for me, I'm not, I'm not out everywhere ... (Female, Two-Spirit, First Nations, Status, 61, Vancouver).*

# Community

- *Community* is about places, relationships, participation and shared interests.
- Participants access community by
  - Interaction with useful inclusive services,
  - Offering themselves in community service (i.e. volunteering/unpaid work, community leadership),
  - Attending community events.

# Participants said

- To feel part of a community is based on a sense of belonging, where you can be yourself.

*I couldn't live in that (First Nations) community anymore. It was, a whole lot of it was trying to show people who they thought I should have been, rather than me showing them who I was. And that, it was pretty harsh. I couldn't do a lot of things that I wanted to do. I had to be part of the house, White picket fence, pets, all these things that everybody idealized. And I couldn't do it (First Nations, Status, Two-Spirit, male, 48, Vancouver).*

- Community, belonging and participation are connected.

*... well again belonging of course. In some ways to me, community is part of also giving to it and getting from it. To be part of a community, you do have to put things in.... (Metis, lesbian, female, 34 years, Winnipeg).*

# Participants said

- Community and identity are connected through perception of shared interests.

*I think community for me means the people that are involved in the well being of our people, and I'm always talking about Aboriginal people as a whole. ... anything that I do always has to be two-spirited related, where it's actually speaking to me as a two-spirited person... And two-spirited people for me are Aboriginal people (FN, TG, female, Two-Spirit, 40 years, Winnipeg).*

- Participants described inclusivity as a value of community. Community however is not always experienced as fun and inclusive.\*

# Belonging

Is relational and interactive, feeling safe, accepted, and welcome to be yourself.

*... I think, when you feel you become disenfranchised or however you feel, you know, like you've been rejected, you tend to create a family of your own that you can identify with, and one of the things I did is that I created a family where I had people that weren't actually in my blood relations and I created a support network around those people in my life, you know. So family for me, it has two different meanings, my blood and my ... chosen family, yeah definitely (First Nations, Two-Spirit, transgender, 40, Winnipeg).*



# Belonging

*... I grew up as a ward of the Crown until I achieved adulthood. I was running away in there as well and going into the major cities' centres, to me that young, that's a place where I could go and then not be caught and repatriated, knowing my own, choosing my own identities and sexuality just seemed like the more people, chances were I was going to be able to find others where I might be able to freely express myself (First Nations, Status, female, queer, butch, dyke. 52, Vancouver).*

# Belonging

Sometimes belonging depends on the perceptions of others, the ability to prove oneself, and the ideas we have about the others' perceptions.

*In Vancouver, in the Aboriginal, two-spirited gay, lesbian, transgendered and bisexual community, I would have to say yes. On the other hand, I'd have to disagree with having a sense of belonging in the gay community as a whole. I would have to say that the stereotype of the Indian male is still there when you go and approach other non-Aboriginal people and at times it is uncomfortable (First Nations, gay male, youth focus group, Vancouver).*

# Belonging

A sense of belonging is rooted in a sense of oneself and one's culture.

*I used to be embarrassed to be an Aboriginal person because of how people treated me. But now it's not. I'm becoming more spiritualized ... and that's the whole basis for me. As long as I continue to maintain that spiritualism based on what my mother, my grandmother, sister have taught me, then that's it. That's what's gonna get me through and of course, I belong, to whoever I meet. It's almost simple but it's very complex (First Nations, Two-Spirit, male, 48 years, Vancouver).*

# Becoming Home

*... because for many, many years I couldn't stand it here, and then that night I realized that over time, it became my home because I came out here under very unusual circumstances, faced difficult times, and despite it all, I managed to forge a home here in Vancouver, and the people I connected with through the years sort of started to grow on me...*

*I left everything and returned with just a duffel bag to Vancouver and realized that this is my home, for better or for worse, and that somehow through all the years, I'd done enough right and made enough connections here and sort of, this is my home, cause I guess you could say that the acceptance I'd been looking for as a Two-Spirited person wasn't found within my own family and by Toronto, by extension, which is why I left that place to begin with and came to a then unknown place on the other side of the country, Vancouver, and hating it here for years upon years and then many years later realizing that this is now my home... The west coast took a little while to grow on me and it did... This is my home (Bisexual, female, transsexual, 36, First Nations, Status, Vancouver).*

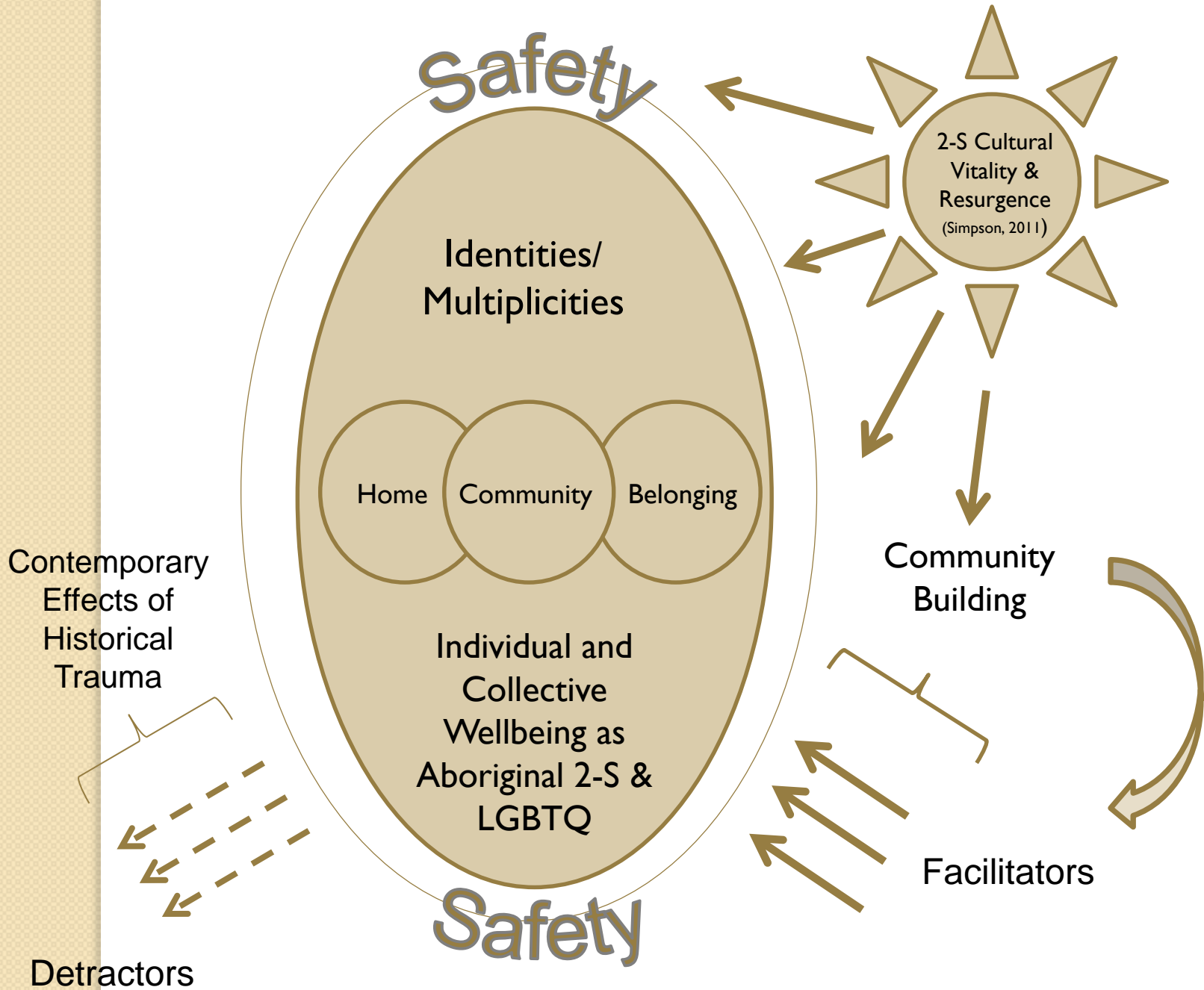
# Becoming Home\*

- Home, community, and belonging are not isolated or stand-alone ideas. They exist within contexts of values, cultures, identities and communities.
- The collective and individual are connected socially and relationally. Thus, finding a sense of home, community, and belonging happens alongside finding a home within us (Scofield, 2010).
- To do so, we must honour all of our identity's component parts.
- Participants shared what was unique about their situations and settings – the things they enjoyed most that made their location feel like home, or community over time.

# Participants said

*“I’ve moved for a reason, you know it was to go away to university, to have an adventure, but then I stayed because of the community I developed” (Female, Métis, bisexual, 35, Winnipeg).*

- How a newcomer gets started in the city matters. Coming to an urban setting from a reserve or rural community can be a cultural and material resource shock.\*



# Contemporary Effects of Historical Trauma

- Knowledge regarding gender and sexuality teachings seems difficult to access or retrieve (Meyer-Cook, 2008; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004).
- Myths such as homosexuality = pedophilia are common.
- Unresolved trauma interferes with positive attempts at education (Meyer-Cook, 2008; A. Wilson, 2009).
- The impact of Christian churches in some communities has resulted in almost wholesale acceptance of Christian teachings (that pathologize sexual and gender diversity) resulting in the erasure of positive Two-Spirit histories and traditions (see also Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004).
- Participants shared concrete examples of the continuing effects of historical trauma, such as post-traumatic stress, child welfare experiences, relationship violence, fears of being perceived as perpetrators, racism, homo/transphobia, and lost teachings about sexual and gender diversity.

... HOMELESS IN ORIGINAL TERRITORIES.



# Participant Recommendations

- Participants described health and wellbeing in the *physical* realm to mean having a safe home, good food to eat, and decent place to lay your head. Housing is important.
- Participants also suggested support and other services for specific segments of the Aboriginal Two-Spirit and LGBTQ community. These services would offer community-connecting places, address specific needs, and also promote health, wellbeing and healing.
- Solidarity building... we must work together.\*

*... cultural teachings, sweat lodges, because Aboriginal people need a reference or a place where they can identify with a past experience (First Nations, transgender female, Two-Spirit, 40, Winnipeg).*

# Participant Recommendations

## **In the City:**

- The need for supports that are culture and sex/gender sensitive.\*
- The need for transition services to assist people when they first move to the city.

## **Other services:**

- Two-Spirit housing services;
- Aboriginal worker at the Rainbow Resource (LGBTQ) Centre;
- Métis-specific services;
- a long-term substance treatment service open to transwomen;
- a gay group home/foster-care, jail.

# Participant Recommendations

**Participants identified a need for community activities and events that are not alcohol or bar-based, that include cultural components and are respectful of sex and gender diversity.**

## **On Reserves:**

- Community workers who can talk about gender and sexuality;
- Address anti-homophobia and diversity;
- Ensure gay or transgender representation on council.

# Update - Consultation with Albert McLeod

- Meeting with and letter to AFN
- PD planning for Rainbow Resource Centre workers in Winnipeg
- Poster funded by WRHA
- Development of Two-Spirit Teachings
- First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (2015)
- Upcoming conference Dec 4 on homelessness in Winnipeg (Social Planning Council on the Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness)

# TSPM Advocacy with the AFN

Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.



April 6, 2015

National Chief Perry Bellegarde  
Assembly of First Nations  
55 Metcalfe Street  
Suite 1600  
Ottawa, ON K1P 6L5

Dear National Chief Bellegarde:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and AFN Regional Chief Bill Traverse on March 25, 2015 to discuss Two-Spirit issues. This letter highlights the following key recommendations that Conrad Merasty and I put forward, i.e. that the AFN:

- establish a Two-Spirit Council;
- support annual education/awareness-building conferences about Two-Spirit people at the regional and national levels; and
- provide support to the Annual International Two-Spirit Gathering being held in Saskatchewan in 2015.

As you are aware, many Two-Spirit people have overcome racism, homophobia, and transphobia to live full, meaningful lives. We contribute to the knowledge and skills of our communities and to Canadian society in general. Two-Spirit people flourish as artists, First Nation Chiefs, professors, physicians, writers, social workers, Elders, pipe carriers, politicians, civil servants, pow wow dancers, school teachers, nurses, human rights activists, film-makers, foster parents, and business owners. We seek fair representation at all levels of First Nation governance and opportunities to lend our voice and expertise to solving serious issues such as domestic violence, suicide, HIV/AIDS, and murdered and missing Aboriginal people in North America.

Sincerely,

Albert McLeod  
President

 **Two-Spirits  
Indigenous LGBTQ**

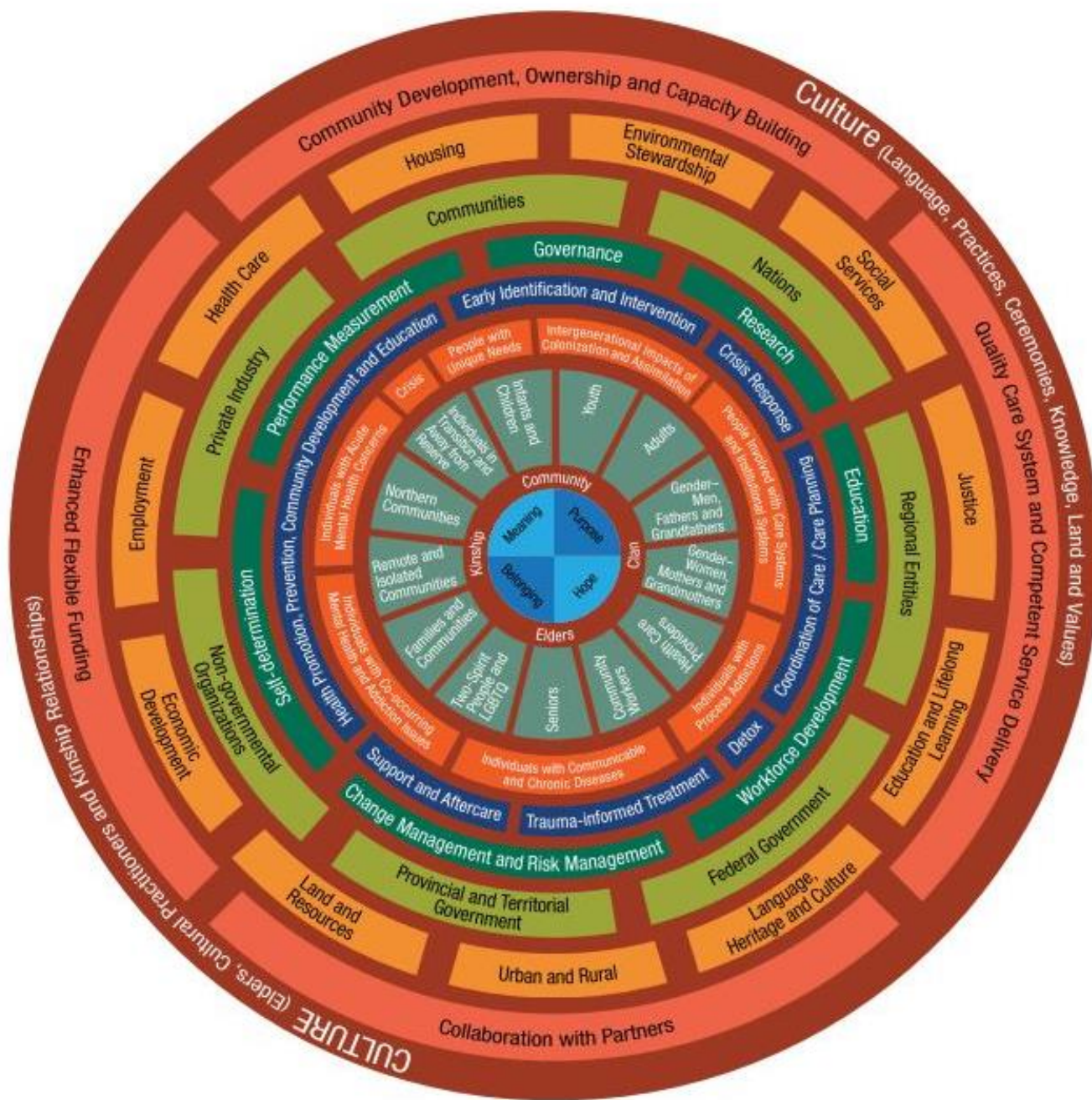


**You are  
not  
alone. Reach out.**

Klinik Crisis Line 204-786-8686 1-888-322-3019 TTY 204-784-4097  
Klinik Sexual Assault Crisis Line 204-786-8631 1-888-292-7565 TTY 204-784-4097  
Manitoba Suicide Line 1-877-435-7170 • Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868  
Mobile Crisis Service 204-940-1781 • Crisis Stabilization Unit 204-940-3633  
Youth Mobile Crisis Team 204-949-4777 • McDonald Youth Services 1-888-383-2776  
Rainbow Resource Centre 204-474-0212 [www.rainbowresourcecentre.org](http://www.rainbowresourcecentre.org)  
Two-Spirited People of Manitoba [www.twospiritmanitoba.ca](http://www.twospiritmanitoba.ca)

*Funding provided by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority*

FIGURE 2: FIRST NATIONS MENTAL WELLNESS CONTINUUM MODEL



# Considerations

For folks multiply located identity and “home” are processes rather than destinations – “becoming home” is complicated.

Seemingly straightforward solutions may not account for experiences of oppression and contemporary effects of historical trauma.\*

We must move forward with multiple perspectives and positive entry points.

To facilitate community building, formal and informal supports must be inclusive, accessible, flexible resources that help with what people need. Needs may be concrete like food and shelter, or social and identity-based.

This concept of *cultural care and safety* must embrace acceptance of differences across and within Indigenous identities and sexual and gender diversity, thus building cultural competency.



# Participants said

*... there really is a sense of loss in having to leave somewhere and you carry that with you, you know, until you find a place where you can actually let it go (First Nations, transgender female, Two-Spirit, 40, Winnipeg).*

*I think Vancouver understands the gay community, but my wishes and my dreams for everybody, I guess in the world, is, or in Canada at least, is to have a better knowledge of Aboriginal issues and Aboriginal history (First Nations, gay, male, youth, Vancouver).*



**Thank you for listening.**

**Questions? Comments?**

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