

Turning Towards Our Traditions: Valuing LGBTQ / Two-Spirited Aboriginals and Fighting Against Sexual Discrimination

Post-Conference Report



October 3, 2016
Maddie's Place
Kahnawake QC



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of this event, especially the dedication and hard work of the conference speakers who generously gave their time and shared their knowledge.

*Quebec Native Women would also like to gratefully acknowledge and offer our sincere appreciation for the generous assistance and expertise provided by **Diane Labelle**.*

*Quebec Native Women's conference "**Turning Towards Our Traditions: Valuing LGBTQ/Two-Spirited Aboriginals and Fighting Against Sexual Discrimination**" was possible thanks to the funding support provided by **Justice Québec**.*

Our Organisation

Quebec Native Women Inc. (QNW) is a bilingual non-profit organization created through a grassroots community initiative in 1974. We represent Indigenous women from ten of Québec's eleven Nations: Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamek, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Eeyou, Malecite, Mig'maq, Mohawk and Naskapi living in communities or in urban areas, as well as Indigenous women from across Canada who live in Québec.

QNW defends the collective interest of Indigenous women in Québec. We are an organisation devoted to sensitisation, education and research in the areas of promotion of non-violence, justice, rights, health, youth, employment, education and the environment.

QNW's mission is to support Indigenous women and their families in the improvement of their quality of life, both collectively and individually, and to assert its members' needs and priorities in dealings with government, civil society and decision-makers, in every sector of activity connected with Indigenous rights.

Socially and economically, we are involved in the promotion and development of new training initiatives for Indigenous women to help improve their living conditions and that of their families. These initiatives also allow them to participate more fully in their communities.

At the political level, QNW works on behalf of Indigenous women in Quebec to ensure that their right to equality are recognized both constitutionally and in legislatively. QNW also supports Indigenous rights to self-governance and is working to ensure that Indigenous women have full and total participation in this process.

QNW has undergone unprecedented growth in the last decade, and this is reflected in the constantly improving quality and increasing quantity of its work, as well as in the tangible outcomes it has achieved. Supported by a solid organizational structure and its 40 years of experience, the organization is now well-known for its active involvement in every sector that affects the lives of Indigenous peoples in Québec

Conference Overview



On October 3rd, 2016 84 members of the LGBTQ/Two-Spirited community, Indigenous community members, organizations and intervention workers gathered at QNW's conference: **"Turning Towards Our Traditions: Valuing LGBTQ/Two-Spirited Aboriginals and Fighting Against Sexual Discrimination"** at Maddie's Place in Kahnawake, Québec.

By officering a secure space where members of the LGBTQ/Two-spirited community could share their experiences and examples of best practices, we became a driving force for change in public opinion and within the Aboriginal community regarding sexual minorities. Through the promotion of environments that are more inclusive and secure we will better insure the security, integrity and dignity of all our people.

As stated by Viviane Michel, President of QNW, in her opening remarks *"This event is an excellent location to share and learn best practices so we can improve our responses based on the needs of LGBTQ/Two-spirited Aboriginals. Making healthier communities and being true to our culture and history can only be done when we honour these important members of our community."*

The conference tone was set with a traditional opening prayer in Kanien'kéha by Konwaiatanònaha Norton a Mohawk elder from Kahnawake. The conference followed with opening words from Viviane Michel, President of Quebec Native Women and Diane Labelle Director of First Nations Regional Adult Education Center.

The first presentation was given by Diane Labelle and her partner Suzy Goodleaf, Psychologist and Marital and Family Therapist on Two Spirit and Identity. Followed by Albert McLeod, Co-Director of Two-Spirited People of Manitoba, who presented **Residential School Impacts and Reclaiming Identity**. **Growing Into Identity: Supporting Urban LGBTQ Aboriginal People** was presented by Christopher Sheppard, Executive Director St. John's Native Friendship Center.

After a lunch break the group returned with the Indigenous LGBT-Two-Spirited panel discussion with Mona Belleau, Inuk Activist, Gina Metallic, Registered Social Worker through the Ontario College of Social Workers and Natalie L. Williams, Transgendered community member.

The conference ended in working groups discussing two questions:

What are the principal issues and barriers that you feel LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people face in your communities and/or organizations? The primary issues and barriers that LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people face according to those who participated were:

- Lack of tools and resources specifically for LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Lack of secure spaces for LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Lack of understanding regarding the realities of LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Loss of traditional Indigenous values and knowledge on the subject of sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity;
- Intersectional discrimination faces by LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Violence and intimidation faced by LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Lack of support from families and community members for LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Lack Indigenous LGBTQ/Two-spirited positive role models;
- Lack of political support in Indigenous communities for LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Lack of advocacy for Indigenous LGBTQ-Two-spirited community members;
- Lack of sensitisation on the subject of LGBTQ-Two-spirited Indigenous people in Indigenous communities;
- Lack of training for intervention workers and LGBTQ organisations;
- Lack of visibility for LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Subject is still very taboo in Indigenous communities.

What are the principle recommendations or actions that can be taken to address these issues and barriers?

The main recommendations of actions that could be taken to address these issues and barriers by those who were present were:

- Networking and collaboration between LGBTQ organisations, Indigenous communities and Indigenous organisations;
- Development of sensitisation projects for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and organisations;
- Development of resources and spaces for Indigenous LGBTQ/Two-spirited people in Indigenous communities and urban areas;
- Renewal of traditional teachings and of ceremonies for LGBTQ/Two-spirited indigenous people;
- Development of anti-homophobia and transphobia project specific to Indigenous realities;
- Making frontline services more easily accessible and adapted to the needs of LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people;
- Raise awareness in Indigenous communities and urban areas of existing LGBTQ resources;
- Make existing resources and training known and available in both languages;
- Develop tools and anti-discrimination protocols in Indigenous communities and organisations.

Speakers

Biographies



Diane Labelle

Diane Labelle is an experience presenter and advocate who has been actively involved in working on improving the quality of life LGBTQ/Two-Spirited community for many years. A Mohawk mother of two, she lives openly with her partner in Kahnawake.

Diane is also the Executive Director of the First Nations Regional Adult Education Center (FNRAEC) in Kahnawake. Opened in September of 2013, the FNRAEC is Quebec's first English-language adult education centre geared toward Aboriginal students. She has a MA in Political Science, a graduate degree in Education with a post-graduate diploma in Special Education, and a diploma in Management.



Suzie Goodleaf

Suzie Goodleaf has been formally trained as a Psychologist and Marital and Family Therapist. She received her Bachelor's degree in Arts specializing in Psychology from Concordia University; her graduate degree from McGill University in Education; Counselling Psychology and a Post-Graduate degree from the Argyle Institute for Marital and Family Therapy. Suzie offers individual, couples and family therapy as well as consultations and training. She is the psychologist for Step By Step and trains in Attachment; she is also a contracted professor for University of Toronto in the MSW Program: Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency.

She also advocates for improving quality of life for all LGBTQ/Two-Spirited people and lives her life openly with her two children and partner.



Albert W. McLeod

Albert W. McLeod has worked in Winnipeg presenting workshops about Aboriginal culture, traditional ceremonies and healing, HIV/AIDS awareness, Indigenous LGBT (Two-Spirit) people and Aboriginal textile art for the last 30 years. His services are available to individuals, programs and organizations interested in improving their understanding of Aboriginal history and culture.

He has First Nation ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Metis community of Norway House in northern Manitoba. Albert is the Co-Director of the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc. and a member of the National Aboriginal Council on HIV/AIDS.



Christopher Sheppard

Christopher Sheppard is Inuit and a beneficiary of the Nunatsiavut Government and was born and raised in the northern Inuit community of Postville, Nunatsiavut.

He has lived in St. John's since 2004 and it was during this time that he became heavily involved in the urban Aboriginal community which eventually turned into a long-standing commitment to community service. This included representing urban Aboriginal young people in the Atlantic region, and being elected to the Executive of the National Association of Friendship Centers for the first time in 2008.

He has worked at the St. John's Native Friendship Centre since 2007 and is currently the Executive Director. Christopher continues to volunteer with other organizations in his free time including sitting on the urban Aboriginal research committee at the University of New Brunswick UAKN Atlantic, being appointed as a Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commissioner in 2015 and helping start a fundraising non-profit in St. John's in 2016.



Gina Metallic

Gina Metallic is a Mig'maq Two Spirit women from the Listuguj Mig'maq First Nation. She is currently living in Ottawa with her wife. Metallic obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and Educational & Counselling Psychology at McGill University, later to pursue a Master of Social Work in Community Development. Metallic's graduate work focused on Two Spirit Identity development, and wrote and analyzed her own coming out journey, and the intersectionality between being a Queer, Indigenous and being hyper-feminine woman.

Metallic has been a guest speaker on the topic of Two Spirit issues and Indigenous child welfare practices for the Trudeau Foundation Annual Conference, the RCMP National Headquarters, Canadian colleges and universities, and multiple Indigenous organizations. Gina has also been a guest writer for the Montreal Gazette and has appeared on Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) for the series "Working it Out Together", on the topic of Child Welfare and Two Spirit Gifts.



Natalie L. Williams

Natalie L. Williams is a 57 year-old community member from the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory. Her background includes military service, trade-school and university education, 'Blue Collar' and 'white collar' work experience, most notably including a number of years writing for a local newspaper, from which she is now retired.

Natalie identifies as (MTF) transgendered, having 'come out' in the local media in 2006 and having 'transitioned' until 2008, when she finally found her rightful place on the 'gender continuum'. She also identifies as a recovering alcoholic, firmly asserting the unfortunate connections between issues of sexuality and addiction in our less-than-perfect world, while further asserting similar connections between issues of sexuality and 'schoolyard bullying', which she endured throughout her primary and secondary school years, simply for being 'different'. In spite of it all, however, Natalie describes herself as a 'survivor' – not as a 'victim'.



Mona Belleau

Mona Belleau is an Inuk who comes from Iqaluit, Nunavut. She has many years of experience working in various Aboriginal organisations as well as her volunteer experience with the Coalition des familles LGBT where she has organized social activities for the city of Québec.

Mother of two children, she also worked with the Maori in New Zealand and the Cook Islands. She was president of the Aboriginal student association at Université Laval and she also wrote the foreword for the book entitled Jeunesses autochtones : Affirmation, innovation et résistance dans les mondes contemporains, which was published in 2009. She has had the immense honor of being one of the co-presidents of Pride Montreal this summer. Social justice and equality are values that have always animated her.

Participants Feedback



We are pleased to report that the overall rating of the conference was highly positive based on the responses provided by our participants in the evaluation questionnaires. It was clear from participants' feedback that the presentations they heard enabled them to learn more about the realities of LGBTQ/Two-spirited Indigenous people. Participants often reported that the conference inspired them and was an

opportunity for them to network and with other community members and organisations. Many attendees voiced their appreciation for the shared experiences, knowledge and best practices that can be taken back to their organisations and communities. Most of the participants also expressed the interest of having another event to delve more in-depth on the subject.

"It was interesting to hear testimonies and helped me understand their reality and challenges."

"Well done, very informative, excellent atmosphere."

"Good quantity / structure and types of presentations."

"Great topics as a heterosexual woman I felt so much compassion and understanding. I'm inspired."

"Identifying issues and barriers and actions that could help be taken was helpful."

"It's nice that you did a conference on LGBTQ, I am a lesbian and it helped me a lot!"

"Well done, very informative, excellent atmosphere!"

"Thank you so much! The place, the presentations, the themes, the food, the ambiance, the transport, the translation... Everything has been truly amazing, I've learnt so much."

"Thank you for this day of exchange and information! It was very rich and pertinent!"

"The totality of the subjects will be useful to me. I appreciated the sharing."

"I loved the sharing. Very rich, moving and enriching!"

"Thank you for the privilege of attending!"